Contract Negotiations

By David Cicarella, NHFT President

Contract negotiations are always tedious and time-consuming yet are obviously incredibly important. Our contract is quite different than other unions in the city as teachers throughout the state are strictly governed by the Teachers Negotiations Act.

The Teachers Negotiation Act (TNA) specifies the following:

- The contract negotiation window begins 210 days prior to the expiration of our contract (our contract expires on June 30, 2021).
- Mediation begins 160 days prior to the expiration of our contract.
- Arbitration begins 135 days prior to the expiration of our contract.
- A stipulated agreement remains a possibility during the arbitration period. This allows both sides to continue to talk and reach an agreement that the arbitrator will endorse. As an FYI, this is always preferable as we get to control the tenets of the contract as opposed to handing it to an arbitrator who then has full authority to decide who gets what.

As we prepare for my fifth contract negotiation, we will again assemble a Negotiations Team that is diverse and represents all of us in terms of years of experience and teaching assignments. As we get closer to the negotiations window, I will ask for volunteers willing to serve. For those considering volunteering, please note that this is a huge commitment of time with meetings after school and often running into the evening.

This year will again be challenging given the barren fiscal condition at all levels: local, state, and federal. New Haven virtually lives off of state and federal grants (87 cents on each dollar for the NHPS comes from grants with the city contributing the remaining 13 cents per dollar). However, despite the dire fiscal outlook at all levels of government, we secured a three (3) year contract for 2018-2021 which did not...

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One year ago, Los Angeles teachers on strike were demanding an end to random searches where students were yanked out of class to be frisked. By the time they walked back into work, they had won a partial victory. Now these searches are coming to an end districtwide—landing a blow against racism in the schools.

L.A. teacher union activists, like their counterparts in Chicago, Seattle, St. Paul, and other cities, are making contract demands to confront segregation, underfunding, and the criminalization of the students they teach—problems that hit Black and Latino students hardest.

The L.A. strike elevated a wide range of demands, including smaller class sizes and more nurses and social workers. After listening to students about their top concerns, strikers highlighted the issue of random searches.

The district started this practice 30 years ago after a school shooting, with the stated goal of keeping weapons out. But as of 2019, L.A. was one of very few districts using random searches—only 4 percent do nationwide.

Students are pulled out of class while administrators and security officers search their bags and scan them with a metal detector. When these staff are short-handed, teachers and counselors are sometimes asked to do the wanding.

**NOT SO RANDOM**

A University of California Los Angeles report on two years of searches (2013-2015) found that they confiscated overwhelmingly ordinary items, not guns and weapons. Contraband included markers, highlighters, Wite-Out, lighters, and body spray.

And the “random” searches weren’t so random. The student-led group Students Deserve, which also includes parents and teachers, reported that students in magnet schools and advanced classes were rarely searched. Black students got searched most often.

Students said it made them feel like suspects at their own schools. Marshé Doss, a senior at Dorsey High School during the strike, had been searched and had her hand sanitizer confiscated; a school official accused her of bringing it to school to get high.

“As Black and Brown students, we have all of these things piled up against us,” said Doss. “I had so many questions after that experience.”

Teacher Sharonne Hapuarachy sponsors the Students Deserve chapter at Dorsey High. When the random search happened in her classroom, she was shocked. “It was really disturbing and scary for me, even as the teacher,” she said. She was taken aback by the way the students were spoken to. “It felt very serious; it creates a sense of anxiety.”

**MADE THEM BARGAIN**

Ending random searches was one on a long list of union demands that the district did not legally have to bargain over. The district ignored these—until the walkout.

“Because the strike brought out public opinion in support of our issues,” said United Teachers Los Angeles Secretary Arlene Inouye, “we were able to leverage that at the end to get things we would never get before.”

In the deal that ended the strike, the district committed to a pilot program, letting 14 schools apply to opt out of the searches right away; 14 more would become eligible two years later.

Other union wins were class-size caps, more staff, legal support for undocumented students, and green space on school campuses.

But the strike momentum led to a bigger win on the issue. In May, a school board seat opened up. With UTLA’s help, a union allied won the seat. And in June, the board voted to sunset the random searches with the end of the 2019-2020 school year.

**JOINED STUDENT ACTIVISTS**

Four years before the strike, teachers came to union leaders complaining about the searches, Inouye said.

She recalled one teacher in particular who brought the issue to her attention. “He never thought that the union would be interested in the issue,” Inouye said. “Of course we would,” was the leaders’ response, she said, “but we have to build and organize around it.”

Teachers and counselors said when they were asked to conduct the searches, it broke the trust they were trying to build with students. They also argued the searches were a waste of time that could be spent learning.

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After seemingly endless efforts, we have finally secured the return of investment giants Fidelity and Vanguard for our 403-b option. These are two immensely popular companies as they have excellent track records on profit returns coupled with low fees.

A bit of history as to their disappearance and return:

Prior to 2009, the City of New Haven offered 72 investment companies. But then, in 2009, the IRS unilaterally ordered all municipalities to have a third-party administrator handle all contributions, and Plan with Ease was selected. However, companies such as Fidelity and Vanguard, and dozens of others, did not want to get involved in the detailed, individual reporting of contributions required by the IRS. The city was left with a mere handful of investment companies to offer, and many teachers were not satisfied with the choices.

We have pushed incessantly for months on end. On March 4th we attended a financial meeting at City Hall at which a decision was made to bring in another third-party administrator (IPX) who would handle the detailed reporting required by the IRS. Fidelity, Vanguard, and others will now be available to all teachers as a 403-b investment option. More details to follow!

The Return of Fidelity and Vanguard

By David Cicarella, NHFT President and Pat DeLucia, NHFT Vice President

.include the much despised step freezes, wage freezes, and the ballooning costs to health care benefits that so many of our colleagues around the country were forced to endure.

Our last contract was negotiated during perhaps one of the most challenging economic circumstances in recent memory. And this one is not much better. Despite this, while other districts negotiated settlements that included step freezes, wage freezes, and reductions to medical benefits, we were able to secure the following:

Salary:

- All teachers received a raise every year
- No steps were added to the salary scale
- All teachers moved up a step every year
- Control of salary scale structure was maintained
- Homebound, Summer School, and Adult Ed teachers (evening) were paid $32/hr – up from $23.69/hr
- Salary increases were secured of 2.6%, 2.6%, 2.7% (8.1% total when compounded over 3 years)

Contract Language:

- 64 sick day payout was retained
- 25 years in New Haven free medical for life or until Medicare eligible was retained for this contract
- Total accumulation of sick leave rose from 186 days to 215 days
- Length of student school day remained the same

- 15 minutes of unencumbered* time was added to the teacher day (without students) in the last year of contract. No time added in 2018-2019 or 2019-2020
- Committee is to be established to discuss all outstanding issues

NHBoE proposals that did not come to fruition (to our benefit):

- Weakening of grievance language by eliminating compensatory awards
- Eliminating the accumulation of personal days from 4 days to 2 days
- Reducing teacher voice by eliminating CEPC and other language
- High medical cost shares
- 7.5 hour teacher day
- Eliminating early dismissal before holidays and vacations
- Eliminating all class size limits
- Salary proposal of 0%, 2%, 2.5% for 3 years

While the negotiations will represent another challenge, we have fared well considering the circumstances. And I am confident we will assemble another Negotiations Team that will again secure a decent contract. More details will be shared as we get closer to the negotiations window.
NEW HAVEN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS
Executive Board 2019-2021

President
DAVID CICARELLA
Fair Haven K-8
NHFT President
13 years on Eboard

Executive Vice-President
PAT DELUCIA
Riverside HS
NHFT Vice-President
21 years on Eboard

Treasurer
MIKE PANTALEO
(no photo available)
Conte/West Hills K-8
Special Education
16 years on Eboard

Executive Secretary
MARCHANTHONY SOLLI
Literacy Department
HS Instructional Coach
10 years on Eboard

Vice President for High Schools
DAVID LOW
Sound School HS
Physics/Mathematics
16 years on Eboard

Vice President for Middle Schools
JUDITH LEACH
Columbus K-8
Read 180
1 year on Eboard

Vice President for Special Services
RAY POMPANO
Ross-Woodward K-8
Physical Education
18 years on Eboard

Vice President for Elementary Schools
TRACY PAIGE-HARRIS
Ross-Woodward K-8
Kindergarten
2 years on Eboard

EXECUTIVE BOARD –HIGH SCHOOL

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Wilbur Cross HS
Social Studies
42 years on Eboard

TONI CRISCUOLO
ESUMS HS
Social Studies
1 year on Eboard

AL MEADOWS
Wilbur Cross HS
Social Studies
New member of Eboard
EXECUTIVE BOARD – PRE-K - 8

IRIS FESTA
Conte/West Hills K-8
School Counselor
3 years on Eboard

REGINALD AUGUSTINE
Hillhouse HS
Art
9 years on Eboard

MICHAEL SOARES
Fair Haven K-8
ESL/Bilingual
1 year on Eboard

KARA STEELE-DISTANTE
Celentano K-8
Mathematics
1 year on Eboard

ERICA MCDANIEL-EPPS
Conte/West Hills K-8
Grade 3
12 years on Eboard

MICHAEL MAZZACANE
(no photo available)
Fair Haven K-8
Mathematics 7-8
18 years on Eboard

PAM STRICKER
Clinton Avenue K-8
Kindergarten
10 years on Eboard

EXECUTIVE BOARD – SPECIAL SERVICES

J. PETER WILSON
Central Office
Special Education
18 years on Eboard

JANE ROTH
John C. Daniels K-8
Special Education
1 year on Eboard

MELODY GALLAGHER
(no photo available)
MASH K-8
Art
New member to Eboard

TRUSTEES

DERLENE ORTIZ
Itinerant
Speech Pathologist
7 years on Eboard

KRIS WETMORE
CO-OP HS
Art
5 years on Eboard

RACHELE THOMAS
Hillhouse HS
AP Biology
1 year on Eboard

JOE GONZALEZ
Wilbur Cross HS
Business
1 year on Eboard

ORLANDO HERNANDEZ
Fair Haven K-8
Mathematics 7-8
1 year on Eboard

CHIEF STEWARD

MARIANNE MALONEY
New Haven Academy HS
Engineering/Math/Physics
9 years on Eboard
Teacher Strikes Boost Fight for Racial Justice in Schools...continued from page 2

So UTLA teamed up with Students Deserve and the American Civil Liberties Union to launch the Students Not Suspects campaign. They organized forums and protested at school board meetings. High school students designed and handed out 18,000 #studentsnotsuspects buttons. Students and parents spoke up about why searches weren’t making schools safe.

“We fear it [being stopped and searched] outside of school,” said Amee Monroy, a Students Deserve activist who is a Dorsey senior this year. “We shouldn’t have to fear it in school.”

Students had been organizing on this issue since 2016. But “having UTLA on our side added way more people to the movement,” Monroy said. And the strike added big leverage.

**COUNSELORS NOT COPS**

L.A. teachers aren’t alone. The Chicago Teachers Union has been outspoken about the racism of that city’s school system.

Schools with many students of color are disproportionately deprived of funding and staffing. And before their 2012 strike, Chicago teachers battled a wave of school closings in parts of the city where the district should have been adding resources, not subtracting them.

When Seattle teachers struck in 2015, they demanded funds and training for every school to form an equity team, which would identify and change racist discipline policies. They won these teams in 30 schools.

A central demand in St. Paul teachers’ near-strike in 2016 was alternatives to harsh discipline practices that disproportionately affected students of color. They won it.

In 2017, teacher activists in Philadelphia and Seattle first organized a week of action on the theme Black Lives Matter at School. Since then, a growing number of unions and grassroots education activists around the country has participated every February. One united demand is to end “zero-tolerance” discipline policies that impose mandatory suspensions or push students into the criminal system for certain infractions.

Many school districts have moved to limit suspensions. But unions assert in bargaining that it’s not enough just to change the rules. What students need instead is more time and attention from trained adults; districts have to put money into staffing.

Last fall, teachers in Chicago made racial justice demands again when they walked out for 11 days. On top of guaranteed nurses, counselors, and librarians in every school, they proposed that the district allow high schools to reduce the number of police officers stationed inside and redirect that funding to hire staffers trained to counsel students.

They also demanded that the district stop cooperating with Immigration and Customs Enforcement and with the city’s police database of gang members.

**A LEARNING PROCESS**

CTU has protested the decline of Black teachers in the district—from 40 to 20 percent in two decades. It calls for the district to create pipelines to train and recruit teachers of color.

The union works in coalition with police accountability groups. When the city says there’s no more money for schools, teachers point to its creation of a $95 million cop academy.

All this action for racial justice didn’t crystalize overnight. It has taken discussion for members to build a consensus that school climate is a union issue. And those discussions aren’t over.

“There’s a lot more work to do to help people think about this differently, how racism presents itself economically [in terms of allocation of resources],” said CTU’s chief of staff, former social studies teacher Jennifer Johnson. “Our students don’t need punitive systems, but support systems.”

In Chicago and L.A. last year, district negotiators spent months dismissing demands that went beyond legally sanctioned topics like wages and benefits.

“Of course the district said no at first,” Inouye said. “They weren’t going to hear any ‘common good’ demands.” It took strikes to make the districts move.

CTU did not win its demand to swap out school police for support staff. But it did win increased staffing for nurses, social workers, and therapists, and new contract language about restorative justice, an alternative approach to student discipline that emphasizes solving problems and making amends rather than punishing infractions.

**NEXT, PEPPER SPRAY**

In L.A., the Students Deserve coalition has now set its sights on ending the use of pepper spray against students. In one incident at Dorsey High, school police used pepper spray on students who were fighting—but also ended up spraying other students who were trying to break up the fight or just walking by.

Since the random searches are coming to an end, Students Deserve presented the school board with its list of proposed school-safety alternatives. The students recommended adding more staff to offer help and guidance. They also recommended that the district involve the community, rather than the police, in a “safe passage” program to provide adult supervision on routes where kids and teens walk home from school.

Student activists will organize this campaign the same way they organized the last one, Doss said: “talking to students, doing direct action, doing things bigger.”

For the union, taking on the issue of random searches has uncovered new leaders like Hapuarachy. She said campaigns like this one have gotten her more active in the union. For her, UTLA’s mission includes “fighting for racial justice in schools, making sure there aren’t pockets of schools where students are being treated differently in other parts of the city.”