

# North Shore Massachusetts teachers strikes at impasse: Expand strike action! Build rank-and-file committees!

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*Massachusetts teachers: Fill out the form below to learn more about founding a rank-and-file committee.*

Educators in the North Shore Massachusetts school districts of Beverly, Gloucester and Marblehead completed a week of strike action Friday, November 15, with negotiations remaining at an impasse. Teachers and paraprofessionals are demanding better wages and improved working conditions, including paid parental leave. Educators in the three districts voted overwhelmingly for strike action after working without contracts since August 2024.

The Democratic Party is using anti-worker laws to break the strike. On Wednesday, Essex Superior Court approved fines of \$50,000 a day against the National Education Association-affiliated unions, increasing by an additional \$10,000 each day. By Friday, fines had accrued to \$180,000 for the Beverly and Gloucester unions, while similar fines began to be levied Thursday against the Marblehead union.

After a week on strike, there has been next to no progress in negotiations between the Gloucester, Beverly and Marblehead teachers unions and their respective school committees. The school committees have purposefully stalled negotiations in all three districts, aiming to starve the educators back to work without winning any meaningful improvements in wages or benefits. Officials in the cities of Gloucester and Beverly and the town of Marblehead insist that there is no money to meet the educators' demands. These claims should be rejected by teachers and paraprofessionals.

In Massachusetts, headed by Democratic Governor Maura Healy, public education is funded according to a convoluted formula, primarily from state and local property taxes, with a small portion coming from federal grants. Wealthier districts can tap higher property taxes from their wealthier residents, creating inequality in education between rich and poor districts.

The Marblehead School Committee says that the Marblehead Education Association's (MEA) demand for a 34 percent increase in wages would produce a \$7.5 million shortfall in their existing budget, while Beverly's school committee says the Beverly Teachers Association's (BTA) proposals would create a minimum projected shortfall of \$14.4 million over the next three years.

The struck districts claim the educators' demands would bankrupt them. But high-quality public education is the basic social right of every child. There is more than enough wealth to fund schools in Massachusetts, which has the fourth largest percentage of millionaire households of the 50 US states, according to Kiplinger Personal Finance. The state is home to 22 billionaires, who have amassed their wealth through the exploitation of workers in sectors like technology, finance and healthcare.

But the national teachers' unions, the NEA and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), accept the claims of school districts that

"there is no money" to pay for education, leaving educators who strike to fend for themselves within the framework of capitalist inequality in their fight for the wages and benefits they need and deserve.

The incoming Trump administration's stated aim to eliminate the federal Department of Education and push for school privatization will further bankrupt school districts across the US. The heads of the NEA and AFT have sowed complacency in the face of Trump's pledge to dismantle public education because they accept the capitalist framework of education funding.

NEA President Becky Pringle, who pulls in an annual salary of \$495,787—approximately 8.5 times that of the average public school teacher's salary, largely sourced from educators' union dues—insists that nothing has significantly changed in the aftermath of the Trump victory. On Trump's election, she said, "Nothing will stop us from protecting, promoting and strengthening public education. We are doubling down on our fight for our students, our schools and our communities. We will not be deterred."

## What educators are demanding

In all three districts, the union and school committee proposals for teacher pay and benefits are far apart. The proposals for paraprofessionals are widely divergent; the school committees' insulting proposals would do next to nothing to lift these workers out of poverty.

Gloucester Mayor Greg Verga stated that to meet the demands of teachers the city would need to either raise taxes by roughly \$400 per household or make significant cuts to other city agencies. He also said teachers' demands could potentially lead to the layoff of two dozen teachers.

As of November 12, the Gloucester Teachers Association (GTA) was asking for a 21.6 percent increase in teacher pay over four years, with the School Committee countering with only a 9 percent increase over 4 years, according to the *Boston Globe*.

Paraprofessional starting pay is presently only \$22,016. The GTA is demanding a starting salary of \$37,142 in fiscal year 2028; the School Committee proposed a starting pay of \$28,500 in fiscal year 2026 on October 22. The GTA and the School Committee's proposals for paraprofessional parental leave are similar to those in Beverly and Marblehead.

Abby Ash, a first grade teacher who is seven-and-a-half months pregnant, spoke about the Gloucester School Committee's proposal on paid parental leave at a press conference November 16.

“Did they know that it takes six weeks for a mother to have to go back to the doctor to make sure she has healed appropriately?,” she asked. “That is not enough time, and that’s for typical deliveries. If you have anything that goes wrong, you’re eight weeks, 10 weeks out. What are those families going to do when they have to choose—does my mom go back to work, or do we go unpaid and not get to pay the bills? This is unacceptable.”

She said educators were leaving the district. “We have people not wanting to come here, because you do not care about them. You don’t care about their families, and you are not going to unless we stand here, out here tonight, and we tell you that the wage proposal is not acceptable, the paid parental leave is not acceptable, the sick family leave time is not acceptable. We are here and we will stay here until we get our deal closed.”

As of November 11, the BTA proposed an average increase in teachers’ salaries of 8.1 percent this year and 4 percent per year for three years, according to the *Globe*. The district also proposes an 8.1 percent increase this year but only 4 percent per year for two years.

The discrepancy in demands for paraprofessional wages and benefits is immense. On November 8, the BTA asked for a starting salary of \$41,217 for fiscal year 2027, with the School Committee provocatively countering with a minimum starting salary of \$16,850. The union proposed 11 weeks paid parental leave versus only three by the School Committee.

Katie Jutras and Mia Chavez, high school students in Beverly, came to City Hall November 15 to support the striking educators.

Katie said, “Regarding everything with Trump and education I think that I’m fearful about the quality of education going forward with him as president, because I think giving power to the states, and just given his policies and everything, it’s likely that a lot of education is going to be taught through a lens that’s not entirely authentic. For example, in Florida with banned books, and them not wanting to teach any queer education or anything along those lines.”

“I work at aftercare,” Mia said. “I make \$17 an hour, and I make more than a para [paraprofessional] in a year of school. I make \$17 an hour, and my paras make \$20,000 a year as salary, and I probably make more than that.”

Asked whether students supported the teachers, she said, “I think it’s half and half. I have a lot of friends who are very against it and just want to go back to school for their education, and they think the teachers should stop striking, and that it’s unfair that they’re trying to get what they want when they should just be negotiating. But I think that’s completely wrong. I think what the teachers are negotiating for is so valid.”

On November 9, the MEA proposed a 22.6 percent wage increase over four years for teachers, with the School Committee countering on November 11 with only 10.9 percent over four years, according to the *Globe*. MEA spokespersons told the *Marblehead Current* there had been “no new tentative agreements since we began mediation.”

The *Globe* reports that current starting pay for Marblehead paraprofessionals is a miserly \$11.93 per hour. The union is demanding \$30,000 annual salary after four years, which would still be poverty wages. The School Committee is proposing paras be paid only \$16.65 an hour after three years!

Samantha Rosato, a tutor and paraprofessional in the Marblehead Public Schools (MPS), spoke at a solidarity rally. She said, “The reality for tutors, para educators and permanent subs is that working for MPS means working for poverty wages. Para educators at MPS earn between \$11.97 and \$21.15 per top step per hour. Tutors earn between \$25 and \$30 per hour. Permanent subs start at around \$23 per hour. It is not possible for an individual to survive on these salaries and getting by on these wages is a daily struggle for all of us. Many have multiple jobs.”

She added, “Our members’ only agendas include ending the practice of poverty wages for our essential staff, establishing modern parental family

and bereavement policies, so that the educators can be human beings and spend time with their families, safe schools where every child receives the support they need and competitive wages that ends our staffing crisis. That is our agenda.”

On November 9, the MEA proposed eight weeks of paid parental leave, with two weeks paid out of family leave and two more paid from sick leave. The School Committee has proposed educators receive only 12 days paid leave and up to 12 weeks total, to be paid out of accrued leave, meaning that if educators have not accrued enough leave they will not be paid beyond 12 days.

## What way forward?

After a week on strike, there has been next to no progress in negotiations between the GTA, BTA and MEA and their respective school committees.

Neither the NEA nor the MTA has issued any statement aimed at mobilizing their members against Massachusetts’ Democratic Party-led state government’s draconian fees and injunctions against the strikers. The NEA’s official web site carries no report of the educator strikes in Gloucester, Beverly and Marblehead.

The escalation in the courts must be responded to in kind by expanding the struggle. Instead of submitting to the districts’ stalling tactics and refusal to negotiate, striking teachers should demand that their strike be spread to the 117,000 members of the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA) in districts across the state.

To advance this struggle, rank-and-file committees of educators, in alliance with students and parents, must be organized in every school district to secure contracts that provide livable wages and working conditions to all school workers. Educators and residents must organize across districts to counter any threats of fines and criminal penalties faced by educators who strike to defend their interests.

Striking North Shore educators should instruct their local unions to refuse to allow a penny of union members’ dues money be used to pay the Massachusetts court-ordered fines. They should not be coerced into accepting sellout contracts by the mounting gargantuan fines.

The NEA has total assets of almost \$400 million and raised \$374.2 million in dues in 2022–23 from its approximately 3 million members. Strikers should demand that these funds be used to financially support strikers and their families in their fight for a decent contract.

In the educators strike in Newton earlier this year, the Newton Teachers Association (NTA) proposed 21.5 percent in pay increases over four years, but in the end agreed to only 12.6 percent. Paraprofessionals also received a paltry 12.6 percent wage increase, plus some one-time payments of \$500–1,100, which did not make a dent in the losses the strikers incurred during the strike. The union agreed to pay the nearly \$1 million in fines ordered by the state.

Throughout the four years of the Biden administration, the union playbook has been to isolate workers’ struggles and restrict them to appealing to Democratic politicians to apply pressure on the state and city governments. The North Shore teachers strikes demonstrate the bankruptcy of this strategy.

The experience in the Newton strike and the ongoing strikes on the North Shore demonstrates that the teachers’ union apparatus, and their political masters in the Democratic Party, will not defend educators’ right to pay and conditions that reflect their indispensable and highly skilled role in society and that workers need to take matters into their own hands.



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