

## **Strongsville Education Association: Binding Interest Arbitration Speech**

The Strongsville Education Association is a professional group of dedicated teachers, media specialists, guidance counselors, speech therapists, psychologists and nurses. Our task is to prepare the children of Strongsville for success in a highly competitive and global economy. This is what we do. We educate.

We have been working without a contract for over nine months. Our Bargaining Team has relied on collective bargaining in good faith to obtain a fair and equitable contract. We have been in similar situations in the past with this Board and their Attorney, Bill Pepple- our last contract in 2010 took nine months to settle. In previous negotiations, the Board was willing to meet and talk about the issues, eventually resulting in a contract. They sent in a bargaining team that actually had settlement authority to cut a deal, as opposed to offering solutions they couldn't deliver with their Board or their client.

This time, the Board refused to bargain in good faith. They have refused to continue to discuss the issues that need to be discussed in order to settle the contract. By issuing a last best offer, two days before the start of the strike, the Board forced this strike. Instead of continuing to bargain, they shut down the lines of communication, walked away from the table, and forced this devastating community crisis. In an effort to reach a settlement, in order to end this strike, the SEA has now countered the Board's last best offer three times. Each time the Board is unwilling to move.

The Board has caused chaos in the schools and in the community. The schools are a disaster. For this alone the Board should be ashamed. The Board promised the parents that they would have qualified teachers to replace us, yet many classes are still overflowing with students because they don't have enough subs. Students are not being supervised, especially at the high school, making the classrooms unsafe. No learning is happening at any level. While subs may have a 4 year degree in something, they are not trained as teachers. They do not know our students and they do not know their needs. Simply assigning a worksheet is not teaching. Watching movies is not teaching. Showing up just to get a paycheck is not teaching. Ignoring the needs of special needs children is not teaching. Telling students to teach themselves is not teaching and its certainly not acceptable!

The community is also a disaster. The Board should be ashamed of this as well. By illegally posting the proposals, two days before the strike vote, the Board intentionally caused chaos in the city. Just like in a classroom, simply posting a proposal does not teach or explain the meaning of the proposals. Posting the proposals doesn't tell the story behind the written word. This was intentionally done by the Board to cause misunderstanding and anger among residents. This is just one of the tactics used by the Board to advance their personal agenda in lieu of actually negotiating with their teachers. Posting the proposals was not done to educate, but was done to anger and

confuse the public. A sleight of hand designed to influence the community to support the Board's agenda at the ultimate expense of the students.

In our 2009 contract negotiations the Board agreed to use Binding Interest Arbitration, on an issue by issue basis, as a contingency plan to settle the contract. Binding Interest Arbitration is the same process that is used by the Mayor and the City of Strongsville with the essential safety services like police and fire. In the case of the SEA negotiations with the Board in 2009, the contract was settled before Binding Interest Arbitration was needed because both parties had settlement authority, continued to talk, and actually bargained a settlement.

In our 2010 contract negotiations the Board AGAIN agreed to use Binding Interest Arbitration, on an issue by issue basis, as a contingency plan to settle the contract. And once again, just like in 2009, the 2010 contract was settled before Binding Interest Arbitration was needed because both parties had settlement authority, continued to talk, and actually bargained a settlement.

The SEA never wanted to go on strike. The SEA wanted a fair contract that both sides could live with. We wanted to negotiate a settlement without having to engage in a prolonged labor dispute that is more about union busting than it is about so-called fiscal sustainability. We didn't want the strike to start and we certainly want the strike to end. We need to be back in our classrooms and continue to educate and prepare our students for the future.

Therefore, we are proposing a solution. We are proposing a concept that puts students first and allows us to return to our classrooms as soon as possible. We are proposing that the SEA and the Board enter into Binding Interest Arbitration, on an issue by issue basis, in order to end this dispute. We are proposing to use the same plan that was proposed by the Board in 2009 and in 2010 to allow an outside party to settle all unresolved issues.

In this process an Arbitrator is mutually decided upon by both parties. A hearing is then scheduled after the end of the 2013 fiscal year on June 30th. If the Board is telling the truth about their finances it will be revealed by then. If they are not telling the truth, and they are intentionally suppressing revenue projections and overestimating expenses, THAT truth will be revealed by then as well.

Up until the date of the hearing we can continue to negotiate on all issues. We can work to settle all issues before the arbitration date. If that doesn't happen, and once the hearing starts, each issue that is on the bargaining table will be presented to the arbitrator. The arbitrator then makes a decision based on the facts presented by the SEA and the Board for each issue. Whatever the arbitrator decides is binding for that issue and we then move on to the next issue until each one is resolved and the contract is settled.

Instead of squandering another \$1.8 million on Huffmasters security and unqualified subs, the district will have its highly qualified staff back in the classrooms where we belong. Instead of continuing to watch the community be torn apart the Board can get back to the business of running schools that deserve to be called excellent with distinction. This process is a win for the students. It is a win for their parents. It is a win for the community and it is a win for the taxpayers.

The community wants a settlement. The taxpayers want a settlement. The parents want a settlement. And most of all, the students and their teachers want a settlement. It's time for the board to prove that they truly want a settlement. It's time for the board to prove that this is truly about bargaining in good faith, for the best interests of the students, and not about trying to advance a personal agenda. It's time to prove that you're not prolonging a strike, at the expense of the students of Strongsville, in order to break the union.

Please join me in walking to the Board building now, in order to deliver this request for the Strongsville Education Association and the Strongsville Board of Education to enter into binding interest arbitration and end this strike today!

-- *Tracy Linscott*