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District 15 teachers OK mediator in talks

New contract unlikely before school starts

By Jamie Francisco
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The teachers union of Palatine-based Community Consolidated School District 15 has reluctantly agreed to the district's push for a federal mediator in the hopes of resuscitating contract talks.

"Our goal is to continue negotiations, and they left us with no alternative," Lisa Nuss, chief negotiator for the Classroom Teachers Council, said Monday. "We need to do what we need to do to get them to come to the table with us."

District officials said it is unlikely that a new contract will be in place before classes start Aug. 23, but it will not affect the school year, said Supt. Robert McKanna. The current contract expires Aug. 31.

"It's going to be pretty tough to have it settled in two weeks," McKanna said. "We'll certainly try."

The Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service has assigned a mediator to assist in negotiations, but dates have not been scheduled, said Dan O'Leary, director of mediation services.

The district proposed mediation May 30, which surprised teachers because they believed it was premature, Nuss said.

In early June the district filed a request with the mediation service but could not proceed without a joint request from the union, which it refused to give.

School board President Nancy Carlson said the mediation decision was not made lightly, but after months of negotiations it became clear a mediator was needed.

"The heart of the [contract] is the economic issues," she said. "We've been unable to come to a successful conclusion to those, and that is why the services of the mediator were requested."

Carlson said she believes mediation is the best chance of securing a fair and equitable contract for all parties.

"There are some differences of opinion; like all negotiation, it takes time and patience," she said. "I think if we are all reasonable, we will be successful in negotiation and have a contract in place."

Bargaining-team members met late last month, but it became apparent at the meeting that the district was unwilling to move forward without a mediator, Nuss said.

"We were very disappointed," Nuss said. "We're actually farther behind than we were on the 30th of May."

McKanna disagreed with the union characterization of the July meeting and said it was a chance to review discussions, considering the time between bargaining sessions.

"We should've been in mediation months ago," McKanna said. "We might've had everything done by now. It's frustrating that the union refused all this time."

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