

Haverhill School Committee and Haverhill Education Association Hold Fourth Negotiation Session

Haverhill, MA – The Haverhill School Committee and the Haverhill Education Association (HEA) convened their fourth collective bargaining session Tuesday night as both parties continue working toward a successor agreement to the current teacher contract, which expires on June 30, 2025. While the terms of the current contract will remain in place until a successor agreement is ratified, the School Committee is committed to concluding negotiations in a timely, collaborative, and fiscally responsible manner.

At the meeting, the School Committee was prepared to receive a response from the HEA to its comprehensive proposal entitled *"School Committee Proposal: A Responsible and Competitive Teacher Compensation Plan."* This proposal includes:

- A 6% Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) over three years
- Targeted step and lane adjustments are designed to maintain Haverhill Public Schools' (HPS) competitiveness in regional teacher compensation.

Current data show that Haverhill teacher salaries are competitive with surrounding districts and, in some cases, such as those with a Master's degree and five years of experience, are more than 6% higher than is typical in nearby districts.

The School Committee is committed to working toward the timely completion of a contract agreement that addresses teacher concerns, provides competitive compensation, and is sustainable without undue layoffs in this challenging national economic climate with shifting federal priorities and uncertain state education funding. The Committee remains firmly committed to long-term fiscal stability for Haverhill's public schools and responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

Despite the Committee's readiness to engage in discussions around compensation and several HEA proposals—including expanded paid parental and bereavement leave, increases in stipends and differentials, and enhanced tuition reimbursement—the HEA expressed that they were not yet prepared to discuss financial matters. The Association reiterated that all 60 language proposals submitted are priorities and reiterated its intent to address them sequentially before engaging in salary discussions. After four sessions, the committee believes it prudent to present a wage proposal alongside the 60 items suggested by the HEA to assess the overall financial and operational context before agreeing to any specific terms. The HEA was unable to provide a date by which they would deliver a financial proposal for School Committee review.

In the absence of a financial discussion, the HEA focused the meeting on building conditions and student behavior. The School Committee fully agrees that school safety and building conditions are critically important and has taken significant steps in recent years to address both areas. Over the past five years, in addition to capital improvements, dozens of behavioral health

positions have been added to support the diverse needs of students. This upcoming school year, the district will open a new day school explicitly designed to support the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of Haverhill's youngest learners, providing a nurturing, specialized environment where students can receive the services they need without disrupting the learning of others.

The School Committee remains open to ongoing collaboration and is prepared to engage in meaningful conversation across all areas of negotiation. However, the Committee believes it is essential to tackle critical compensation discussions up front and to prioritize those other issues that can best be addressed in a collective bargaining agreement. The Committee believes that many of the 60 issues raised by the HEA can be, or already are being, addressed by district management and do not need to be included in a collective bargaining agreement. The Committee continues to express concern that delaying financial discussions may hinder the goal of finalizing a new contract before June 30, 2025.

The School Committee first invited the HEA to begin negotiations in August 2024, and again in October 2024, negotiations have been ongoing since March 2025; however, only six weeks remain until the contract expires, and the HEA has not developed a financial proposal for discussion. The only financial guidance the HEA has suggested is that they want Haverhill teachers to be among the highest paid in the region. The Committee has had the HEA proposals reviewed by the school's financial administration team. The projected cost of the HEA's initial proposal is \$26,942,000 in the first year. This additional cost would entail a 20% increase in the school budget and add an estimated \$1,149 to the average single-family property tax bill in Haverhill.

To support progress, the School Committee has proposed four additional bargaining sessions on June 2, June 10, June 18, and June 23, and is currently awaiting confirmation of availability from the HEA. The next scheduled negotiation session is set for May 21, 2025.

The School Committee remains steadfast in its commitment to open dialogue, transparency, and securing a fair contract that supports both educators and the long-term success of Haverhill's students and schools.