

AAEA STATEMENT AT 6/23 AAPS BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING:
President Mexicotte, Trustees, and Dr. Roberts,

Good evening. I am happy to announce that after many months of thoughtful and deliberate negotiations, the bargaining teams of AAEA and AAPS reached a tentative agreement last week. After sharing the TA with our members, allowing comment and debate as required by our association's bylaws, and after conducting a vote that was certified by our Elections Chairwoman, Elaine Hill-Richmond, on Friday June 18th the membership of AAEA ratified the TA according by a 4:1 ratio. Trustees, you have just recently been briefed on the details of the TA, the rationale behind those details, and will tonight decide whether that agreement will become incorporated into our contract.

I want to express my thanks to several groups who labored at great length and who had to make some difficult decisions. Both bargaining teams conducted themselves professionally and respectfully under difficult circumstances. They deserve first mention. Throughout, both teams were able to approach common goals from different perspectives that didn't always fall into perfect synch. The ability to merge two perspectives in service to common goals is testimony to each team's commitment to those goals and their appreciation of the other's perspective. Our common goals were and always will be:

- 1) the maintenance and advancement of quality instructional programs for all Ann Arbor students,
- 2) the maintenance and advancement of the terms of employment for staff, and
- 3) the maintenance and advancement of the district's financial ability to honor the previous two goals.

Student learning that goes beyond the adequate to excellence; the welfare of staff in terms of their health, compensation and work environment; and sustainable finances that preserve Ann Arbor's standing as one of this state's premier public school systems... three goals that were achieved despite tough financial pressures that are overwhelming many other districts.

I've often said that our ability to cope as well as we have with a state funding structure that has largely ignored the evolution of this state's economy from one that was dominated by heavy smokestack industry to one that relies upon research and development along with services, has been because of good planning by administration and cooperative sacrifice by staff. Administration and staff have once again applied that formula to arrive the best possible solutions in

this TA. I give a world of credit to both bargaining teams for their collaborative success at the table.

I also want to give my members who were not on our bargaining team a world of credit for their participation in the ratification process. We arrived at our TA on Monday June 14th in the afternoon. That same evening, AAEA representatives from every building met and were asked to absorb the entire contents of the TA in order to be able to explain it to over 1200 of their peers across the entire district. They and every member of the AAEA had only two days to absorb, consider, question, and debate the TA's merits before voting started online on Thursday. They did all of this during the last week of school while their plates were already overflowing with their end-of-year duties, they were finishing instruction toward mandated objectives, and were reaching essential closure with their students. The process of absorbing and debating the details of the TA continued through Thursday and Friday even as they were voting online to meet a deadline of 4:00 last Friday. That our members were able to attend to the TA, ask necessary questions, arrive at very difficult personal decisions, and ratify the TA by a 4:1 margin is nothing short of amazing.

I also want to thank the public for their patience. Neither team was willing to go after the "easy solution" of how to deal with stunning budget cuts... the "meat cleaver" approach. The dollars themselves were easy enough to understand... there weren't enough for business as usual, as has been the case for many years as described by Trustee Nelson in his earlier comments. However, the need to identify and balance priorities that made sense, both in terms of educational delivery systems and the needs of staff, led to complexity. Student needs are complex, especially with such a diverse student population as Ann Arbor serves. Serving the needs of almost 16,500 unique and deserving young individuals is the very definition of complexity. So both teams put students first by being deliberately surgical rather than using the meat cleaver approach. A lot of experts were called in from both administration and staff to advise both teams on best practices as we weighed the costs and benefits of our decisions as well as their indirect effects throughout the system.

And finally, I want to thank central administration for first proposing cuts that were significant enough for my membership to then consider how they would step up to the plate in like fashion. Central administrators first took upon themselves significant personal cuts, then proposed program revisions that would preserve the excellence we've come to expect in Ann Arbor while squeezing out every possible ounce of cost. Cutting some \$16 million, nearly 10% of the budget, is no small feat, and I thank them for setting the stage for productive negotiations.

Now that both partners at the table have had the opportunity to carefully consider the TA in a manner that has honored our tradition of deliberate collective bargaining to arrive at balanced intelligent solutions, I invite the public to consider it carefully. If passed tonight, it will be posted on the homepage of AAEA's website as soon as my webmaster can get to it. It will be posted on the AAPS site as well if it's not already up. The agreement, like the rest of the AAEA/AAPS contract, is available and easily accessed. But I want to try to prepare the public for reading it...

If you are looking totally the concessions and gains for one "side" or another, you will find them. If you want to fully understand the rationale behind its contents, I urge you to ask... the reasons for every single aspect of the TA are many and interrelated. I say this because I have been following the comments in the media about the TA among those who had not even seen it... the temptation to start with opinions, add rumors, stir the pot, and then somehow arrive at what some declare to be "facts" is apparently too much for some to resist. If you want to start with a conclusion, you can save yourself a lot of time... don't read it with a closed mind unless you are not interested in the thought and care that went into the TA or its intended purposes. But if you want to understand it, please dive in, ask questions if unsure about any of its points, and then arrive at whatever informed conclusion that seems reasonable to you.

One caution: You will find many instances of concessions and gains to tally and list in one column or the other, and you might assume that they in effect translate to winners and losers. If so, you will not have grasped the common goals that I mentioned at the beginning of my comments. You will have fallen prey to the temptation to see things as "us vs. them", of seeing a contract as a zero sum exercise, as an accounting sheet of balancing debits and credits, as black and white, and in that misperception you will have missed the whole point of collective bargaining and spirit of this TA. Just as education and the human experience are not matters of zero sum gains, neither is this TA. Where one "side" or the other gave a concession or realized a gain, our students and our district were the only winners. Although no teacher is completely happy with every aspect of the TA, in balance there are no ultimate losers. I challenge anybody to point to any part in this TA and to name who did not, if only indirectly, gain from it. Teachers stepped up and gave concessions because we are teachers who are dedicated to our profession, our students, and our district. The district gave concessions to maintain staff that is to our students and programs as gas is to gas tanks... inseparable and mutually supportive. The object of the entire bargaining exercise was to balance concessions and gains for the benefit of all, first and foremost among them the students of this community.

We maintained programs at the level first proposed by administration months ago... no further cuts were made there. We maintained staff at the level first proposed by administration months ago... no new staff will be laid off this year or next. Teachers are giving financial concessions next year and the following year because the district's needs are immediate. Teachers will reap small incremental financial gains only if and when our financial emergency has abated, as it must. Few thought all of this possible in one agreement, but this community deserves such results and has been rewarded by this TA. This TA permits us to drop cynicism in favor of confidence, doubt in favor of certainty, and defeat in favor of success. It allows us all to plan and teach. And I again thank everybody who participated in this process and congratulate them for a difficult job done amazingly well. There are aspects of this TA that have never appeared in a contract anywhere in this state; it will serve as a model for others to follow in the years ahead.

With that in mind, I want to invite everybody in the community to an event tomorrow that allows us to go beyond coping as we have coped once again with this TA. The district did not propose its budget and pave the way for this round of bargaining with \$16 million of cuts for any reason other than the state of Michigan continues its downward spiral in regard to how it funds education, our infrastructure, and social services. By now, everybody has noticed this in their daily lives. Less is never more and hunger never cures hunger no matter how well we cope with our continuing descent. Our state's structural deficit continues. But the tide is turning now that the very real effects of those failed policies of neglect, ideological rigidity, and denial are becoming apparent. Thousands of educators, parents, administrators, and school trustees will gather tomorrow on the lawn of the Capitol to let our legislators know that once and for all, Enough is Enough. Ann Arbor residents will gather tomorrow morning in Pioneer's parking lot to caravan to Lansing. We leave at 9:00, and the rally starts at 11:00. The forecast calls for good weather, there will be tents for kids with face painting and crafts, there will be plenty of cold water, and free parking with shuttles to and from the rally. We need headcount to get our common message through loud and clear to our legislators and every candidate for office.