

THE NJEA REPORT

TINTON FALLS EA BEGINS THIRD YEAR WITHOUT A CONTRACT

Approximately 200 Tinton Falls school employees, including teachers, secretaries, and paraprofessionals, have begun their third school year working under the terms of an expired contract. Although a Memorandum of Agreement was signed by both negotiating teams last year, the members of the Tinton Falls Education Association (TFEA) rejected the deal because of the salary settlement. As a result, the TFEA and Tinton Falls Board of Education are meeting with a state-appointed fact-finder to resolve the bargaining crisis.

Tinton Falls teachers make almost \$10,000 less than comparable districts and about \$6,000 less than the Monmouth County average. Paraprofessionals make about \$3,000 more than the county average; secretarial staff make about \$3,000 less than the average.

"We cannot continue like this," said TFEA President Cherie Ronan. "Our members are falling further and further behind their peers economically, yet they continue to provide an excellent education to the children of Tinton Falls."

Negotiations are further complicated by an atmosphere of disrespect for staff. The beginning of this school year was particularly rocky. Teachers were prevented from entering the buildings to set up classrooms until three days before students returned. Many staff members were concerned about student safety, should they be unable to clear away materials in time.

Paraprofessionals working with prekindergarteners have no scheduled bathroom breaks and no scheduled lunch until after the students' day ends.

Over the summer, without warning, all of the computer hard drives were replaced, taking with them everything that was saved. Many staff members were unable to recover their documents.

The TFEA has been working to communicate their concerns about the district's actions, but were barred from handing out informational fliers at several of the district's back-to-school nights, upon orders from the superintendent, John Russo. The association shares information with the public at community events.

In addition, the TFEA has taken a vote to authorize their elected leaders to take any action necessary in order to settle the contract.

JERSEY CITY SCHOOLS ONE STEP CLOSER TO LOCAL CONTROL

The State Board of Education has adopted a recommendation by Commissioner of Education David Hespe to move Jersey City's public schools one step closer to local control. Jersey City, which has been under state control for 26 years, longer than any other district in New Jersey, has been moving toward regaining full local control in recent years. Having already regained the right to local governance and management of its own budget, the district was granted control over personnel and operational decisions in October.

The final step in the process is for the district to regain control over its curriculum and instruction. The commissioner announced that the Department of Education intends to complete that step by next spring.

NJEA President Wendell Steinhauer praised the move.

"This long overdue action is the right thing for the students and residents of Jersey City," Steinhauer said. "We've seen during more than a quarter century of state control in Jersey City and elsewhere that a key ingredient of successful schools is getting school employees, parents and the community more engaged, not silencing or ignoring them."

Steinhauer also called on the Department of Education to advance the same process in the other state-operated districts, Camden, Paterson and Newark.

Jersey City Education Association (JCEA) President Ron Greco also lauded the action.

"We've reached this milestone due to the exceptional efforts of the members of the JCEA. They have worked tirelessly and under very difficult circumstances to move our district and our students forward," said Greco. "We look forward to achieving full local control and working with parents and the Jersey City community in the ongoing work of delivering the best quality schools to every child in Jersey City."

THE NUMBERS CHARTER SCHOOLS

18% THE AVERAGE ANNUAL PERCENTAGE BUDGET SURPLUS IN NEW JERSEY'S CHARTER SCHOOLS

2% THE LEGAL LIMIT OF PERCENTAGE SURPLUS IN NEW JERSEY'S TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS.

Source: Education Law Center (www.edlawcenter.org) examination of NJDOE 2013-14 audited summary files.

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