

On December 2, 2008 the District and representatives from the Cocksackie-Athens Teachers Association completed their fourth mediation session. You may recall that a Declaration of Impasse was signed by both parties and filed with the Public Employment Relations Board on May 13, 2008 and since the filing of the impasse both sides have met with an appointed mediator in an effort to reach a new collective bargaining agreement.

Throughout this process the school district has primarily sought to accomplish three goals: one, an increased instructional day for all schools; two, an equitable salary based upon the increased instructional day and three, a contribution from the teachers to defray the ever escalating cost of medical insurance coverage. The increased instructional day is premised upon scores obtained by our students from various state mandated examinations and the fact that the school day here at Cocksackie-Athens is shorter than the instructional day at other schools within the area. Moreover, there is a trend within public education for an increased school day. In short, we want our students to have the very best education in order for them to be competitive, productive citizens in the global economy.

We live in uncertain times. We read daily about plummeting real estate values, the diminishing value of our 401(k) pension plans, portfolio losses, a state and national economy that is spiraling downwards, increased unemployment, and an impending New York State budget that in all likelihood will have negative and devastating impacts on all school districts within the State of New York. It is obvious that as a community we shall need to do more with less. Despite this somber scenario the Board of Education on December 2, 2008 presented a fair and comprehensive settlement proposal to the teachers' representatives encompassing the educational and financial issues confronting the District.

Unfortunately, the district's settlement proposal was rejected. In a good-faith effort to resolve this impasse the district is willing to keep its most recent settlement proposal on the table until January 15, 2009 with the hope that the teachers' representatives will place the proposal before the entire membership for a vote prior to January 15, 2009.