

## Board of Education Offers Status On Negotiations With Teachers

**Editor's Note:** The following letter concerning talks with the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Education Association (SPFEA) was read by Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education Vice President and Negotiations Committee Chairwoman Theresa Larkin during the September 24th school board meeting.

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The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education has proposed a fair contract to the SPFEA. We have listened and responded to the needs and wants of the SPFEA and balanced these with the expectations of the taxpaying public and the well-being of our students.

Why no settlement? Consider: We have offered the SPFEA a three-year proposal with increases of 3.7 percent, 3.7 percent, and 3.5 percent (1998-2001).

- The average Union County school district increase for 1998-1999 is below 3.7 percent.
- The regional cost of living is up only 1.85 percent.
- The 1997-1998 average Scotch Plains-Fanwood teacher's salary (excluding benefits) was \$54,756.
- Westfield's 1998-99 increase is 3.4 percent.

Why no settlement? Consider: The board's proposed settlement includes no change in health and dental benefits.

- More than 75 percent of employees in the United States are covered by some form of managed care—yet we have offered to continue our traditional insurance coverage.

Union County school district recent give-backs in health and dental include, but are not limited to:

- Clark - employees to be switched from a traditional insurance indemnity plan to Blue Select (a preferred provider

plan) effective June 30, 1999; those hired after July 1, 1998 will be enrolled in an HMO (Health Maintenance Organization).

- Linden - (1995-1998) New hires receive DPP (insurance deferred payment plan) single coverage for first three years.
- Westfield - (1996-1999) All employees moved from CIGNA indemnity to CIGNA DPP (HMO) program.
- Union County Vocational-Technical Schools - (1996-99) Reduced dental benefits from 100 percent preventive and diagnostic to 80 percent.

Consider:  
 • We have not gone to a two-tier health plan such as Clark and Linden, or to an HMO plan such as Westfield.  
 • We have offered no change to our dental benefits.

Consider:  
 • The board's proposed settlement does not ask for any increase in instructional time.  
 • The SPFEA offered and both sides agreed to one additional day for professional development.

Why no settlement? Consider: The board initiated an early beginning to negotiations, proposed streamlined procedures, initiated the assignment of a mediator while continuing to seek a negotiated settlement, developed a compromise proposal and modified that proposal (by continuing longevity) to accommodate the stated objection by the SPFEA.

And still no settlement. Why? Since the board's offer is better than average for Union County in salary and benefits, the responsibility for the continuing lack of a settlement belongs to the SPFEA leadership.

Board of Education  
 Scotch Plains-Fanwood  
 School District

## Telephone Political Survey Called 'Distasteful' for Town of Westfield

On Wednesday, September 16, I received a telephone call that I found very distasteful. I was told it was a national political survey; however, it was obviously a survey designed by one of the candidates for Mayor of Westfield, or the supporters of that candidate.

There were some general questions, but from time to time a question was asked, or an implication given, that was derogatory or negative toward (Westfield Mayoral candidate and First Ward Councilwoman) Gail Vernick.

What sets our country apart from many others is that everyone has the right to run for office, just as everyone has the right to vote according to his or her conscience. When a candidate's position is so weak that it is felt that it is necessary to defame another or deal in untruths in order to succeed, we are in serious trouble.

The final question of this survey was, "What is your ethnic background: Anglo Saxon, Italian, Irish or other?" My ethnic background is not reflected in party politics. I am not only an American by birth, but a Westfielder by birth. I shall vote for a candidate who will work for a better Westfield, and who conducts himself, or herself, with dignity and respectability

within the letter of the law.

I should hope that any candidate who finds this survey as lacking in good taste as I do, will come forward and renounce this campaign tactic.

Beatrice G. Scully  
 Westfield

## Local La Leche League Thanks Leader for Help In Publicizing Walk

Thank you very much for printing an article entitled "La Leche League to Sponsor World Walk for Breastfeeding," in *The Westfield Leader* in July. The Westfield La Leche League group had a successful walk, with 30 participants raising over \$900.

The exposure we received from your newspaper certainly helped in our fundraising efforts, and in our efforts to raise awareness about breastfeeding. Thank you again for helping us promote the World Walk for Breastfeeding.

Charlotte Lee  
 La Leche League  
 Westfield

## Letters to the Editor

### Situation in Washington is Detracting From Vital Needs of County Residents

A visit to Washington last week convinced me that the business of the people is suffering from the current distractions.

Supposedly, by today, Thursday, October 1, the United States Congress should complete work on the funding bills necessary to keep the government operating. I don't see that deadline being met.

Among the items up for consideration are two of special concern to Union County: Funding for summer youth jobs and low-income Home Energy assistance. It's clear that each year, counties such as Union will have to fight the battle to maintain programs which benefit our citizens.

At this point, over \$6 million in funding is at risk for Union County. The Summer Youth Employment and Training Program provides economically disadvantaged young people with meaningful work experience.

It is obvious that there is a direct connection between the drop in juvenile crime in the state and the ability to provide alternatives to just hanging around for our young people.

Equally at risk is the low-income Home Energy Program, which is of such great assistance to our senior citizens. A basic right of Americans should be the security

of being provided with basic comforts of shelter and warmth. In this regard, the so-called conference committee meeting between both the House of Representatives and the Senate will be critical.

Currently, the Republican House of Representatives' bill does not provide any funds for the summer jobs or energy assistance. That is truly an outrage.

Union County's role in the National Association of Counties is due to our status as one of the 100 largest counties in the United States. For that reason, we have taken up the battle to get our share of funding.

Along with the other urban counties of this country, we have a new mission, namely, that the range of critical issues facing us is not lost in the current Washington whirlwind.

The responsibility to improve conditions for our fellow citizens shouldn't be lost to the current Washington climate.

The people's business, such as summer jobs and heating assistance for seniors, will be the test of judgment for representatives long after the current Washington follies are completed.

Donald Goncalves  
 Freeholder  
 Union County

### Teacher Union Member Describes Contract Issues in SP-F District

Will there be a school contract settlement in Scotch Plains-Fanwood?

There are compelling reasons to believe that money is not the issue: First, this past June, 43 staff members retired, creating a \$1 million breakage windfall. Breakage is the difference between a retiree's salary and that of a new hire.

Second, the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Education Association (SPFEA) is asking only a 2.5 percent, or cost of living, raise for 157 of the most experienced teachers.

Third, the Board of Education spends a great deal of money on legal fees disputing with the SPFEA over contract violations brought to their attention by the association. In the last three years, 95 percent of all grievances filed by the association were denied, necessitating on-going attorney fees. Each denied grievance costs the board approximately \$1,500.

Fourth, the majority of these issues could have been settled in-house, at the Superintendent's level, at no cost to the taxpayer. Ultimately, 95 percent have been settled by arbitrators in favor of the grievant.

So if settlement is not a money issue, what is it? Could it be a power play?

Annie Lucas  
 SPFEA Action  
 Committee

## Poll Was 'Biased' and 'Erroneous,' Aimed at 'Damaging' Mrs. Vernick

On Wednesday, September 16, as I was getting ready to go out for the evening from my home in Westfield, I received a telephone call on the pretense of conducting a survey or taking a public opinion poll.

In light of the political climate surrounding the White House, I was pleased to voice my opinion on such a momentous matter.

To my surprise and displeasure, I was instead misled into a so-called "survey" of local issues and politics. The survey no more resembled an objective information gathering method than it did a biased, erroneous and intentionally damaging means of imparting information about one of our town's candidates for mayor.

When I initially questioned on whose behalf the survey was being conducted, the young man said he did not know. Later, after hearing only positive statements about the current mayor (Thomas C. Jardim), and only negative and untrue slurs on the mayoral candidate, Gail Vernick, I stated that it was obvious who had requested the inquiry.

To this statement, the surveyor only

laughed. Curiously, the most damaging statements were made about Mrs. Vernick's husband. It is interesting, though unfortunate to note, that one rarely hears slurs about the spouse of a male candidate, while those against the husband of a female candidate are commonplace.

I strongly object to this type of campaigning and indirect mudslinging, especially at our local level. The issues should be the focus, and the ability of the candidates to run for office in a dignified and responsible way is what we, as citizens of Westfield, should expect and demand.

Jennifer L. Brandt  
 Westfield

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## Scotch Plains Resident is Thankful For Removal of Park Place Proposal

As a neighborhood resident, I would like to thank township officials and my fellow neighbors for standing firm against the proposed development of a drug store on the Park Place Restaurant site.

It is my understanding that the applicant has withdrawn the proposal from further consideration by the Board of Adjustment.

Several months ago the applicant approached the Township Council to rezone the property in order to make business and retailing a conforming use. Because the Township Council unanimously refused to do so, the applicant was forced to apply for a use variance.

Fortunately, our Board of Adjustment did not rubber-stamp the application, and while never having to formally vote

on the issue, were resolute in demanding overwhelming evidence that any potential use variance was in the best interest of the neighborhood.

All the while, the neighborhood residents were courageously standing against the application and letting their voices be heard. Ultimately, the applicant had to withdraw.

I believe we owe a debt of gratitude to our elected officials, those they have appointed to the Board of Adjustment, and the concerned citizens of Scotch Plains who were there to defend the residential character of our neighborhood and ensure that our community remains a great place to live and raise a family.

Christian M. Abel  
 Scotch Plains

FOLD

OSCARS  
 1X2

GAIL VERNICK  
 3X10½

ET PETERSEN  
 3X6

WFLD COMMUNITY PLAYERS  
 3X4

COMCAST  
 3X3