

Dist. 15 teachers open door to strike

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After working without a contract for nearly three weeks, teachers in Palatine Township Elementary District 15 took the first step Monday toward walking off the job.

During a meeting of the union's general membership, the teachers voted overwhelmingly to move forward with a possible strike — but one does not appear to be imminent.

Lisa Nuss, chief negotiator for the Classroom Teacher's Council, the union that represents the nearly 800 District 15 teachers and certified staff, said of the 777 votes cast Monday, 772 of those voted to file the proper paperwork with the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Board, giving the union the option to strike.

That does not mean the teachers can immediately begin striking, however.

Once the paper is filed, the union must wait 10 days before walking off the job.

"We will now talk about a decision on when we will file," Nuss said. "A decision on that has not been made yet."

Nuss reiterated that a strike date has not been set and the union still plans on negotiating.

"We really hope the next step is a contract settlement, not a strike," Nuss said. "We are hoping the board is willing to work with us and move this to a successful conclusion."

Superintendent Robert McKanna said he was not surprised by Monday's vote but hoped the upcoming bargaining session the two sides have scheduled for Tuesday night would produce some progress.

"I am still optimistic we can get things accomplished," McKanna said.

But knowing a strike is now possible, McKanna said the district has been contacting all of the licensed day-care facilitators in the area to see what their availability is so they can let parents know before any possible work stoppage.

"We are going to be pro-active on this," McKanna said.

The teachers have been working without a contract since the previous one expired Aug. 31.

Since last fall, the two sides have met more than 25 times, including the last five with a federal mediator.

Among the issues still needing to be negotiated are salaries and health care benefits.

The district is currently offering a 9.25 percent salary increase to be spread out over the next three years, as well as additional increases related to retirement incentives, extra-curricular stipends and tuition reimbursement.

Despite the district's decision to make their offer public, Nuss said the teachers still will not discuss the details of the bargaining sessions.

"We are not going to negotiate in the public and in the press," Nuss said.

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

For updates on the negotiations, parents and residents can visit both the district's Web site www.ccsd15.net and the teacher's union Web site at www.ctteachers.com.