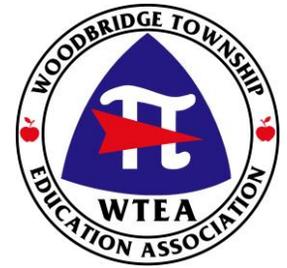




ADVOCATE



Negotiations Update

The end of the current school year will also mark the expiration of the three-year collective bargaining agreement under which our members have been working. One of the most important responsibilities of our Association is to negotiate and maintain a collective agreement for the 1800 professionals that we represent.

Early in the calendar year of 2015, we expect to begin a long series of bargaining sessions with representatives of the Board of Education. It is our goal to have a tentative agreement in place by the opening of school in September. The work will not stop there. Implementation of a new agreement often takes several additional months.

The WTEA Negotiations Team was introduced to our membership several months ago and has been operating since last spring. We offer this update for our members as we kick off a year of collective bargaining.

The Team has nearly finished an initial draft of our negotiations proposals. This includes initiatives in all seven parts of our agreement, as well as an analysis and revisions to each salary schedule. Our proposals emerge from many sources, including initiatives we have sought to bargain in the past without full success, as well as from our experience with enforcement of our current agreement.

We have also received a statistical report from NJEA on the negotiations survey conducted by our reps in the fall. The report is especially effective in identifying the priority weight given to various issues by our members as a whole and for each subgroup. This information is of special importance to us as we make decisions at the table throughout the bargaining process.

Another very useful source of information is the collection of comments that our members attached to the negotiations survey. Not all

comments lend themselves to a solution through negotiations. However, your leaders are responding organizationally to each comment you have submitted.

We intend to give special attention to the process of keeping our members informed throughout negotiations this year. Please feel free to call me or another member of our Team with any special concerns that you have.

Health Benefits Issues

In the past, our health benefits program was shaped primarily through local bargaining. However in 2011 New Jersey enacted Chapter 78, the law that has been phasing in premium contributions over a four year period. Provisions of that law prevent local associations from reducing premium contributions through bargaining for certain periods of time.

For Woodbridge, in 2015-2016 the premium contributions for our members will escalate up to the fourth and highest level required by the law. These contribution levels will remain in place for us for the duration of our new collective bargaining agreement. Only after the conclusion of the next agreement are we allowed to negotiate more permanent reductions in premium payments.

Nevertheless, our negotiations proposals include initiatives to improve our health benefits program in other ways. We also will bargain for salary increases that will compensate for this heavy financial burden that has been placed on our members.

Many of us remember the days when collective bargaining regularly produced agreements that improved salaries and benefits in ways that moved us toward greater economic fairness. Forces outside of our community and beyond the control of WTEA have certainly set us back in the last several years. In 2015, we hope and expect to set a new trend toward economic justice for our members.

Brian Geoffroy, President
January 5, 2015