

# **-COLLECTIVE BARGAINING INITIATION- With All-Calls for PACE and Member Organizers**

## **Dear Members,**

We have colleagues on both sides of the return-to instruction plans, and the Union continues advocating for all members to have their majority/minority desires represented and discussed openly. To say that last night's School Board meeting was a colossal disappointment in mirroring that practice is an understatement.

The "Soft Pause" recommendation was criticized before break not for its content, but for being a form letter that members could use for their advocacy. In response, SEA encouraged everyone to write highly personalized letters and prepare public statements for last night's meeting. After spending precious time drafting advocacy on both sides of the recommendation, not a single member's letter was read during public comment. Nor was the majority/minority balance of their content discussed by the School Board.

The question of employees' happiness seeing students in-person was addressed anecdotally, but not through hard data; the question of employees' overwhelming concerns regarding their safety with vaccines on the horizon, which is on public-record and backed by hard data provided by SEA, was not addressed.

The School Board demonstrated a resounding failure to dignify the weight that every employee's voice should have, especially in a time of escalating crisis. The meeting solidified the need to have every employee's considerations fully contended with before any plans are enacted.

Simply put, last night showed the necessity of Collective Bargaining in Stafford County Public Schools.

Moving forward, we acknowledge it is difficult for members to see the long-term goal when the overwhelming majority feel their immediate securities are not being registered. To address those triages:

### **SHORT-TERM: Revamped Guidance and Engagement**

- SEA will conduct an updated universal membership survey by Friday.
- SEA Leadership will present updated advocacy plans based on the new data.
- SEA will be returning to the Building Rep structure and Action Network as the centralized, direct, and secure means of sharing action plans and hearing members' concerns. The Union's social media presence will no longer be used for that function.
- Building Reps will be receiving further guidance from SEA Exec within the week.

### **LONG-TERM: Fast-Tracking Collective Bargaining Acclimation**

- Stafford is a top-targeted, qualifying local for Collective Bargaining. We will be bringing in state-level resources and national-tier management for consultation on empowerment and acclimation efforts towards sowing an open and mutually supportive Collective Bargaining culture.
- SEA will be building and hosting "Union School" to inform membership about values and successful collective actions expressly tailored to SCPS.
- SEA is immediately announcing an all-call for members to serve on the Political Action Committee of Educators (PACE) for the 4 district seats up for election this November on the SB and BoS. [If you are interested, please fill out the PACE form here.](#)

- SEA is immediately announcing an all-call for members interested to serve as Member Organizers. There are 4 paid positions available, funded by VEA and NEA. If you are interested in this, [please fill out the Member Organizer form here](#).

COVID-19 has shown that Public Education is not only at a breaking point, but is now at the beginning of what will become one of the great labor movements in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Stafford will be an epicenter of that movement in the Commonwealth. As one of our members asked before last year's Lobby Day "*will we be a whisper, or a roar?*" And as one of our members stated last night "*it is time to be louder than ever from afar.*"

Now more than ever is the time to ensure that all members have a direct voice at the table, at all meetings, and with all matters concerning their employment. SEA will continue to represent the dignities and desires of our membership's majority and minority opinions. We must initiate a Collective Bargaining mindset and recalibrate our methods now, to ensure it becomes legal practice in the near future.

Reflect on that future and how we can come together as a Union to get there.

For now, be cognizant of your colleague's emotions and opinions; we have those who are celebrant, and many more who are devastated following last night's School Board meeting. We have those wanting to go back, and the majority who still feel it is not safe yet. We have at least 75% of staff who have responded they want the vaccines. This is an impossible situation, so please reach out and be there for each other.

As always, SEA is here for you. Take some time to invest in yourself, trust in your Union, and we will update you on actions very soon.

Respectfully,

SEA Executive Board

January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2021