

Tuesday, September 4, 2007

Dear Students and Parents:

It is with mixed feelings that I report to you that 79% of Shoreline Education Association Members voted to ratify a new contract today.

### **This Is What Democracy Looks Like**

On the one hand, I am elated that school will start on time and that a strike has been avoided. I am also impressed and grateful for a community response that is clearly a major reason why I my colleagues and I will not be walking a picket line tomorrow. Simply put, Shoreline's families decided to hold their elected officials accountable. And that's what we're supposed to do! As a social studies teacher, I know it has been a civics lesson for me, and hopefully for us all.

### **A False Choice**

The very nature of collective bargaining means that no contract agreement is perfect. In the end I voted to ratify the contract, but not without deep reservations about the tradeoffs that were made.

Unfortunately, the School Board is still insistent that cuts be made in the areas of student activities and assistance for our special needs students. The mere fact that such items are in the teachers' contract to begin with attests to the fact that in the past decade, Shoreline's teachers have made real choices to trade take home pay for support of programs that directly benefit our students. For example, in past bargains, rather than increasing salaries, teachers have advocated for the funding and hiring of instructional aides to assist in classrooms that include students with special needs. Yes, this helps with teacher workload, but more importantly, it helps us to do our jobs better and that ultimately supports students and families.

Consequently, Shoreline teacher salaries lag behind many surrounding jurisdictions. Unfortunately, when the School Board is looking for politically palatable cuts, it is these very student supporting programs that it raids in an effort to balance the budget. (Versus say, demanding decreases in teacher salaries.)

The choice between support for our students or our livelihoods is a false one. This time around Shoreline teachers decided they could no longer make the false choice of forsaking one's own family for the sake of someone else's. We also decided that our community and its elected officials must begin to take more responsibility for what is valued and funded in the Shoreline School District. This is the reason why your teachers voted for a 1% pay increase, over two years, to our supplemental contracts. This is in addition to the state mandated 4.3% Cost of Living increase, of which, approximately 75% is funded by the State Treasury.

### **Challenges Abound**

- Does our District want to effectively support its special needs students?

- Does it want enriching activities, clubs and other organizations for its students to be involved in?
- Are Shoreline Families willing to support these and other needs by holding their elected officials accountable?
- Are our families willing to live with a situation where Shoreline's Schools are staffed at the state's bare minimum requirements, thus resulting in larger class sizes and challenges to the personalized instruction our students deserve?
- Are our citizens willing to live with the fact that the State of Washington underfunds public education, pitting local school boards and educational professionals against one another in a fight over leftover scraps?

Perhaps this is more information than you needed, but I thought you deserved a more detailed perspective on what this settlement means and the challenges it poses for the future of our school district.

### **Trusting the Process**

Building great institutions takes time, energy and commitment. It is my hope that this year's bargain is a new beginning for the Shoreline School District as it faces the challenges, and pursues the promise, of public education in our great republic.

Good luck, and have a great first day of school.

Sincerely and signing off,

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David G. Guthrie  
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Social Studies Department