

Remarks - Board of Education Meeting

12/14/15

Good evening. My name is Lynne Landis - Health and Physical Education teacher here in the Tinton Falls School District. Before I begin my remarks, I'd like to take a moment to thank outgoing Board of Education members Paul Ford and Susan Fisher for their years of service to the Tinton Falls Schools Community and I wish them well as they move on to other endeavors.

As many of you know, I have been employed by the district for most of my 32 year teaching career. I have been fortunate to be able to work with the lower elementary students here at MFA for 28 of those 32 years.

By nature, I am a person who observes, takes in information, and asks questions to try to comprehend what is going on. While I don't know the monetary numbers and/or particulars currently being discussed, I do know that the negotiating teams for both the TFEA and the Board of Ed have been working on the process for a few years now. I appreciate the efforts on both sides of the table.

In my years in the district, I have only spoken to you, my employers, in this type of forum when presenting information about a district program and/or accepting an award on behalf of the students and staff or a personal award. I am speaking to you tonight to express my concerns about where the district is headed. I would be speaking whether there were two people or several dozen people behind me like there are tonight.

No one in the teaching profession enters the field with the expectation of making monumental amounts of money. I know I didn't. However, what I did know was that I would be going to work each day to do a job that I would love – that of shaping and molding the lives of young people so that one day they would emerge as responsible and contributing citizens of their communities.

One of the highest compliments teachers can receive is that of former students coming back to the district in which they were educated to work alongside their former teachers in the capacity of colleagues. Granted, while many of us veterans may feel old upon seeing them as young adults, it reaffirms the fact that what we are doing on a daily basis is making a difference in the world. I have had several former students working with me as colleagues and/or substitute teachers.

I have listened to people speak at Board meetings prior to this about the need for the district to be competitive in salaries with neighboring districts in order to attract the best teachers. While I agree with this way of thinking, I also feel it is important to maintain the highly qualified and talented teachers that we currently have.

Over the past 3 or 4 years, I have witnessed colleagues resign to take better job offers in a different district, retire before they intended to, or leaving the profession altogether. Now of course, there are many variables attached to these decisions, but I do know that many of these colleagues were struggling to make it or tired of the struggle. Additionally, I have become aware of the fact that some of the currently employed young teachers in this district have begun to search elsewhere for employment. The teachers that fall into the 2-7 year range of employment are quite marketable and will no doubt find jobs in other districts.

Working in the trenches, I can tell you that while our teachers continue to give their students the best they can offer, morale is at an all-time low.

The struggle for many of my colleagues is real. One has told me that she is making plans to leave the district and perhaps even the profession. She is a single mom of three who was \$1200 away from qualifying for free and reduced lunches for her own children this year.

Another is a single mom of two whose home has escaped foreclosure twice and she has had to file personal bankruptcy.

These are college educated professionals who have been working in the district for some time now. They are not rookies. They are seasoned professionals who are at the top of their game.

In my mind, the district is facing two major problems – maintaining its highly qualified and valuable personnel and attracting young highly qualified professionals who can offer so much to our school community.

As I mentioned in the beginning of my comments tonight, I am a veteran with several years left – I hope! It is also my hope that the meeting that was scheduled to take place this Friday, December 18th, between the TFEA and the Board of Ed will still take place. A settlement needs to be reached soon...one that offers a fair and livable wage to all of the district's employees. The idea of the Tinton Falls School District being one that is known for its quality education needs to continue to be one of the main reasons why people choose to move to this town. This can happen with a fair settlement that ends this impasse.

Thank you for your time this evening.