

# Teaneck Public Schools District Advisory Team

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## District Advisory Team Meeting Minutes for April 21, 2014

### Board Members:

Gervonn Rice  
Sebastian Rodriguez  
Sarah Rappoport  
Clara Williams

Barbara Pinsak, Superintendent of Schools

**Ms. Pinsak began the meeting at 7:10 pm with an update regarding TTEA negotiations.**

### TTEA Negotiations

Ms. Pinsak reported that on February 6, 2014, a meeting with the TTEA negotiating team, Board negotiations committee and Super Conciliator was scheduled. The TTEA Negotiations Committee and the Board Negotiations Committee waited until 8:30 pm for the Super Conciliator to arrive at the Board Office. We tried to contact the super conciliator by telephone and email. He responded the following day indicating that he forgot to place the meeting on his calendar. The super conciliation has been rescheduled for March 13, 2014. On March 13, 2014, the Super Conciliator met with the Board Negotiation Team and the TTEA negotiation team. He went back and forth between negotiations teams and decided to stop the meeting because both sides were so far apart.

Parents inquired about the next step for the settlement? How can the Board be proactive so the contract is settled?

Mr. Rodriguez responded that it is a two-team process and the Board Negotiating Team has made a proposal to the teachers.

Ms. Pinsak responded that we have what the fact finder suggested which the Board cannot accept. The information is posted on the website.

Parents inquired about the super conciliator's role and does he give any guidance as to how the Board can work out the details of the settlement with the teachers?

Mr. Rodriguez responded that the super conciliator's role is to bring the teams closer. He goes back and forth between negotiating teams and we hope that this will start a dialogue. On Monday, April 28<sup>th</sup>, we hope to make some progress and get a lot closer to a settlement. Everyone feels we need to come to an agreement and we don't want to jeopardize the district by not agreeing to a contract. It is a process of give and take.

Mrs. Rice stated that as Board of Education Representatives, we are looking at taxes and how much a taxpayer can bear in three -to-five years in the future. We are trying to make the best opportunity for our students without over taxing the residents. The bottom line is money, we are trying to stretch our state funds and apply for grants when available. We are open to any suggestions that parents may have.

Mrs. Rappoport stated that the teacher's contract is 65% of the district's total budget and it is about 40% of the total tax levy by this negotiation. If we don't control the budget, it is hard to keep the taxes in control. If we go way up to cover the TTEA increases, we take the taxes way up. If we don't take the

tax levy up, then we have to increase class size. Teachers dissatisfaction is affecting the students and if we cut programs and increase class size that would also affect the students.

Ms. Pinsak stated that the 5.2% increase was crafted by the fact finder. He looked at what the teachers were asking and what the Board proposed and the fact finder came up with 5.2% not including retroactive pay.

Parents stated that they attended a meeting with teachers negotiating the contract. At that meeting, the teachers stated that they wouldn't give back retroactive pay because it would be setting a precedence.

Ms. Pinsak responded that in some districts teachers did give up the retroactive pay in order to settle the contract so it has been done.

Mr. Rodriguez responded that there are over 400 teachers and if you speak to each one individually, you would get a different answer from each one.

Parents inquired about surveys done by the administration to get feedback from the employee? The comments heard by parents from teachers is that it isn't all money-driven but there is a disconnect between testing and they don't have the freedom or ability to work on other areas due to testing. Does the district give teachers the opportunity to give feedback?

Parents continued that the teachers are concerned because of the test scores affecting their evaluation. Some teachers are doing the bare minimum because the contract has not been settled. At 3:15 or 3:25, they stop responding to emails or making or receiving telephone calls.

Parents suggested that the district show staff their full compensation package as part of the survey and they may realize how green the grass is in Teaneck.

Parents responded that the teachers already know how great their salaries and benefits are in Teaneck.

Ms. Pinsak responded that the district receives feedback from teachers through committees. Surveys are given to teachers for feedback about their professional development for the Danielson Model. She will look into a general survey for staff.

Parents reported that at the meeting they attended, teachers were angry that they had to pay toward their benefits.

Ms. Pinsak responded that the State had changed the requirements from a three-year contract and you may now go to a five-year contract. The Board might consider a five-year contract. There are pros and cons that would be put on the table to inform the TTEA, NJEA and Board of Education. We have a two percent cap on the tax levy and to fully fund just the TTEA salaries it is over two percent without the increase. In New Jersey, the guides have to be completely reworked but it is complex.

Parents responded that New Jersey has 13 steps but New York schools have 16-22 steps.

Mr. Rodriguez responded that changes to the contract have to go through negotiations. The salary guide steps were not one of the items for negotiations so we don't want to derail the process if we add new items to the negotiations.

Parents inquired about the Board's position and plan for the long term and if teachers strike. It is illegal in New Jersey but the teachers may strike and then when ordered by a court to return they will return to school.

Mrs. Rice responded that a policy is in place if there is a strike.

Ms. Pinsak stated that if the judge rules that we can fire staff on strike then we will hire new staff.

Parents inquired about staff working without a contract?

Mr. Rodriguez responded that there is a contract in place.

Ms. Pinsak stated that the teachers don't have a new salary guide but the district is following the letter of the contract.

Mrs. Rappoport stated that Teaneck teachers' salaries are fifth in Bergen County and 11<sup>th</sup> in the State.

Mrs. Rice stated that the information is on the website and there is an article in the Record. The existing contract is a result of TTEA teachers receiving a 12% raise.

Parents stated that teachers are approaching parents about their support for teachers. What response should we give them when approached?

Parents reported that when approached she stated that I am here to support the children.

Ms. Pinsak responded that is a very good response "we are here to support the children."

Mrs. Williams stated that the Board is sincerely trying to negotiate with the TTEA. We have had one meeting with the super conciliator. He has suggested that both sides come up with what they must have in the contract. It is an understatement about how much we have lost in funding. We have many unfunded mandates, for example, for the harassment, intimidation and bullying (HIB) mandate the state gave us only \$10.00 per student. We have to budget approximately \$500,000 for the new testing, new technology, software for the evaluation of teachers and principals. The state gave us approximately \$40,000.

Ms. Pinsak responded that in 2009-2010, we received over \$7 million dollars in state aid. That was greatly reduced and surplus amount, that was because of careful spending and was to have been used for tax relief in a future year, was subtracted from the state aid number. The aid has never returned to the amount from 09-10 school year.

Mrs. Williams continued that in reducing the tax levy, funds are being reduced in surplus and when something unexpected happens in district, it must be taken care of immediately.

Mrs. Rice continued that you need to have funds for roofing, solar, etc. You need a contingency plan and available cash for emergencies. Some people believe there is a pot of money that is not being used but that isn't true.

Ms. Pinsak stated that the roofs are 25 years old; if they leak they ruin classrooms. We must maintain our roofs for the safety of our teachers and students. When the Board had the funds, they put it towards the teachers' salaries.

Parents stated that their concerns about rumors of candidates refusing positions when offered because the contract hasn't been settled.

Ms. Pinsak stated that she has interviewed a lot of candidates for unfilled positions and have received a lot of applications. Sometimes a candidate accepts another position but she had not heard that it was due to contract negotiations. She reviewed the attrition rate of the last five years of staff who left their positions and it was very low in Teaneck.

Parents agreed that they would remain neutral but they would refer parents to the information on the Teaneck Public Schools website.

Parents continued that we have elected officials to make these decisions; therefore, we will trust them to do their job.

Mrs. Rice responded that as Board Trustees they represent everyone in the community. The community helps us to be informed. As you receive information from the teachers, you may contact the Board for more information.

Ms. Pinsak will update the two-page outline on the website after the April 28<sup>th</sup> super conciliation meeting.

Ms. Pinsak concluded the meeting by requesting the District Advisory Team members forward their BQMT Minutes to Ms. Kuhran. Ms. Pinsak thanked everyone for taking the time to dialogue.

Parents stated that they would be willing to attend the PTO Council meeting if the meeting was held half-hour or an hour prior to the District Advisory Team meetings.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Monday, April 28, 2014 is the next super conciliation meeting.

TBD: next District Advisory Team Committee Meeting

**Respectfully submitted by Linda Kuhran**