Dear NHFT Member:

We have made it to the last day of one of the most challenging years of our careers. We value all you have done to support your students, schools, colleagues, and our union. Six months ago, I took office alongside motivated Executive Board members and our invaluable Vice President Pat DeLucia ready to get to work. Six months later, we are still managing the challenges that COVID has wrought, not to mention the regular challenges of an already difficult job. And there is much more to do to ensure that educators have the support we need, so we can do the jobs we have been hired to do. I hope you will take the next few minutes to learn more about what our union has accomplished since January and I invite you to get even more involved in the months and years to come.

On my second day as President, we had our first Executive Board meeting of 2022 and we discussed our three priorities for Year One: Increase support for our building stewards; improve communication and engagement among members; and rebuild our committees and revise the NHFT bylaws. As a result of the hard work of NHFT members, we have been able to make progress on each of these priorities. We have ensured that every school has a steward, even where there were vacancies. We coordinated with AFT-CT to provide training for our stewards about teachers’ rights, the grievance process, and the importance of open and active communication. We met regularly with teacher groups at several schools to respond to culture, climate, and school safety issues. We have increased teacher agency and centered the power of collective action by supporting teachers to have more of a say in the decisions that impact our day-to-day work. And we have learned that we will keep making progress when we show up and speak up for ourselves and each other.

We continue to rely on stewards to help get the word out about our union work. And we are reflecting on how to improve our communication infrastructure even more. We are using tools like Action Network to stay connected, updating our social media (FB and Twitter), and revamping our website for a late August 2022 debut. And we have created more opportunities for members to engage in union work. Our members regularly participate during the public comment portion of Board of Education meetings. We marched with other unions this spring to demand that local and state leaders fully fund our schools and classrooms. We testified at several Board of Alders budget hearings to reiterate these demands. We lobbied for school funding
by phone banking at our union hall, convincing the Board of Alders to fund 90% of the Mayor’s proposed budget for our schools. We are fighting for the schools our communities deserve and this is just the beginning.

When we return in August, our committees will continue the work we started this spring. Under the leadership of co-chairs from the Executive Board, committees will meet regularly and need the input and participation of rank and file members. Some of our most important work came out of our Teacher Retention Committee who crafted an illuminating survey that over 1000 members completed. And because we recognize that an unprecedented number of our colleagues are leaving New Haven Public Schools this year, we are also competing exit interviews to compile the push and pull factors that have led to such high resignations and retirements. We are grateful to everyone who has helped with the survey and interviews; the data yielded will be crucially important in our contract negotiations work this summer. We are also proud that for the first time, our Negotiations Working Group was open to all NHFT members who wanted to share suggestions and proposals for our next contract. The strength of our union depends on the engagement of our members and we are moving in the right direction.

Amidst this growth, we are still responding daily to the stressors that make our jobs so challenging: DCF referrals, TEVAL tension, breakdowns in communication, school safety and student behavior concerns, facilities issues, the impact of understaffing, lack of support from some building leaders, contract violations, and related grievances. As we get ready for next year, we will continue to prioritize the needs of NHFT members and continue to build the capacity of our school teams to organize and advocate at the building level. Our union hall will be open for business in the 2022-2023 school year — stewards meetings, executive board meetings, meet and greets, committee meetings, social hours, teacher trainings, and more. And of course, please save the date for our Back to School Union Party on Friday, September 30 from 4pm-8pm at Amarante’s Sea Cliff in New Haven.

It is hard to capture six months’ worth of work in one letter on the last day of school. On behalf of Pat and the rest of our team, I wish you the rest, relaxation, and healing you deserve after this year like none other. Please reach out with questions, concerns, or suggestions. Our door is always open and we depend on your feedback to continue to grow. Thank you for your service to New Haven’s students and their families and for your commitment to our union. I value your trust and I am committed to our collective work ahead.

In solidarity,

Leslie Blatteau
President, New Haven Federation of Teachers