

11/1/16

Mr. Eakins et al:

I am writing this open letter in an effort to offer a suggestion before bargaining resumes tomorrow afternoon between the district and the union. I would have broached this issue in my comments at the school board meeting this afternoon, but I never would have been able to make a meaningful case considering the time constraints I faced in that format. As such, I hope that you read this letter in its entirety, as I feel there is some merit to the economic argument being presented herein. Perhaps more importantly, I believe that if these words are considered carefully and a consensus can be crafted at the table tomorrow, it will lead to a boost in morale among the teacher workforce, will be a benefit to thousands of children who live and learn in our district, and further engage the economic engine of our community that is already working so well in the city of Tampa and across Hillsborough county.

Though I am not a fan of the recent shift to business terminology by you and other members of the district leadership team (e.g. students being “clients”; schools offering “products”; the district needing to be “right-sized”), I understand the need to view and approach our current financial challenges in this way. In using this same language myself, I would like to appeal to this side of the district’s economic reasoning by laying out some points that I firmly believe are in line with this thinking. I implore you, then, to read my suggestion and then follow my points through to the end. If you feel that they can be dismissed outright, at least I can sleep a little better knowing that I made my pitch to try and help thousands of teachers and students across this school district.

With all due humility, I am asking that the district bargaining team come back to the table tomorrow prepared to offer a \$1,000 raise to each and every teacher by adjusting the bands of the pay scale from top to bottom. Now, I guess that you or others may be laughing at what seems to be an outlandish suggestion, but please at least let me state reasons why this can be a huge win for you, your administration, and the entire community within Hillsborough county.

It may be a threadbare platitude in this day and age, but “you’ve got to spend money to make money.” My father, who was a business manager, owner, and held numerous high-level positions in the corporate world used to say this to me all the time when I was a kid. I didn’t understand it then, but as a 41 year-old saver and investor, I certainly do now. Although you may be thinking that we cannot afford to offer such a raise at this time, I would counter with the fact that this is precisely the time to do this. Let’s face it, if you’ve driven around this city and county in the last 3-5 years since we’ve emerged from the Great Recession, Tampa is booming. And yet we’re seemingly the only game in town who isn’t thriving.

Investment in our community is happening all around us. Whether it stems from the leadership of our mayor, Bob Buckhorn, or business magnates such as Jeff Vinik, these men are keenly aware that in order to allow our city, county, and community to grow and thrive we need to make an investment that impacts both now and the future, the phrase you yourself said at the Town Hall meeting a few weeks ago. If Tampa and Hillsborough County want to invite even further investment to our rapidly growing city, then we must have an award winning, top-tier education system that draws employers who will offer competitive salaries and whose employees will want to send their children to our schools.

But none this happens when we don't financially invest in our workforce. The school district took a step in the right direction last year when it moved all ESPs up several steps on the pay scale and paid them an additional bonus, which was commendable in light of the fact that many of these dedicated employees were living right at the poverty level. We need to take the next step this year by investing in teachers this time, and for the sake of brevity I will bullet the main points that I hope you take into consideration before tomorrow's session at the bargaining table:

- If we want to have the best school district in central Florida, we need to recruit, hire, and retain top talent. We used to have a leading salary compared to surrounding counties, and at best we are competitive with them yet will soon fall behind and attrition will increase, especially near our borders where a short commute will increase a family's income. Moreover, the unemployment rate in the Tampa Bay area is the lowest in the state (just under 5%), which means there are jobs to be had and we may lose great teachers to other industries all together. Just this past week, in fact, Governor Scott boasted of our state's nation-leading increase on the jobs report; how are we to gain access to the best and brightest minds—especially for S.T.E.M.—when we cannot compete with nearby school districts?
- Jerry Ford, our school district's fiduciary who has a moral obligation to steer us in the proper direction financially, has already attested that our debt profile is "relatively healthy." I know there is pressure to shore up savings from bond rating agencies, but I believe we can achieve both aims simultaneously. Even if in interest bearing accounts, the money cannot be earning much and will not have nearly the economic impact of putting it into the pockets of teachers who will in turn inject it back into the local economy. Relatedly, approximately 70% of the American economy is predicated on consumption; Tampa and Hillsborough are indeed a microcosm of this dynamic, and an investment in our teachers is an investment in our community.
- Using basic demographics, this increase in salaries will lead to helping thousands of our students. We have approximately 210,000 students in our

county. If every teacher has the average of two children attending our schools, this raise will impact nearly 15% of our students. This could lead to more food on the table, or gifts during the holidays, especially for so many of the single parent households of which I spoke in my comments. If you were to move forward with this raise, the cumulative impact of it and last year's for the ESPs means that you have added income to the family of the entire workforce, making a beneficial impact on close to one third of all the children in the district. That would most certainly be a number to tout and would win approval of other city and county leaders who are trying to show how Tampa and the surrounding vicinity is a great place to live and work.

In closing, I can sum it up by saying this: when we invest in others, it helps the entire community in which we all live. This is an idea that is as old as economic theory itself, which we've seen time and again expounded upon in seminal works such as Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. It can be condensed to another platitude that my father used to say when I was young, "a rising tide lifts all boats." By adding \$1000 to each and every band on the teacher pay scale, it will mean more money being spent in the city and county. And while I believe this economic argument can stand on its own rational merit, I'd urge you to do so, Mr. Eakins, for a more emotional reason—this increase in pay could potentially be a huge boost in teacher morale, which, as my wife noted in her comments, is at an all-time low; more importantly, however, it would perhaps rectify the relationship between the teachers, both union and non-union alike, and the district. And that would be a huge win for you and your administration.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Ryan Haczynski