

CLEVELAND HEIGHTS TEACHERS UNION
LOCAL 795 - AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS
DEMOCRACY IN EDUCATION • EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY

an Ohio Non-profit Corporation



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February 15, 2017

Dear Superintendent Dixon:

On behalf of the members of the Cleveland Heights Teachers Union, I am writing to express our collective surprise and disappointment in reaction to your February 3, 2017 letter and FAQ.

One of the benefits of working for the Cleveland Heights–University Heights School District (CH-UH) has been that even when the District’s administration and its teachers disagreed over the particulars of a contract provision, neither side ever lost sight of our shared goal. Success for both sides was always defined as finding solutions that balanced everyone’s needs and accomplished our shared mission within the constraints that have been imposed upon us.

It wasn’t always easy, but both sides remained committed to our educational partnership, even when negotiations were at their most rancorous. Neither side vilified the other because we understood that doing so would inevitably undermine our community’s confidence in the District and would ultimately be self-defeating.

At least that had been the case, until we received your February 3 letter.

Our members were taken aback by how your letter’s tone and its selective presentation of the facts so dramatically broke with our shared approach.

We were troubled, for example, by how your characterization of CH-UH teachers as being “fairly” compensated seemed to imply otherwise. No mention was made of how CH-UH teachers helped shoulder the burden of the District’s financial challenges through modest salary increases and increases in our health care premiums. Teachers in surrounding school districts have received increases of between 1.5% and 3.0% each year; CH-UH teachers, on the other hand, have only received a total increase in their salaries of 3.5% over the last five years. During the same period, the State Teachers Retirement System began taking an additional 4.0% out of our take home pay. While these circumstances were far from ideal, our members accepted the sacrifices they entailed as our contribution to a long-term financial solution for our District.

CH-UH teachers do, in fact, believe that we have been compensated fairly; in most comparisons based on education level and experience, our salaries are within \$1,500 of

the average for the 28 Cuyahoga County districts that report to the State Employees Relations Board. We are simply interested in ensuring our compensation remains fair so that we can continue to attract and retain the talented, hard-working educators who are crucial to the District's efforts to maintain enrollment.

In light of your inclusion in your letter of the District's 5% decline in enrollment from the beginning of 2014-2015 until the beginning of this school year, we found the absence of any mention of last year's layoff of 10% of the District's classroom teachers particularly baffling. How can we talk about how to best serve the needs of students without at least acknowledging that ranks of CH-UH's teachers have been literally decimated and these staff reductions were out of scale with declining enrollment?

Any fair assessment of how CH-UH teachers are compensated must include both our salaries and benefits and our workload. The teachers who survived last year's layoffs are being forced to work even harder absorbing the responsibilities of their former colleagues. Your letter neglects to mention how this has led to larger class sizes and the issues they create. And as the Administration has forced teachers to take on even more responsibilities during their contractual time, it has also proposed expanding mandatory professional development during teachers' non-contractual time, which would increase the days teachers must work. A fair account of the Administration's proposal of a 0% increase in base salary for CH-UH teachers this year would have to be placed in the context of the additional work the Administration is demanding of us.

Further, when you wrote, "All other unions agreed to take a 0% base salary increase and rollover their current contracts through June 30, 2017," you seem to imply that a base salary increase is a settled issue for everyone else and that CHTU stands alone in its opposition. As you are aware, but failed to mention, the District's other unions have also agreed to "me-too" clauses in their contracts that would grant their members any base salary increase negotiated by CHTU. Your implications to the contrary, a base salary increase remains an open issue for all of the District's unions.

CH-UH's teachers have been committed partners in pursuit of the District's mission. We work closely with the Administration on many District level committees: Appraisal Review Committee, Local Professional Development Committee, Master Teacher Committee, and Summit. We have done so for years.

We are strong advocates for our students, which was reflected in how we began our negotiations. The first interests we brought to the negotiating table didn't focus on salary or benefits. They were issues that arose from our community listening project from last year, including wrap-around services and limitations on non-mandatory testing.

And we went "all in" on last year's tax levy issue. Many of our members live in our district and we worked hard to show our family, friends, and neighbors why CH-UH had

earned additional tax investment. We did so in the belief that the Administration would continue to treat us as partners and bargain with us in good faith. Being told after the fact that none of the revenue generated by the levy we supported could be allocated to ensure fair compensation of our District's teachers was inexplicably provocative and discouraging.

Despite our alarm at what appears to be the Administration's unilateral decision to treat the District's teachers as adversaries and opponents, instead of allies, our membership is hopeful that the fruitful partnership that we have enjoyed for so long can be restored. Our District faces enough external challenges without creating unnecessary internal ones.

At the same time, we will remain dedicated advocates for our interests and the interests of our students and their families. We know that you and many members of your administration have not been with our District long and haven't had a chance to get to know everyone, but many of us have been here for decades. While we will willingly renew our partnership with the Administration to pursue our District's mission, we will be equally vigilant to guard against misguided proposals that will undermine what is for many of us our life's work.

Sincerely,



Ari Klein, President
Cleveland Heights Teachers Union

Cc: Board Negotiating Team
CHTU Members