

June 7, 2017

My name is Susan Andrews. I am a teacher at Highline High School and Executive Secretary for Highline Education Association.

Director Dorsey, Dr. Enfield and Board members,

Words are powerful.

Authors choose words deliberately in order to convey a precise meaning.

That's one of the lessons my 9th-grade lit/comp students are learning in our Literature reading and discussion unit. We focus on precise words and phrases an author uses to determine literal, denotative meaning or inferential, connotative meaning in order to have a deeper understanding of the characters and the theme.

Though I sincerely hope my students will continue to explore literature long after they have graduated from Highline High School, the skills they are learning now--to think carefully about the words and the language used both in speech and in written text are vital in a society in which politicians use dog-whistle politics to hide racist appeals and advertisers promote unrealistic products.

Or when my former students and their families read contracts designed to obscure conditions less than favorable to themselves and other working people.

Words also matter when one signs on to them as did our Superintendent when she signed the PSESD letter dated April 14 of this year. The letter suggests that the undersigned Superintendents of a number of districts would encourage the state to fully fund basic education AND allow them to stop bargaining additional salary agreements with local Education Associations.

According to the PSESD letter,
"Statutory limitations must be in place for future collective bargaining agreements, that prohibit bargaining of local levy resources for basic education duties and responsibilities."

And

"We strongly support limiting the use of local levy resources to time worked outside of the 180-day school and for duties and responsibilities that are clearly distinguishable from those basic education functions routinely expected of teachers."

But what is "routinely expected of teachers"? Ask any teacher who has taught for 10 years or more how basic education expectations have changed from then to now.

Districts consider all those technology related tasks -- learning and using new grading software, incorporating new technology into curriculum, addressing all the emails that come in hourly -- as routine, just part of the routine expectations.

Nowadays, expectations on teachers are greater for building and maintaining relationships with our students and collaborating with our colleagues. More training, more meetings; just routine expectations.

Is all of this considered basic education, too?

As a teacher, I think these concerns and the accompanying pay for the extra hours incurred needs to be bargained through our local association, HEA.

The meaning of the words in the letter are clear: no more local collective bargaining on issues of great concern to teachers, staff, students and their families.

We say no to the restrictions on collective bargaining, Dr. Enfield, and respectfully ask that you take your name off the letter.