

Dist. 15 starts talking strike

Teachers frustrated on progress of talks

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Saying no progress is being made in negotiations over a new contract, union officials in Palatine Township Elementary District 15 said they are now preparing for the worst.

Lisa Nuss, chief negotiator for the Classroom Teachers' Council, the union that represents the 772 District 15 teachers and certified staff, said no significant progress has been made since federal mediation began late last month and that she will ask the union membership next week to authorize a possible strike.

"We are very disappointed," Nuss said. "We had hoped the (school) board would have worked more in cooperation with us."

At a meeting scheduled for next Monday, Nuss said the union will vote on whether to file the proper paperwork with the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Board giving them the option to strike.

If the union gives the go-ahead, a 10-day notice to strike will be filed, which gives the union the option of striking anytime after those 10 days have expired.

But Nuss emphasized the union has no plans at this time of walking off the job and that all this move does is gives them the option of going on strike if a new deal isn't reached.

"At this point we are not setting a strike date," Nuss said.

District 15 Superintendent Robert McKanna said he was disappointed the union felt negotiations weren't moving forward, but he said he would know more about the decision after another bargaining session with the union scheduled to go into the night Monday.

Before Monday night's negotiations, McKanna said an emergency board meeting was held to update each member on the status of the negotiations.

One of the deciding factors in moving forward with a possible strike vote came Friday, Nuss said, when the district informed the teachers they would not be getting their annual salary increases as scheduled next week while negotiations continue.

Traditionally, the district's annual salary adjustments are reflected in the first payroll of the

academic year, which occurs Friday.

School board President Nancy Lee Carlson said once a new contract has been obtained, the new compensation structure will be implemented to ensure all teachers and certified staff receive their full salary increase based on the new terms.

In the past, Nuss said district practice has been to place teachers on the next level for years of service as well as for any post-graduate work completed if a school year is started without a new contract.

Nuss said she believes the move to freeze salaries violates state labor law and that the union will be filing an unfair labor practice complaint over the issue.

McKanna said the union was clearly notified in January that the district would not extend the terms of the contract past the Aug. 31 expiration date.

"They were told at that time that there was no obligation to do so," McKanna said of placing teachers on the next pay level. "We are just going to keep people where they are and the raises will be there when the contract is settled."

Since last fall, the negotiating teams have met more than 25 times for a total of more than 125 hours.

While the two sides have reached agreement in some areas, issues still remaining to be settled include salaries and health benefits.

District 15 serves nearly 13,000 children from Arlington Heights, Hoffman Estates, Inverness, Palatine, Rolling Meadows, South Barrington and Schaumburg.

Updates from the union>