

March 24, 2025 – HEA and Haverhill School Committee Negotiation Session Summary

On March 24, 2025, the **Haverhill Education Association (HEA) Teachers Unit** and the **Haverhill School Committee** negotiating team met for their second bargaining session to negotiate a successor contract before the current agreement expires on **June 30, 2025**.

During this session, the HEA presented its **Parental Leave Proposal**, which includes:

- Up to **one year** of parental leave following the birth, adoption, or placement of a child (up to age 18).
- **12 weeks of fully paid parental leave**, not deducted from accrued time, for all employees, regardless of parental status (birth or non-birth). If both parents are employed by HPS, each would be eligible for the full leave.
- An **additional 12 weeks of unpaid leave**, during which employees could use accrued sick time if desired.

School Committee negotiating team members, all of whom are parents themselves, expressed **empathy and appreciation** for the proposal's intent. However, they raised **concerns about financial sustainability** and the challenge of ensuring **qualified teachers remain in classrooms**. They also noted the **difficulty of securing substitute teachers**, which can lead to **education support professionals (ESPs) being reassigned** to cover classrooms, potentially disrupting student schedules and IEP services. The Committee expressed a desire to work with the HEA to explore potential solutions to these challenges.

In response, the HEA emphasized that this proposal would make **Haverhill a leader in parental leave policy among Massachusetts public schools**. They noted that **40 out of 306 districts in the state currently offer some form of parental leave**, but none provide up to **24 weeks of potentially paid leave**. The HEA also shared **compelling testimonials** from teachers highlighting the need for expanded parental leave.

Next Steps

The parties negotiated meeting times and dates. The session began **15 minutes late** due to scheduling challenges faced by some School Committee members who work full-time jobs. While there was discussion about adjusting the start time to **5:00 PM**, the union expressed that a later time would create conflicts with their members' family obligations. As a compromise, both parties agreed to a **4:45 PM start time** moving forward. However, it remains uncertain

whether this adjustment will consistently allow all School Committee members to arrive on time. An alternative may be to start later but end at the agreed-upon time.

The next bargaining session is scheduled for **April 7, 2025**. At that time, the HEA plans to present **15 additional proposals**. There will also be discussions on the potential formation of **subcommittees to address teacher stipends and duties**.

The School Committee has requested that the HEA **prioritize its more than 60 proposals** to facilitate meaningful discussions and a financially sustainable agreement. While the HEA maintains that all proposals are equally important, the Committee emphasized that **difficult financial decisions will need to be made**. The goal emphasized by the School Committee is to **negotiate a contract that fairly compensates employees while protecting the district's ability to provide consistent instruction and maintain reasonable class sizes**. Neighboring communities that recently settled contracts are now experiencing **significant layoffs**, and the Town of North Andover has closed an elementary school. The Committee is determined to **avoid similar consequences for Haverhill students and educators**.

In the absence of prioritization from the HEA, the School Committee is **conducting a thorough review of all proposals** and working to compile a **balanced offer** that supports employees while preserving **staffing and student services**.

Additionally, the Committee has **requested to schedule negotiation dates through the summer, if necessary**, to ensure that a contract is in place before the start of the school year. To date, both parties have agreed on **meeting dates through the end of April with 2 dates proposed in May 2025**.

Session II began at 4:45 p.m. and ended at 7:20 p.m.