Shrewsbury School Committee Statement re: Negotiations
with the Shrewsbury Paraprofessional Association

October 5, 2021

The Shrewsbury School Committee values its relationship with the Shrewsbury Paraprofessional Association (SPA). It appreciates the work of all members and the value it adds to the district and the lives of all students. Over the last four months, the School Committee has been engaged in negotiations with the SPA in a good faith effort to reach a new contractual agreement.

Our goal entering negotiations was to put money into the pockets of all SPA members. We have negotiated in good faith and in our most recent proposal, year one and year three cost-of-living (COL) increases are greater than 2% for all paraprofessional job categories, in addition to step increases. In year two, the proposal provides in the range of 4% to 10% in combined COL and step increases to all paraprofessionals in the category that the SPA asked to be prioritized.

We believe it is important that you have accurate, transparent information regarding our negotiation discussions. We would also like to clarify the following information regarding recent statements made about Federal funding; the Student Opportunity Act (SOA); the May 2021 Proposition 2 ½ Override; and, the local labor market.

- **Federal funding** - The American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) Fund has provided 3 separate appropriations for one-time, restricted use related to COVID-19 impacts as follows:
  - ESSER-1: $162,060 was spent on personal protective equipment (PPE) and COVID-19 surveillance testing.
  - ESSER-2: $557,280 was spent on additional PPE, procuring additional school furniture, furniture storage, tents, technology hardware, and required special education compensatory services for students.
  - ESSER-3: $1,229,980 comes with more restrictions and is planned to be used as follows:
    - 20% must be used to address lost instructional time and ensure interventions that respond to the social, emotional, and academic needs of disproportionately impacted underrepresented student subgroups due to COVID-19.
    - The School Committee gathered feedback from the district and community stakeholders on the best uses of the ESSER-3 monies. Based on feedback, the School Committee voted unanimously on September 22, 2021, to use the money as follows:
      - hire 2.0 FTE school adjustment counselors (1 for Elementary, 1 for High School).
      - hire 4.0 FTE tutor positions (Middle school) to provide academic support in reading and/or math during the school day.
      - Funds for after-school, school vacation, and summer vacation programming.
      - Funds to pilot and then expand after-school transportation to provide access to academic support and activities.

- **Student Opportunity Act (SOA)** is the updated law known as Chapter 70 funding that uses a state aid funding formula to provide funding to each school district. Shrewsbury is a minimum
aid district. We received $30 per student of minimum aid this year, and this is not a new source of funding. Funding to Shrewsbury did not increase beyond the $30/student minimum state aid this year, unlike districts that are not “minimum aid” districts who received substantial state aid increases.

- **May 2021 Proposition 2 ½ Override** - Due to the fact Shrewsbury is a minimum aid district, a larger portion of school funding falls on the town. In January 2021, the School Department needed approximately $5 million more than the town could provide in order to maintain current staffing levels and programs for the 2021-2022 school year. The School Committee strongly advocated for a Propositional 2 ½ Override to be placed on the annual town ballot. The taxpayers of Shrewsbury willingly approved a $9.5 million dollar increase to support public education to preserve jobs and programming to be spread over at least four years. This funding was requested for specific purposes, namely to allow the district to save over 50 staff positions that would have been cut this year, add the necessary positions to open the new Beal School, and restore four of 30 positions cut the previous year and to restore additional positions over time.

- **Local labor market** - The School Committee actively assesses the local labor market to survey what surrounding districts are paying for similar positions. This is a standard method for gathering information to determine the salaries that are being paid for like positions. We used this data when creating and making our proposals during negotiations with the SPA team.

The School Committee has had open, honest, and transparent discussions with the SPA negotiating team based on accurate information and facts. We value our relationship with this important team and are disappointed that we have not been able to reach a contract agreement during negotiation discussions.

As we have reached an impasse in our negotiations, we have filed for contract mediation, which is the next stage of the negotiation process. We are optimistic that the mediation process will help the parties reach agreement on a new contract as soon as possible.