

We, the District 15 Concerned Parents, would like to thank you for this opportunity to speak tonight. We have come to express our support for the Board and for our teachers. There is nothing easy about the negotiations process and we sincerely respect the enormous amount of time and consideration both sides have invested. We are sure that neither group has entered into this process lightly. We encourage all parties to continue to work together to avoid a strike and to approve a contract that will be fair, equitable and in the best interests of **all** the stakeholders.

We are a community that values quality education. Like parents and parenting, teachers and teaching are priceless. However, quality is not just about salaries and benefits. Quality can be maintained and improved by providing better tools for the classroom, like science labs, enhanced and up to date technology for the students to use, lower class sizes and many other programs that the District can allocate funds for.

We live in a community where salaries are frozen or increasing slowly. Pensions are non-existent, and layoffs are also increasing. Many of us have suffered through job losses or downsizing – a guaranteed job is a thing of the past. The teachers in district 15 have not experienced the same changing economy that our community has. According to the Wall Street Journal, in the last 5 years, wages for college-educated workers increased only 1.3%, compared to over 24% for teachers in District 15.^{1,2} In the last 5 years, health and retirement benefits have declined for most families, with premiums growing more than 50%.² Teachers in District 15 have virtually the same health and retirement benefits they had a decade ago.

The teacher's contract needs to reflect the community they serve. We believe that the CTC requests for a 23% raise over the next 3 years, and 36% over 5 years, along with other increases in benefits, are out of sync with current economic reality and would place our district in financial peril.

If the Board accepts the CTC's proposals, the ultimate result will be deficit spending. Previous deficit spending resulted in budget cuts, with class sizes increased to the bursting point. Those budget cuts and teacher layoffs, that caused so much pain for our teachers, our parents and most importantly our children, will happen again if the Board agrees to a contract that will require deficit spending. We finally have a balanced budget. We do not support raises that are out of sync with this community and we ask the Board of Ed to please stand firm and not accept a contract that would put our district in a financially unsound situation.

We urge the District and the CTC to continue negotiating in good faith but we also urge the CTC to take into consideration the real-world economy. While the CTC has said they do not want to negotiate through the public, we value transparency and are grateful to the board for publicly making the details on key issues available. We have a vested interest in this process through our children and we are the very public whose tax dollars fund this district. We too are stakeholders in District 15.

The strike that the union is planning is in no ones best interest. Before they take the step of walking off their jobs, the public has a right to know what they are asking for. How do they justify such a drastic step which will have ramifications in our district for years to come?

If the CTC does choose to walk off their jobs and leave the children behind, we will advocate for them to return to the classroom and the bargaining table. While a strike will be difficult for all of us, we will encourage both parties to remain calm and continue to work towards a contract that will support the board's mission to provide the highest quality education while maintaining a financially sound future.

Thank you.

ref: ¹thechampion.org

2000 – CCSD15 Avg Teacher salary = \$50,305

2005 – CCSD15 Avg Teacher salary = \$62,718

increase = 24.6%

ref: ²the Wall Street Journal, 9/22/06