

The following is an excerpt from the Superintendent's Report that Steve Cochrane presented at the Board of Education meeting on October 28, 2014:

I want to conclude my report tonight by taking about negotiations. I want to share with those of you here tonight and those of you watching at home what I see as my role, what I see as the issues, and what I maintain as my hope and expectation for this district. My comments are my own.

As superintendent, my role in negotiations is not about taking sides. It is about taking a long-term view of what is in the best interest of our students. I made a promise to this community when I first accepted the role of educational leader of the Princeton Public Schools. It was a promise that I would – in all my decisions and recommendations – be guided by what I believed was right for kids. I am committed to keeping that promise.

So, let me go on record as saying that I believe it is absolutely in the best interest of our students to have teachers who are fairly paid and feel affirmed and respected for their work. Teachers who are compensated fairly, teachers who feel affirmed, are teachers who are freed up to focus not on money but on mission. They are educators who will eagerly come together as many did this month on a Saturday to enhance their instructional practice by attending a day of workshops on reading and writing at Columbia's Teachers College. They are the chaperones who will continue to mentor our students on life-changing trips to France and Italy and Washington D.C. They are the counselors who will plan activities during Violence Awareness Week and throughout the year to inspire our students to act with honesty, empathy and kindness. They are the nurses who will continue to go above and beyond to keep our children physically and emotionally healthy under increasingly complex circumstances.

So, yes, I believe it is in the best interest of our students for our teachers to be fairly compensated, and I will continue to advocate for that. I also believe, however, that it is in the best interest of our students to have ENOUGH teachers to maintain reasonable class sizes in the face of rising enrollments. Moreover, I

believe it is in the best interest of our students to have enough resources in the form of technology, textbooks and other supplies so that we can maintain and perhaps enhance the quality of our academic, athletic and artistic programs.

Unlike many districts where enrollment is declining, enrollment at PPS is up 125 students over last year and is continuing to rise. I need to plan for that. We need to plan for that. None of us want to see kindergarten classes of 23 as we nearly had at Littlebrook this year. None of us want to see the continuation of chemistry classes of 28 at our high school. This year's initially proposed budget included approximately five new teaching positions to address the enrollment increase and to expand elective offerings at the middle school. All five positions were cut in our efforts to meet the two-percent cap.

And therein lies the question that keeps me up at night: How do we do it all? How, with a tax levy cap that limits our budget increase to \$1.3 million do we provide a fair increase for our current teachers and also fund an appropriate increase in new positions and needed resources?

I believe there are workable answers to that question. I believe those answers will involve a salary structure for our teachers that is fair and sustainable over time. I believe those answers will involve meaningful cost-saving measures in the area of health care premiums. I also believe those answers will involve a legal and affordable way to address our teachers' increased health care contributions associated with Chapter 78.

How we get to those answers, however, will be just as important as the answers themselves. The process we use, the level of our discourse, will define us as people, as educators, and as a school district. Moreover, the process we use will send a powerful message to the young people in this community who are looking to us for leadership.

On our opening day together as a full faculty, I spoke about "measuring what matters." I noted that the skills our students need to be truly successful in life are probably not the ones most easily measured by a standardized test. Life's problems do not come to us as multiple choice questions or short essay

responses. They are much more nuanced, complex, and messy. They often involve competing priorities and conflicting emotions. And so, in talking on that first day about the skills our students need to be successful in life, I highlighted creative problem solving. I highlighted critical thinking (the ability to look at issues from multiple perspectives), I spoke about oral communication, collaboration, empathy and compassion.

As educators, we value those skills. We strive to teach them in our classrooms and beyond our classrooms. Indeed, it is beyond our classrooms, in what is known as the “parallel curriculum,” that we sometimes teach the most.

Kids are always watching us – whether we want them to or not. And so it is quite possible that this negotiations process – played out in public and in the press – is the consummate “teachable moment.” Students want to know that the political process works. They want to know that the adults in their lives can solve problems creatively, collaboratively and respectfully.

And so, what is my hope and expectation for myself, for this board, and for all members of the Princeton Public School community as we engage in the negotiations process? It is that we continually strive to elevate our public and private discourse to the highest level. That we celebrate points of commonality. That we disagree respectfully. That we listen with empathy. That we examine issues critically. That we come to the table with solutions. And that we continue to maintain a focus on what is in the best interest of students.

To be sure, I do not envision negotiations as singing Kumbaya. I know we have to work through difficult issues and difficult emotions. I know, as well however, that among the members of the Board and of the PREA there are really smart, hardworking and caring people who are deeply committed to achieving a workable compromise and to doing the right thing on behalf of our children.

I want to thank our teachers and the PREA leadership for their professionalism throughout this process. I want to thank the members of the Board for their dedication to this process and to all of the teachers, parents, community members and children who are affected by it.

Finally, I want to assure everyone, especially our students, that we will reach a resolution – and we will do so in a way that will make you proud and affirm the Princeton Public Schools as a lighthouse district for the nation.