

## District 15, teachers agree to work with mediator

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Days before state labor officials could have forced mediation, Palatine Township Elementary District 15 and its teachers agreed to revive stalled labor negotiations.

But this time around, it'll be with the help of a federal go-between.

On Friday, negotiators for the district's 772 teachers agreed to meet with a mediator, a move district officials first requested in May. The Classroom Teachers' Council initially rejected the idea, saying they thought talks were advancing toward a resolution.

The request for outside help came a week after an hours-long bargaining session left both sides at a stalemate.

The Illinois Education Labor Relations Board could have forced both sides to the table Monday, 15 days before the start of a new school year.

As it stands, classes in the state's third largest elementary school likely will begin before a new contract is inked, Superintendent Robert McKanna said. This will not disrupt student's education, he noted.

The existing agreement expires Aug. 31.

"The practicality of being done by the first day of school is nil," McKanna said Saturday.

Still, both McKanna and negotiators for the district's teachers said they hope to have a new contract soon.

"This is definitely not a last resort," chief negotiator Lisa Nuff said. "We would like to have a successor contract prior to (Aug. 31), but we are willing to bargain after that."

Some issues remaining on the drawing board include salary and health benefits.

District officials and teachers signed the current contract 10 years ago, but agreed to two extensions. In 2002, they shook hands on a 3.75 percent increase in teachers' base pay for the current school year, but left the agreement's terms in tact.

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