



Newton Special Education Parent Advisory Council

May 16, 2024

Newton School Committee
City of Newton
1000 Commonwealth Avenue
Newton Centre, MA 02459

RE: 2023-2024 End-of-Year Report

Dear School Committee Members,

On behalf of the special education parent/guardian community of Newton Public Schools, we respectfully submit the attached report, for your review.

Kindly,

The 2023-2024 Newton SEPAC Board



2023-2024 End-of-Year Report to the Newton School Committee

May 16, 2024

To: The Newton School Committee: Rajeev Parlikar (Ward 1), Christopher Brezski (Chair, Ward 2), Anping Shen (Ward 3), Tamika Olszewski (Ward 4), Emily Prenner (Vice Chair, Ward 5), Paul Levy (Ward 6), Amy Davenport (Ward 7), Barry Greenstein (Ward 8), Mayor Ruthanne Fuller (*ex officio*); and Superintendent Anna Nolin

From: 2023-24 Newton SEPAC Board Members: Annette Nedeljkovic (Chair), Eliza Spaulding (Secretary), Jenny Klein-Sosa (At-Large), Claudia Svoboda Ruehl (At-Large), Julie Swersey (At-Large), and Doreen Rachal (At-Large)

Cc: Casey Ngo-Miller, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services

Newton SEPAC 2023-2024 End-of-Year Report

What is the SEPAC?

Every School Committee is required to establish a Special Education Parent Advisory Council, per the Massachusetts General Laws, in part due to the legislative initiatives of Massachusetts Advocates for Children. The duties of the SEPAC include those noted below (M.G.L. c. 71B, 3):

“The school committee of any city, town, or school district shall establish a parent advisory council on special education. Membership shall be offered to all parents of children with disabilities and other interested parties. The parent advisory council duties shall include but not be limited to: advising the school committee on matters that pertain to the education and safety of students with disabilities; meeting regularly with school officials to participate in the planning, development, and evaluation of the school committee's special education programs...”

Other duties include meeting regularly with school officials to participate in the planning, development and evaluation of the district's special education programs; and cooperating with the district on their annual workshop on the rights of students, parents and guardians under state and federal law. The SEPAC is a self-governing public body which creates its own by-laws and operational procedures. A SEPAC is different from other parent groups in a school district such as a PTA, PTO or School Council – a SEPAC does not represent families from one school, rather it represents all families of children with disabilities from the entire school district.

2023-2024 Board Composition and Liaisons

In accordance with the Newton SEPAC by-laws¹, an election for the next school year's board is conducted in late spring, and positions are held for one year. All nominees must be a parent or guardian of a student with a disability and/or special needs (either with or without an IEP or 504) enrolled in Newton Public Schools or Out of District placement. A board election was held in June 2023 and yielded 5 board members elected by majority vote. Of those, 1 declined, and 4 agreed to serve in Chair, Secretary, and At-Large roles. To expand board capacity, a second election was held in August 2023, which yielded two additional elected board members who assumed At-Large roles immediately.

- Chair: Annette Nedeljkovic
- Secretary: Eliza Spaulding
- At Large: Jenny Klein-Sosa
- At Large: Claudia Svoboda Ruehl
- At Large: Julie Swersey
- At Large: Doreen Rachal

In addition to the board, other key leadership roles supported the year's work.

- SEPAC Liaison Coordinator: vacant
- SEPAC Election Coordinator: Cheryl Lavoie
- School Committee Liaisons to the SEPAC during 2023-24: Paul Levy & Barry Greenstein

The nomination and election process is currently underway for the 2024-2025 school year, and the next board will assume their roles in July 2024.

¹ [2017 - Newton SEPAC By-Laws](#)

Of the 22 Newton schools and out-of-district placements, a majority were represented by at least one SEPAC Liaison in 2023-2024. This was the first year in many that the position of Liaison Coordinator was unfilled, making it difficult to identify volunteers for all schools. SEPAC Liaisons were instrumental in sharing information and resources and fostering community among families with children receiving special education services in Newton. At each school, the SEPAC Liaison meets regularly with administration, supports special education staff, runs support or informational groups for parents, includes special education announcements in newsletters and ensures information about the SEPAC is distributed at school and at IEP/504 meetings. SEPAC Liaisons serve on all schools' PTO boards to ensure the needs of children with disabilities and their families are appropriately accommodated and included. They are also a key link in the chain of communication between families and special education staff and administration.

Preschool:

NECP Jacquelyn Orleck

Elementary Schools:

Angier	Cara Colgate & Jill Hempen-Anthony
Bowen	Seema Joshi
Burr	Eliza Spaulding
Cabot	Anna Claeys
Countryside	Jill Canelli
Franklin	Yael Mito
Horace Mann	Erica Remi & Erin Kistler
Lincoln Eliot	Winko An
Mason Rice	<i>vacant</i>
Memorial-Spaulding	Jenny Klein-Sosa
Peirce	Jessi Champion
Underwood	<i>vacant</i>
Ward	Tabatha Flores & Jordyne Wu
Williams	<i>vacant</i>
Zervas	Maureen Forry

Middle Schools:

Bigelow	Rocio Calvo
Brown	<i>vacant</i>
Day	Spencer Poole
Oak Hill	Megha Menon

High Schools:

Out-of-District:

Ann Rounseville

Goals for the Year

The Newton SEPAC board approached this school year with continued commitment to the goals from the year before. We have strived to work collaboratively with NPS toward realizing its core values of ensuring academic excellence, educational equity, and social and emotional well being for all students. We commend NPS leaders for sharing our desire for NPS to become an anti-ableist and disability-affirming school district, and we appreciate the many concrete efforts made so far to this end. In addition, we continue to advocate for our students with disabilities in many ways, including encouraging leaders to 1) elevate voices from disabled individuals in decision-making, 2) provide professional development and consulting opportunities for educators and administrators in disability-affirming practices and evidence-based approaches, 3) creating school environments and curricula with universal design principles at the forefront, and 4) ensuring that all students' with disabilities Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 plans provide equitable access to the curriculum and are implemented with fidelity over time. We recognize that the mindset shift toward becoming an anti-ableist district requires time to take root, even in ideal circumstances—such as leadership commitment, swift and clear planning, and adequate funding—all of which can be challenging to align. We also know that the essential work of providing special education accommodations and services to meet all needs is complex and requires proper resourcing. We acknowledge that complexities of this school year (e.g., leadership transition, continued post-pandemic impacts, unsuccessful contract negotiations resulting in a teacher's strike), have no doubt impacted the pace of change. But our goals hold steady, as we believe they are in the best interests of all our students, staff, parents, and the community as a whole.

Newton Public Schools was joined in July of 2023 by a new Superintendent, Dr. Anna Nolin, who came to us after many years of leadership in Natick Public Schools. From the outset of the school year, SEPAC leaders sought to establish and cultivate a relationship with Dr. Nolin, founded in understanding and trust. Quite notably, Dr. Nolin prioritized engaging directly and immediately with the community through informal gatherings and meetings held with staff, city, community, and parent/family group leaders. SEPAC Co-Chairs from 2022-2023 met with Dr. Nolin just prior to our leadership changeover, and in that meeting expressed a desire on the part of our community to be a source of constructive feedback and collaborative partnership with her and her team. Over summer, Dr. Nolin met with a large number of Newton families, community members and residents representing a broad range of perspectives. In the fall of 2023, the current SEPAC board hosted an in-person/virtual hybrid "Meet-and-Greet" with Dr. Nolin, as an opportunity for our special education community members to hear about her takeaways from the many touch-points over summer as well as her initial goals (see Entry Plan²). Dr. Nolin shared her desires to ensure robust and aligned Tier 1 ELA and math curricula across the district, coupled with a strong and consistent system for collecting performance data that could be used for ongoing monitoring and systematic improvement. She acknowledged the budget cuts that affected special education in NPS over recent years, and she discussed the need to strengthen systems of support for students with and without IEPs/504s. The SEPAC board expressed support for those goals.

Dr. Nolin was accompanied at that meeting by Dr. Casey Ngo-Miller, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services, who additionally spoke about the district's commitment to anti-ableism, and she summarized the Office of Student Services' plans related to fostering a culture of authentic inclusion and acceptance for students with disabilities across all classrooms and schools. Dr. Ngo-Miller provided an overview of the emergent Anti-Ableism Working Group, tasked with curriculum development for elementary students, and she described the district's intent to form a Disability Advisory Group (DAG) as well as planned professional development offerings for staff intended to educate and encourage systemic change toward becoming a more meaningfully inclusive district.

SEPAC leaders additionally shared priorities held by our community around seeking transparent and consistent communication from administration, the need for better representation of a wide range of disabilities and

² November 2023 - Dr. Anna Nolin's Entry Plan - https://drive.google.com/file/d/1k_AlbEYkwDQQwRw7-XyRNrmwZqQgKYY2/view?usp=share_link

intersectional identities in decision-making, and the troubling lack of disability awareness curriculum for students coming into this year in the wake of NPS's decision to discontinue the Understanding Our Differences program last school year. We reaffirmed the shared goal of creating environments that are affirming and supportive, and also noted that this does not replace the need for strong, evidence-based special education programs and services that fulfill every IEP and 504 plan, which requires proper funding and staffing.

In meetings with district leaders and staff throughout this school year, we have strived to express a sense of urgency for change, based on the widening gaps for our students with disabilities compared to their peers, across a range of metrics. In this report, we offer first a reminder of the significant vulnerabilities experienced by NPS's students with disabilities, then a brief review of many challenges and successes of this year, and end with some key opportunities for collaboration and partnership between SEPAC and our leaders and decision-makers aimed at ensuring a fully equitable educational experience for every student.

Data Trends – NPS's Students with Disabilities

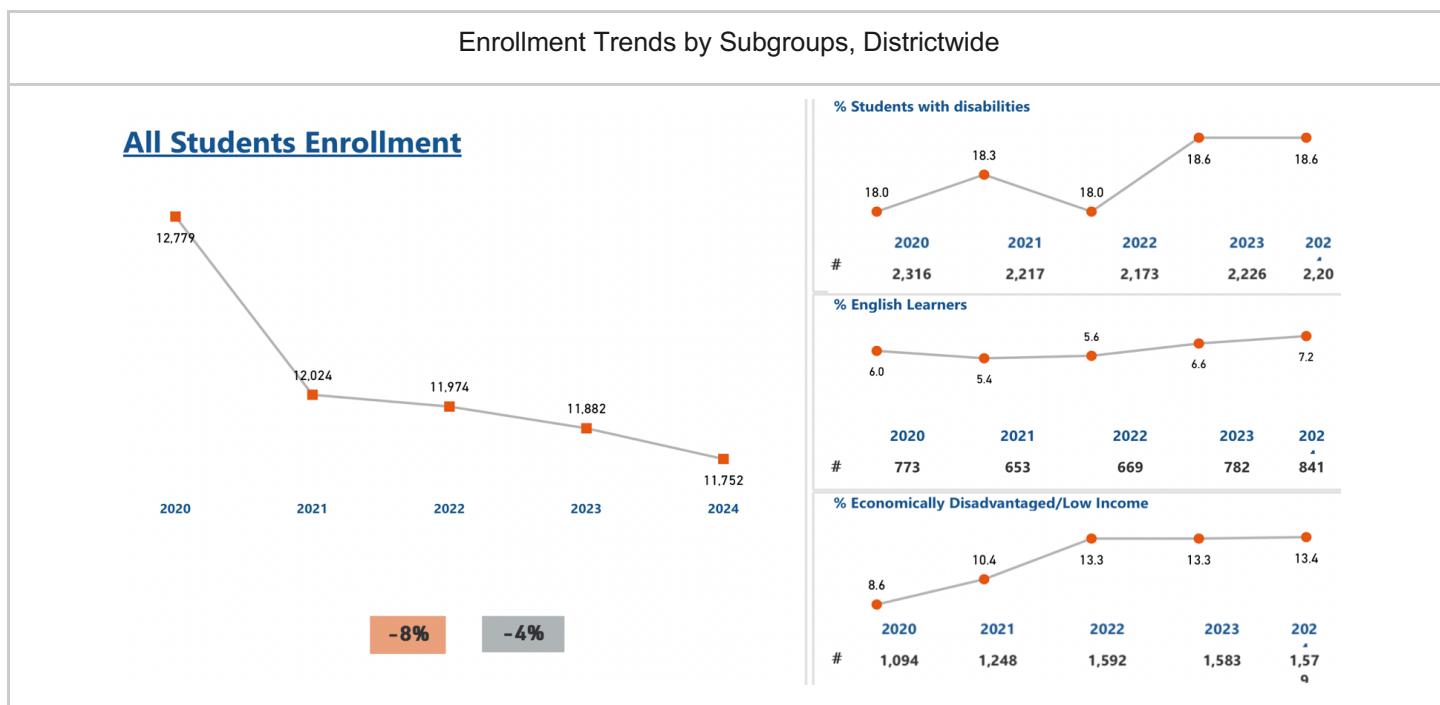
Newton Public Schools recently released their 2023-2024 Annual Report³, which provides an overview of NPS's progress toward reaching our system-wide goals. The four goal areas listed are:

- Goal 1: Foster joyful and supportive learning environments
- Goal 2: Provide culturally responsive, high quality, rigorous instruction for all
- Goal 3: Ensure equitable access to effective educators
- Goal 4: Optimize district planning and budgeting ecosystem

In describing each goal area, the NPS Annual Report provides K-12 all student data trends, and also several data points are disaggregated by race/ethnicity. One data point in the document, enrollment percentage, references students with disabilities. The SEPAC would like to present here a complement to that high-level view, with additional data, below, to help inform stakeholders about NPS's students with disabilities. We provide demographics of NPS's disabled student population, as well as data-based examples highlighting gaps related to the school experiences and performance between students with disabilities (SWD) and their non-disabled peers. Our aim is to underscore the urgent and continuing need to address these gaps.

Enrollment

NPS's percentage of students with disabilities (SWD) has shown a slight increase of +0.6% between 2020 and 2024. This may not seem like much, but it is important to note that this upward trend has been observed during a time period when NPS's all student population has decreased by -8%. Similar increases in the percentages of students who are English language learners (+1.2%), and those who experience economic disadvantage (+4.8%), have also been observed. Taken together, these numbers indicate higher needs for a larger proportion of NPS's student population since the pandemic year. Given these trends, the SEPAC believes it is important for NPS to include projections for subgroups in their annual Enrollment Analysis Reports⁴, so that this data may be used for decision-making and planning, both programmatic and financial.



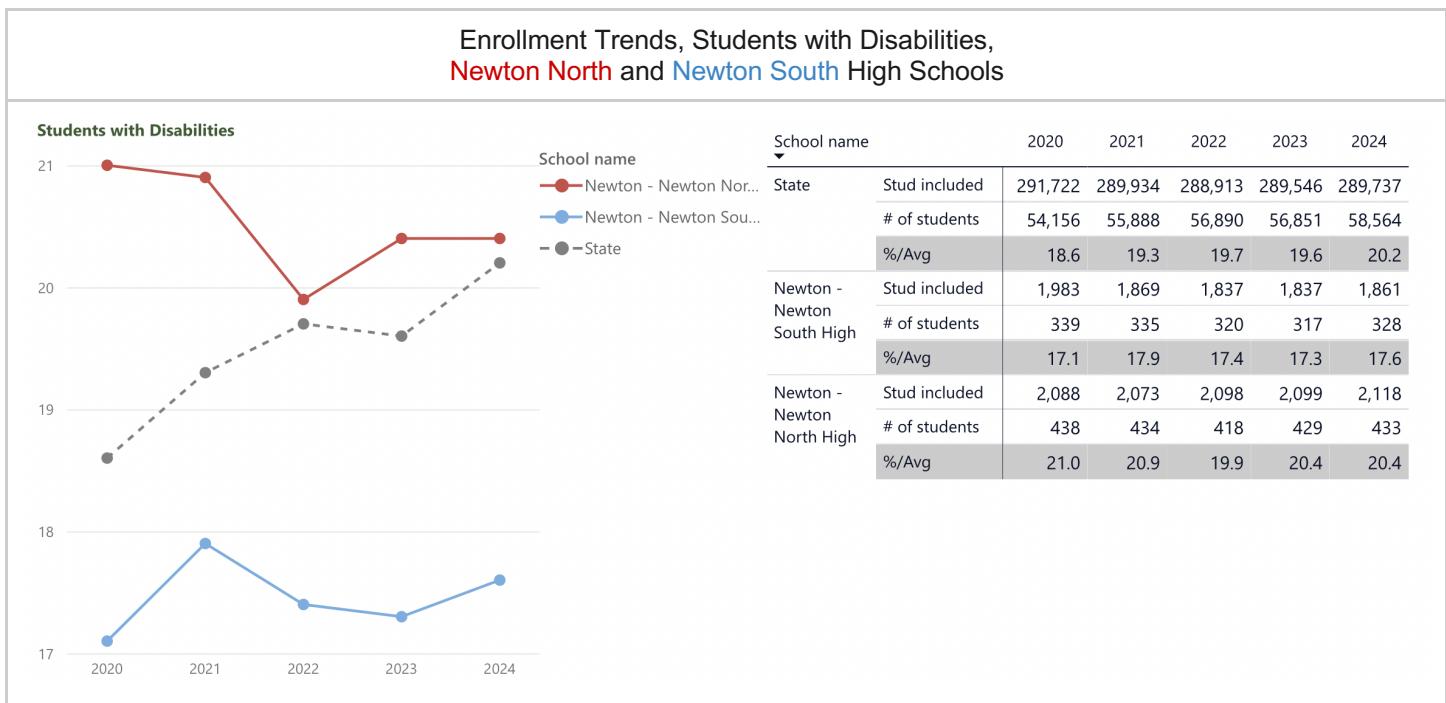
³ NPS's 2023-2024 Annual Report - https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PKseG2cbD96RPd46y_23MQvLLtluEpw/view

⁴ NPS's Enrollment Analysis Reports - <https://www.newton.k12.ma.us/Page/4219>

Many of NPS's students with disabilities also belong to other historically marginalized subgroups. In 2023 (most recent data publicly available), just under a quarter (23%) of our in-district students with IEPs also experienced economic disadvantage, and 3% were also English language learners.

Enrollment, Students with Disabilities by Other Subgroups, 2023	
SWDs in-district	2,118
SWD only	1,533
SWD/low income	477
SWD/EL	59
SWD/ELL/low income	49
% of SWDs in-district	
SWD only	72%
SWD/low income	23%
SWD/EL	3%
SWD/ELL/low income	2%
<i>Percent of district enrollment</i>	
Low income	13%
English learner	7%

Looking at our two largest schools, we see that the proportion of students with disabilities has historically been higher at Newton North High School (~20%) as compared to Newton South High School (~17%). It would be helpful to understand what factors may contribute to this differential, potentially in terms of eligibility determinations, servicing, and/or programming offered at each location.

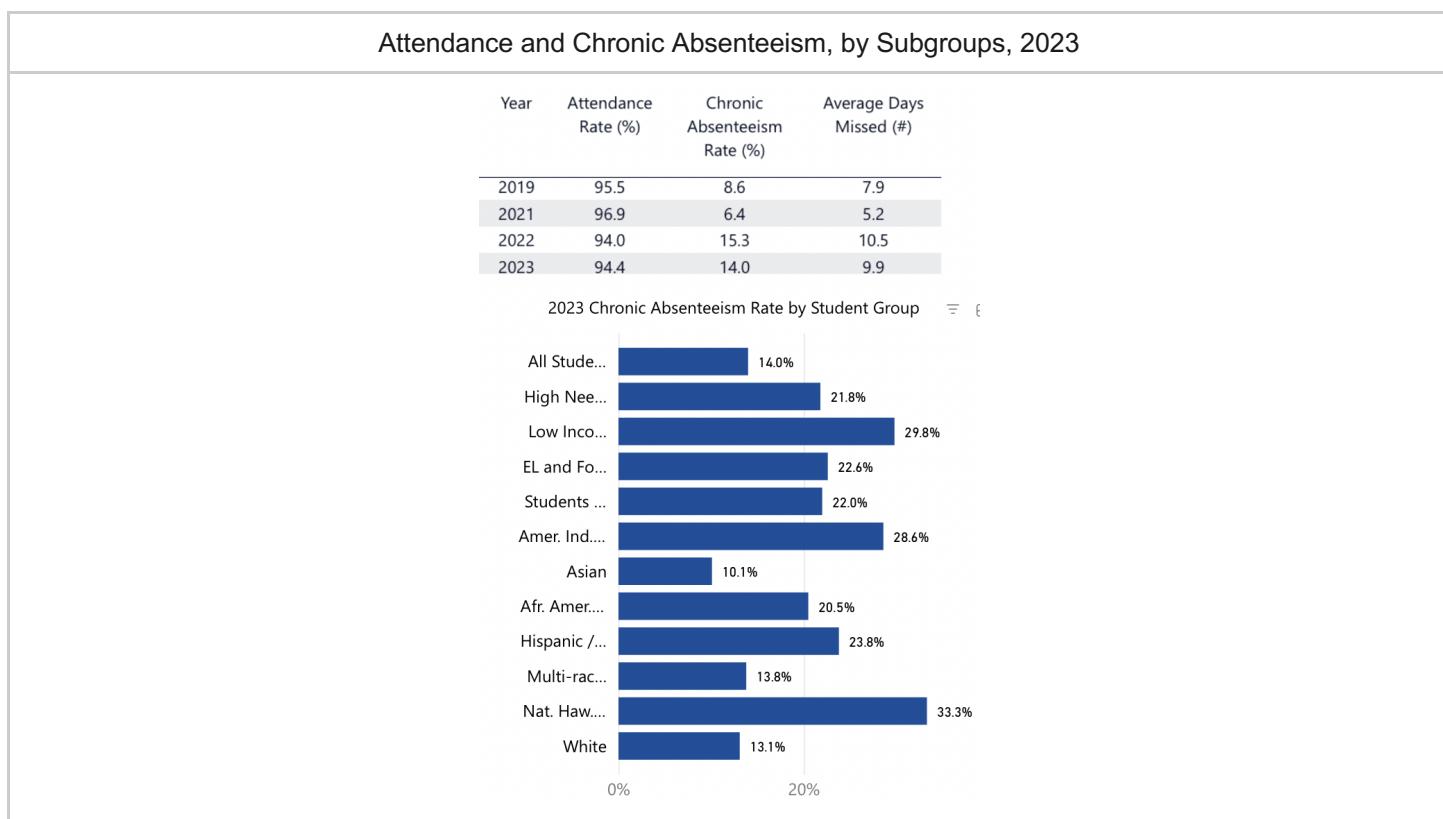


In- and Out-of-District Placements

Students with disabilities are primarily served in-district within inclusive classrooms at neighborhood schools or in district-wide programs housed at specific schools within NPS. As of April 2024, 118⁵ of NPS's 2,208⁶ students with disabilities were being served in out-of-district placements. That 5.3% was up from 4.8% in 2023, and consistent with previous years' rates (5.2% in 2022 and 5.5% in 2021).

Attendance / Absenteeism

Over time, NPS has seen increasing rates of chronic absenteeism (missing 10% or more of the school year) across the district, a troubling trend that is also being observed statewide. For all NPS students, the rate has risen from 8.6% in 2019 to 14% in 2023. Students with disabilities were chronically absent at an even higher rate last year—22%. This school year has been unusual, in that it included an unexpected school closure due to the teacher's strike, the cancellation of February vacation week, and the extension of the school year to make up days. Families had to make hard choices about whether to keep students out of class for pre-planned family travel, summer camp start dates overlapping with added-on school days, and other events (e.g., illness) which may have been hard to anticipate or change. From the SEPAC's perspective, chronic absenteeism is a particularly important metric to consider for students with disabilities, who lose both instructional time *and* IEP services on days out of school. Therefore, it will be very important to closely examine absenteeism rates for the current year, once available.



⁵ NPS's FY24 May Fiscal & Operations Report - https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SDI0yKDBmYVG-7Hw5pw3r2mgXjfAxw5c/view?usp=share_link

⁶ Per enrollment reported to DESE in October 2023.

Social and Emotional Well-Being

It is a common understanding that students' social emotional needs are higher since the pandemic, for students with and without disabilities. In February of 2023, middle and high school students were asked to complete the *Youth Risk Behavior Survey* (YRBS), which is a self-report questionnaire assessing health risk behaviors and protective factors of students. In November of 2023, YRBS results⁷ were reported out by NPS to the School Committee. Consistent with previous findings, compared to non-disabled peers, NPS's middle and high school students with disabilities reported higher rates of mental health challenges, concerns about safety in and out of school, skipping school due to feeling unsafe, experiences of being bullied in school, experiences of forced sexual contact, and risky and dangerous behaviors. Results were not disaggregated by subgroup for questions related to depression, self-harm, suicidal thoughts and behaviors, or school connectedness. We believe that this is important information to report out for students with disabilities, given vulnerabilities identified in these areas previously. Going forward we strongly encourage NPS to share with the public YRBS results for all students and disaggregated by subgroups, in keeping with previous precedent.

Of note, to assess for experiences of discrimination, the YRBS asks whether the student felt they were "treated badly or unfairly in school because of" their race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, or religion. *Discrimination is not assessed in relation to disability status, however.* Given the higher likelihood of students with disabilities being targeted due to this aspect of their identity, this omission is striking. In future administrations of the YRBS, we advise that this question be adapted and available for students with disabilities to reflect and report upon.

In addition to the YRBS, NPS educators are assessing and monitoring students' well-being using other existing and newly acquired tools. The *Panorama Survey on Student Social Emotional Health* was administered this year to grades 3-5. Across the middle schools, NPS administered *Sown to Grow: A Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Tool*, an evidence-based program that links student check-ins with real-time, personalized educator feedback. NPS also continued use of its *Survey on School Connectedness* with grades 3-8 and grade 10.

In November of 2023, NPS gave an update on SEL and mental health in elementary⁸. At that time, they noted observing "increased overall student mental health and SEL needs, both in terms of the number of students requiring individualized supports as well as the complexity of need within classrooms." Specifically for grades 3-5, survey results showed that "disproportionalities persist in the form of self-reported lower scores across all 7 domains for a variety of identity groups, including students that identify as male, Black students, free and reduced lunch status, and **students that are supported through IEPs.**" Further, NPS's general education support and stabilization data showed that educators "continue to see increase in complexity and intensity of student need in referrals for clinical consultation and support from this district crisis support team."

At the middle and high school levels⁹, NPS's secondary leadership team also reported a "rise in [students'] social-emotional distress, as per results from the YRBS and the *Signs of Suicide* surveys, as well as an uptick in initial referrals to special education, often related to anxiety and depression. They cited "inadequate investment in staffing levels" to support the "framework for general education Tier 1 and Tier 2 social emotional supports."

If higher social, emotional, and mental health needs of students in general education are not properly supported, the long term risks increase for these students. From the student-centered lens, lack of timely and appropriate assistance for challenges across all aspects of the school life—from acute mental health situations to academic fall-backs—can chip away at a student's self-esteem and confidence, further compounding their challenges.

⁷ November 2023 – NPS's YRBS Presentation -

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_gFjGuExdcfoggxMNdhsq4bUP3nQxJjE/view?usp=share_link

⁸ November 2023 - NPS's Elementary SEL and Mental Health Update - <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eSXNdIc1DKCe9-oSqTNcrjfzjmV5dN97/view>

⁹ November 2023 - NPS's Secondary-Level Mental Health Update - <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Jqe43nOfModMaM5J7-Ry9V5WIRAC0fuG/view>

From the systemic perspective, a sub-optimal system of support that misses general education students in need will eventually result in added stress to the special education system in our district, through more eligibility evaluations and resulting IEPs, causing further demand upon resources that are already spread thin.

To be clear, the SEPAC firmly believes that a robust tiered system of support in general education AND a comprehensive system of inclusive, affirming classrooms complemented by strong district-wide programs for special education must BOTH exist and be adequately resourced. We fully support Dr. Nolin and her leadership team's *Vision for a Multi-Tiered System of Support for SEL and Mental Health*, in the same way that we support Dr. Ngo-Miller and her leadership team's complex framework for ensuring that all students' with disabilities IEPs and 504 plans are comprehensive and implemented with fidelity. These two systems do not run in isolated parallel, rather, they are intrinsically interconnected on a continuum of services for our students. We must provide a cohesive process that catches student needs early, addresses them immediately using data-based feedback loops, and links seamlessly with special education if and when general education supports are found not to meet a student's needs.

Academic Achievement

SEPAC has previously reported that in terms of academic performance, students with disabilities have consistently scored significantly lower than their peers on ELA and mathematics MCAS. These trends persisted in our most recent 2023 results¹⁰. NPS is acutely aware of these difficult differentials, and has submitted plans to DESE¹¹ for how they intend to confront them:

"At NPS, we are dedicated to closing opportunity gaps, particularly for historically marginalized student groups, including Multilingual Learners, Hispanic/Latinx students, Black/African American students, and **students with disabilities**. Our submission identifies disparities in student learning opportunities and outcomes, and outlines evidence-based strategies to address these inequities. Our plan focuses on leveraging Culturally Responsive Practices, informed by a thorough analysis of data. Through this approach, we aim to create an inclusive learning environment that respects and affirms the diverse backgrounds and experiences of our students. Additionally, we are committed to providing academic and social-emotional support through the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)."

That said, we submit some notable examples of disparities we continue to observe in Newton's students with disabilities, in an effort to highlight the urgent need to address them. The following data are excerpted from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) website¹².

¹⁰ November 2023 - NPS's MCAS memo - https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FH7B3qVlhPDnb-rsER2_2mz1PwCIMbug/view?usp=share_link

¹¹ March 2024 - NPS's Student Opportunity Act memo - https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SjlHWdSCJ7eSphN5G_LCrb-aEVRJ1C7B/view?usp=share_link

¹² Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) provides a number of data analysis tools, offering many ways to disaggregate and compare data. A list of useful datasets and reports, referenced in this document, can be found here: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/dese-directory-of-datasets-and-reports>

English Language Arts (ELA)

In 2023, 25% of SWD in grades 3-8 and 46% in grade 10 met or exceeded expectations in ELA, compared to all student rates of 66% and 81%, respectively.

ELA Percent Proficient, by Subgroup, Grades 3-8 & Grade 10

MCAS Results: Non-High School (Grade 3-8)					MCAS Results: High School (Grade 10)				
Next Generation MCAS Percent Meeting or Exceeding Expectations by Student Group					Next Generation MCAS Percent Meeting or Exceeding Expectations by Student Group				
Student Group	2019	2022	2023	2023 # Included	Student Group	2019	2022	2023	2023 # Included
All Students	73	65	66	66	All Students	78	80	81	81
High Needs	48	38	37	37	High Needs	51	55	53	53
Low Income		33	33	33	Low Income		58	49	49
EL and Former EL	58	47	44	44	EL and Former EL	46	56	38	38
Students w/ disabilities	33	25	25	25	Students w/ disabilities	43	42	46	46
Asian	79	75	75	75	Asian	81	86	86	86
Afr. Amer. / Black	41	33	36	36	Afr. Amer. / Black	48	45	48	48
Hispanic / Latino	53	44	45	45	Hispanic / Latino	69	61	57	57
Multi-race, Non-Hisp./Latino	77	70	70	70	Multi-race, Non-Hisp./Latino	82	79	86	86
White	76	67	68	68	White	82	83	86	86

Mathematics

In 2023, 29% of SWD in grades 3-8 and 47% in grade 10 reached proficiency in mathematics, compared to 68% and 81% of all students, respectively.

Mathematics Percent Proficient, by Subgroup, Grades 3-8 & Grade 10

MCAS Results: Non-High School (Grade 3-8)					MCAS Results: High School (Grade 10)				
Next Generation MCAS Percent Meeting or Exceeding Expectations by Student Group					Next Generation MCAS Percent Meeting or Exceeding Expectations by Student Group				
Student Group	2019	2022	2023	2023 # Included	Student Group	2019	2022	2023	2023 # Included
All Students	73	68	68	68	All Students	84	79	81	81
High Needs	50	42	43	43	High Needs	63	54	56	56
Low Income		31	33	33	Low Income		55	50	50
EL and Former EL	68	60	59	59	EL and Former EL	78	66	58	58
Students w/ disabilities	34	30	29	29	Students w/ disabilities	50	38	47	47
Asian	87	84	85	85	Asian	92	92	97	97
Afr. Amer. / Black	32	26	27	27	Afr. Amer. / Black	56	42	43	43
Hispanic / Latino	45	41	45	45	Hispanic / Latino	76	53	52	52
Multi-race, Non-Hisp./Latino	76	72	72	72	Multi-race, Non-Hisp./Latino	83	81	91	91
White	74	69	69	69	White	86	82	83	83

Science

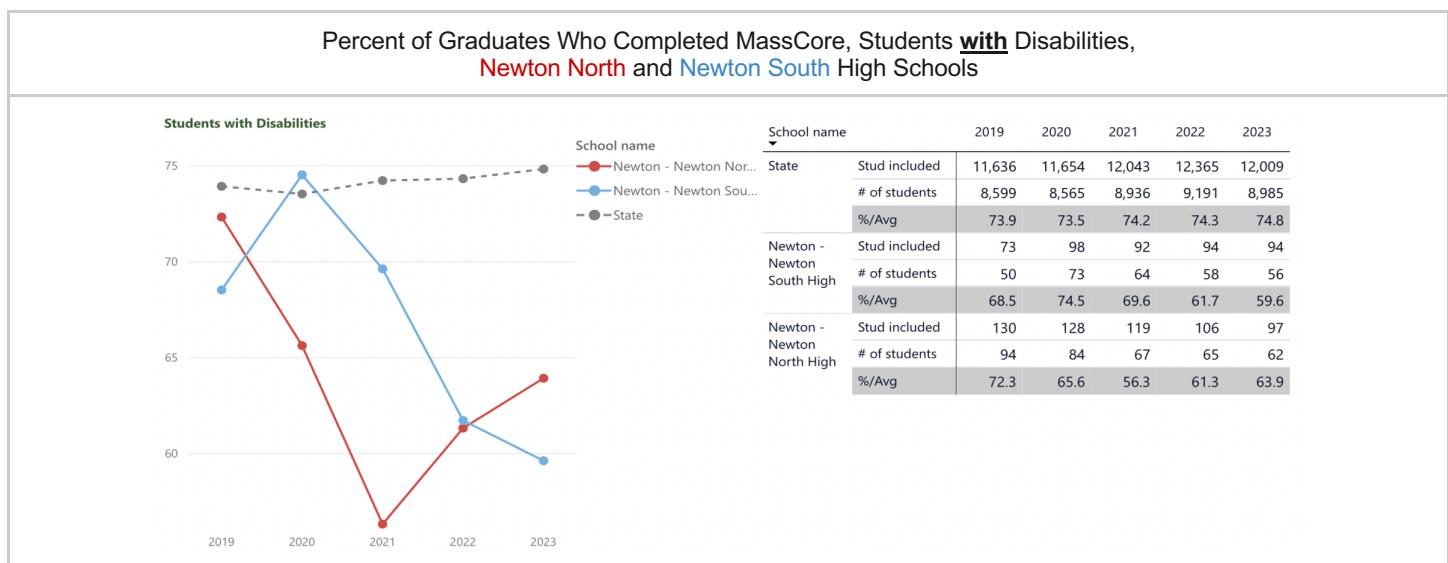
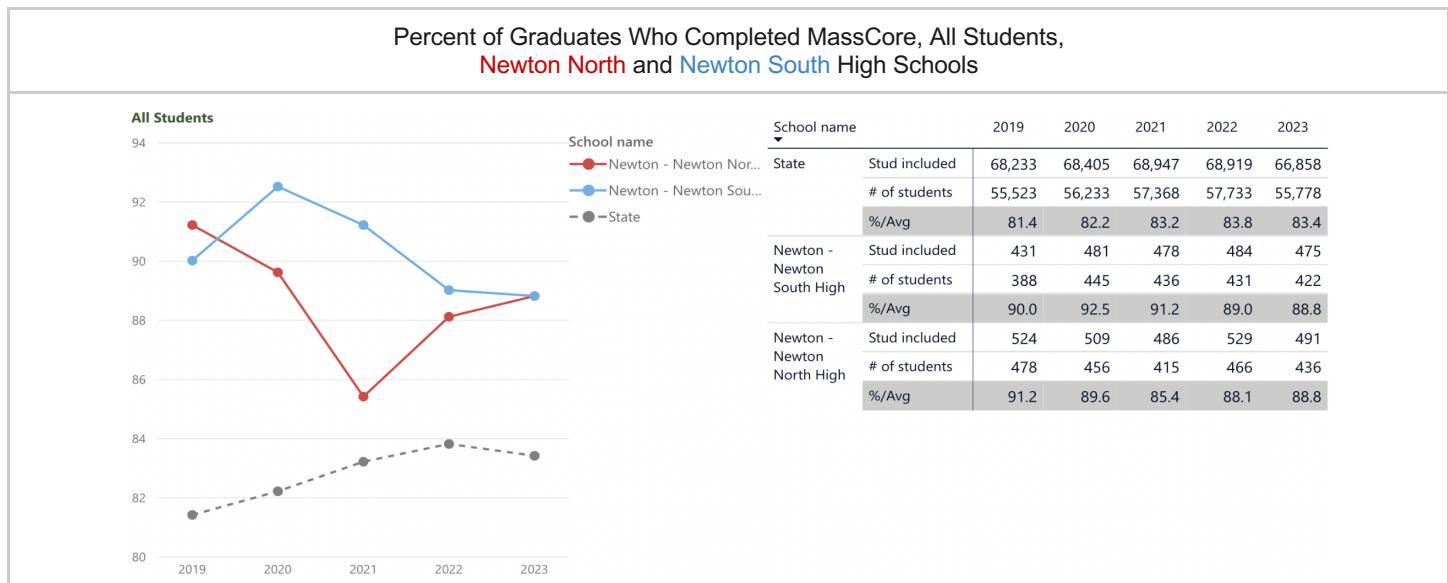
Last year, 28% of SWD in grades 3-8 and 41% in grade 10 reached proficiency in science, compared to 64% and 79% of all students, respectively.

Science Percent Proficient, by Subgroup, Grades 3-8 & Grade 10

MCAS Results: Non-High School (Grade 3-8)					MCAS Results: High School (Grade 10)				
Next Generation MCAS Percent Meeting or Exceeding Expectations by Student Group					Next Generation MCAS Percent Meeting or Exceeding Expectations by Student Group				
Student Group	2019	2022	2023	2023 # Included	Student Group	2022	2023	2023 # Included	
All Students	66	66	64	64	All Students	66	79	79	79
High Needs	41	41	39	39	High Needs	43	53	53	53
Low Income		32	33	33	Low Income		44	47	47
EL and Former EL	50	52	51	51	EL and Former EL	49	59	59	59
Students w/ disabilities	28	29	28	28	Students w/ disabilities	31	41	41	41
Asian	74	76	76	76	Asian	79	94	94	94
Afr. Amer. / Black	32	27	26	26	Afr. Amer. / Black	26	33	33	33
Hispanic / Latino	41	45	49	49	Hispanic / Latino	49	55	55	55
Multi-race, Non-Hisp./Latino	68	72	69	69	Multi-race, Non-Hisp./Latino	68	85	85	85
White	68	68	65	65	White	67	80	80	80

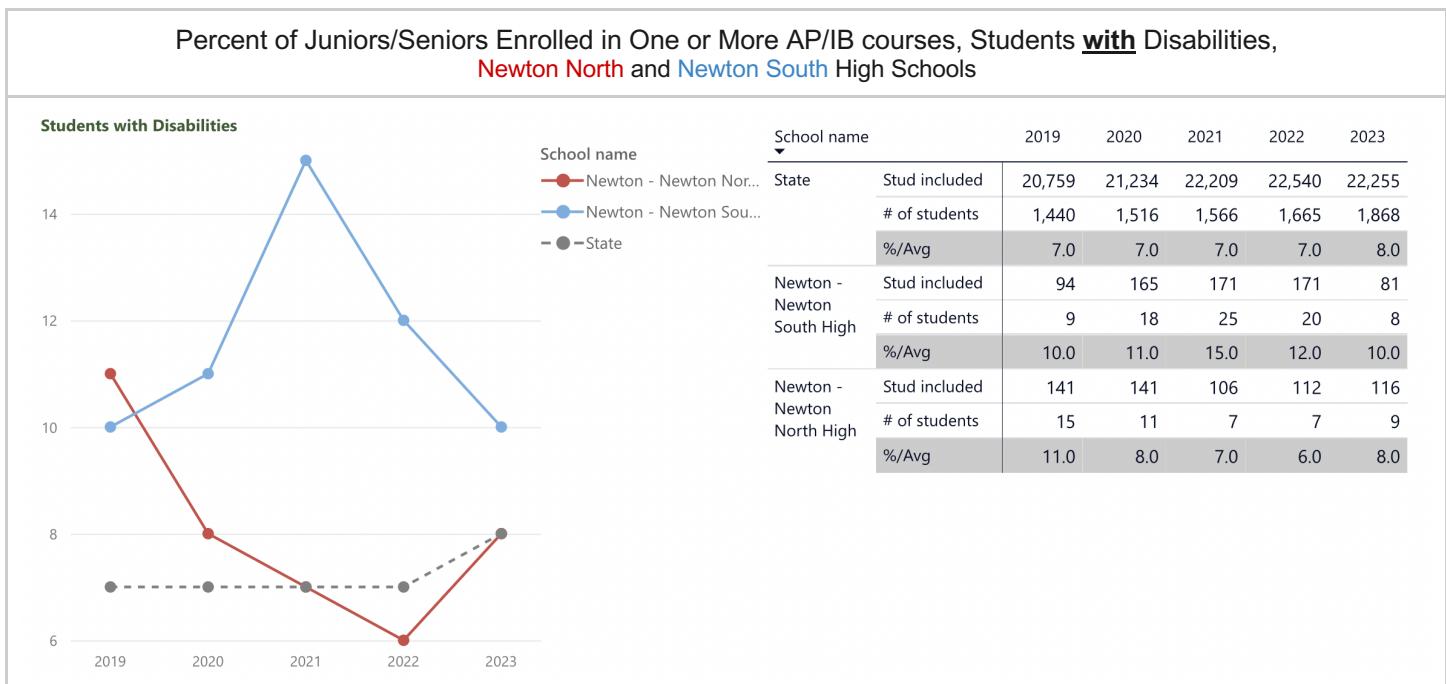
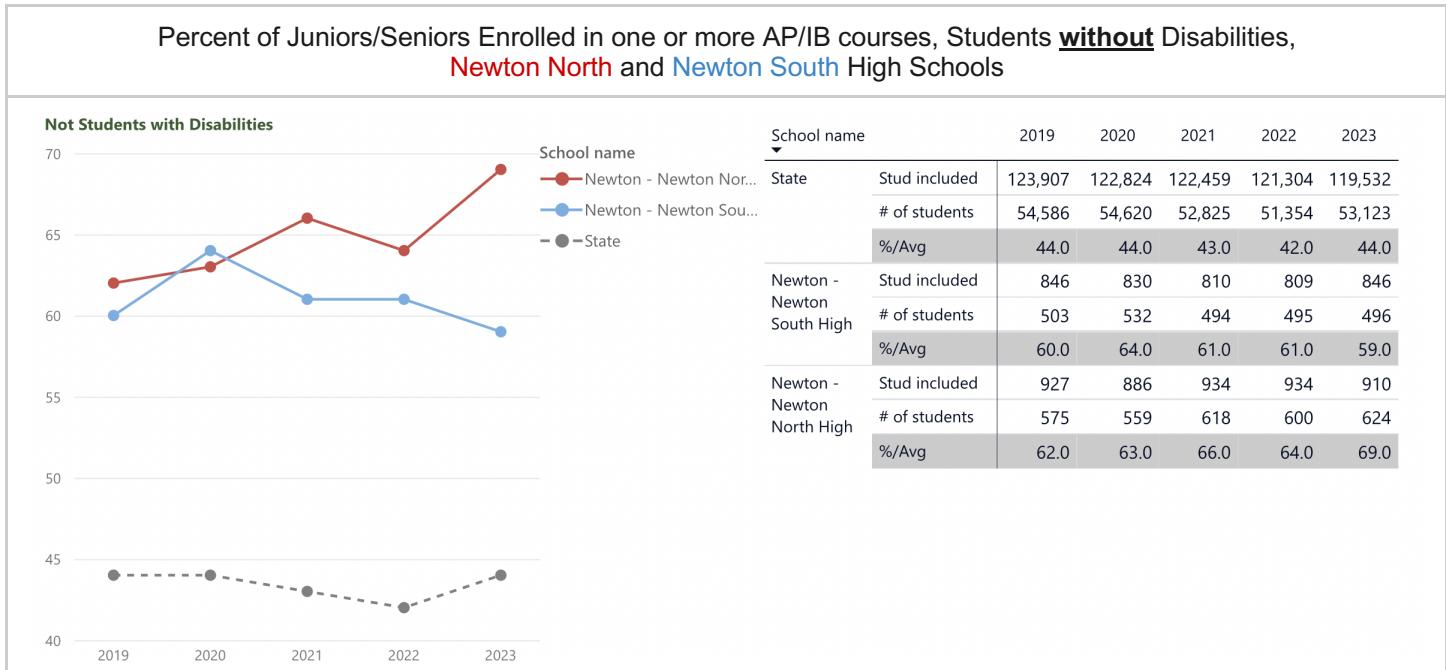
Indicators of Post-Secondary Success

MassCore¹³ is a state recommended, rigorous program of study that aligns high school coursework with college and workforce expectations. Per the DESE website, the program of studies includes the successful completion of four units of English, four units of mathematics, three units of a lab-based science, three units of history, two units of the same world language, one unit of the arts, and five additional "core" courses. In 2023, 89% of all NPS graduates, across both high schools, had completed MassCore. For students with disabilities, the charts below show a striking downward trend of fewer completing MassCore over the last 5 years, with 2023 rates of 64% at Newton North and 60% at Newton South. These MassCore completion rates are even lower than the 75% of students with disabilities statewide having graduated with all MassCore classes taken.



¹³ DESE's MassCore website - <https://www.doe.mass.edu/ccfe/sec-design/masscore/default.html>

Another key indicator related to post-secondary outcomes is students' access to and participation in higher level coursework in high school, particularly **Advanced Placement** classes. There is a notable disparity seen in both high schools between the percentages of students with and without disabilities. Newton North's students without disabilities have been steadily increasing in the number of Juniors/Seniors taking at least one AP class (69% in 2023), while Newton South's rates have hovered around 60%. In contrast, for Juniors/Seniors with IEPs, only 8% (NNHS) and 10% (NSHS) enrolled in at least one AP class in 2023.



Advisory Efforts

A key role of the SEPAC is to serve in an advisory capacity for Newton Public Schools and the School Committee, and to represent the needs of our special education students in collaboration with other related organizations. This school year has included a number of challenging events that have impacted our students, school communities, and larger city. Below are some ways in which we fulfilled our legislative advisory mandate this year, keeping student needs at the center.

The 2023-2024 school year started without a new teachers' contract in place. After more than 18 months of unsuccessful contract negotiations between the School Committee and the Newton Teachers' Association, NTA membership voted to strike in January 2024. The strike lasted 11 school days, during which all school buildings were closed. Before, during, and after the strike, the SEPAC board engaged in a number of efforts to encourage leadership from all involved parties to find a resolution and settle the contract as soon as possible. We focused on placing student needs at the forefront in our communications. In December 2023, we sent a letter to Mayor Fuller advising full funding for NPS. During the strike, SEPAC board members wrote letters to leadership, some in collaboration with other parent-led organizations (PTO Council, ELPAC, FORJ, and school PTOs), asking for meaningful compromise to find agreement and end the strike. *These letters are appended at the end of this document.* We exchanged information and advocated for our students with disabilities by attending many meetings with peer organizations, School Committee members, City Council members, the Mayor, and with our own SEPAC community. As the strike continued, we began to hear more parent concerns about their students with disabilities whose IEP services were not being provided during the school closure, so we surveyed our SEPAC community to better understand their challenges at that time. We compiled the feedback we received and sent it to NPS, School Committee, NTA, and city leaders, again requesting a swift resolution to get students back to school. We provided caregiver-to-caregiver support through phone calls, emails, and outreach to families via social media. We saw membership in our listserv increase, and families and other interested participants exchanged a range of perspectives in that venue. Once the contract was settled and schools reopened, SEPAC organized a Q&A with leaders from the Office of Student Services, to address concerns about how the district would make up for the lost learning time and service delivery. The full effects of students' and the community's experiences of this time period are yet to be determined. The SEPAC is hopeful that key learnings from this difficult process will help avoid it ever happening again.

In August, 2023, NPS began planning to develop an anti-ableism curriculum for students, designed to expand the scope of principles taught in Understanding Our Differences and codify them with the purpose of making NPS a holistic anti-ableist, disability-affirming school district. The working group tasked with this long-term initiative is led by Dr. Maria Kolbe, NPS elementary SEL coach. Members of the working group include two current SEPAC board members and one former SEPAC board member, a co-chair of the Newton Commission on Disability and a number of NPS staff. The role of SEPAC representation within the working group has been to include a wide range of perspectives and bring as many voices from our community as possible into the conversation. With the exception of the weeks during the strike, the work of this group has continued throughout this school year. The anti-ableist curriculum, tentatively called *Getting to Know You and Me*, is an ambitious collaboration between NPS educators and staff, expert consultants and members of the disability community. The primary goals of the working group are:

- to communicate the district's anti-ableist vision
- to develop a grade appropriate curriculum
- to design a professional learning sequence for elementary faculty
- to consult with and receive feedback from educational researchers who have experience evaluating evidence based practices in their research
- to partner with the independently formed Disability Advisory Group, who provide feedback on the authenticity of content based on lived experiences
- to develop a community facing website capturing the district's anti-ableism work

In addition to curriculum development, the Office of Student Services has also engaged in other initiatives to further anti-ableism work in the district. In fall of 2023, NPS held a Mental Health Summit with more than 100 NPS staff members, and a professional development opportunity was offered for staff on “The Neurodiversity Movement.” In March 2024, NPS also announced the formation of their Disability Advisory Group (DAG). NPS describes the DAG¹⁴ as follows:

“Comprising dedicated individuals from various backgrounds and lived experiences, this group embodies our commitment to fostering a meaningfully inclusive education for all students. DAG’s major responsibilities are to advise the Office of Student Services and [the Assistant Superintendent for Student Services] on the following:

- Programming and services for students with disabilities
- The district’s work on anti-ableism
- Supporting the conditions for learning for all students with disabilities

The advisory group works to ensure that the needs and rights of individuals with disabilities are recognized, respected, and addressed in all aspects of education and school life.”

The SEPAC is pleased that NPS has convened the DAG, and we are confident that the advisory that this group can provide from the perspectives of disabled adults with lived experience is an excellent complement to the perspectives of parents and caretakers of currently enrolled students with disabilities in our district. We look forward to learning more about the DAG’s work and hope to have opportunities to collaborate. As an example, one high priority, broad topic area for potential cross-group discussion is accessibility (e.g., ADA compliance for buildings and playgrounds, the need for standardized and inclusive field trip policies, etc.).

With regard to early literacy in NPS, the new EL curriculum has rolled out across most elementary classrooms this school year. Though progress was slowed by the teachers’ modified work-to-rule circumstance followed by the strike, teachers have received professional development and have invested a great deal of time and effort in learning and implementing the new curriculum. We applaud NPS’s decision to invest in this evidence-based approach, as well as the dedication of our teachers in implementing it with our students. The SEPAC board has also been checking in with families about NPS’s implementation of the recent Massachusetts’ dyslexia screening mandate, which was passed in September of 2022 and was required to be implemented statewide by July of 2023. This legislation states that Massachusetts school districts must screen students’ individual reading ability and literacy skills at least twice a year in an effort to catch learning disabilities earlier. SEPAC families have shared concerns about students in need of support being identified too late, sometimes after reaching middle or high school, and other times identified only after special education eligibility evaluations. SEPAC continues to encourage NPS to seek family feedback directly on the accessibility and timeliness of their protocols for informing parents of early screener results and support plans.

Questions around NPS policies and practices related to restraint, seclusion and extended time-outs have been brought up in the past and continue to be of concern to many in the SEPAC community. A number of families have expressed the desire for systemic changes and improvements. This school year, NPS updated its policies regarding physical restraint¹⁵ and bullying¹⁶. However, a number of parents reported experiencing non-compliance with stated policy and procedures (such as failure of school staff to notify parents when restraint or seclusion was used). In addition, based upon parent reports, there appears to be significant variability in the frequency and manner in which restraint and seclusion practices are implemented at different schools. Families remain troubled by current restraint and seclusion practices and have expressed an interest in a district-wide move away from seclusion rooms and toward wellness rooms. In early May, NPS leadership was informed that they had been awarded a DESE “Implementing Strategies to Reduce or Eliminate the Use of Time-Out Rooms Federal Competitive Special Education Program” grant. We applaud the district for seeking and receiving this grant, and we look forward to better understanding how the funding will be used.

¹⁴ NPS’s Disability Advisory Group - <https://www.newton.k12.ma.us/Page/4296>

¹⁵ NPS’s Physical Restraint Policy - https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xoq5RdWIXgi5IPXVyGu0R6Hq3j5BAfd9/view?usp=share_link

¹⁶ NPS’s Bullying Policy - https://drive.google.com/file/d/17m_Wgnv2XpLyj1G92Dc2q-MtAxIp2CGh/view?usp=share_link

Another ongoing concern among the SEPAC community relates to special education aides, as families have noted changing experiences for their students. This year, many families reported that their students are experiencing a shared aide model. There are special education aides filling gaps because schools haven't been able to fill all Behavioral Therapist (BT) and aide positions this year, and aides are also shifted in instances of staff absences. The SEPAC board continues to encourage transparency and communication between staff and families on this topic, as trust building is essential to successful IEP teamwork.

SEPAC has also focused on other topics of community concern, such as experiential changes to Extended School Year (ESY) eligibility determinations, program recommendations, and the timelines of those recommendations. Based upon ongoing feedback from the community, we have communicated to NPS leaders that there is a strong desire for an updated program guide or, at a minimum, greater transparency around existing ESY options including number of hours, curriculum content, and goals.

Over the last two years, the SEPAC board has also engaged with NPS administration around planning for the new IEP form¹⁷, which is required to be fully implemented statewide by this fall 2024. In December 2023, NPS announced they had received a federally-funded grant "to support schools and districts to implement IEP Improvement Project, with a strong emphasis on transitioning to utilization of the newly revised forms and processes." With that support, NPS leaders have developed a comprehensive roll-out plan and have begun staff training this school year. SEPAC has advocated for NPS to offer a parent-focused training, and we were pleased to hear that this will occur in June of 2024. SEPAC will continue to assist the district in conveying information to parents and families to help facilitate a common understanding of the new form, which is intended to serve as an improved roadmap for student-centered IEP discussions that integrate transition planning earlier and more holistically.

Over the course of the last two budget cycles, there have been a number of special education staff FTE reductions that were made on the basis of restricted funding availability, beyond cuts based on shrinking enrollment. The FY25 budget, approved by the school committee in March 2024, restored some of those previous reductions; however, some additions to staffing reflect anticipated program expansions based on rising student needs, as outlined in IEPs. Therefore, the SEPAC continues to encourage transparency around special educator staff caseloads, staff-to-student ratios, and programmatic changes within special education, as funding remains tight. In addition, we understand that there are budgetary limitations that impact NPS's ability to accelerate timelines for upgrading all aspects of our school buildings to meet full ADA compliance and accessibility requirements. However, we must remind leadership that in the absence of these upgrades, many students with disabilities are not provided with full access to all aspects of the school life (e.g., inaccessible auditorium spaces, lack of adaptive playground equipment, challenging disabled parking/dropoff situations, etc.). Therefore, we ask that these issues be brought into the conversation as a priority during discussions about resource allocation. Further, in the context of a recent ruling, it appears that NPS might be required to restore full-time teaching assistants in all Kindergarten classrooms, which would require unanticipated resourcing. It is unclear whether this will happen in FY25. In the absence of additional funding, should this occur, potential reallocations within the approved budget could impact other areas, including special education. The SEPAC will continue to advise our leaders of the critical need to ensure proper funding and staffing to support the services outlined in all IEPs and 504 plans.

As it is potentially budget-related, it is also important to make note of the fact that School Committees are required to vote yearly on whether their school district will participate in School Choice, a program that would offer the opportunity for students who live outside of Newton to attend NPS. This year, there was a great deal of discussion around this topic, culminating in a majority vote by our School Committee to opt-out of joining the School Choice program. In the next year, it will be important for SEPAC leaders to engage in dialogue with NPS leadership about potential implications for special education, should the district opt-in to the program in the future.

¹⁷ [DESE's IEP Improvement Project - Forms and Resources](#)

Board Meetings

Open board meetings were held monthly beginning in July 2023, with a total of 8 meetings held throughout the year (one more may occur in June). They were held via Zoom on weeknight evenings. Board meetings were an opportunity to plan and discuss presentations, discuss community concerns, and disseminate information from NPS and other important resources. There were many constructive discussions on timely topics and the meetings offered a venue to gather feedback from the community.

In addition, Board representatives met with NPS Student Services leadership monthly throughout the school year. Meetings primarily took place in-person, some were virtual. These were attended by the SEPAC Chair and rotating SEPAC Board members. NPS representation was Casey Ngo-Miller (Assistant Superintendent for Student Services), Maura Tynes (Director of Elementary Special Education), and Melissa Gamble (Director of Secondary Special Education and Special Services). During these meetings we discussed community concerns, advised on a range of topics, and discussed upcoming events.

Presentations

The Newton SEPAC organized and hosted the following presentations during the 2023-2024 year:

- Julie Swersey, professional advocate and current board member At-Large, gave a presentation entitled “Understanding Basic Rights in Special Education,” which focused on evaluation, eligibility, and making sense of the IEP. It covered understanding parental and student rights under special education law, understanding special education procedures, and aimed to help parents and caregivers be more active, collaborative participants in the team process.
- Daniel T.S. Heffernan, Esq. presented “Agreeing to Disagree - how to effectively resolve disputes with your school district.” Dan discussed common mistakes that families make during the IEP process. He also addressed the importance of obtaining, organizing, and updating student records. Information was provided about independent evaluations, independent observations, and the different types of responses to an IEP. Finally, Dan talked about when to consider collaborating with an attorney. Thank you to SEPAC members Jessi Champion and Urmila Parlikar for their help organizing the presentation.
- Former SEPAC board member, Kim Gallaugher, offered two parent-led discussions focused on the transitions between levels (elementary to middle, middle to high) for families of students with disabilities. These sessions were offered virtually and were timed around the introduction evenings offered by each middle and high school for families of incoming students.
- Maria Kolbe, NPS elementary SEL coach, gave a presentation outlining the process she is overseeing to develop, review, and pilot the new anti-ableism curriculum for students, tentatively referred to as *Getting to Know You and Me*.
- Rajeev Parlikar, School Committee member, provided a Q&A session for the SEPAC community during the strike. We are grateful for Mr. Parlikar’s time spent explaining the details around negotiations and responding directly to the many questions and concerns shared by our families during that difficult time.
- Casey Ngo-Miller, Maura Tynes, and Melissa Gamble, administrators from the Office of Student Services, provided a Q&A session for the SEPAC community immediately following the end of the teachers’ strike. We thank them for their willingness to engage directly with families to help address concerns and to outline the next steps for students at that time.

Looking to the Future: Collaboration Opportunities and Partnership Goals

In considering the data we have presented and the review of our efforts throughout this school year, the SEPAC encourages our district and city leaders, NPS educators and support staff, community members, residents, families, and students to consider the following guiding principles that shape our perspective:

- We MUST commit to creating a district-wide educational environment that **values, respects, and elevates all aspects of students' many identities**, including physical disabilities, neurodiversity, learning differences, cognitive and developmental differences, and other unique experiences of life.
- We MUST have **high expectations** for every student with a disability to reach their fullest academic and social emotional potential.
- We MUST ensure that every student with an IEP or 504 plan consistently receives the type and intensity of supports that allow **full access to the general education curriculum** across all subjects, across all grade levels, and across all aspects of the school life experience.
- We MUST ensure that students with disabilities have **equitable access to rigorous, high level coursework** and the full range of classes offered to their peers; and we must remove barriers to this happening.
- We MUST **allocate the necessary resources** to ensure equity and excellence for all students with disabilities, with a bar set higher than meeting minimal compliance mandates.

In the next school year, referencing the principles above, the SEPAC will continue to partner with NPS leadership in efforts aimed at adopting an anti-ableist lens in developing and updating policies and practices across the district. We are hopeful that as the scope of this work crystallizes, it may be paired with an updating of NPS's current Statement of Values¹⁸ to more clearly affirm inclusion of students with disabilities as an integral component of the district's priorities. We appreciate the commitment demonstrated by NPS special education administrators in meeting with SEPAC board members monthly, and for offering rapid responses to questions in various forms, including emails, FAQs, and engaging in Q&A sessions at our meetings. We look forward to continued regular communication throughout the next school year.

School Committee representatives who attend our gatherings are instrumental in conveying information both from and to the SEPAC. As in previous years, SEPAC has again requested to have all members of the School Committee rotate through attending SEPAC Open Board meetings, with the hopes of building upon their understanding of SEPAC families' experiences, and giving each the opportunity to hear our community's feedback directly. We hope this will remain a consideration next school year. We are grateful for the continued partnership, and we appreciate the work that our representatives do for our students.

SEPAC seeks to strengthen relationships between students, families, school leaders and staff, the School Committee, the City, and the broader Newton community. One potential new avenue for collaboration could be through the proposed "Family and Community Engagement Office" which Dr. Nolin has described. We are eager to learn more about the vision for this group, and we are prepared to assist with connecting SEPAC community members with this office, as opportunities arise. Another important district initiative is the work to develop NPS's *Portrait of a Graduate*. As this process continues to unfold in the coming year, we hope for SEPAC members to continue to have the opportunity to participate, lending voices to the wide range of long-term goals envisioned by and for students with and without disabilities.

The SEPAC hopes to not only strengthen existing relationships with NPS administrators, but also to build new ones with incoming leaders. Toward the end of 2023-2024, NPS announced that two key educational leaders would be leaving the district. Toby Romer, the Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Schools, would remain until the end of this school year, and at the time of this writing, NPS had yet to identify a candidate for this role.

¹⁸ NPS's Statement of Values and Commitment to Racial Equity -

https://www.newton.k12.ma.us/cms/lib/MA01907692/Centricity/Domain/1438/DEI_Statement_of%20Values_REVISED_Jan2022.pdf

In addition, we learned that Dr. Renee McCall, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, would be leaving the district as well. After conducting a closed search process, NPS announced in early May that Dr. Gina Flanagan would assume that role. In previous years, hiring search committees for administrator positions have included SEPAC representation, including the searches for Dr. Nolin and Dr. Ngo-Miller. We are hopeful that NPS would continue to offer this opportunity to SEPAC families, as this perspective is unique and valuable in selecting new leaders. In addition, the SEPAC encourages NPS leadership to broaden the scope of its hiring and retention practices to more intentionally seek out educators with lived experiences across a range of disabilities.

Caregiver-based community groups such as ELPAC (English Learners Parent Advisory Council), PTOC (Council for Parent Teacher Organizations), FORJ (Families Organizing for Racial Justice), METCO (Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity), and school PTOs (Parent Teacher Organizations) all serve an invaluable role in individual school communities and across the whole district. There are many areas of intersection between our missions, and this year we have worked in concert toward achieving them by having SEPAC board representation at other groups' meetings, discussing and encouraging community action around the teachers' strike, and sharing information. We look forward to continuing meaningful collaboration with these organizations.

SEPAC also prioritizes connecting our community members with one another. However, it can often be difficult for current parents and caregivers of students with IEPs and 504 plans to find and reach out to each other. For important reasons related to protecting students' confidentiality and privacy, parent contact lists are not shared within or between schools. Our SEPAC listserv is limited to those who opt-in by requesting to be included. We believe that to reach the most families and offer our caregiver-to-caregiver support, NPS and City leaders hold the key. Therefore, we would like to request for SEPAC contact information to be biannually (fall and spring) included in the Superintendents and the Mayor's email communications. We also request for the Office of Student Services to request for all schools' IEP Team Leads to provide a hard-copy SEPAC brochure to families at all IEP team meetings, in concert with the regular provision of the parental statement of rights document.

Finally, SEPAC continued efforts to keep our community connected with one another, by maintaining a google listserv, Facebook group, and website to communicate and provide information for members. The recruitment of a SEPAC Liaison Coordinator must be a high priority for next year's board. In the absence of a point person to bring all schools' Liaisons together, information pathways are less robust.

We are grateful for the opportunity to have served in our roles as SEPAC board members this year, and we hope for continued partnership and collaboration between SEPAC board and members, and the larger Newton community. We recommend that the incoming SEPAC board begin the year by surveying our parent community to determine highest priority goals going forward.

Recognition and Gratitude

We appreciate the opportunity to share our work with the Newton School Committee. The Newton SEPAC would not be a successful conduit for our families without the dedicated leaders of our City, our school district, our School Committee, our Board, and of course, our tireless educators.

SEPAC annually collects nominations for the SEPAC Educator Awards. This year, there were 189 nominations for 179 individuals, covering 24 schools and programs. The SEPAC Board and Community will be hosting a SEPAC Educator Awards Reception for the Nominees and the Families who nominated them on June 10, 2024 from 5-6:30pm at Newton North Cafeteria. Nominees also receive emails with nomination statements, award certificates delivered to their school, and a presentation of deidentified nominations from across the district. We are grateful for and celebrate their outstanding work!

Appendices

Letters from the Newton SEPAC to school district and city leaders before and during the strike:

December 18, 2023

January 19, 2024

January 22, 2024

January 24, 2024

January 29, 2024

From: Newton SEPAC newtonsepac@gmail.com
Subject: Message from Newton SEPAC
Date: December 18, 2023 at 12:12PM
To: rfuller@newtonma.gov, Anna Nolin nolina@newton.k12.ma.us, Newton School Committee schoolcommittee@newton.k12.ma.us, citycouncil@newtonma.gov
Cc: Annette Nedeljkovic annettenedeljkovic@gmail.com, Doreen Rachal doreen.rachal@gmail.com, Claudia cbsvoboda@aol.com, Jenny Klein-Sosa jenny.lklein@gmail.com, Eliza Spaulding elizaspaulding@gmail.com, Julie Swersey julie.swersey@gmail.com

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Dear Mayor Fuller, Superintendent Nolin, School Committee Members, and City Council Members,

As the Newton Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) Board, we write to thank you for coordinating over many months to identify and allocate additional funds to Newton Public Schools. We had planned to speak at Public Comment during tonight's School Committee meeting, but instead append this email with our original statement. Yesterday's emails from Mayor Fuller and Superintendent Nolin shared new information that we were pleased to receive.

We are grateful that Mayor Fuller has provided an updated strategy to direct additional funding to NPS, outside of the yearly budget. To us, this symbolizes a shared confidence in Dr. Nolin's assessment of NPS's highest priority needs and vision for the future, as well as the urgent need to settle a fair contract with our incredible and very deserving staff. **We are hopeful for an agreement to come very soon.**

As always, we will continue to regularly share feedback from our community and advise on special education related issues going forward, especially during the upcoming budget season. But for now, we send this message to acknowledge the partnership and collaboration among our leaders to make additional NPS funding happen.

Warmly,
2023-24 Newton SEPAC Board
Annette Nedeljkovic, Doreen Rachal, Claudia Svoboda Ruehl, Jenny Klein-Sosa, Eliza Spaulding, Julie Swersey

Newton SEPAC Board Statement – December 18, 2023

Good Evening. My name is _____, and I live at _____. I am an at-large Board member of the Newton Special Education Parent Advisory Council. Tonight I speak on behalf of our Board, and in consideration of NPS's students with disabilities, who are holding steady at 18% of enrollment, despite overall declines.

By law, the SEPAC advises decision-makers on special education issues. For many years running, SEPAC has spoken here against budget cuts impacting our students. Those cuts, which have stemmed from insufficient city funding year over year, have continued to happen, and our kids now feel the effects.

Tonight we advise again, that it is in the best interest of current and future special ed students for Newton Public Schools to be fully funded, at a level supporting the needs that Superintendent Nolin has laid out in her Entry Plan. This includes full funding for one-time high-priority expenditures and ongoing NPS operational needs, AND for urgently settling a fair contract with our incredible and very deserving staff. These necessary short- and long- term investments in our students' learning environment and staff's working conditions must not wait any longer.

We came into this school year knowing caseloads would be higher than ever for special educators, counselors, social workers, and support staff. We knew secondary level class sizes would be very large, disproportionately impacting students with disabilities. We saw UOD abruptly eliminated and nothing put in its place yet to teach about inclusive classrooms and disability awareness. And we knew our kids would keep experiencing barriers to learning related to minimal building maintenance, limited and inconsistent curriculum resources, no systemwide program evaluations, and many more issues put on the backburner yet again.

To zoom in on one aspect of immediacy, just last month, Assistant Superintendent Ngo-Miller outlined unfunded staffing needs we have THIS SCHOOL YEAR. A high school SLP, a Kindergarten aide, a BCBA, a middle school OT, a social worker and an entire classroom of staff positions at NECP. These necessary positions alone amount to nearly half a million dollars. You can't fill holes like that with fixing budget inefficiencies, outside money is needed to make us whole.

There are city funds available right now that could be used to alleviate NPS's constricted budget, untie the SC's hands to find a fair agreement with teachers, AND allow our new leader to start NPS down a path of post-pandemic restoration and next stage initiatives.

Mayor Fuller, we appeal to you directly. Our advisory body, parents, SC members, and City Councilors all trust in Dr Nolin's plan for what's needed. If you do too, then you will tap all resources available and accelerate a direct path to fully fund NPS immediately. If just this past week you can find an extra \$10m that you didn't know was needed for the new senior center, then students must also be given that same level of priority.

Thank you for your time.

Open Letter from Leaders of Parent Organizations in Newton to Mayor Fuller

January 19, 2024

We are united in concern and frustration. As leaders of Newton's parent organizations, we have come together to express grave concern for the well-being and learning of our students. The repeated budget cuts and failed contract negotiation between our leaders and our educators are hurting our students, splintering our community, and resurfacing the trauma of school closure for many of us. The current strike hurts everyone and must end immediately. The long-term success of our school district is at risk.

Our trust in Mayor Fuller is broken. We believe that Mayor Fuller has failed to present an adequate budget allocation for the Newton Public Schools ("NPS") for many years, leading to budget cuts that have hurt our kids, our teachers, and our communities. We worry that she is out of touch with the reality of our public schools. Our trust in her has eroded every time she's chosen *not* to prioritize our children.

Student needs are higher than ever and not being addressed. Budget cuts prevent NPS from meeting the academic support needs of students and from providing the increased mental health and social emotional support today's students require. Students are still recovering from lost learning due to the pandemic. We see alarming trends in social, emotional, and behavioral challenges in our schools. Staff positions have been cut drastically, and for years teachers have tried to fill these gaps by overstretching. But despite their efforts, the lack of resources continues to negatively impact the academic and social/emotional learning of students.

We have a new superintendent who is working hard to forge a new norm of transparency and communication and who is working on a long term strategic plan for our schools. But right now her hands—and those of the School Committee—are tied by chronic underfunding from the Mayor. The Mayor has failed to demonstrate the leadership necessary to protect our schools and our children; she is the **only one** with power now to quickly access and allocate funds at her discretion. And we call on the City Council to swiftly approve an increased allocation.

We demand urgent and meaningful action from Mayor Fuller—NOW. In times of crisis like this, we expect our city's leader to step up.

- We ask Mayor Fuller to immediately release additional funds from free cash and the overlay surplus to give room for both parties to bargain in good faith and find fair agreement, while also ensuring adequate funding for the school system as a whole. Although the Mayor has released some free cash already, it is not enough.
- We ask for the Mayor to lift her arbitrary 3.5% cap on yearly NPS budget increases, and provide full funding for the superintendent's proposed FY25 budget which may require increases beyond 6.5%. The goals our superintendent has laid out cannot be reached without full funding.
- We call upon the City of Newton's Retirement Board to revise the Mayor's pension liability plan while still satisfying the mandated timeline of 2040. Extending the timeline would increase the yearly pool of resources available to all city and school functions.

All of Newton's voters should worry. This is bigger than just the parents and students of the Newton Public Schools. If the Mayor continues to ignore our students, all residents of Newton will be affected. Disagreement that leads to a strike tarnishes our city and school system's reputations. Starving NPS of vital resources year over year set the stage for this. If our schools are allowed to decline and our community loses trust in city leadership, we all suffer.

We call on the Mayor to fully fund the Newton Public Schools and for all parties to bargain in good faith to end this strike immediately.

Respectfully,

Organization	Name	Title
PTO Council	Lucy Ewins	Co-President
PTO Council	Elsa Janairo	Co-President
PTO Council	Susan St. Pierre	Co-Secretary
PTO Council	Suzanne Johnston	Co-Secretary
Newton SEPAC	Annette Nedeljkovic	Chair
Newton SEPAC	Eliza Spaulding	Secretary
Newton SEPAC	Jenny Klein-Sosa	At-Large
Newton SEPAC	Claudia Svoboda	At-Large
Newton SEPAC	Julie Swersey	At-Large
Newton SEPAC	Doreen Rachal	At-Large
ELPAC	Angie Kim	Chair
FORJ	Amelia Oliver	Treasurer
FORJ	Pria Sarma	Board Member
PTO Equity Spending Committee	Helen Makadia	Equity Representative
NECP PTO	Yael Mito	Co-President
Angier Elementary PTO	Brigid Tobin	Co-President
Angier Elementary PTO	Miriam Blankenship	Co-President
Angier Elementary PTO	Katherine Biotti	Co-President
Bowen PTO	Carol Aboud-Moore	Co-Chair
Bowen PTO	Uzma Saghir	Co-Chair
Burr PTO	Angie Kim	Co-President
Burr PTO	Amir Moghimi	Co-President
Burr PTO	Jyoti Shah	Co-president
Burr PTO	Julie Swersey	Secretary
Burr PTO	Shannon Derick	DEI Chair
Burr PTO	Mariko Wong	Education Chair
Burr PTO	Kayla Noblecilla	Events Co- Chair
Cabot PTO	Rebekah Gewirtz	Co-President
Cabot PTO	Corrie Pappas	Recording Secretary
Cabot PTO	Rakesh Das	Treasurer
Cabot PTO	Jenny Katz	Executive Committee
Cabot PTO	Agnes Pietrzyk	Executive Committee

Cabot PTO	Anna Claeys	Executive Committee
CountrySide PTO	Chelsea Boughan	Co-President
CountrySide PTO	Melissa Monokroussos	Co-President
CountrySide PTO	Adam Lipson	Co-President
CountrySide PTO	Erin Geraghty Kapoor	Co-Clerk
CountrySide PTO	Steven Lee	Treasurer
Franklin PTO	Kelsey Sprowell	Co-President
Franklin PTO	Graham Voysey	Co-President
Franklin PTO	Yael Mito	Fundraising Co-Chair and SEPAC Liaison
Franklin PTO	Allison Player	CAS Co-chair
Horace Mann PTO	Elisabeth Zimmer	Co-President
Horace Mann PTO	Sarah Porter	Co-President
Horace Mann PTO	Vanessa Salas	Treasurer
Lincoln Eliot PTO	Theresa Proia	President
Lincoln Eliot PTO	Rodrigo Canales	Secretary
Lincoln Eliot PTO	Julie Loh	Treasurer
Mason-Rice PTO	Molly Stearns	Co-President
Mason-Rice PTO	Wendy Sheu	Co-President
Mason-Rice PTO	Ena El-Hadidy	Co-Vice-President
Mason-Rice PTO	Jackie Lee Donabed	Co-Vice-President
Mason-Rice PTO	Colette Hanna	Director of Outreach
Mason-Rice PTO	Patrick Moriarty	Co-Treasurer
Mason-Rice PTO	Jennifer Pai	Director of Fundraising
Mason-Rice PTO	Emily D'Amour	Secretary
Mason-Rice PTO	Celia Ivanov	Director of Engagement
Mason-Rice PTO	Natalie Wong	Communications Co-Chair
Mason-Rice PTO	Tseh-Hwan Yong	Communications Co-Chair
Memorial-Spaulding PTO	DayAna Davidou	Co-President
Memorial-Spaulding PTO	Margaret Stefater-Richards	Co-President
Memorial-Spaulding PTO	Kristen Pontoriero	Treasurer
Memorial-Spaulding PTO	Marie Lundbak Eriksen	ELL Chair
Memorial-Spaulding PTO	Kimberley Mak	Secretary
Memorial-Spaulding PTO	Lama Mulki	Co-Treasurer

Memorial-SpaULDING PTO	Ana Riella	Fundraising Co-Chair
Memorial-SpaULDING PTO	Alison Kanarek	Fundraising Co-Chair
Memorial-SpaULDING PTO	Ling Yang	Fundraising Co-Chair
Memorial-SpaULDING	Renata Matrosov	Marketing Chair
Memorial-SpaULDING	Jessica Poltarak	Ex-Officio
Peirce Elementary PTO	Jordana Bluestein	Co-President
Peirce Elementary PTO	Jaime Mason	Co-President
Peirce Elementary PTO	Abby Blake	Co-Vice President
Peirce Elementary PTO	Erica Chamberlain	Co-Vice President
Underwood PTO	Margaret Silva	Co-President
Underwood PTO	Renata Ballesteros	Co-President
Underwood PTO	Amy Davis	VP Fundraising, Former Co-President
Underwood PTO	Maggie Elitt	Communications Co-Chair
Underwood PTO	Nicole Peterson	DE&I Chair
Ward PTO	Rashi Khanna	Co-President
Ward PTO	Bryan Saltzburg	Co-President
Williams PTO	Rosemary White	Co-President
Williams PTO	Abigail Glovsky	Co-President
Williams PTO	Michael Lujan	Treasurer
Williams PTO	Ashley Remis	Co-Secretary and Communications Director
Williams PTO	Megan Mack	Co-Secretary and Communications Director
Williams PTO	Leanne Dunne	Advisory Board
Williams PTO	Jim Strickland	Advisory Board
Williams PTO	Derek Tashjian	Advisory Board
Williams PTO	Alison Callahan	Advisory Board
Williams PTO	Sarah Cheslock	Advisory Board
Zervas PTO	Jacob Eidsmoe	Co-President
Zervas PTO	Augusta Maher	Co-President
Zervas PTO	Kristin Jonash	Vice President
Zervas PTO	Brandy Blakely	Vice President
Zervas PTO	Monica Richardson	Vice President
Zervas PTO	Delia Cheung Hom	Vice President
Zervas PTO	Shruti Bansal	Treasurer

Bigelow PTO	Eugene Rhee	President
Bigelow PTO	Alex Rolfe	Vice President
Bigelow PTO	Aparna Rolfe	Secretary
Brown PTO	Janelle Phillips	Co-President
Brown PTO	Vida Kianzad	Co-President
FA Day PTO	Cedar Pruitt	Co-President
FA Day PTO	Tramy Lao	Co-President
Oak Hill PTO	Crista Martinez Padua	President
Oak Hill PTO	Katherine Seder Karon	Treasurer
Oak Hill PTO	Erika Guerra Downey	Executive Committee
Oak Hill PTO	Michelle Spitzkoff	Executive Committee
Oak Hill PTO	Jenna Stein	Executive Committee
Newton North HS PTSO	Natalia Espinal	Co-President
Newton North HS PTSO	Jacqueline Freeman	Co-President
Newton North HS PTSO	Karen Ghiron	Vice President
Newton South HS PTSO	Will Adams	Co-President
Newton South HS PTSO	Maggie Schmidt	Co-President

January 22, 2024

Dear Mayor Fuller, Members of the Newton School Committee, Newton City Council, and Newton Teachers Association,

In addition to the parent organization open letter we signed and sent to Mayor Fuller on Friday, we write to you now from the SEPAC Board and Community to urge you to quickly settle an educator contract agreement and fully fund our schools going forward. As we know, now and in future budget cycles, when one designs for the most marginalized, everyone wins. But without immediate funding to assist with negotiations and planning for adequate yearly allocations, this is impossible.

When the pandemic hit and schools closed, students with disabilities were the first ones brought back into buildings for in-person learning because they are some of our most vulnerable students. Our school district and special educators supported them because they needed it, but they have continued to feel the impacts of this disruption. Schools closing again is disproportionately impactful for our neediest students. To share how pandemic learning loss, year over year budget cuts, and the current strike have/are impacting students with disabilities, we thought it best to hear directly from parents and guardians of students with disabilities:

Elementary School:

My son is a rising 3rd grader on an IEP. He is dependent on the 1:1 aide he receives from his loving, caring and supportive aide so this time away from her and his class will have a very negative impact on his academic as well as social emotional progress. I urge the mayor to meet with the NTA for a fair contract so NPS can continue to live up to its once prestigious reputation as the best district for our kids with special needs.

Our daughter was in her formative reading years of 1st and 2nd grade when covid shut the world down. Previously, the school was offering her reading assistance, but we lost a lot of that during covid. We requested an evaluation by the end of 3rd grade and she was diagnosed with dyslexia. By this point she was so defeated with school and resigned herself to being "the dumb kid". Thankfully through working with her IEP goals and her utterly amazing 4th and 5th grade teachers, her confidence has increased tenfold. She is excited to try new challenges in school and her reading and writing keeps improving. This was also bolstered by the social emotional support in her IEP and working with the school psychologist. We have a completely different child today due to the caring support of her teachers.

My child absolutely needs a shared aide to function in the classroom. He needs help with paying attention, following directions, and managing his emotions. We have had excellent aides thus far. If these highly skilled educators can't afford to stay in Newton, if their positions go vacant, our son & our family would be in crisis. We must pay them a salary that affirms their enormous worth & value!!

A meeting including representatives from my son's medical team and school staff was to occur, a meeting that took a month to schedule because of the number of people involved in my son's complex needs, now isn't happening.

Below grade level reading and writing performance with inadequate school based intervention leading to mental health crisis involving school avoidance, family financial strain to seek therapies and interventions outside of school, etc.

This strike is taking a particularly significant toll on many neurodivergent kids, like mine, who crave the regular routine school brings. Large disruptions in their schedules often cause heightened anxiety and stress that can take months, even years, to subside, and can permanently alter their sense of safety/security that school is constantly, predictably supposed to bring. That's especially so here because the strike is indefinite, meaning parents can't tell their kids when the regular order of their lives will be restored. That's why I'm dismayed the teachers took this action and why the Mayor has let things get to this point.

Has trouble regulating themselves; problems with social emotional skills leads to obsessive screen fixation; routines and expectations disrupted leading to behavioral issues, inability to focus, depression or anxiety elevated not knowing what to expect.

Lack of consistent routines causes poor self regulation and increased anxiety, irritability and lack of focus; difficult to engage or concentrate outside of screens.

Nearly two months without OT services led to heightened anxiety and dysregulation, inability to access curriculum. Lack of planning and consult time for IEP team means disjointed and inconsistent collaboration on curriculum accommodations. SPED teacher heavy caseload means less attention given in the least restrictive environment, more recommendations for sub-sep programs.

My son's learning disabilities mean that typical home-school strategies don't work. To get schoolwork done at home, I have to guide, instruct, cheer, manage, finagle, negotiate and ultimately devote a substantial amount of time and energy to getting something done - only to get to an outcome that is far inferior to what his wonderful teachers help him accomplish. Being a child with learning disabilities means his academic gains come slower and are more vulnerable to regression. Each day out of school equates to missed opportunities and actual regression. His wonderful and talented NPS educators know how to foster learning in a way that builds both his skills and his confidence as a learner. I simply cannot provide that home.

My daughter is autistic and her academic and social success is largely dependent on the quality of her educators. She has thrived so far because of the well-trained, dedicated, and experienced special education providers she has had, but she will require this caliber of professionals on her team for many years to come. She, like other disabled students, stand the most to lose from NPS's inability to attract and retain quality educators. I am angry with my neighbors who voted no on the override. But now my

daughter's fate is in your hands and you are also failing her tremendously. This strike will be hardest on my daughter and those like her who need routine and consistency - who need constant practice to keep their skills and who struggle to return from breaks and absences. Yet I fully support her teachers. They deserve better, because my daughter deserves better. This situation needs to be rectified immediately by Mayor Fuller and the School Committee by fully funding NPS and negotiating with our teachers in good faith. I am beyond disappointed with their course of action and words over the past year.

We want to make sure that the BTs and aides are paid a fair and living wage to prevent the constant change in BTs for our student. Our student requires a highly trained/consistent team but we are afraid we will continue to lose people in his team due to pay in this district. The challenge with the strike is for working parents of children who require 1:1 support, there is nowhere for us to turn for additional support. We need to work. However none of the childcare resources sent out by PTOs and social media community pages can support children who require 1:1 support.

We are in the midst of adjusting my child's medication and we need feedback from his classroom teacher which we did not receive due to the strike. It's definitely delaying and disrupting our figuring out his medication.

My child with a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) is in a General Education classroom with a Shared Aide. Most devastatingly, he suffers from social-emotional negative experiences daily because his peers do not understand and therefore lack empathy for his differences (they could but they themselves are such social-emotional messes from the pandemic and there is not enough qualified staff to teach them and Understanding Our Differences was suddenly cut and replaced w/what sounds like a great in-house Anti-Ableist Curriculum in development but nevertheless, a gap on understanding differences and Ableism exists NOW and for FOR HOW LONG!?! while my child suffers daily). It is so bad that a classmate's parent called me , "My child has been coming home upset saying the kids don't understand your child and are very mean to him. Some kids know they can push his buttons and he'll be the one to get in trouble. They even have a proud look on their faces when they do." This is not just a Special Education problem. It is a General Education problem squandering the educational benefit/necessity of Inclusion that can only be solved by better (hiring and training) and more teachers, aides and support staff and excellent and immediate social-emotional including Anti-Ableist curriculum, including any that must be outsourced for the year that the in-house curriculum is not yet widely implemented. I actually think that my son would not need a Shared Aide if his General Education peers had more social-emotional regulation education and support. Almost all of his behavior is in reaction to theirs. Secondly, we are lucky to have had amazing Shared Aides/Unit C members but we have also observed a wide variance in competency (variance within Unit A as well). There should also be enough staffing coverage that Unit C members can attend IEP Meetings bc they are an integral member of the team implementing much of the actual IEP moment to moment as the Aide to the student. Thirdly, my child was denied reading support in his IEP for 2 years despite numerous clinical reports diagnosing and indicating Double Deficit Dyslexia. I could go on and on but I am beyond my 200 word limit... thank you for reading and serving.

Our family has 3 children on IEPs in NPS. Two are in citywide programs and one is in inclusion. I have seen clearly over the last 3 years how detrimental it has been to not have full funding in our schools. I have seen our schools struggle to find qualified aides to meet my students' needs and struggle to find substitute teachers due to pay that is below a living wage. These aides work so very hard with my students and pour every bit of their being into helping my students be successful and many have second jobs to make ends meet. We have seen interruptions in services being provided when staff could not be hired quickly enough. When my daughter was struggling with bullying and major anxiety to the point of self harm, the school psychologist suggested reducing her counseling time to solely group lunches because his caseload at the time was so high. Their school has a leaking roof, no air conditioning (which is incredibly difficult for students with sensory needs) and a cafeteria that is so small that they sometimes can't all eat as a class in the same room. The library recently lost \$5000 worth of books due to moisture and the district has indicated that there are no funds to replace them with. I implore the mayor to please take the steps needed to fully fund our schools so our students have the resources they need to succeed as future citizens of Newton.

Middle School:

After school clubs are not run and these clubs were the highlight of my child's school experience. That entails lack of social opportunities with like minded peers. The experience in the clubs was a chance to participate equally with the non-disabled peers that in return was boosting his self-confidence. Just the overall low morale of the teachers feels disheartening.

My son is still catching up on foundational math literacy concepts stemming from learning loss from the pandemic and before which has led me to seek support for him in an attempt to bring his understanding to grade level. The lack of adequate support in the classrooms to help students who might need additional help has resulted in kids missing out on learning important concepts that have led them to fall behind. Teachers are not provided adequate support and resources to help our children learn and they are unable to provide individualized support to kids who need it most.

The kid misses school today and I have to take a vacation day off from work to look after my son. Hope the school can start soon!!

For the last four years we have noticed a significant trend in administration neglecting to cover teacher and aide absences. During one recent school year our student had nine different classroom aides. Nine. The fact the position got covered at all was primarily because of daily parent advocacy. Some days the building aide filled the role. We were told by the administration that subs could not be found. The pay rate was/is so low it would have been one step up from volunteering. Not once in the last three years has the lead SPED teacher been replaced with a substitute when absent. We went 3 months before the SLP position was filled. Never has an absent behavioral therapist or room aide been covered the staff "make do" with what they have. This long term neglect takes its toll. This chronic slow bleed of educational underfunding has resulted in the current crisis not the strike. The strike is the emergency wake up call to the majority of very wealthy community members that objectify teachers and all middle

class workers as service providers... with the wealth to pay privately for their own if more services are needed.

Mental health crisis involving extreme anxiety due to inadequate intervention for unidentified specific learning disability. Had to pay for an outside neuropsychologist to give formal diagnosis of dyslexia, dyscalculia, and anxiety. Signs and symptoms had been present since First grade but took an outside eval to finally get Newton to address my child's needs in 8th grade.

The strike is nothing compared to the learning loss that my child has suffered due to increased class sizes (particularly difficult for neurodivergent children) and the cuts in personnel. I urge the school committee to do better, and to do so quickly.

High School:

The learning loss and lack of adequate support had a devastating impact on our daughter, leading to several hospitalizations and basically two years of no learning. It's hard to see how she'll ever catch up to what she has done in these years, and she'll be emotionally scarred for life.

We are in the middle of trying to switch my 9th grader's 504 to an IEP. I can't send my paperwork to the school. My child had stopped going to school due to anxiety which had gotten so bad during the pandemic she was selectively mute. She had gotten better in 8th grade but now she's refusing school. The team can't help her when they are on strike. She has a therapist, a psychiatrist... we are doing everything we can. She needs her school team!

My child is in one of the high school programs. Every aspect of his abysmal experience so far is a direct result of staffing shortages. The few available support staff are stretched thin, stressed, unable to communicate effectively and the result is utter chaos. He has gone from being a kid who loves school to one who hates it and will do anything to be able to stay home. He has made no measurable progress academically or socially; indeed, I'd say he has lost ground. This is unsustainable.

My daughter's educational experience has suffered this entire year due to the impasse between NPS and NTA. The burden of missing school is only the latest in a string of inadequacies stretching over this entire school year. My daughter is slowly but steadily getting left behind due to a lack of resources, not because of greedy teachers.

In Summary:

These powerful impact statements from parents and guardians remind us of how students with disabilities are disproportionately affected by unexpected stoppages of school and underfunding of NPS. NPS' [core values](#) ground and guide the school communities we want to be – let them do just that to settle a teacher contract agreement and get our most vulnerable population back into schools now.

Respectfully Yours,

Annette Nedeljkovic, SEPAC Chair	Ruchika Sharma
Jenny Klein-Sosa, SEPAC Board At-Large	Ajay Subramanian
Doreen Rachal, SEPAC Board At-Large	Jill Canelli
Claudia Svoboda Ruehl, SEPAC Board At-Large	Cecile Pham
Eliza Spaulding, SEPAC Board Secretary	Therese Nguyen
Julie Swersey, SEPAC Board At-Large	Aileen Landau
Yael Mito	Janet Jackson
Lisa Estes	Jennifer Coats
Letterkica Russell	Sharon Kunder
Gareth Honig	Sophia Aiello
Seema Joshi	Joseph Aiello
Cori Guenther	Kiki Sahinidia
Jason Guenther	Taso Sahinidis
Jordyne Wu	
Amanda Auerbach	
Naz Ali	
Larissa Gordon	
Jessi Champion	
Vincent Champion	
Xin Cheng	
Erin Blanchfield	
Bill Blanchfield	
Leanne Dunne	
Sarai Logue	
Mark Logue	
Sarah Belanger	
Aliya Kleiner	
Amanda Caruso	
Christin Stella	
Elizabeth Zwick	
Tabatha Flores	
Angelyn Larkin	

**An Open Letter from Leaders of Parent Organizations in Newton Calling for
Respectful Communications and Joint Updates**

January 24, 2024

Dear Mayor Fuller, School Committee, Newton Teachers' Association ("NTA"), and the Newton Public Schools ("NPS"):

Leaders of Parent Organizations in Newton are hearing from our communities: the communications from all sides in the educator contract dispute are unproductive and divisive. Our community is confused by contradictory information being shared by the School Committee, NPS, the NTA, and the Mayor. This includes what is stated in formal emails, social media posts, and press conferences. No one knows what information to trust, and it's clear we're not all operating from a common set of facts. All of this confusion is unnecessarily pitting community members against each other. As parent organization leaders, we care deeply for our parents, our educators, and our students. We worked tirelessly after the pandemic to repair our communities and bring them back together. We cannot sit idly by as we are torn apart again.

We value open communication and the sharing of ideas and information. We request that all parties consider how their communications (including social media posts, emails, and press conferences) are contributing to the current divisiveness and what message they are sending to our students about how to respectfully negotiate from disparate positions.

We call on you to negotiate in good faith, communicate respectfully, and consider **only releasing joint statements** at the end of each negotiation session.

Respectfully,

Organization	Name	Title
PTO Council	Lucy Ewins	Co-President
PTO Council	Elsa Janairo	Co-President
PTO Council	Susan St. Pierre	Secretary
SEPAC	Annette Nedeljkovic	Chair
SEPAC	Jenny Klein-Sosa	At-Large
SEPAC	Doreen Rachal	At-Large
SEPAC	Claudia Svoboda	At-Large
SEPAC	Julie Swersey	At-Large
SEPAC	Eliza Spaulding	Secretary
ELPAC	Angie Kim	Chair
FORJ	Pria Sarma	Board member
PTO Equity Spending	Helen Makadia	Equity Representative

Angier Elementary PTO	Katherine Biotti	Co-President
Angier Elementary PTO	Brigid Tobin	Co-President
Angier Elementary PTO	Miriam Blankenship	Co-President
Bowen PTO	Carol Aboud-Moore	Co-Chair
Bowen PTO	Uzma Saghir	Co-Chair
Burr Elementary PTO	Angie Kim	Co-President
Burr Elementary PTO	Casey Kudesia	Treasurer
Burr Elementary PTO	Grace Huang	Communication chair
Burr Elementary PTO	Julie Swersey	Secretary
Burr Elementary PTO	Mariko Wong	Education chair
Burr Elementary PTO	Julie Swersey	Secretary
Burr Elementary PTO	Shannon Derick	DEI Chair
Burr Elementary PTO	Amir Moghimi	Co-president
Burr Elementary PTO	Jyoti Shah	Co-President
Cabot PTO	Anahita Dua	Co president
Cabot PTO	Rebekah Gewirtz	Co-President
Countryside PTO	Adam Lipson	co-president
Countryside PTO	Melissa Monokroussos	Co-president
Franklin PTO	Graham Voysey	Co-President
Franklin PTO	Kelsey Sprowell	Co-President
Horace Mann PTO	Elisabeth Zimmer	Co-President
Horace Mann PTO	Sarah Porter	Co-President
Mason-Rice	Molly Stearns	Co-President
Mason-Rice	Wendy Sheu	Co-President
Mason-Rice	Ena El-Hadidy	Co-Vice-President
Mason Rice	Jackie Lee Donabed	Co-Vice President
Mason-Rice	Jennifer Pai	Director of Fundraising
Mason-Rice	Colette Hanna	Director of Outreach
Lincoln-Eliot	Theresa Proia	President
Lincoln-Eliot	Rodrigo Canales	Secretary
Underwood PTO	Margaret Silva	Co-President
Ward PTO	Rashi Khanna	Co-President
Williams	Abigail Glovsky	Co-President
Williams	Rosemary White	Co-president

Williams	Michael Lujan	Treasurer
Williams	Megan Mack	Co-Secretary and Communications Director
Williams	Elena Silverman	Advisory Board
Williams	Jim Strickland	Advisory Board
Williams	Natasha Babushkina	Advisory Board
Williams	Leanne Dunne	Advisory Board
Williams	Alex Babushkin	Advisory Board
Williams	Amanda Bathory	Advisory Board
Williams	Sarah Cheslock	Advisory Board
Zervas	Augusta Maher	Co-President
Zervas PTO	Jacob Eidsmoe	Co-President
Bigelow PTO	Alex Rolfe	VP
Brown PTO	Janelle Phillips	Co-President
Day PTO	Cedar Pruitt	Co-President
Day PTO	Tramy Lao	Co-President
Oak Hill PTO	Crista Martinez Padua	President
Oak Hill PTO	Katherine Seder Karon	Treasurer
Oak Hill PTO	Jenna Stein	Executive Committee
Oak Hill PTO	Erika Guerra Downey	Executive Committee
Oak Hill PTO	Michelle Spitzkoff	Executive Committee
NNHS PTSO	Jacqueline Freeman	Co-President

Urgent Letter to Mayor Fuller, the Newton School Committee, and the Newton Teachers' Association
January 29, 2024

The Newton Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) and other parent-led organizations have been coming together to support one another through this difficult time. Collectively, we volunteer endless hours organizing events, supporting enriching learning experiences for the students and families, and cultivating relationships with school leaders and staff. In addition, the Newton SEPAC has worked for years to fulfill our legislatively mandated mission to advise our school and city leaders on issues related to special education. Despite parents' many commitments, WE PRIORITIZE OUR SCHOOLS to create lasting positive memories for our students, staff, and city as a whole. With this in mind, as the Newton SEPAC Board, we share the following:

- We believe that a contract must be meaningful to our teachers AND sustainable for our community.
- We believe that there continues to be insufficient funding to maintain our school system's quality at the level that all students deserve.
- We also believe that our **STUDENTS MUST RETURN TO SCHOOL NOW.**

Although the SEPAC community shares many values, there are differing views on how a reopening of schools should be accomplished. From the perspective of the SEPAC Board, we ask that all parties involved in negotiations take a HARD PAUSE to consider our children's experiences right now. All students are feeling the negative effects of schools being closed, but there is an inordinate impact upon our students with disabilities. These children rely upon the routines, services, and supports provided by our schools, and they are getting NONE right now. As you place our kids in mind, consider the following requests:

To the School Committee and Newton Teachers' Association negotiating teams:

- **STOP DIVISIVE RHETORIC IN THE MEDIA.** If you deeply care about our students, you must soften your stances and language, and cease public blaming immediately.
- **PRIORITIZE OUR KIDS BY CHANGING YOUR ASKS.** If you truly understand the compounded impact that the pandemic and current school closures are having on our students—especially those most vulnerable, you must take action to adjust your offers. The NTA's requests must be FEASIBLE within the context of available funding. If they are to track more closely to that, then the School Committee must respond MEANINGFULLY to meet them in the middle.
- **REJECT POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS.** If you want this to end now and send our kids back to school, you must ignore the backdrop of creating precedent in our state and do what's right for OUR children.

To Mayor Fuller:

- **RESCUE OUR SINKING SHIP.** Offer additional financial assistance to the School Committee and NTA in a fiscally reasonable manner, IF—and only IF—the two parties can first agree upon a number that will solve this immediately and send kids back to school tomorrow.

Hear us now. If you don't, students will continue to suffer the consequences—especially our students with disabilities and other vulnerabilities. NPS will lose valuable teachers to other districts, and the previously strong, mutually supportive relationships between parents and teachers will continue down a damaging path. THERE IS NO MORE TIME TO WASTE.

Respectfully,

The 2023-2024 Newton SEPAC Board

Annette Nedeljkovic, Jenny Klein-Sosa, Doreen Rachal, Claudia Svoboda Ruehl, Eliza Spaulding, Julie Swersey