

Pensions

We already took two major pension cuts.

The two major pension changes in the past 15 years were the 1% employee contribution increase in 1995 and the 2005 creation of a lower tier (Schedule B) benefit for those with less than 10 years of contributing service as of July 1, 2005. After each change, we were told that after these reductions were enacted, our benefits would be safe. Ask your Senator and Representative to keep this promise of no further cuts.

Vesting should protect benefits.

In 2005, the Governor and the General Assembly did not touch the pension benefits of vested employees. In Rhode Island, workers are vested after providing 10 years of service. To be vested should mean that benefits cannot be reduced. Ask your Senator and Representative to keep the promise by maintaining the integrity of vesting.

We pay our share every pay day.

Starting on the first day on the job, teachers have paid 9.5% of salary and state workers have paid 8.75% of salary to fund our pension benefit. This is one of the highest contribution rates in the country! There were years in the early 1990s when the State did not pay its share. There were early retirement programs in the early 1990s that the State never funded. This contributed to the large unfunded liability we have today. We should not have to accept pension cuts because the State did not live up to its promise to fund its portion of pension benefits.

The State can't afford to put us in a defined contribution plan.

The Employees' Retirement System actuaries estimated that it would cost \$150 million this year to transform our traditional defined benefit plan to a defined contribution plan. The State cannot afford this amount of money, and workers cannot afford to lose a secure pension benefit.

All we want is a secure retirement.

We did not become teachers, state workers, or school district staff to get rich, but we did expect to have a secure retirement. The state is 8 years into a 30-year repayment schedule of the unfunded liability. There is a significant unfunded liability in the State and a teacher pension plan that can be dealt with if the State simply stays on track of paying off the unfunded liability under its current plan.

We pay for our benefits.

Once the unfunded liability is gone, the employer cost of our pension will plummet from approximately 22% of salary to 3% of salary. In other words, for those teachers and state workers in Schedule B, you pay 9.5% / 8.75% of your pay and the employer pays about 3% of salary. The rest of the employer cost is to pay off the unfunded liability which we did not cause.

Private sector comparisons are unfair.

While it may be true that our pension benefits are better than many private sector pensions, most private sector pension plans do not require *any* employee contribution. Generally, the private sector pays better than the public sector for comparable jobs. Comparing pension benefits without considering contributions and overall pay packages is unfair.

Health Care

Permit employees to have a voice.

The current State law permits all unions in both the public and private sector to negotiate health benefits. Along with salary, health care is the most important topic unions deal with at the bargaining table. Health care negotiations transcend cost-sharing. Employees want to have a voice in plan design, available networks, drug and office visit cost sharing, and other elements of the plan. Proposals to remove health care as a negotiable item would prevent workers from having a voice in what their medical benefits are.

Not a cost saving.

There is a significant amount of misinformation about teacher health insurance savings available by forcing teachers into the state plan. An AFT survey comparing health plans revealed that 9 of the 11 AFT communities in Rhode Island pay less this year for family health coverage (all with Blue Cross Coast-to-Coast) than the State pays for comparable benefits with United.

Purchasing Pools are our best strategy.

More and more school districts are joining purchasing pools to buy medical insurance at reduced costs. This process allows districts to save money while providing good benefits within the parameters of union contracts.

We all pay for our coverage.

All unionized State workers and school teachers pay some form of premium cost sharing for medical benefits. Even before co-payments were bargained, unions agreed to lower pay raises in order to maintain fully-paid medical insurance. Those past trades would not be recognized should the Assembly force all school teachers and municipal employees into the State plan

Why promote for-profit medical insurance?

We all benefit when Blue Cross and United compete for business because it helps control costs. That being said, it would be wrong for the Assembly to force all local government workers into the State medical plan because the only provider allowed by the State is an out-of-state, for-profit company. United won a contract extension as the exclusive provider of benefits without the contract being put out for bid by the Carcieri administration! Why should the Assembly encourage a shift in business away from a local non-profit insurer to an out-of-state, for-profit insurer risking more Rhode Island job loss?

Teacher Bargaining Rights

Teacher working conditions are student learning conditions.

Union contracts govern teacher rights and benefits. Students also benefit from teacher union negotiations because teachers care about student learning conditions. Limiting a union's ability to negotiate important items such as class size, adequate supplies and materials, textbook selection, health and safety, student discipline, specialist caseloads, and qualifications for employment will hurt students.

We are the solution, not the problem.

All teachers want students to learn and reach high standards. Politicians need to be reminded that teachers chose their career to educate children, not to get rich. Classroom teachers should have *more* say, not less say, in important issues facing schools to enhance student achievement. Collective bargaining is the only avenue available to public school teachers to express our ideas and take a stand on what are the best methods to educate children.

Avoid the slippery slope.

Some politicians "merely" want to prevent teachers unions from naming a health insurer in the contract, or "simply" want to permit the creation of a statewide performance evaluation system. This is a slippery slope that we must avoid because it will lead to further erosion of our bargaining rights.

Consider the administrator carousel.

Some of the politicians who want to limit the scope of our bargaining want to empower school administrators to make important decisions free from the constraints of a union contract. Compare your seniority in your school and district to the seniority of your principal and/or assistant principal. Administrative turnover is huge, and most school administrators do not have many years of service in the school and/or district they are currently working in. It does not make any sense to empower school administrators who have not exhibited a commitment to the district by reducing classroom teacher bargaining rights.

Do not devalue our expertise.

In the education industry, non-educators are making important decisions without the benefit of the expertise and knowledge of classroom teachers. Consider the recent decision by our Board of Regents (where only two of the nine regents have classroom experience) to harm special needs students by eliminating caseload caps, class size limits, and deregulating extended year programs. The General Assembly should value the expertise of teachers and permit that expertise to be voiced at the bargaining table.