

# 2023 Canton Schools Contracting

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*The author pays property taxes in Canton. Otherwise, neither he nor any relative is associated with the Canton Public Schools in any way.*

Massachusetts has the best public schools of any state. Within Massachusetts, Canton schools get an A rating, almost in the A+ tier achieved by neighbors Westwood, Sharon and Milton. Our other neighbors tail off from Norwood (A-) to Randolph (C+).

Note: Multiple references are at: <https://3NT.XYZ> > Ideas > Politics

In the next few years, I expect real challenges to maintaining our A status, let alone aspiring to A+. A slide into mediocrity could happen. Education, and the well-being of students and school staff, have suffered greatly during the COVID pandemic. We are going to need our teachers (and assistants) now, more than ever – in a time when more and more teachers are leaving the profession. This is not a time to pinch the budget, but to reward our teachers and encourage them toward yet better results.

This brings me to the current bargaining issues for Canton school staff. The school department has posted its interpretation of the process at

<https://www.cantonma.org> >  (upper right) > School Committee > Collective Bargaining Agreements > 2022-2023 Contracting Information

There, I found “Jan. 10 – Unit A Fact Sheet: What has been on the table for Unit A?” I have preserved a copy of this document at 3NT.XYZ, because I found several noteworthy issues with it:

- (a) *The current financial offer to teachers is a 7% across-the-board over 3 years, depending on their years of service/longevity and post graduate work. This 7% is in addition to existing steps and lanes, which cause the actual wages for the majority of individual Unit A members to increase an additional 1% - 4.35% per year based upon steps alone, resulting in a total of 10% to 14% increase over the 3 years.*

There are two kinds of money here: *merit raises* and *cost of living increases*. Both kinds of increases should be automated. Presumably, the “steps and lanes” are merit raises, issued for more time in service, plus new training, certifications, degrees, etc. Merit raises are apparently automated already. There is no mention of “doing a great job” awards or bonuses that you might find in the private sector.

The 7% over three years should be for cost of living. Clearly, that’s inadequate, as inflation in Massachusetts has been running 7% or more for *one* year. I expect something like 12% to be fair – but don’t take it from me – both sides should agree on a public cost of living metric, and employ it henceforth. It could be applied annually,

based on the inflation of three years previously, based on the previous year, or however the parties agree.

An offer of 7% is taking back the buying power of the merit increases – some employees might have less buying power than at the start of the previous contract, despite steps and lanes. This is not a good way to retain teachers. However, it could be that with a true cost of living increase, the steps and lanes have been more favorable than the town can actually afford, requiring a one-time adjustment to that component.

(b) Expanded parental and bereavement leave.

These are benefits that will help many employees over time, but they cost money. Did the town propose them to increase goodwill among the teachers, or for them to be part of total current compensation? Perhaps now is not the time.

(c) *eliminate the unusual practice of “stacking” (taking more than one day at a time), “wrapping” (taking time off around long weekends, vacations, and holidays) and “rolling” (building a bank of time) personal days to ensure educators are in the classroom with students unless the educator is sick/has a unique life event that must be attended to, or is absent under another authorized leave provision.*

Clearly, the administration is trying to improve the quality of the education with this one. One compromise would be for each employee to get a couple of unrestricted personal days a year, and the others would not be eligible for stacking or wrapping. Or charge two days for each stacked or wrapped day. Rolling is fine; requiring employees to take personal days or lose them is meddling, at least below a cap of two to four years' worth.

(d) *Increase to hourly rate for class coverage/after school work from \$30-\$40 (i.e., 33%).*

Including this statement out of context is offensive. When was this rate increased to \$30? If it went to \$30 three years ago, and was agreed to be fair at the time, \$34 may be fair. If the rate was last changed 20 years ago, \$40 is long overdue. Has the workload increased? What do other towns pay? Please figure this out and index it.

(e) *Addition of process for reporting and addressing assaults.*

Surely there should be a process for reporting and addressing any assaults that take place in our schools. Does this mean there is none, or it is inadequate or not properly advertised?

Please ignore any technical errors above and focus on a common-sense approach to assuring the well-being of our schools, students and teachers. Indexing the cost-of-living increase to inflation would be a fine way to reduce future disagreements.