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Letter: Salary raises justified

Thursday, October 2, 2003

To the editor: Last week's story about salary increases I awarded to principals and other administrators in the North Andover Public Schools was, on balance, accurate. There are, however, two matters I feel should be clarified. First, Superintendent Designate Harutunian and I had several transition meetings over the course of the spring to discuss the full range of issues associated with a "change of command." During two of those meetings, one in late May, the second in June, which was followed by a subsequent telephone conversation, we specifically discussed the salary of the high school principal. Part of the discussion centered on the fact that the high school principal's salary was the lowest in the area. Dr. Harutunian also discussed his view of the matter with the principal during two meetings he had with her in the same May/June time frame. The substance of these latter two meetings' was shared with me separately by both Dr. Harutunian and Mrs. Nicholson.

When I conducted Mrs. Nicholson's annual review in June, I concluded, on the basis of her outstanding performance, that her salary should be increased. Parenthetically, it is still below that of other high school principals in the area. I informed my successor of my decision during a telephone conversation on a same day. His response was, "It's still low. Is Susan OK with it?" I said "yes." It was my understanding at that point that the matter of the high school principal's salary was resolved to the mutual satisfaction of the three of us.

The second matter is the original "story" published in the local daily newspaper which began the recent brouhaha. The Citizen's reporter chose to take the ethical and moral high ground and did not include in his story my comments regarding that paper and its reporter.

I chose not to speak with the reporter who wrote the non-story in the local daily. I did so because I believed that no matter what I said she already had her "story." "Fire? Ready, Aim" ... The reporter and her paper have a history of making news, not reporting the news. The "story" in question is a good example of what I referred to during a school committee meeting in June in response, to another "making the news story." It is a reporter's responsibility to accurately report the news. She had the truth about the administrator salaries months ago and she chose not to use it.

Shortly after I presented the budget for the current year to the school committee, I met with the reporter at the daily to discuss it. Among the things we discussed was that only one administrator's salary, that of the Atkinson School principal, was set for this year and the reason for it. I also showed that reporter the line item that included funds for administrative raises, as well as funds for collective bargaining agreements that remained to be completed. I told the reporter that no administrative salary increases would be awarded until the end of the year when I conducted the annual performance review with each of the administrators.

The reporter was also present at a school committee meeting when a member of the committee asked why only one administrator was budgeted for an increase in salary. The committee also discussed the line item in which funds were placed for administrator salary increases as well as anticipated contract settlements pending the completion of negotiations.

I would hope that in the future, the daily paper would try to report, if not fairly, at least accurately and that reporters would take the time to obtain all of the information to report the news and not continue to make the news. The North Andover Public Schools deserve to be treated fairly. The citizens of North Andover deserve to be informed of events in an accurate and fair manner.

William E. Allen

Superintendent of Schools (Ret.)

North Andover Public Schools

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