Right-Sizing

Good evening Mayor Mitchell, Superintendent Anderson, members of the school committee, administration, my union sisters and brothers in attendance, and members of the community. My name is Thomas Nickerson and I am the President of the New Bedford Educators Association.

 As some of you will recall, I spoke on behalf of the Association at the March School Committee Meeting about the practice of “Right-Sizing,” a phrase that has been used around the district in recent months. It has caused concern among our members across the district in light of recent events and as we near the end of the school year. The Association is, of course, opposed to any changes that would lead to increased class sizes, which would create compromised educational environments for the students and families we serve, or decreased staffing which will cause stress upon the remaining educators in any building.

At the March meeting, I explained that Paramount among the exemplars of the NBEA’s concerns is the Renaissance Community Innovation School. The members at RCIS were informed of the closure of that school effective for the 2023-24 school year just a few short weeks ahead of the March meeting. As Renaissance is a community school, the majority of the students will return to that building. This means they will be absorbed by the Gomes School and staff for next year. However, while over 20 Unit A positions were eliminated by the closure of Renaissance, only 5 new positions were created at the Gomes School for next year. Understandably, the NBEA is concerned about class size at the Gomes school for next year as well as the elimination of over 15 positions. Why is that? Any educator can tell you that a class of 30 students is not an ideal learning environment, and I’m sure the community’s students and parents would agree. Increased class size or caseload for counselors or related service providers will tax remaining staff and potentially hurt retention. Considering the difficulties associated with recruiting, which were exemplified by the turnout at this week’s recruiting fair, we cannot afford to lose any more good educators.

In closing, last time we asked the committee for clarification on the decisions related to right-sizing, as the Association is concerned that our members and the students they serve will be adversely affected. This time, we would ask that you keep the concerns of the students, staff, and families of the Gomes and Renaissance Schools, and all others in our district, in mind as you consider the fiscal year 2024 budget. Larger classes are bad for students, and staffing cuts are bad for everyone.

Thank you for your consideration in these matters and thank you for your time.