

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FROM CHELSEA EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

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The Chelsea Education Association disagrees with the characterization Dr. Julie Helber shared with the Chelsea School District Board of Education on Monday night. We are currently working without a contract because we don't believe that the Chelsea School District School Board is demonstrating the respect for teachers we feel we have earned.

In the 2016-2017 school year, three more work days were added to our contracts. No additional compensation was received for that additional workload. We are now in our third year of increased days. CEA Co-Lead Negotiator Mike Brown summarized, "Bottom line, we are asking to be paid for the time we work, a modest inflationary raise - more than what the Board has offered, but less than the 2.1% stated by Board Trustee Rhodes at the meeting - and, finally, for the CSD to contribute to the insurance hard cap levels outlined in PA152, by the year 2021."

It has been 7 years since Chelsea teachers' wages have increased with the cost of living. That means that though the cost of owning a home or a car, buying common consumer goods, putting kids through college, or paying property taxes have all gone up, teacher pay has not. Once you've been a loyal employee of the CSD for more than 15 years, your salary stagnates. That's no way to encourage teachers and staff to invest in this community, giving up their free time or even settling down in this wonderful city.

"Dr. Helber shared with the Board that they have offered some raises for the next three years. It sounds nice when you don't have the whole story," CEA President Rick Catherman shared. "What she didn't share was that the raises they're offering us don't make up for years of freezes, of those on the top step getting no

increase in salary, despite how much more expensive life has become in recent years."

The Board has offered to extend the salary schedule up to step 17 by the end of the proposed 3-year contract. But, adding steps alone doesn't account for inflation. If there are no cost-of-living raises, in 10 years, a teacher on step 17 will make the same amount as a teacher on step 17 in 2021. But, in 2028, with inevitable inflation, that same amount of money will have less spending power.

"The pay scale must keep up with inflation," CEA Negotiator Chris Orlandi insisted. "The proposed 3-year increases of 1.3%, 1.0%, and 0.5% will not do that. The value of a teaching career in Chelsea decreases if the scale does not make cost-of-living gains."

Teachers' health insurance costs have gone up, as have most other people's. However, all increases have been left to CEA Members to pay. The Chelsea School District contributes well below what was set by the state as a maximum hard cap number, back in 2010. That contribution number has not changed since, despite the state hard cap ceiling continuing to grow, along with the trends in insurance premiums.

"The District has finally offered to increase that flat-rate contribution, that's true," CEA Co-Lead Negotiator Loren Thorburn allowed. "That being said, that alone won't help teachers make up for all the increases we've paid over the years."

Though the Chelsea School District has the money to address all of the teachers' concerns, they have shown that they are unwilling to take any real risk and use that excess money to show the CEA that the teachers are the people who implement all of their policies, and stand in front of students everyday, giving the Chelsea schools the fine academic reputation it has.

The Chelsea School District Board policy calls for a minimum of 15% in their fund equity. Fund equity is, in simple terms, the District's savings account. Dr. Helber characterized their fund equity as being the same as keeping money in a savings account, in case a new roof is needed on a house.

"However, the District has never dipped into their fund equity to pay for a 'rainy day' scenario. Instead, they ask teachers to freeze pay, they refuse to increase insurance contributions year after year, and pass the District's added expenses on to the teachers," said Brown. "In 2012 when the state cut \$470 a pupil, the CEA made concessions to help the district, only to see the audited fund equity remain at over 20%".

"What makes matters worse," shared Orlandi, "is that we're not even asking them to dip into that protected 15%. We're asking that they use some - only some - of their excess cushion to pay teachers what they're worth. They have more than a million dollars above that mandatory fund equity and we're asking for a bit of profit sharing. That's money on top of their budget, on top of their known expenditures. We're not asking for all of it, but we're asking for what we're due, to start to make up for the years of not getting anywhere near it."

"The CEA feels the School Board's reaction to the facts we've presented has shown a lack of respect for our skills, our time, and our worth to the Chelsea community," Catherman added. "And now to have our superintendent share a one-sided and misinterpreted version of those facts is outrageous. Never in my tenure as president, in Chelsea, or as a teacher have I ever seen a school leader do such a thing."

"We've tried to be respectful," Thorburn said. "We've asked our Members to keep things off social media, to keep details and reactions to negotiations among themselves, to keep the mood of negotiations professional and positive. But now, our superintendent and our Board have chosen to share their version of events in public. It's unprecedented and an unfortunate turn in negotiations."

Brown opined, "Even though we have worked our way through the process, from just our two teams sitting down, to including a state mediator, to calling for a fact finding session, we've asked our Members not to 'protest' with social media posts or wearing the color of protest. We chose to keep our feelings about the Board's negotiation position out of the spotlight, so they wouldn't feel betrayed by a one-sided portrayal, which can spoil the relationships that are so critical to

cooperative collective bargaining. What they've done here is broken that relationship."

Though the fact finding process was already called for by the CEA, Dr. Helber presented paperwork to the Board that authorize the District's attorney's to also file for fact finding. "I'm not sure what the point of that was," said CEA Vice-President Meg Emlaw. "We're already in the process. Who cares who asked for it? That seemed like needless posturing for the benefit of the public." She continued, "We're constrained by rules about when we can conduct Union business, when we can talk about Union issues, when we can work on our Union responses to what's happening. The District has the bully pulpit of Board meetings and the ability to spend their whole work day strategizing and consulting their attorneys. This seems very underhanded."

During the Fact Finding state, it is recommended that negotiations continue. Last week, a meeting was held between Brown, Thorburn, Helber and the District's consultant. The District presented this latest offer, that was publicized at Monday's Board meeting. That offer was perceived as a continuation of bargaining, which the CEA attempted to respond to, earlier that day.

"Since Dr. Helber and the CSD Board have decided to make negotiations public," Brown said, "we can share that during Monday's lead negotiators' meeting, that had been scheduled the week before, we were told they would not be bargaining that day. A very 'take it or leave it' attitude. When it was pointed out that they indeed have an obligation to bargain through this process, they stated they would only bargain through a mediator, not face-to-face."

Brown continued, "She was willing to attempt to embarrass and ridicule myself, my team, and my Members, yet unwilling to then face us after the fact."

Fact finding is a step in the collective bargaining process that requires both sides to pull together evidence related to their positions in the negotiations. Each side will present their evidence in a legal proceeding, but the result will not be binding. Either the Chelsea Education Association or the Chelsea School

District can ignore the recommendation, and negotiations would resume. No date has been set for the fact finding hearing, as of yet.