

Ramapo Indian Hills Education Association Speech given at the Board of Education Meeting on 2/26/18

The RIHEA would like to thank all of the students, parents and residents that came out to the board meeting tonight to voice their thoughts on the ongoing contract negotiations, or just to find out more information concerning the impasse between the RIHEA and the board. Below is the statement read by the RIHEA in response to the boards presentation:

"Today marks the 603rd day the dedicated members of the Ramapo-Indian Hills Education Association have been working without a contract.

The Association has been negotiating in good faith throughout the entire process and is simply looking for a contract similar to contracts settled by other schools in this area. The sad fact is that due to rising healthcare costs and the amount of money our members contribute to their healthcare premiums, many faculty and staff have seen their take home pay steadily decline over the last five years and this will likely continue even after a new contract is settled.

At the beginning of the negotiations process, the Board stated that one of their goals was to restructure the salary guide in order to attract new staff and stop staff from leaving. They can accomplish this goal by simply funding a better salary guide, which according to a recent audit they clearly have the financial means to do. However, the Board falsely claims that the only way to accomplish this goal is to eliminate longevity payments for staff, so they essentially want the staff to bare the financial burden to accomplish this goal. This while the median salary for teachers in our district already ranks among the lowest in our county.

The Association cares deeply about this school district and wants to attract the best and the brightest for our students while stopping the mass exodus of qualified teachers leaving the district. Therefore, the Association proposed salary guides that included major concessions on our part including teachers taking a 0% increase in the first year of the contract and changes to the longevity structure that would save the district tens of thousands of dollars over the next two years and an immeasurable amount of money in the future.

In return for all of this sacrifice, the Association asked for a permanent cap on the percent of the healthcare premium that members pay. This cap has been instituted in neighboring districts including Ramsey, Mahwah, and Ridgewood. The Board refuses to institute this cap and instead offered a flat dollar amount for insurance relief that was barely even equal to the amount they would save in concessions by the Association and would never keep up with rising healthcare costs. This offer also required many other concessions by the Association.

The Board claims it would be fiscally irresponsible to institute such a cap, but this is difficult to believe for many reasons including the fact that, as I have said, neighboring districts have instituted such a cap and because in a recent audit done by the district it has been shown that this Board consistently over-budgets its spending while underestimating the amount of state aid they receive, leaving the district with a large surplus.

Here are some pertinent facts, according to a recent audit done by the district, ask yourselves if they seem fiscally responsible.

From 2011-12 to 2015-16, the district over budgeted their healthcare costs by an average of over \$1.2 million (\$1,201,367) per year. In that time span the district has actually saw decreases in healthcare costs in all but 1 year.

From 2011-12 to 2016-17, the district consistently underestimated the amount of Extraordinary Aid they received. Each year they estimated receiving \$0 but have received on average nearly \$300 thousand (\$293,478) annually.

From 2011-12 to 2015-16, the district consistently underestimated the amount of State Aid they received. On average they received over \$300 thousand (\$322,395) more than they estimated annually.

From 2011-12 to 2015-16, the district has underestimated its revenue by an average of more than one and half million dollars (\$1,658,530) annually.

From 2011-12 to 2015-16, the district has operated with an average surplus of nearly \$1.8 million (\$1,796,117) annually totaling a surplus of just under \$9 million over the last 5 years.

Lastly to add insult to injury, this Board continues to issue press releases full of misleading statements and half-truths and post them on the district website, similar to tonight's presentation by the Board.

At the last Board of Education meeting, many parents expressed their feelings that this was unfair and asked if the Association could post something on the district website. The superintendent reached out to the association via email in reference to this request and the Association responded saying the Board could post a simple link to our Facebook page on the district website. It has been nearly 3 weeks since the Association responded, we followed up again last week, and as of today no such link has been posted. Instead today, they posted their one-sided, slanted, brief they submitted to the fact-finder.

The men and women who dedicate their lives to the students of the Ramapo-Indian Hills School District and make the district successful deserve a fair contract, not a bargaining crisis that has extended itself for nearly two years. The bottom line is that we simply cannot support a board that does not make its staff a priority and continues to make a conscious decision to drain its most valuable resource."