

The MPTA is sensitive to and respectful of the thoughts of parents, students, and community members on the matter of block scheduling. We would like to make you aware of the efforts the teachers have taken to avoid this current situation.

What is the MPTA's position on using the community as a bargaining tactic?

We feel strongly that we should not use the community as a forum for issues of contract negotiations. However, the current situation has forced our hand. And, if the community is going to be involved, they should be informed.

We are disappointed in the district's use of the community as a bargaining tactic. Evidence: On March 2, 2017, without any prior substantial conversations, the MPTA was issued an ultimatum. The President of the Board of Education stated that the MPTA had 24 hours to agree to roll over the block schedule agreement outside of negotiating a new contract. This agreement was to be made immediately or the Board would advise the community that the Teachers Association was putting the block schedule at risk. However, if the Teachers Association agreed to the Board's demands without negotiation, a different letter praising the Teachers Association would be sent out to the community instead. The following day, the BOE sent a letter to the community soliciting a call to action from parents and students. The MPTA feels that it is the Board's responsibility, not the community's, to negotiate an agreement to replace the contract that they crafted and signed.

Why is this happening?

The teachers' contract expires on June 30, 2017. The block schedule is a sunset provision of our current contract. Sunsetting means that it will expire with the contract in June. It was negotiated and mutually agreed upon by both the Board of Education and the Mount Pleasant Teachers Association in our last contract. The contract needs to be negotiated by its end date in order to continue the current schedule in the high school.

Wait. Hasn't this happened before?

Yes. We are disappointed to find ourselves in this position again. At the start of our last contract negotiations, the district engaged in similar tactics by pressuring the teachers to sign a side letter approving block scheduling. Due to the circumstances of timing, we signed the side letter and agreed to work outside our contract. Following that signing, the Board of Education did not negotiate the contract for two years, leaving us with 0% salary increases for both years. This year the MPTA took the necessary steps to avoid this situation. We had three years to solve this issue and worked hard set up the process early on.

Will this continue to happen in the future?

We hope not. In our recent offers, the MPTA has made block scheduling a permanent option for the district.

What does settling the teachers' contract entail?

A negotiating team representing the teachers meets with a negotiating team that represents the school district. We discuss which aspects of the current employment contract each side would like to keep and which to change. Wages, hours, and conditions of employment are always discussed. Scheduling is also part of our contract.

Contract negotiations can take as much or as little time as the two sides determine. In the process, they can be efficient or prolonged. Some contracts are settled in a few months – some can drag on for several years. One would hope that it is the intention of those involved to settle a contract before its expiration. The MPTA has put forth much effort toward this end.

The Board understands that an agreement must be reached. However, to do so it must become a priority. Our teaching schedule is dictated by the contract we mutually create. If the Board wanted a particular bell schedule that affected our teaching time, they should not have waited until February to begin discussions when they knew this section needed to be negotiated. The BOE, Dr. Guiney, Mr. Schenker, and the entire high school faculty have known (for years) that June 2017 marks the end of the block schedule implementation according to our contract. At a previous BOE meeting, the Board accused the MPTA of blindsiding them. The facts were there. Respectfully and in light of these facts, it is impossible that anyone, including the Board, was “blindsided.”

What steps did the MPTA take to solve this issue before it impacted the community?

First and foremost, the sole priority of the Mount Pleasant Teachers Association is to provide your children, our students, with an education that prepares them for the 21st century. The successful preparation of our students, both now and as they head into the next chapter of their lives, is of the utmost importance. With this objective in mind, the MPTA initiated talks with the Board of Education and the Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Susan Guiney, beginning in September 2016. The MPTA was eager to begin the negotiation process early to ensure a quick, reasonable, and smooth transition from one contract to another. At that time, the District said the Facilities Bond was their priority. We made it ours too.

After the successful passage of the Bond, the MPTA again reached out to Dr. Guiney and the Board to begin the negotiation process. The MPTA requested a meeting in late November and met with the Board President and the Superintendent on December 19th to make an informal proposal. This offer was respectful of the needs of students, community members, and teachers. It included adding the block schedule as part of the contract in the hope that an agreement could be reached before the end of the 2016-17 school year. The Board declined our proposal on January 12th and both parties agreed to begin the process of formal negotiations. To date, the Board has met formally with the MPTA only once, on February 13th. Before entering the formal meeting, the MPTA extended a second informal offer, which was not acknowledged by the District. Subsequently, both parties exchanged proposals and set future dates for negotiations. We met on March 8th and again on April 19th.

Where are we now?

On April 5th, we wrote to encourage the BOE to come and sit at the table to negotiate. They declined. On April 19th, in a meeting with Dr. Guiney and Mr. Lennon, the business administrator for the district, we asked the district lawyer, Mr. Mountanos, to work with the Board on getting back to us with something that would enable us to move forward. On May 1st our meeting was cancelled while they considered next steps. We have not heard back. We have a meeting scheduled for May 16th. Please encourage the Board to take an active role in negotiating.

Is the MPTA being fair?

Yes. We can say with confidence that we have been fair and just with our negotiations and offers to the district. At many junctures, the Board has recognized us for our reasonableness. Additionally, we are flexible in terms of length of contract. We have asked for one or two year agreements, to give us time to negotiate more lengthy needs and desires. Other districts in our area have been able to settle contracts quickly. There is no reason to work with expired contracts.

Is it true that the negotiators for the MPTA are not bringing back proposals or offers made by the district to the membership?

While this was stated by one of the candidates at Meet the Candidate Night, it is not the case. No offers or proposals have been made by the district to date. Therefore, there has been nothing to present to the membership.

What about MPTA's fiscal responsibility to its members?

It also must be said here that the MPTA has a fiscal responsibility to the teachers. As a unit, our projected cost and compensation for the 2017-18 school year remain the same as they were in 2013-14 when we settled the last contract. With the proposed staffing reductions and retirements, our cost and compensation will decrease even further.

While we understand that it is a tax cap world, it is not the teachers that are strapping the district financially. The budget has increased by over 6 million dollars from 2013-14 to 2017-18; yet the teacher compensation package will be cost the district less than it did 5 years ago. In percentages, we make up roughly 53% of the district's budget. 5 years ago we comprised 60%. Why? The district has chosen to allocate its funds differently. The district is spending its resources elsewhere. While we have little say in the district's spending, it is our place to say that as a school in the business of educating children, teachers are the primary resource. We deserve to be one of the district's main priorities.

Don't teachers get step raises?

Yes. Our salary schedule does include 16 steps. However, over half of our members have reached maximum on that scale. They no longer benefit from step increases. Even with step increases, the cost to the district is minimal. Next year, before projected staffing cuts and possible retirements, it will cost the district \$70,000 to roll over our current contract.

What about the MPTA's fiscal responsibility to the district?

Please know that the MPTA recognizes its fiscal responsibility to the community as well. It was suggested at a past BOE meeting that the MPTA was asking for between 2% and 6% increases. For the record, our offer was more conservative than 2%. This is consistent with other local school districts that have been able to settle their contracts. We are not trying to take advantage of the district. Our offers were fair, and they included the block schedule as a permanent option.

Where do we stand in salary in Westchester?

The Mount Pleasant teachers have a competitive salary. However, it should be noted that our rank among districts that reported salary data fell from #16 in 2011-12 to #30 in 2014-15.

What is the MPTA's position on the block schedule?

The MPTA does not have any objection to implementing the block schedule. We recognize its value. However, it should be noted that our teachers do not teach to a program. They do not teach to a schedule. They teach the students.

As teachers, we enter each and every day with your children as our first priority.

We are committed to working tirelessly to move our students on the path from childhood to adulthood while developing skills, strategies, grit, confidence, and compassion along the way. That commitment will not change.

In summation, we are willing and hopeful to negotiate. However, it is not fair to ask us to sign a side letter requiring us to teach outside the confines of our contract.

The circumstances do not warrant us doing that.

- We have a signed agreement entered into by both parties.
- The MPTA is transparent and has been active in trying to resolve this issue without impacting the community.
- We have been active and fair in the process.
- The BOE has not responded to our efforts to negotiate as they have been unwilling to set meeting dates.

If the community would like to continue the block schedule, please urge the Board to make negotiations a priority in order to achieve this goal.