

**BOARD MEMBERS**

Sheila M. Brogan, President  
B. Vincent Loncto, Vice President  
Christina Krauss  
James Morgan  
Jennie Smith Wilson

**Ridgewood Board of Education****Education Center**

49 Cottage Place  
Ridgewood, NJ 07450  
(P) 201-670-2700  
(F) 201-670-2668

**ADMINISTRATION**

Dr. Daniel Fishbein,  
Superintendent  
Cheryl Best,  
Asst. Supt. for CI&A  
Alfredo Aguilar  
Business Administrator/  
Board Secretary

January 27, 2016

To the Editor, Ridgewood News:

At Monday's Board of Education meeting 20 Ridgewood teachers spoke at the podium. They spoke passionately about their love of teaching and their deep commitment to our children. With pride, they enumerated the educational opportunities that Ridgewood provides and acknowledged the exceptional quality of our district. They implored the Board to reach a "fair" settlement and expressed their frustration that the contract remained unsettled.

The Board is sympathetic to the concerns expressed by our teachers and shares the desire to complete negotiations as quickly as possible. The Board has made every effort to listen to the union's concerns and address them. On January 20 at our last negotiation session, the Board made a new comprehensive proposal that would have increased the take-home pay of every teacher through a combination of salary increases and revisions to the health care plans offered to the REA members. The Board also offered to discuss several ideas to ameliorate the impact of the 35 percent employee health care premium contributions paid by the highest paid staff. These proposals address the teachers' primary concerns while staying within the District's financial capabilities.

Some of the teachers' comments questioned Ridgewood Public Schools' spending on improving curriculum, professional development, technology and eBooks in our elementary school libraries. While our teachers and the work they do are key to making Ridgewood the superior district that it is, we know that their jobs would be exponentially more challenging if they did not have new and improved textbooks, revised curriculum and the technology enhancements such as Chromebooks. As the Board of Education, we are committed to balancing these competing costs and the need to continue to deliver a well-balanced educational program to our students. With the state-imposed hard cap that restricts district property tax revenue increases to two percent or less of the prior year taxes, this is a very tough assignment.

We have had numerous meetings with the REA team and are willing to meet at any time to negotiate all components of the contract.

In the meantime, we will move forward to Fact-finding. Next week, both sides will have the opportunity to submit their positions, arguments and exhibits to an independent, state-appointed Fact-finder. We expect the Fact-finder to issue his non-binding recommendations by the end of April.

This Board is committed to settling an equitable new contract that treats our teachers fairly, is respectful of the taxpayers and maintains the financial integrity of the district. Most importantly, we want to end the unrest that drains our staff's energy so that they can focus on the important job of teaching our children, which is something that they do exceptionally well.

We are united with the teachers in the goal of continuing Ridgewood's "Tradition of Excellence."

Ridgewood Board of Education

Sheila Brogan

Vince Loncto

Jim Morgan

Christina Krauss

Jennie Smith Wilson