

Mrs. Berkowitz and Members of the Board:

My name is Sheila Henchy, and as President of the Great Neck Teachers Association, I'm speaking on behalf of this sea of blue. As you know, our contract with the Board of Education expired on June 30, and we're here tonight so that you can see the people who are covered by that contract.

The Great Neck Teachers Association is made up of the district's teachers, nurses, guidance counselors, psychologists, social workers, and occupational and physical therapists. We also have four affiliated groups: the Office Staff Association, the Paraprofessionals Chapter, the Adult Education Chapter, and the Per Diem Chapter. Each unit negotiates a separate contract with the Board, and each of those contracts also expired last June. Because we are bound together, we are here together tonight.

We are well aware of the challenges that school districts face under the tax cap in New York State, but the Great Neck Schools remain financially healthy in spite of them. In fact, for the last six years the Board has acknowledged repeatedly that this is due in part to concessions made by our members through the last two contracts. We have sacrificed for these concessions: our wages have stagnated while our health care costs have risen. Here before you are the people who have made those sacrifices.

The Great Neck Public Schools have been recognized time and again as being among the best in the nation. *U.S. News and World Report*, *Newsweek* magazine, *Niche.com*, and *Finder.com* have consistently noted the excellence of our schools. The District is rightfully proud of such accolades, publishing them front and center on the GNPS website. Here before you are the people who have earned those accolades.

Our schools have been open for seven full weeks now. I'm pretty sure that students and their parents have been largely unaware that the staff has been working without a contract for all of that time. The reason they're unaware is that our schools are running as they always do: lessons are being prepared with care and taught with energy, papers are being conscientiously graded, students are being given extra help whenever they ask for it. The countless educational, social,

emotional, and physical needs of our students are being met daily, just as always. Here before you are the people who have continued to meet those needs.

We have been negotiating since last February...that's eight long months. Here before you are the people who contribute on a daily basis to making our schools the excellent places that they are. Some of us work full time, some of us part-time. Some of us work in offices, some of us in classrooms. ALL of us work together with pride, and tonight ALL of us say, with one voice, that the time has come for a fair settlement for the Great Neck Teachers Association and its affiliates.