

# New Bedford Educators Vote “No Confidence” in Superintendent Durkin



Lou St. John, president of  
the New Bedford Educators  
Association

Members of the New Bedford Educators Association have voted overwhelmingly in favor of a motion expressing “no confidence” in the leadership of School Superintendent Pia Durkin. Durkin’s tenure as superintendent since last July has been marred by controversy, most recently when she sought to discipline teacher Joanne Maura after a video of a student throwing a chair at Maura went viral.

“New Bedford educators believe that Dr. Durkin has created a climate of fear and a lack of trust that aren’t good for teachers or students,” said Lou St. John, president of the New Bedford Educators Association. “We are urging her to resign so that a new superintendent can be appointed who is willing and able to work collaboratively with staff and members of the community to make our schools great places to teach and learn.”

The no confidence vote was proposed by Maura at a general membership meeting held Friday afternoon, May 2, at the Keith Middle School. All but one of the members present voted in favor of the motion. Since many members were not able to make it to the meeting, a motion was adopted to extend the voting by secret ballot at the NBEA office through Wednesday afternoon.

St. John said that the extended voting mirrored the vote at the Friday meeting, with all but 5 of those casting ballots supporting the “no confidence” motion.

St. John had convened the general membership meeting to seek feedback from members about whether concerns they had raised in a District Climate Task Force had been addressed. At that point, Maura went to the microphone and said:

“I would like to make a motion that the membership take a vote of no confidence in Superintendent Durkin for the following reasons:

- She has created a climate of fear within our schools.
- Her policies, methods and tactics are harming our students.
- Her policies created the conditions that have resulted in the increase of violence in our schools.
- Her actions and inactions are harming the reputation of our schools and they are scaring parents and students away from our district.
- Her actions do not support our educators and students.
- She micromanages every aspect of our jobs.
- She violates our contract and allows other administrators to do the same with impunity.
- She has inserted herself into every level of the grievance process and denies our grievances.
- She has fired, suspended and disciplined educators without just cause.
- She has allowed the educator evaluation tool to be used

as a weapon against our educators.

- Her actions have created emotional distress among our members, which has resulted in many of our members seeking medical and psychological assistance.
- Because of her actions, many of our members have resigned or retired or are in the process of doing so.”

The members present discussed the motion and described their own experiences.

St. John said that members are concerned about staff and student safety as a result of policies to reduce student suspensions without implementing supports for dealing with behavior issues. A prime example was that Durkin threatened Maura with disciplinary action after the video showing a student throwing a chair at her went public.

“Most of our students are wonderful,” St. John said. “But we do have some who act out and can pose a danger to both teachers and other students. We do not feel that the administration has taken this concern seriously and guaranteed us all a safe, supportive and productive work environment.”

St. John said many educators believe that the evaluation system is being misused. He said he is hearing from more and more teachers who formerly had excellent evaluations but who are now receiving negative evaluations for no legitimate reason.

He added that Durkin’s student test-score goals are “laudable” but not achievable. He called the goals “a recipe for failure that does nothing to actually help students reach their potential in our schools.

“Teachers in New Bedford do not feel supported by the superintendent,” St. John concluded. “She has created a climate of fear that is not healthy for staff. And if it’s not good for staff, it’s not good for the students.”