

October 2, 2018

Dear Geneva Board of Education Members,

I am proud to work in this district with the professionals of Geneva Middle School South and I know how proud the district is of what we accomplish on a daily basis with our students. Thus, it is particularly disheartening to continually find ourselves in a fight for compensation that positively reflects our value to the community. I always thought the Board of Education was a bridge between teachers and the community and that their role is to partner with us in educating Geneva's youth. At the moment, the relationship between the Board of Education and the teachers feels adversarial due to tense negotiations. I went into this profession because it is noble and respected, but I do not currently feel respected, nor valued.

You may recognize my name and/or remember me as your child's 6th grade Language Arts teacher. You may know how passionate I am about teaching and giving students a positive learning experience in my class. I was hired 21 years ago by Superintendent John Murphy in 1997. At the time, teaching in Geneva was a coveted position. Geneva residents have always held high standards for their children's education and administration touted *A Tradition of Excellence*. I was honored to be hired here and knew I needed to continually hone my craft to give the students of Geneva the education they deserve.

I would like to share how important the step and lane salary schedule is to my career as a teacher. The step and lane salary schedule incentivized my colleagues and me to surpass each other's accomplishments in a competitive and collegial way. We worked together and shared the insights gained via cohorts offered by surrounding colleges. Often these cohorts were attended by teachers from other districts. Professionally, it gave us the opportunity to broaden our experiences, modify innovations to fit the *Geneva Way*, and bolster our confidence when we realized other districts were less innovative, autonomous and professionally respected by their administration.

In addition to teaching, I am the Language Arts Instructional Coordinator at Geneva Middle School. One of the responsibilities that comes with this role is participating in the interviewing process of new teacher candidates. Increasingly, we have lost elite prospective teachers to surrounding districts whose starting salary is much higher. I do not blame them, but I fear that trend will escalate if the Geneva Board of Education does not continue to reward step and lane advancements in a way that is competitive with surrounding schools. The educational accolades Geneva Community School District 304 has earned in recent years will start to go to schools who value and reward the educational advancement of its professionals. The quality of our teachers is a selling point which attracts families and businesses to Geneva. If we cannot maintain great teachers, Geneva cannot maintain that selling point.

While many residents of Geneva have benefited from the upturn in the economy, teachers have not and are feeling the effects of the last two contracts. To help the district and community through some difficult fiscal times six years ago, Geneva teachers agreed to a salary freeze. We did so in good faith, hopeful at the time that the board would recognize that sacrifice, show us the same respect and reward us in kind down the road. Instead, I have taken on additional stipend positions and I am teaching night classes at a local community college to achieve my financial goals.

In closing, please consider the future of the community of Geneva and the reputation of its schools. That reputation is assuredly not sustainable without maintaining the step and lane salary schedule which has been a part of the *Tradition of Excellence* and Geneva Community School District 304 for over 50 years.

Sincerely,

Julie Cesaroni
Educator and ELA Instructional Coordinator
Geneva Middle School South