



Dear Allison and School Committee:

We are educators. We love to teach, we value education highly, and we care about our students. We also want to work collaboratively with you, our elected officials, to make sure students receive a meaningful education during the pandemic. We also don't want our actions or inactions to be responsible for anyone's long term health problems or death. Decisions that we made in negotiations with the school committees had the potential to lead to all of these outcomes, and that is a great weight.

All that said, we would like to respond to the request to reopen negotiations, and also to debunk some misconceptions about the role of the Amherst Pelham Education Association (APEA).

Your request to renegotiate came as somewhat of a shock to the APEA for several reasons. First, the School Committee had been pushing us to end negotiations for weeks. And this week, we finalized signatures on the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), ratified by our members and the School Committee. Within the language of the MOA we agreed on the need for ongoing conversation:

"The parties acknowledge that they have attempted to address those issues that are reasonably foreseeable at this time to the extent they wish to do so. However, they also acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to evolve and that unforeseeable issues are likely to arise as well. Accordingly, the Districts and the Association agree that new safety concerns should be a point of ongoing discussion."

In this context, the JLMSC was established for the purpose of:

.." reviewing data related to metrics [on]at least [a] weekly basis.... It shall be responsible for discussing how effective the terms of this Agreement are in addressing COVID19-related concerns, and for making recommendations to the Districts and the APEA as to any potential revisions. It shall have other such duties as the parties may agree. The JLMSC will meet weekly and determine the form of its meetings."

This language in the MOA guides us. And the JLMSC has a key role in ensuring that discussion is ongoing. Our JLMSC has received no proposals or recommendations from the district about metrics to bring back to our governance. Most of our questions could only be forwarded to the Superintendent for answers.

The Districts have referred to the MOA with the APEA often in public statements; we are concerned about the narrative. The negotiations were confidential, per the Districts' request, however, we insisted our members be allowed to attend as silent representatives. If the School Committee had allowed the community to attend it would have cleared up much confusion about how the Districts and the APEA arrived at the current metrics.

The Executive Board met on Friday and agreed that we would put the request to a vote by our governance, providing any subsequent negotiations be fully transparent and open to the public. We were extremely concerned that the lack of transparency on the part of the Districts and School Committees meant that the public was not aware of the efforts that the APEA made to address the needs of our students and caregivers, as well as our members.

When the current MOA was negotiated, the Districts/School Committees made an effort to limit communication about the process. We were ultimately told that they would not make an issue of our efforts for open negotiations by including silent representatives of our membership. We agreed that we would communicate with our respective parties to update them about the process, and we agreed not to put anything into the public without first sharing it with the other party. Although the School Committees violated this themselves numerous times, we respected this agreement on our side.

This time we ask for full transparency and completely open bargaining. We believe that taking this approach will allow the community to see that members of the APEA very much wish to do what's best for all stakeholders. As education unionists often say, teacher working conditions are student learning conditions. And in a pandemic, they may directly affect the community in several ways, as well. There is no road map for how to solve this; but we need to approach this collaboratively.

Much is being said publicly and in the community about the current two week closure. But absent in the narrative is that the phasing structure and two week closure action was presented by the Districts, and we agreed to it. Do you own up to the fact that you proposed it, knowing the potential consequences? Making this information available to the public, and why the Committees proposed it, would help the public understand the current closure.

This final agreement necessitated compromise on the parts of both the APEA and the District/School Committees. It was a herculean effort on our part to maximize membership involvement and over a hundred members gave of their time to offer professional recommendations regarding safe and engaging in-person and remote learning. Some of those recommendations took into consideration the challenges of intensive needs students and were proposed by APEA during negotiations but rejected by the Districts. Because of that rejection, and the School Committees' refusal to hold these students' education separate from their phased model, we were unable to include our suggestions in the MOA. As you may have noticed, our Executive Board and negotiations team is quite diverse. APEA was intentional in reaching out to the community through town halls and sent members to seek input at food pickup sites around the community, as well as harnessing member voices and diverse perspectives. And we made deliberate and multiple efforts during negotiations to make requests for inclusion in the MOA that would take into account these concerns. They were rejected by the School Committees.

Therefore, we desire that any renegotiations be open to the public for transparency. The community deserves to know how we come to agreement on issues that directly impact them. The APEA would also like to host a town hall with the Districts to address community concerns that have been brought up by the current MOA (see the MOA posted on our website, www.apea.massteacher.org).

Respectfully,

APEA Executive Board Members

Karin Baker, Vice President

Mangala Jagadeesh, Unit A Elementary

Lamikco Magee, Ethnic Minority Affairs

Georgia Malcolm, Unit B

Elizabeth Pretel, Treasurer

Danielle Seltzer, President

Tiffany Thibodeau, Unit A Secondary

Margaret Todd, Unit C