

Dr. Taylor and BOE Members,

We are Claire Sinclair Jessica Wheeler and Tivoli Hunt, teachers at Tuscan and SOMEA reps for the building. We wanted to share a few sentiments on behalf of our staff.

When the pandemic started, we had to completely change gears and make virtual learning work. We rose to the occasion and, in the words of administrators, “stepped up to the challenge and exceeded expectations.” We worked around the clock to make virtual learning as positive and helpful as possible for all of our students, we learned new platforms and programs on our own time and with limited training, and we supported our Tuscan families and students in any and every way we possibly could. None of us went into teaching to sit at a computer all day; we love being in classrooms with our students, working with them hands-on, making connections, and watching them thrive, but we did what we had to do and worked impossibly hard to continue to be interactive, make connections, and watch our students thrive!

This year, the safe return to school was celebrated by all: students, parents and educators. Yet for SOMEA, the return to school has been extremely challenging, as this year has been fraught with new frustrations. We are facing a lack of supplies/curricular materials, not enough training on new curriculum, substitute and lunch monitor shortages, construction challenges and more. We are being pulled for recess/lunch duty during our lunch and/or prep times among the many other duties we are responsible for accomplishing within our contractual hours (including grading papers, planning for whole group and differentiated instruction, bulletin boards, data spreadsheets, and the list goes on).

Most importantly we are facing extreme challenges in supporting students who have been greatly impacted by this pandemic. Academically, we see the impact of the pandemic in a much larger gap between our lowest and highest performing students. It continues to be a challenge to keep up emotionally, socially, and physically for many of them. Behavioral issues, including lack of self-control, focus, stamina, and executive functioning skills, have been in the forefront as never before. We have returned to classrooms where students have missed out on the social and emotional learning aspects of school for a year and a half. This has been a priority for us and, while supervisors continue to echo agreement in its importance, it is always followed with “you must use [insert new curriculum and/or online platform] to collect data, then record that data in a new format (sometimes in duplicate). Our students and their families need so much more from us. We, teachers, are completely exhausted and drained. We are constantly being reminded about self-care by our administrators. But seriously, when are we supposed to practice self-care?

And now, most importantly, we are seeing exactly how LITTLE the district has appreciated our sacrifices and how much our hard work and precious time are taken for granted.

We started this year without a contract, but we were hopeful that negotiations would go smoothly - especially considering that the pandemic exposed just how important and irreplaceable educators are. Instead, negotiations broke down as soon as SOMEA asked for a pay raise. The requested pay raise was not just SOMEA asking for more money, it was an effort to get our salary guide closer to being commensurate with surrounding comparable districts in Essex County. This BOE voted to give our superintendent a \$30,000 raise prior to his contract even being up for renewal...we only wish educators were valued in the same way.

Many teachers and staff have left this district to make more money in surrounding areas. As a result of the inequality of our pay compared to surrounding districts, we supplement our incomes by working more than one

job to make ends meet. We tutor, teach Beyond the Bell, coach, write curriculum, work as music directors at local churches, and so many more second and third jobs that keep us away from our own families.

We are so disappointed with the way things have gone and to have to be here tonight reading this to you. Many of our children attend or have attended schools in this district, and we want the best learning environment for them AND for all of our district's students. Many of us went through and graduated from this district and feel such pride to work here because we believe in this district. We teachers give our students, families and this district our all every single day, sometimes at the expense of our own children and families and sometimes at the expense of our own mental and physical health. In spite of all of our passion and dedication, here we are tonight asking for the respect and appreciation we deserve. Please stop telling us how amazing we are and how much we are appreciated, and show us by providing us with a salary guide that is FAIR.

Tuscan Staff,

Tivoli Hunt (alumna, teacher and parent in district)
Claire Sinclair (alumna, teacher and parent in district)
Jessica Wheeler (teacher and parent in district)
Jennifer Thomas (teacher and parent in the district)
Suzanne Cicoello (teacher)
Amy B. Popp (alumna, library media specialist in the district)
Christina Giovannelli (teacher)
Jasmine Bloch-Krepfels (teacher)
Amanda Duarte (teacher)
Marci Koltenuk (teacher)
Lisa Rosenburgh (teacher)
Christy Skawinski (Teacher)
Lucille Mungiello (teacher)
Stefanie Wrembel (alumna, teacher and parent in district)
Stephen Carberry (teacher)
Christine Fischetti (Teacher)
Noelle Sullivan (Teacher)
Kim Boryeskne (teacher)
Melissa Koes (teacher)
Rebecca Veza (teacher)
Susan Donatelli (teacher and past parent in district)
Tiffany Vintschger (teacher)
Maura Sackett (teacher and parent of two students who went through SOMSD)
Eva Buggy (school social worker)
Francine DePaolo (Teacher)
Raquel Rodrigues (Teacher)
Claire Van Tine (Teacher)
Theresa Lee (teacher)
Christine Makasakit(teacher)
Sandra Smith(teacher)
Vanessa Wilson (teacher)
Tami Kavenaugh (teacher and parent in district)
Melanie Secor (alumna, teacher and parent in district)
Martha O'Connor (teacher)

Yvonne B. Phillips (teacher)

Katie Rickard (teacher and parent in district)

Laura Terranova (teacher)