



## Lawrence Teachers' Association 2020 Holiday Season Words of Thanks

### Lawrence High School

Dr. Pedersen's letter inspired me to write some Thanksgiving thoughts of my own. In these times, it is important to reflect on all there is to be thankful for. I am thankful for my family, friends, and my generally privileged circumstances. Here at Lawrence, I am sincerely thankful for having colleagues who are both true professionals as well as supportive friends. I am likewise blessed to work in a building where the Administrative Team unfailingly provides support, understanding, and encouragement. Most of all, I am daily reminded that our students, while increasingly in greater need of academic and other supports, give me more respect, amusement, and agreeableness than I deserve. I love Lawrence!

BUT . . .

When I agreed to come to Lawrence in 2001, it was because the pay was about 30% more than what I was being paid in NYC. Today, NYC teachers make about as much as Lawrence teachers but receive more benefits.

Since I mentioned the old days, let me take you back to 2010. *Hurt Locker* won the Oscar for best picture. *Tik Tok* by Ke\$ha was the most popular song. The Lakers were NBA champions. The Saints won the Super Bowl as *The Who* headlined the half-time show. We will never forget the trapped Chilean miners, the horror of the Haitian earthquake, or the brave Tunisians who started the Arab Spring. Oh, what a year it was!

2010 was also the last year Lawrence teachers had an unexpired contract. The top salary under that contract was and remains \$130,000. Adjusted for inflation, this equates to \$108,865.54 today. To many of my colleagues, this amounts to a real and painful decline in their standard of living.

Moreover, besides the real and often ignored financial impact, what really hurts is the disrespect that the BOE's demands and lack of action represent. For me, this feeling may run deeper than for many. I was born in the Soviet Union and came to the United States when I was nine. While I was too young to really feel the full weight of that system, there are certain things you absorb. What still resonates is the disparity between what is said and what is obvious. In the Soviet Union, harvests were always "great," yet we waited in line for potatoes. We lived in a "worker's paradise," yet couldn't always get toilet paper. We lived in the "freest country in the world," yet my parents were afraid I would repeat, in school, something politically incorrect that I picked up at home.

So...now when I read or hear about how much we, as teachers, are appreciated or what a great job we are doing, it makes me uncomfortable. Slogans that do not match reality trigger me in a way that may almost be unfair to the sloganeer. What I said at the outset remains true - I am grateful to work at Lawrence. But, when I hear false or empty praise, contradicting the reality of our situation, my eyes roll so hard I sometimes give myself a headache and, as we know, a headache is a COVID symptom. I want to do a good job, but worry that the Health App will make me stay home.

When we look back on 2020, let us make it memorable not just for all the obvious reasons, but for being the year when Lawrence teachers finally got a new contract.

Grateful, but a bit less grateful than 10 years ago,

Alex Gofman  
Social Studies Teacher  
Lawrence High School

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As the holiday seasons approach, my family and I always like to take the time to reflect upon what we are thankful for. It is more important than ever after this challenging year to take the time to appreciate all that we have, as stated in Dr. Pederson's e-mail.

I have had the privilege of working in Lawrence for the last 21 years, though, 10 of them have been without a contract. I continue to walk through the doors every day and remain grateful for my Lawrence family and students.

The other day I saw this quote and it has really stuck with me and helped me shift my mindset about the world we're living in right now:

***"This is not the year to get everything you want. This is the year to appreciate everything you have."***

I truly cannot emphasize enough how GRATEFUL I am for all of you!

Wishing you all a wonderful (yet different), healthy and safe Thanksgiving!

Nicole Miller  
Special Education Teacher  
Lawrence High School

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As Thanksgiving is upon us, I reflect on some of the many things I am thankful for... As we all would agree, this year has probably been one of the most challenging...In spite of those challenges...I am so very grateful for my health, and for the health of my family (who live out of state and I have not seen) and friends who were able to recover from this horrific virus. In September, I began my 22<sup>nd</sup> year as an art educator, and entered my 20<sup>th</sup> year in Lawrence, for which I am so very grateful.

I am thankful for my amazing colleagues, who continually go above and beyond each and every day with the utmost professionalism. I'm so very blessed to work with such kind, caring and compassionate people, who truly care about our students.... Many who have become dear friends.

I am thankful for my students, who on a daily basis show a great deal of resilience during these trying times as we navigate through a new way of teaching and learning.

I am thankful for our administrators, supportive and custodial staff, our security team and to our amazing technology staff, who tirelessly continue to plow through on a daily basis with our never-ending technological issues.

It does sadden me being void of a contract after 10 years. I would be grateful to the board if my colleagues and I receive the level of recognition and dedication we so deserve for all we provide to the students of Lawrence, and end 2020 with a renewed contract.

May we continue to embrace our challenges and rise above and conquer any and all obstacles that cross our paths.

May we all Have a Blessed and Safe Thanksgiving.

Joann DelGuidice  
Art Educator  
Lawrence High School

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This year has given me great pause and caused me to reflect on the things that are important. Each day last week, my second-grade daughter, came home from school and told me one thing she was thankful for this year. Her teacher asked the students to pick one new thing each day. This made me begin to think about what I am thankful for during this tumultuous year. As so many others have already done, I would like to share what I am thankful for as a member of the Lawrence Public Schools community.

I am thankful for the students that I have had the honor of teaching over my twenty years in the district. I have taught them each day, but they have also taught me as well. Who have shown my family and I love and understanding during one of the most difficult times in our lives, the loss of my husband.

I am thankful for my beautiful children who are proud to say their mom is a teacher. Who love to attend Lawrence events and meet my students. Who despite tremendous loss this year still smile and make me smile.

I am thankful for my wonderful family and friends who support me along each step of life's journey. I could not have made it through this year without them.

I am thankful for the supportive staff that has stood by me through both the most joyous times in my life and the most difficult times in my life. Who have always been there to help not only me but those in our school community who are in need.

I am thankful for the amazing colleagues I have worked with over these twenty years who have helped me to grow as a professional. Professionals who despite difficult times and not having a renewed contract for ten years continue to rise to the occasion and educate the students of the Lawrence Public Schools.

I am thankful for every member of the Lawrence Public Schools community who time and time again persevere through so many difficult circumstances.

I hope to soon be able to say that after ten years I am thankful for a new contract.

Happy Thanksgiving!

Margaret Foy  
Social Studies Teacher  
Lawrence High School

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I just love sharing what I am **thankful** for! First, I would like to thank Dr. Pedersen for sharing her **gratitude** and warm wishes. I would also like to wish my entire Lawrence community and family a very Happy Thanksgiving! I am so **thankful** for all of you! I am truly **thankful** to have been part of the Lawrence community and family, in one capacity or another, all of my life; as a student, a parent, and still, as a teacher. I am also **thankful and grateful** to Lawrence for so many of my academic and personal achievements.

As 2020 comes to an end, it is safe to say that it will go down as one of the most unprecedented years in history. There is no doubt that it has been a year that has helped me to reflect on all I am **grateful** and **thankful** for! Covid -19 threw 2020 into a tizzy with little warning. I selfishly wished time away as I became **grateful** just to survive another month. As I began to reflect on all that I was **thankful and grateful** for, I thought about my life and my metamorphosis from child to adult. Oddly enough, much of what I am **thankful** for is linked to my life in Lawrence. My entire family attended Lawrence Public Schools; my mother, my siblings, children, grandchildren, as well as my extended family. I have deep roots and history here, hence, the reason I am so **thankful** and **grateful** to Lawrence! I am **thankful** to Lawrence teachers for providing my mother with the skills and the education necessary to meet with success and raise 3 children as a single mother in the early 70's. I am both **thankful** and **grateful** to former, #2 School and Middle School, teacher Holly Mjaanes who inspired me to push for the stars. It is because of her I am a teacher today. I am **thankful** to all the Lawrence teachers that provided my children and their spouses with a solid education which has helped pave the way for their successes! I am **thankful** to Lawrence for teaching my family to embrace diversity and tolerance and for giving me an opportunity to shape and teach my students to do the same!

I am **thankful** for the strength and perseverance that I along with all the Lawrence teachers acquired as we were once again forced to step out of our comfort zones and accept another "new norm" in teaching: masks, desk shields, gloves, hand sanitizers, social distancing, and teaching to an 8" screen. I am **thankful** that we stood strong and united as we tackled still another monumental task! I am **thankful** to my administration, the secretaries, custodians and security that helped the transition back to the new Lawrence. I am **thankful** not only for the lessons I teach, but for the lessons I've learned!

New rules afforded me an opportunity to slow down and reflect on what I have to be **thankful** for, to appreciate thought provoking conversations, and to connect with people in different ways (Google Meet, Zoom, etc.) during a time of social distancing. I look at the tireless efforts that the Lawrence teachers continue to make while getting little or no respect, and it is so disheartening. It is imperative that people understand that education is so much more than academics. Lawrence teachers have stepped into their new roles, fully embracing the newest challenge of providing our students with basic needs, as well as emotional and social strength, while still providing them with a strong foundation of academics, as we prepare them for life outside of Lawrence. We do all of this despite the absence of a contract for the past 10 years. I am **thankful** and **grateful** that the **LTA** continues to persevere with integrity while teaching with dignity and spirit on a daily basis. I would love nothing more than to be **thankful** and **grateful** for a BOE that would be **grateful** and **thankful** for the tireless effort, integrity and dignity of the Lawrence teachers that are shaping the youth of the entire Lawrence community!

I am personally, so **thankful** for the **LTA!**

Happy Thanksgiving!

Linda Gerard  
Social Studies Teacher  
Lawrence Middle School

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While I'm thankful for so many things, my family, my friends, my job, and my co-workers (who have become my friends and family), I would be remiss not to address the blatant disrespect that has been shown to the faculty over the past decade (DECADE!). Ten years with no contract, no suggestion of one on the horizon, and no true, good-faith negotiations equates to the district telling us that we are, contrary to what we have been told, worthless. We are in fact not respected, not appreciated, and not deemed "worth it." By not compromising or finding a resolution of any kind over the course of ten years, is tantamount to you saying we are enemies. (This is what you do to an enemy; you try to defeat them, which is what the district is clearly attempting to do.) So, while I'm thankful for so many aspects of my life, this gigantic grey cloud that has followed us around for a decade isn't one of them.

Sincerely,

Paul Vega  
English Teacher  
Lawrence High School

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As I look back upon my 21 years as a Lawrence High School business teacher, I find myself thankful for many things.

I am thankful for my family, my wife Susan and twin daughters Alexa and Ashley. I am also thankful that we had a wonderful surrogate, Heather. Without her we would not have our two beautiful daughters.

I am thankful that Dr. Steve Kussin took a chance on a teacher that had a Master's Degree in Elementary Education and a temporary certification in business education and no high school teaching experience.

I am thankful to be teaching in the building from which I graduated in 1989. I am a proud graduate of #4 school, #2 school and the former Lawrence Junior High School.

I am thankful for the incredible teachers I have the pleasure of working with every day. We are faced with so many challenges in today's day of hybrid and remote learning.

I am thankful for my wonderful students who are also faced with many obstacles and my former students who still reach out to me on a regular basis.

I am thankful for Rob Wiebke and the technology department who are working so hard to make sure we have the resources to educate our students.

I am thankful that we are blessed to have an incredible secretarial, custodian and support staff who work behind the scenes and should be recognized for all of their hard work.

I am thankful that the LTA is working diligently to negotiate for a fair contract.

I am hopeful that the Board of Education will negotiate a fair contract in good faith.

Happy and Healthy Thanksgiving

Mark Palladino  
Business Teacher  
Lawrence High School

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## Lawrence Middle School

I am most thankful for my wonderful and supportive husband and sons. I am so grateful that I have their kisses, hugs, and human contact every day.

It has been amazing to share and make music with students for the last 15 years at Lawrence. Some of my most cherished memories are of performances from students that still give me goosebumps. I can't wait for performances to return like a phoenix rising from the ashes.

Most of my career at Lawrence has been working tirelessly with all of you without a renewed contract. Nobody can even believe it when I tell them. I am most saddened by the loss of so many talented young teachers who leave our Lawrence family, not because they want to, but because they have to for their careers. It is my sincere hope that the Board of Education sees that our students deserve dedicated teachers who feel appreciated.

Thanks to our secretaries, nurses, aides, security, technology, administrative team, and the families of our Lawrence students.

Happy Thanksgiving!

Susan Rogan  
Choral Director  
Lawrence Middle School

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This Thanksgiving and always, I am THANKFUL for:

my husband, Scott; my daughter, Alexandra; my son, Andrew, and the rest of my loving family -  
- yes, we still love one another after being cooped up for so long

my friends -- yes, we still can vent about life, though virtually;  
and for being an educator -- yes, I, TEACHER, am more than a Wi-Fi.

I look at my twenty-seven years here at Lawrence and I am GRATEFUL for:

all the wonderful children I have worked with every day -- I have some of their children now --  
and  
all the dedicated adults in all departments and offices who make our schools a better place for  
all of our students,  
especially the tech people who can, on a very short notice, provide two hot spots on a Friday, at  
2 p.m. (fact).

I am INSPIRED by my fellow Lawrence teachers -- we educate our learners while we continue to  
improve ourselves professionally so  
we can better serve our students and their families. We successfully carry on our  
responsibilities regardless of what challenges come our way.

For the past ten years, we have continued to do so without a fair contract. It is great that the Board of Education is having everything else in our district upgraded, updated and improved -- yet the biggest investment should be in the people educating the children of the community.

On a recent Wednesday, a fellow teacher and I were walking to our cars and in a socially distanced manner were talking about the next day. A community member who was helping with serving the food walked up to us and started thanking us:  
"You teachers are heroes; thank you for what you do for the kids."

My colleague and I were so moved by his kind words. It was appeared to us his children do not attend our public schools, but he felt the need to say thank you anyway.

To him and to you all -- Happy Thanksgiving!

Katerina Brinton  
ESL/ENL Teacher  
Lawrence Middle School

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As I reflect on this year, I have so many mixed emotions. It has been a year of wonderful highs and painful lows. There has been jubilation and heartache, but I'm thankful that Dr. Pedersen reminded me to count my blessings.

To begin, I am thankful for my amazing husband who takes care of us, makes us laugh, and places us above all else; my wonderful daughters who bring me pride and joy every day; my parents and in-laws, my sister, my brother-in-law, and my nephew who fill my life with happiness; and my furry bunnies who bring comfort to every day.

Next, I am thankful that my daughter has found love with a wonderful young man and that we get to plan a beautiful wedding. I am also thankful for my friends who bring laughter and insanity to my life, even if it is from a far these days.

Lastly, I am so very thankful to work in Lawrence, a place that welcomed me 28 years ago and made me feel like I had come home. I am thankful for all of the administrators, custodians, teachers, teacher aides, the technology crew, the nurses, and staff that have become a second family to me. For 28 years, LMS has been my home away from home, and I am thankful to be a teacher of the thousands of students that have also become my family over the years.

Although we have been without a contract for 10 long years, we have never strayed from what



is most important: our students. In fact, our teachers have shown true grit through trying times and difficult circumstances. We never give up, and we never forget that at our students are our number one priority.

I hope now is the time that we are recognized for our dedication by coming to terms for a good and fair contract.

Happy Thanksgiving to you all; be safe and be well.

Lisa King  
English Teacher  
Lawrence Middle School

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## Lawrence Elementary School

As I prepare for the week with many Thanksgiving themed activities, I wanted to share what I am most thankful for. I am mindful and grateful for all of life's opportunities I have been afforded. One of those opportunities led me to Lawrence when I accepted a teaching position 18 years ago. The gratification of developing relationships with some of our most challenging learners has been both immeasurable and fulfilling. For 10 of the 18 years at Lawrence, I have worked without a contract. It is disheartening and frustrating not to be recognized for the outstanding work that takes place by our dedicated faculty. I hope to be able to show our community that with all the chaos and division in our country today, our community can work together to find a resolution for a fair and well-deserved contract. Wishing everyone a very happy and healthy Thanksgiving!

Sharon Mor  
4<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher  
Lawrence Elementary School

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What a year this has been. As Thanksgiving approaches, I want to reflect on the things I am truly grateful for.

I am thankful for my family. My husband and my children make life fun, crazy, and wonderful. I wouldn't want it any other way.

I am grateful for my home. I am so lucky to live in the beautiful community of Long Beach. How fortunate I feel that during the pandemic, I was able to mentally escape with walks and bike rides on the boardwalk.

I am truly thankful for my health. I am 46 years old. My mother was diagnosed with cancer at the same age and passed two years later. I never take my health for granted. Money means nothing if you don't have your health.

I am so grateful for my friends, both in the workplace and out. I am surrounded by such kindness, humor and support. I couldn't get through the work day without the support of my colleagues.

I am grateful for the administrators that genuinely support us at LES... Rina, Jackie, and Gilynn. There is never a problem they can't handle. In these turbulent times, it means so much that we feel supported. They don't just say they are grateful for the teachers; they show it in many ways with their actions.

I am grateful for my sweet students and their wonderful families. It is amazing how we can still feel a very strong connection to all of the students, even if we have never met them in person. When I spoke to the families during report card conferences, so many of them said they appreciated all the work we were doing. They said they could never have the patience that we have. They were truly grateful for us. It's too bad the Board of Education does not show the same sort of gratitude towards us.

I am grateful for the postal service. I am hopeful that our Chromeboxes and cameras will arrive shortly.

I mourn the death of a Lawrence that once was. I am a teacher here for 25 years. When I first started here, everyone said I hit jackpot. I was right out of Queens College and offered a job in first grade. The professors said it would never happen. They told us the graduates to work in NYC and get experience before attempting to apply to Long Island. I felt like the luckiest person.

I have watched several schools close, great teachers leave, and families flee. It is loud and clear that the Board does not care about saving Lawrence. Why would they? They are not stakeholders, merely observers. I am grateful and hopeful for many things in my life. A new contract is not one of them. 10 years is way too long to go without a contract. At least there are other people in our lives who ARE grateful for us.

We are teachers. We did not go into this profession ever expecting to be rich. I love what I do and I still love the kids. They are the reason to get up in the morning.

I wish everyone a holiday season filled with love and laughter.

Patricia Egan  
6<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher  
Lawrence Elementary School

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While spending the past several days teaching the students in my class about gratitude during this Thanksgiving season and after reading Dr. Pedersen's email on the 7 Days of Gratitude it made me pause to think about the things that I am thankful for and there are so many. I am thankful for my incredible family, my wonderful friends and all of my supportive colleagues that encourage me daily. I am beyond thankful for the administration at LES, Rina Beach, Jackie Beckmann and Gilynn Cromartie, who always go above and beyond to support the teachers and help us be the best we can be daily. They lift us up and give us the strength to carry on during these very difficult and unprecedented times. These are just some of the things I can say I am thankful for each and every day.

With that being said, I think about what I wish I could be thankful for. I have been working for the Lawrence School District for 29 years. During this time, I have dedicated my professional life to the amazing students of the district, always going above and beyond to meet their needs as well as supporting and helping families in the district in any way I can. In the 29 years, 10 of them, almost 1/3 of my time at Lawrence, teachers have been working without a contract. This is incomprehensible to me and so many others in the field of education. Don't tell me you appreciate me, show me you appreciate me with a contract that I and all the teachers in Lawrence have earned and deserve. My hope is one day I can open up a school email that says "Congratulations to the HARDWORKING TEACHERS of the Lawrence School District on the approval of their new, well deserved contract by the Board of Education". That is something my family and I would be beyond thankful for.



I wish everyone a happy, restful and healthy Thanksgiving

Christina Foster  
5th Grade Teacher  
Lawrence Elementary School

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## **Thankful**

I am a teacher. My choice of profession has offered me wonderful opportunities and experiences for which I am forever grateful.

This past year has been unprecedented, frightening and disconcerting. It has also taught me what is truly important.

I am grateful for my husband, Joe, and my two children, Joey & Juliana. They are absolutely everything to me. It is because of their love and support that everything and anything is possible. I always know that with my family by my side, no dream is too big. I am grateful for the opportunities, the life and the education that we can give them. I am grateful that I can keep them safe and healthy by providing them with a strong home and the security of health insurance.

I am thankful that I was raised by parents who devoted their lives to being teachers. They came from families who immigrated here and understood that a good education was the key to achieving the American dream.

This is my 25th year as a teacher and my 21st year in Lawrence. I could fill a book with all of the stories of my students. Their experiences are most times unimaginable. For their undeniable spirit, I am grateful. And, yet, they continue to show resilience, strength and adaptability with each new challenge that comes their way.

Do you know why? Because a teacher has made a connection with them and earned the trust of their families.

I am grateful and honored to work with excellent and talented teachers. We have shared our lives making our schools a special place and a safe haven for our students.

This past year showed the ultimate dedication of the Lawrence teachers. We were asked to reverse engineer education and recreate it in a way that our students would still grow and learn. And, as dedicated and loving teachers, we figured it out for our students.

I want to pause here for a moment. What did that really mean? What was actually asked of us? It meant thousands of hours researching technological possibilities, learning from colleagues, supporting our colleagues, working out the strategic planning, and then the process of reimagining education on a digital level.

And, then, we did what we dedicated our lives to do, we taught. We taught our students how to survive in this new world so that they could continue grow and learn and realize their potential.

I am always grateful to the amazing people who support my work. Dr. Ann Pedersen, Rina Beach, Jackie Beckman and Gilynn Cromartie, thank you for everything you do to support us and our students at LES. Minnie Napolitano and Michelle Paolantonio, thank you for the many roles that you take on to make everything run smoothly. I am grateful on a daily basis to Nicole Quinn, Mike Walsh, Rob Weibke, Anton and Alex. There is nothing that we have asked of you that you couldn't fix or work out. To Alfredo Vega and his amazing team, thank you for all that you do for us. A special thank you to the cafeteria staff who make sure that our students are fed and loved. Finally, thank you to our Security Staff and Nurses and Teacher's Aides. I am aware and grateful for the many and varied roles that you perform each day to keep both the students and the teachers safe.

In closing, thank you for the opportunity to express my gratitude. Being grateful is a conscious choice that I choose to make each day. It is my hope that this will be the year that we will receive that support in the form of a contract that recognizes and values our dedication to the students of Lawrence.

Wishing a beautiful Thanksgiving to all.  
Sincerely,  
Jennifer Talenti  
ENL Teacher, Lawrence Elementary School

## Lawrence Primary School

As the holiday season approaches, I am reminded of everything I am grateful for. After seeing the seven days of gratitude email, it encouraged me to examine the many reasons to be thankful this year.

I am thankful for my family. My husband and my children who light up my life and make me proud every day. My mom who continues to be my role model. I am thankful for the amazing people I am lucky to have worked with and the special friendships I have formed working in Lawrence. I am grateful for the support of my administrators who helped me continue to grow as an educator all these years. The support given by Kirsten to transition us to this technology driven instruction. I am thankful to have been given the opportunity to make a difference in children's lives. I am thankful for the support of our parents and their demonstration of appreciation. Their kind words during a google meet, their words of thank you at parent teacher conferences.

I have worked for Lawrence Public Schools for the last 34 years. I am a product of this school system. It has been a part of my life since 1975.

It is with heavy heart that I can say how difficult and disappointing working without a contract the last ten years has been for me. I have dedicated my life to Lawrence and wish I could say that the Lawrence Board of Education is showing the hardworking teachers how valued they are. I wish I could say that moving forward towards a contract look imminent. I wish I could say better and more secure times are ahead. I wish I could say I felt confident about my financial situation. I remain hopeful that soon these wishes come to fruition to reinforce stability to our teachers. This is what the dedicated professionals of Lawrence deserve. Wishing everyone a happy and healthy Thanksgiving.

Be Well,

Lisa Scelfo  
3rd Grade Teacher  
Lawrence Primary School

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As Thanksgiving 2020 approaches I find myself thinking a great deal about the things I am grateful for. A loving, supportive family, terrific friends, good health, a job that I love and colleagues that, through the years, have provided support, strength and friendship. These are the big things.

But somehow, in the year 2020, it is perhaps the little, things that I have become most noticeable to me. You all know what they are...the sink, void of dirty dishes, that greets you at the end of a long, Internet-less day at work, pulling into the Costco parking lot and noticing that there isn't a line to wait on to enter- and if you are really lucky, paper goods on the shelves when you *do* enter, the team of administrators and tech guys that show up to your room when you are having difficulty or the sweet voice coming through your Chromebook, during a

Google Meet, to ask for permission to use the bathroom. (Yes, 7 and 8 year olds really do that!) So many little things to be grateful for.

I have been blessed with a 30+ year career in Lawrence. Each and every day I am witness to teachers, administrators and staff going above and beyond to meet the needs of each and every teacher, student and family in the district. To borrow a thought from Mother Theresa, "...Do small things with great love." This, is what we all do.

Although many things in Lawrence have changed through the years, there is one thing has remained constant - we continue to do small things with great love for the students and members of the community we were called to serve.

As we enter into the 2020 holiday season, I hope and pray for just one more small thing, to have the opportunity to work under a new and fair contract. A decade is just too long...

Wishing all of you a happy Thanksgiving!

Linda Rasmussen ☺  
3rd Grade Teacher  
Lawrence Primary School

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~THANKSGIVING WEEK~

I'd like to take a moment to express my sincere gratitude as we head into this holiday week.

I am so grateful for my health, my family, and my friends. Life is so much sweeter because of all of them!

I am so grateful to work alongside some of the best educators out there. I have the utmost respect for my colleagues; especially now during these uncertain, challenging times. These educators continue to bring new meaning to the phrase "above and beyond" and I'm proud to call them my friends.

I am so grateful to work with my students and families and watch them all rise to the occasion this year. I am impressed by them each and every day! I am also grateful and blessed to work on grade level with talented teachers. To my grade one colleagues, I am proud to be a member of our first-grade team!

I am so grateful to be working under a new principal who works tirelessly to make sure her staff and students are safe and sound during these trying times. As a senior building representative in the building, Kristen is a great team player and communicator and together, we easily solve problems for the betterment of all who work and learn at Lawrence Primary School. Thank you, Kristen.

I am so grateful to have worked alongside head custodian, Billy Mahr throughout my career. He takes great pride in caring for our schools. I am grateful to all the custodians who are working so hard to keep our rooms clean this school year. Thank you.

I am so grateful for my two secretaries, Sabrina and Nere, who do so much more than answer telephones. They are so quick to lend a helping hand and will even go so far as to help trouble shoot technology problems when they can! Thank you both!

I am so grateful for our school nurse and our mental health professionals. Thank you for the work you do each day for the students as well as the staff. We need you now more than ever.

I am so grateful for the technology team and all the efforts they have made on a daily basis to help us with the nonstop tech issues! Anton comes to my room daily, ready to assist in any way that he can. Nicole Quinn is always so fast to respond to my never-ending emails, so for this, I am grateful.

I am so grateful for Dr. Phyllis Harrington, Superintendent of Oceanside Public Schools. She was my first principal in Lawrence. She hired me and tenured me 27 years ago! I'm grateful she did because I have spent my years in Lawrence teaching with the best of the best! I have learned from the best and have made the very best of friends all in one. I owe Dr. Harrington a debt of gratitude as I reflect this week on all of my blessings.

I am also grateful to be a senior building representative for the LTA. It has been so uplifting to work alongside union president, Lori Skonberg as I watch her and the rest of the officers and Exec Board members represent, defend, and protect the outstanding members of the LTA. Together, we would all be eternally grateful for a fair and renewed contract. Ten years is just a few years too long to work under an expired contract. The teachers in the Lawrence Public Schools deserve this now more than ever! It would be wonderful for the BOE to show them their appreciation for their endless hours of hard work during a pandemic.

Thank you, Lawrence Public Schools for allowing me to teach and mold young minds for the last 27 years. It is truly the greatest, most rewarding profession. . . even more so now during these unprecedented times.

Be safe, be well, be healthy, be GRATEFUL.

Happy Thanksgiving!

Jennifer Arleo  
First Grade Teacher  
Lawrence Primary School

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The challenges of 2020 have made many of us more cognizant of the numerous things for which we are thankful.

I am thankful for my incredible son, who inspires me every day with his resilience, kindness, empathy and thirst for life, knowledge and adventure.

I am thankful for the love, support, and health of my extended family who mean the world to me.

I am thankful for my loving and supportive life-long friends who are an integral part of my life.

I am thankful for my career and the Lawrence Family. The camaraderie of the staff here is exceptional! The teachers, aides, administrators, secretaries, custodians, nurses, and all other support staff are exemplary. I have been fortunate to have worked with amazing students and families throughout my teaching career. They continue to inspire me to be a dedicated teacher.

I have been a teacher in the Lawrence School District for 27 years, I worked as an instructional aide in Lawrence for two years, and I am a graduate of the Lawrence School District. Therefore, Lawrence has been an integral part of my entire life. I am thankful for the opportunities that Lawrence has provided. For the past decade, I, along with my professional colleagues have continued to work diligently, going above and beyond to ensure that our students receive the best education despite our working without a contract. I would be thankful if the BOE would demonstrate their appreciation of us hardworking professionals and would, with good faith, negotiate a fair contract.

Wishing everyone a happy and healthy Thanksgiving!

Amy Merritt  
1st Grade Teacher  
Lawrence Primary School

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## [#4 School](#)

Reading everyone's warm and heartfelt emails made me want to reflect. I feel like I have been part of the Lawrence family my entire life. My heart is in Lawrence.

I started my learning career as a Pre-kindergarten student at Number Four, back in the day! Then fast forward a lot of years and I became fortunate to start my teaching career at Number Four School. It was a time when we had a *great* and fair contract and truly felt respected and appreciated, a time when I was amongst *great* people and had the opportunity to form ever lasting friendships, and a time where *great* things were happening in all of our amazing and unique buildings.



Unfortunately, for the last 10 years, only two of those three greats still exist. Great teachers and great things happening in our buildings.

It's been 24 years since I started my teaching career and now I'm back at #4 for the third time. Third time is a charm.

I am so fortunate and thankful to work with a wonderful and warm administrator, who can handle and fix any problem. Lisa Tariq, welcomed me and made me feel at home the second I walked into the building in September.

I don't know where she finds the extra hours in each day to accomplish what she does. She truly is a blessing and an asset to Lawrence.

Amongst all the hardships in the world today, I come to work with such positivity and gratefulness that I get to work with such professional and wonderful colleagues.

I am thankful to the IT team who work tirelessly to help us in every possible way.

I am thankful to the custodial staff, especially Anthony and Dave who have helped me transition from LES to Number 4, so smoothly and efficiently.

My innocent and happy students put a permanent smile on my face and make me a kinder and gentler person everyday.

I'm fortunate to have a supportive husband and two beautiful children.

And for all these reasons, I am truly thankful.

I wish everyone in my Lawrence family a happy and healthy Thanksgiving. I continue to look forward to the day that we get that fair contract, we have earned this past year and deserve after 10 professional years.

How good would it feel to have pension security, to be validated, to be appreciated, and to know that our Board appreciates our commitment to education and the community we serve.

Caterina Schneider  
Kindergarten Teacher  
#4 School

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This year has given me more time to reflect than I have ever had. Through all of this madness I have plenty to be thankful for. The health of my family and my granddaughter's smile tops the list. My teaching career is also such a major part of my life. I am days away from my 50th birthday and I have spent the last 25 years in Lawrence. With pride, I can say that I have spent half of my life, educating children, wiping tears, giving hugs, and reassuring parents. I've done all of this as part of an elite group of educators who are the most dedicated, loving people that

I've ever worked with. I've learned so much from so many of you. That is why I find it so disheartening that we have been working without a new contract for the last decade. I want all of my colleagues to know how much I respect you and am thankful for you.

***Have a happy healthy holiday season.***

*Aliesia Glenn*

ECC @ #4 School  
Kindergarten Teacher

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This Thanksgiving I am grateful for a healthy and loving family. I am thankful to all the healthcare workers, some of whom I am friends with, who continue to help others despite the risks. I am thankful that I was lucky enough to stay home with my family during the pandemic and had the ability to spend time with my husband and children.

I began working in Lawrence 14 years ago. I am thankful to come to work every day happy and excited because of the wonderful people I work with. I have made many close friendships that are irreplaceable. I am thankful to have had administrators that have taught me so much and supported me throughout my career. I am thankful to the custodians and cleaners that help keep our building clean and safe. I am thankful for the secretaries, support staff, aides and nurses who have taught me a lot about teaching that I didn't learn in college.

This year I am especially thankful for our students and their caretakers. I am lucky enough to teach our littlest learners who have now learned to "sanitize" before you come in, "fix your mask" and "enter your student ID number". For this I am thankful that they have worked so hard because they love school and I love teaching them.

I've been working in Lawrence for 14 years, 10 years without a contract. I am hoping next Thanksgiving I can say I am thankful for a new one.

Wishing all of you a healthy and happy holiday season!

Jessica Roschnotti  
Kindergarten Teacher  
#4 School

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So many beautiful messages of love and gratitude have been written by our colleagues in the season of giving THANKS and students across Lawrence's instructional areas have also expressed their gratitude in tasks beginning last week, sparked by our leaders with the sentiment to be mindful and thoughtful. May I take a moment to share my reflections for this year and my gratitude.

2020 is a memorable year shared with many challenges and a year that has brought to light many powerful messages that I tried to impart onto my own children.

- 1# Our health is paramount
- 2# The truth matters
- & #3 Stand up to support a group of people that are not treated fairly; no matter how hard it may seem to elicit change.
- My children fill me with gratitude. I am grateful for their growth and development and for the maturity they demonstrated during this monumental moment. They became independent and adjusted as their mom became their PM teacher because they understood they had to share their teacher/mom in the AM with their other brothers/sisters, mom's students.
- I am also grateful to my husband, who during my 15 years at Lawrence (5 years of which I spent on maternity leave and 10 years spent without a renewed contract) will text uplifting messages throughout the day to not only me but to lifelong friends/ colleagues because he knows in Lawrence we all need to laugh and smile to get through our day sometimes.
- I am thankful for the health of my 92-year-old grandmother and my parents, both educators who I continue to learn from and hope to make proud each and every day.
- On a daily basis, I am extremely grateful to my assistant teaching aide, Joanne Curcio, who contributes endlessly to our classroom success despite making a fraction of what she deserves.
- In close and a final pause of gratitude, I am grateful for the glimmer you see in a 5-year-old student's eye when they realize they can read for the first time. It's remarkable and rewarding and far outweighs what any contract can promise monetarily.
- However, as our pensions do not reach their projected value and our stability/future is threatened, I can only hope the BOE hears our pleas and reads our letters of love to Lawrence...may the love spark a notion to negotiate a fair contract for a group of elite educators I'm proud to call colleagues.

With love, gratitude and positivity,

Anastasia Gordon  
Kindergarten Special Education teacher  
#4 School