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Methuen Teachers Lowest Paid in the Area Say They Just Want to be Treated Fairly

By Tom Duggan on October 29, 2024 · Comments Off



By: Tom Duggan 10/29/24

Teachers in the Methuen School System say they have been short changed when comparing their pay and other compensation to other collective bargaining units in the city.

The Valley Patriot sat down with two Methuen teachers and a program assistant to find out exactly what they are looking for in their next contract and what the impasse seems to be between them and the city.

Timony school teacher Tracy Swviniarski has been teaching for 28 years and works with students at the K-4th grade level in the STEM program and is a union representative.

"It's common in Methuen over the 28 years I have worked here for the city to pit the unions against each other,"

Swiniarski says.

"We just want to be treated fairly. We have been without a contract since June and it's disheartening when we see the cops and firefighters' unions getting contracts. It's

nothing against them, they deserve everything they get, but there is enough money for all of us to be treated fairly."

Judy Flagg has been teaching in Methuen for 22 years and is a Methuen resident teaching 7th grade at the Tenney. "We want fair compensation," Flagg told The Valley Patriot.

"I've also need adequate staffing levels."

What we are asking for is comparable to other schools of comparable size. Communities like Malden and Melrose have about the same median gross income, city population, and school population. What we make compared to those districts' pales by comparison."

For comparison, Haverhill Public Schools Teachers are making \$102,987 at their top step '0,' with a base salary of \$53,753, Lowell teacher's top step is \$113,598 with a \$53,048 base pay. Malden, which is the most comparable district, has a top step of \$111,985 vsâth a base salary of \$56,000.

"We are not asking for Andover Public School salaries. Methuen's current top salary is \$98,131 with a starting salary of \$48,656." Flagg also says that when compared to what Lawrence is making, "the difference is significantly less."

"My car insurance went up more than my last raise. We are not keeping up with inflation. We got a 2% raise last year. Our last contract was a zero percent raise the first year, and then a 296 raise for the second and third year of the contract. If we aren't the lowest-paid teachers in the Merrimack Valley, we are really close to the bottom. I don't think most people know that and I don't think it's fair to the students we are supposed to be educating."

But, it's not just the teachers working without a contract. Program assistants (PA's) like Michelle McCormack (who has worked at the CGS school for 8 years and is now at the Timony school) says the wages PA's get "is far less than a livable wage.

"That's why we need the city to come up vv-ith the additional 94M. We cannot take any more cuts."

What's more, the teachers said that the city did away with "deans," who are school administrators who deal with discipline problems all day.

Most frustrating for the teachers, they say, is that they feel like they have no voice in the community.

"The administrators are allowed to make their case directly to parents but we aren't. We have to try and get the

word out through the press or showing up at public meetings and speaking out. It's very difficult to educate

people. A lot of people think we are making the kind of money the cops and firefighters are making but we're not.'

Acting Methuen Mayor Dave Beauregard did not care to return phone calls and texts for a quote on this story about the Methuen teachers.