

## Negotiations Update

### October 29, 2019

The Wissahickon School Board of Directors and the Wissahickon Education Alliance, a joint teachers and support staff union, share a common interest in providing the highest quality educational experience for our students. The Board and Union have been negotiating since January, 2019. Both sides are now presenting what's known as "final best offers" during this non-binding arbitration.

Our School Board values and respects our teachers and support staff, and we appreciate their hard work, expertise, and talents. We are proud to offer them salaries that are among the highest in the state and country for their profession. In Montgomery County, our teachers earn compensation packages second only to those in the Lower Merion School District. Our proposal includes very reasonable salary increases, and we expect our teachers and support staff to remain competitively compensated in this next contract. The health care package being offered to our staff members is also very competitive as compared to the private sector, as well as to other regional school districts.

As Board members we are tasked with balancing the need to preserve excellent teacher salaries with providing adequate funding to continue our high quality programs and initiatives. Salaries comprise the greatest portion of our budget, but we must also consider:

- **The needs of our community.** The salary increases included in our proposal would allow the District to stay within the Act 1 index for tax rates. Act 1, a state law that limits how much a school board can increase taxes, is set at 2.3% for 2019-20 and 2.6% for the 2020-21 school year. The Wissahickon School Board and Administration have worked diligently to keep our tax rate among the lowest in Montgomery County (second lowest after Upper Merion.) We are committed to maintaining this.
- **Enrollment growth.** An expansion at Stony Creek Elementary School will provide additional space to accommodate up to 200 new students, and will cost approximately \$20 million. Because of increasing enrollment at the elementary level, the District hired five additional elementary teachers in the 2019-20 school year and expects to hire another five in 2020-21.
- **Educational programming.** Our achievement data continues to rise, making Wissahickon an increasingly desirable high-performing school district. We must allocate resources for high quality professional development, student programming and resources, and continued growth of our robust curriculum offerings.
- **Increasing Special Education costs.** Like most districts across the region, special education costs have continued to climb while federal and state funding has not kept pace. These increases have been 28% the past five years.

We believe our contract proposal is extremely reasonable and responsible. In the interest of transparency, both final offers are posted on our website under the Negotiations Update tab. The Board has worked to propose a fair contract, given our limited ability to raise revenue.

Hearings will be held December 16 and 17 when the District and Education Alliance will present their proposals and make their case in front of a neutral arbitrator. The arbitrator will make a recommendation and both the Board and Union will vote separately on whether to accept or reject it. We're hopeful that we can reach a resolution that respects the many needs of our school district.