

No more free benefits

Join the real world

Negotiators trying to fashion a new contract for Neshaminy teachers should look to the private sector.

Nobody wants to see a teachers strike in Neshaminy — not the students nor their parents, not the school board nor the administration, not the teachers nor their families.

That said, the administration was right to reject the fact-finder's recommendation, which, if accepted, might have precluded any chance of a strike. Why do we say that? Because in our view any labor agreement that doesn't require workers to contribute to the cost of their health benefits is out of touch with reality. And by reality we mean the private sector, where workers on average cover about 25 percent of the cost of their benefits.

Giving teachers a continued pass on that fact of life — as the fact-finder shockingly proposes — would lead to anger and resentment in the community. Make that more anger and resentment; taxpayers already begrudge Neshaminy teachers the free benefits they now have. That perk has to end.

We're not suggesting hitting teachers with a whopping 25 percent share of their benefit costs all at once. Catching teachers up to the real world should be done incrementally, and the administration's proposal to start out at 10 percent and jump it a point a year for the life of the contract is both reasonable and fair.

Other sweet deals that have to end include longevity pay and the seven-hour work day. What a lot of folks don't realize and often escape attention during contract negotiations is the step schedule, which awards teachers annual pay increases based on years of service and accumulated credits.

In our view, nobody should get an automatic pay hike just because they've managed to hang around. Any salary bump outside the annual contractual increase should have to be earned.

Speaking of contractual increase, the union's proposed 4 percent annual hike is just plain ridiculous. Our guess is that most Neshaminy taxpayers see much less than that themselves. Similarly, the administration's proposed 1 percent annual increase is near insulting and counterproductive. Negotiators on both sides need to measure their proposals against the private sector.

The quicker they join the real world, the quicker a fair and reasonable agreement will be reached.