

Warwick Teachers' Union to Conduct Informational Picketing on April 11, 2017

Place: Warwick City Hall, 3275 Post Road, Warwick, RI 02886

Time: Tuesday, April 11, 2017; 2:30 pm – 4:30 pm

Purpose: Darlene Netcoh, President of the WTU states, “The Warwick Teachers’ Union is holding informational picketing at Warwick City Hall to call attention to the following:

- 1) Warwick teachers have been working without a successor collective bargaining agreement (CBA) since August 31, 2015, but the Warwick School Committee (WSC) and Superintendent Philip Thornton have violated terms and conditions of that contract and have negatively affected the students’ educational experience regarding class size and special education services.
- 2) Instead of negotiating with the WTU, Thornton and the WSC have wasted hundreds of thousands of dollars of taxpayers’ money to pursue interest arbitration, to take issues to the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), and to file frivolous court actions.
- 3) Throughout this school year and specifically over the past few weeks, the media, both print and television, have extensively covered the myriad outrageous conditions that exist in the Warwick Public Schools. Members of the public, which included both parents and teachers, voiced their outrage at the Warwick School Committee meeting that occurred on April 4, 2017. At this meeting the Norwood PTA and others called for Thornton’s resignation.
- 4) Superintendent Thornton has allowed dangerous conditions, such as non-functioning fire alarms in elementary schools and raw sewage in classrooms at a junior high school, to exist in the schools and belatedly and only after a parent broke the news communicated about the fire alarms with the parents and teachers.
- 5) Instead of ensuring that all fire alarm systems were operational and that students had safe, sewage-free classrooms in which to learn, Thornton spent three million dollars on polishing gym floors and putting carpeting in auditoriums.
- 6) The WTU is abiding by the terms and conditions of the 2014-2015 CBA until the parties agree to a successor agreement. However, Thornton and the WSC have chosen to follow a path of unilaterally violating that agreement and have expended hundreds of thousands of dollars for interest arbitration, court actions, RIDE appearances, and other legal fees to the law firm Brennan, Recupero, Cascione, Scungio & McAllister, LLP. These dollars should have been spent on educating our students; providing safe, healthy classrooms and buildings for students and staff; and settling a successor CBA.
- 7) Thornton and the school committee are wasting the taxpayers’ money on their poor, ill-conceived decisions about consolidation and on their numerous attorneys’ fees because they would rather litigate and arbitrate than negotiate.”

A Quick History of the Current Dispute

WTU President Darlene Netcoh states, “In December 2014, the WTU first requested to begin negotiations with the WSC, which finally consented to negotiate in the summer of 2015. In the fall and with an acting superintendent, the WSC requested mediation, the parties chose Vincent Ragosta as a mediator, and the parties met numerous times during September and October. However, after Superintendent Philip Thornton was hired in October, he attended only one mediation session and then immediately filed for interest arbitration, which began in December 2015 and has not yet concluded. In the meantime, the superintendent and WSC have filed endless motions in the courts and have brought actions to RIDE, while the parties have continued to meet in mediation, now with Vincent Ragosta and the Mayor of Warwick. In order to resolve this two-year dispute, the WTU first proposed last year and recently reiterated its offer to make the neutral interest arbitrator’s decision binding. The WSC has not responded to this offer. The taxpayers of Warwick need to know that since June 2015 they have spent approximately \$20,000 a month on the law firm Brennan, Recupero, Cascione, Scungio & McAllister, LLP for a total of hundreds of thousands of dollars; \$135,000 on interest arbitration as of December 31, 2016; thousands of dollars on mediator Ragosta; and untold tens of thousands of dollars on the Justin Martin and Associates public relations firm for the school department to attempt to put a positive spin on its actions. After all the time and money spent on a contract renewal process that should have concluded with a successor agreement before the expiration of the collective bargaining agreement on August 31, 2015, the WSC and Superintendent Thornton should be willing to make the neutral interest arbitrator’s ruling binding and focus their time, attention, and resources on rectifying the hazardous conditions that have jeopardized the safety of Warwick’s students and on restoring trust to the parents, students, teachers, and the community at large.”