

## Dist. 15 contract details kept quiet

**Both sides waiting until all members agree to new terms**

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Palatine Township Elementary District 15 officials and teachers union representatives are keeping mum on the details of a tentative contract agreement struck late Sunday night after two marathon bargaining sessions this weekend.

Officials said negotiations — which lasted for 11 hours on both Saturday and Sunday — centered on teacher salaries, health insurance and retirement benefits. They said they wouldn't get more specific until the agreement is made official.

"Our members need to see it first, and then they'll vote on whether to ratify it," said Lisa Nuss, chief negotiator for the Classroom Teachers Council, which represents District 15's 772 teachers. "Until then we can't talk about it."

That vote could come as early as Monday. The school board also needs to approve the contract, which could happen at the Oct. 25 board meeting.

District 15 teachers have been working without a contract since August, a "contract hiatus," according to Nuss, that hadn't occurred since the 1980s.

"We've gone over 20 years without having to begin a school year without a contract," Nuss said. "This is definitely not common."

Tensions had been rising since mid-June when a mediator was called in, then kicked into high gear after the school board announced a salary freeze in September. That led teachers to vote to support a strike.

But it never came to that.

"It took so long because the original contract had been amended so many times that there was a lot of language to review," said District 15 Board President Nancy Carlson. "But we worked amicably together to come up with an agreement and we've done so."

In the latest proposal, the district was offering a 9.5 percent salary increase over three years, as well as additional increases related to years of service, extracurricular stipends and tuition reimbursement.

District officials wanted to maintain current contribution rates for health insurance coverage. They also wanted changes in how much prescription medication teachers would receive for each \$15 co-pay.

The last known proposal also called for a teacher to give advance notice of intent to retire and receive up to three years of 6 percent salary increases.

The union would not release details of what it was proposing.

The agreement has parents of some of the 13,000 elementary-school children in Arlington Heights, Hoffman Estates, Inverness, Rolling Meadows, Schaumburg and South Barrington wondering what toll the concessions will take on the district's financial future.

Sally Kim, a representative of Concerned Parents of District 15, says the members of her group fear teacher benefits might come at the expense of student services or the district's financial health.

"We hope the contract the school board agrees to doesn't require cuts in education spending, increase the district's budget deficit or put the district in a position that requires them to ask the taxpayers for more money in a referendum," Kim said. "We can't imagine the teachers getting what they want without any of those consequences."

Still, both sides Monday afternoon were feeling both a sense of accomplishment and guarded optimism.

"This was not simple," said Superintendent Robert McKanna. "It'd been years since there had been updates to the terms and conditions of employment."

McKanna said the agreement seems likely to be ratified by both sides, probably in the next seven to 10 days.

"You never know, but I would like to think that would be the case."

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