

Dist. 15 parents urge settlement in contract dispute

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With teachers in Palatine Township Elementary District 15 able to go on strike anytime after Monday, hundreds of parents packed Wednesday's school board meeting to express their displeasure over the current contract negotiations, which have been ongoing for the past year.

While some were there to support the teachers and others in the district, all were in agreement that a strike benefits no one.

Speaking on behalf of a community-based group called District 15 Concerned Parents, Brita Higgins urged both sides to come to an agreement before the situation becomes dire.

"We encourage all parties to continue to work together to avoid a strike and to approve a contract that will be fair, equitable and in the best interest of all stakeholders," Higgins said.

Frank Skorski, who moved to the district two years ago specifically because of the schools, said teacher strikes are like a divorce.

"The only ones who are hurt in a divorce are the children," Skorski said. "I don't want to see all that exists in this district destroyed."

Parent Ron Nieberding implored both sides to agree on a reasonable deal.

"My greatest concern is the damage that may be done to the relationships you two have," Nieberding said. "Build on the momentum you have had in the last 24 hours and make sure the students of the district get what they deserve."

After several weeks without reporting any progress, school board President Nancy Lee Carlson said Wednesday that some headway was made during a bargaining session earlier this week.

During those negotiations, the district and union signed tentative agreements on several issues, including teacher and union rights and responsibilities, working conditions, disability and liability insurance, leave of absence, tuition reimbursement and grievance settlements.

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

Major issues still needing to be agreed upon include salaries and health insurance.

Another common sentiment heard from parents Wednesday was that they would like the teachers to be more forthcoming to the public in what they are asking for.

While the district has been very upfront with its offer, the teachers have maintained their stance of not negotiating in public.

Following Wednesday's meeting, Lisa Nuss, chief negotiator for the Classroom Teachers Council, the union that represents the nearly 800 District 15 teachers and certified staff, said despite the plea from parents, at this time they will continue to keep their offer private.

A union decision earlier this month gave teachers the option of striking next week, but Nuss continues to reiterate that no strike date has been set and they plan to continue negotiations.

Besides another negotiation session scheduled for today, the two sides also have bargaining sessions scheduled for Oct. 5 and 13.

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 at www.ccsd15.net and the teachers union Web site at www.ctteachers.com.