

Progress reported as talks continue

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By **MARIO BARTOLETTI** Staff Writer

Palatine Countryside

District and union negotiators have made some progress in Elementary School District 15 teacher contract negotiations.

The two groups met last week and are scheduled to meet again today (Thursday) and Oct. 13.

"We're hoping it will not be an unlucky Friday the 13th," Superintendent Robert McKanna said. "We've made some progress and we have some tentative agreements."

Chief union negotiator Lisa Nuss said there are five tentative agreements, which both groups have signed off on.

"Which leaves more of the major financial aspects yet to be decided," she said. "We're still looking at salary, insurance, retirement, class size, planning time, duration of the contract and the school calendar."

Nuss said the district has not given the union a salary schedule.

"Our last proposal had salary schedules attached," she said. "We want to compare like numbers."

The union has not yet released information concerning its proposal.

The board has offered about a 3 percent salary increase, which amounts to almost \$5 million spread over three years (including step increases for experience, but not lane increases for additional schooling).

McKanna said the public doesn't see those kinds of raises.

"In the past few years, we've been paying more for teachers here than in other districts," McKanna said. "If the comparisons with Schaumburg (District 54) are accurate, we would save \$3 to 5 million if we paid our teachers what they are paying."

Nuss disputed that estimate.

"We work a longer year than other districts, and we've looked at a number of districts in the Chicago suburbs, and it's hard to find one that compares to us," she said.

Nuss said in terms of population, size and quality, District 15 is unique.

"We're the only district in Illinois and one of only four in the nation to have won the Baldrige (National Quality) Award," she said. "We have many Blue Ribbon schools, national board-certified teachers, and our test scores are outstanding."

She also said teachers' employment differs from business.

"Bonuses, severance packages, stock options don't exist in teaching," she said.

PTA's request

Northwest Suburban Council PTA President Elizabeth Bratkiv expressed concern whether parents in the district would be given some lead time in case of a strike.

"We'd like a 24- to 36-hour notice to parents prior to striking," Bratkiv said Tuesday.

Nuss said any decision was still premature.

"Both setting the date and time frame have not been discussed yet. We're hoping though the bargain process we're not ultimately faced with that decision," Nuss said.

Bratkiv also offered to have the PTA sponsor a public meeting where both sides would present information and district residents could dialogue with them.

"The PTA is neutral on the negotiations," she said. "Everyone wants what's best for both sides in this."

