

# Haverhill, Methuen Teachers Make Case for More State Aid for Schools

By Caroline Louise Cole | 18 hours ago



Michelle Braga, chair of the Haverhill Education Association's negotiating team, opens the legislative forum sponsored by her union and its counterpart in Methuen, held Saturday at the Haverhill AmVets Post 147. (WHAV News photograph.)



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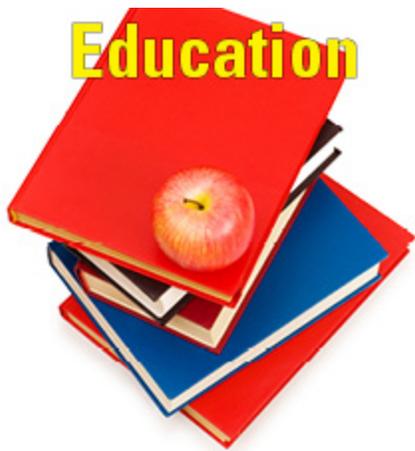
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(Additional photograph below.)

Teachers from Haverhill and Methuen highlighted deficiencies with the schools in their cities and called on lawmakers Saturday to find more money during a legislative forum hosted by the teachers' unions in the two cities.



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About 175 people, including the mayors of both cities, Melinda E. Barrett of Haverhill and David P. “D.J.” Beauregard Jr. of Methuen, as well as state Sen. Pavel M. Payano and state Reps. Andy X. Vargas and Ryan M. Hamilton listened in at Haverhill AmVets Post 147. Several school committee members and city councilors from both cities also attended.

Michelle Braga, chair of the Haverhill Education Association’s teacher bargaining team, opened the event by explaining why the forum was organized.

“Today, we are here to talk about issues of critical importance to educators in both of our cities. And a common thread that you are all going to hear this afternoon is how these issues require all school stakeholders in our cities to partner with each other in order to solve some of the most pressing issues facing our students and schools,” Braga said.

She turned the meeting over to a panel 13 other educators from Haverhill and Methuen who spoke in turn on four broad topics—funding for schools, school safety, fair wages and humane family and parental leave.

Anna Sabella, a teacher at Haverhill High School, pointed out Haverhill spends much less on its students than other neighboring communities. She held up a sign that said, “Your MA Zip Code should not determine student success” and argued for more equity in how the state apportions funds for education.

“That’s really something that has stayed with me as a parent with a child in the Bedford school system where I live and with all of the kids that I have in my classroom every day,” Sabella said.

Her colleague, Natalie Willwerth, a biology teacher at Haverhill High, said that the science department has only two classroom sets of working microscopes, but a closet full of broken ones because there is no money to fix them.

Jessica MacLeod, a Methuen teacher, pointed out her city spends \$7,000 less per student than Lexington does.

The issues go beyond money.

Maria Geoffrey, a Haverhill middle school counselor, said many of her students’ express fear about their immigration status or that of their parents, and the fear in general doesn’t contribute to a healthy learning environment.

“Respectfully, there is currently no clear system in place in our cities to support students if parents are taken by immigration,” Geoffrey said.

Michelle Hull, a paraprofessional in Methuen said her role has become more complex and demanding in the 17 years she has been teaching and her hourly wage does not reflect her responsibilities.

“Over the years I’ve watched as the role of a paraprofessional has changed dramatically. When I started, we assisted. Today, we are essential,” Hull said.

Braga pointed out that while a “living wage” in Massachusetts is calculated at \$57,000 a year, a paraprofessional with 10 years of experience in Haverhill makes \$37,000.

Members of the Haverhill School Committee who attended were At-large members Josiah E. Morrow and Penelope Guerrero, and Toni Sapienza-Donais, Ward 1 member Mirca Z. Rivera, Ward 2 member Robert R. Brown, Ward 4 member Amanda B. Basiliere and Ward 7 member Thomas Grannemann. Members of the Methuen School Committee in attendance were Alejandro Baez, Nicholas DiZoglio, Mary Beth Donovan-Grassi and Laurie Keegan.

Members of the Haverhill City Council attending were President Timothy J. Jordan, At-large Councilor Colin F. LePage, Ward 2 Councilor Daniel R. Diodati and Ward 7 Councilor Catherine P. Rogers. Members of the Methuen City Council attending were John Drew, Ryan DiZoglio Ella MacLaren, Ronald Marsan, Jena Z. Pesce and Yanilda Santos.



*Haverhill High School teacher Anna Sabella holds up a sign making it the case for more equity in the way the state funds education during a legislative forum sponsored by the Haverhill and Methuen Education Associations Saturday at the Haverhill AmVets Post 147. (WHAV News photograph.)*