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November 18, 2015

To the Editor of the Ridgewood News:

At the November 16 Board of Education meeting, Mike Yannone, REA president, questioned the purchase of new science textbooks and funding professional development opportunities for our high school English and social studies teachers. He suggested that we reallocate this money and use it to fund salary increases above two percent for our teachers. So let's examine the rationale for investing in revised curriculum, new textbooks, and professional development in support of educating our 5,754 students, pre-k through twelfth grade.

Here is the reality for science this year and why we will budget money for it next year:

- Our staff is reviewing our K-12 science program to align it with the New Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Because of these new standards, we anticipate a need to increase the science budget next year to purchase new textbooks and provide professional development for our middle and high school teachers. In the 2017-18 school year we will align our elementary science programs to the new standards and will purchase new materials and provide training to our teachers.
- As is the standard practice, the budget following the study year is skewed in the direction of the curricular area being studied when the need for new materials and resources is identified. Therefore we will plan for these identified science improvements as we build the budget for next year and the year after.

Throughout the school year we provide a number of professional development opportunities for our teachers. For the last several years, our middle school teachers have been working with an English Language Arts and writing consultant. This year, the same consultant is working with our high school English and social studies teachers. Our district has a rich history of bringing experts in to assist, support, and train the staff.

Mr. Yannone asked us to invest in our teachers. We do. Their salaries range from \$55,693 (highest minimum reported in Bergen County) to \$116,173. The average teacher salary is \$82,500 (near the highest in Bergen County). Each contract year our teachers receive an increase in salary as they move through the salary guide. Salary increases and tuition reimbursement are given to teachers working on their graduate degrees. Additional salary increases are granted once a teacher receives his/her Master's degree or Ph.D. We appreciate the work our teachers do and they are well compensated.

We know that the teachers feel frustrated that the contract is not settled. We too want to settle the contract, though in settling the contract, we must be mindful of the district's ability to financially fund the terms of a new agreement. Last week we proposed a series of dates to meet with the REA. We await their response.

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