My name is Tom Nickerson and I am President of New Bedford Educators Association. Thank you Superintendent O’Leary, Mayor Mitchell, and members of the School Committee for having me here today. I would also like to thank our NBEA members who joined me today in support of this issue and in solidarity. We are joined by members from several elementary schools including Rodman, Carney, Ashley, Congdon, and Hay-Mac to name a few, as well as our three middle schools and New Bedford High. It warms my heart to see our union growing stronger by the day.

 I am here today on behalf of our members to share our collective thoughts on the upcoming contract negotiations. As you are aware, we will be at the bargaining table soon. While it seems only yesterday we were ratifying the last contract, in fact, almost three years have passed. In that time, things have changed quite a bit. As a result, the NBEA negotiations committee will be working to bring our members the most robust contract yet.

 What will we be fighting for? Overall, our members deserve better working conditions, especially for working parents. Additionally, our Educators need more autonomy. Finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention the clear need for a strong wage package for our members as the cost of living has increased historically in the last three years.

 In closing, we will be entering negotiations before year's end. When we do, I encourage the committee to remember what I shared at convocation and the last school committee meeting:

* Strong unions (like the NBEA) lead to strong **contracts**.
* Strong **contracts** lead to employee **satisfaction**.
* **Satisfied employees** lead to better **retention** (something NBPS needs desperately).
* **Educator retention** leads to **stability** for our students and better chances for their **success in school and in life**,
* and that's what we’re all here for.

 My name is Tom Nickerson, NBEA President and I thank you for your time today.