

Wood River-Hartford Elementary School District union initiates public posting process in bargaining

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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On Tuesday, Nov. 17, 2015, the **Wood River-Hartford Elementary School District #15** informed the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Board and the Wood River Education Association, IEA-NEA that it was initiating the public posting process whereby both parties are mandated by state statute to post its most recent bargaining proposal, including the cost for its proposal.

Both the WREA and the District must submit their proposals within seven days of the notification date to the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Board (IELRB). Upon

receipt of the proposals, the IELRB has seven (7) days in which to post the proposals on its Internet website. Both parties have been bargaining since June, 2015 and the WREA membership have been working without a contract since August, 2015.

Sheryl Ross, co-president of the WREA, said her group is hopeful a fair and equitable settlement will be soon reached.

“We now have a date on Dec. 14th to meet with the district and a mediator,” she said. “We have been working without a contract since August and everybody is still doing what they are told and doing our part. We are hoping to get something settled now. That is my hope.”

Ross stressed the two factions are not far apart, she said she thinks it is just a difference of philosophy so to speak.

“The district hasn’t really told us what they are unhappy about in the contract,” she said. “They didn’t say why they were rejecting the contract the last time. We have made two counter offers, but it is hard to make a counter offer if we don’t know what they are unhappy about.”

Both parties have had one mediation session with the support of a federal mediator; however, a planned second mediation session was canceled at the last moment when the mediator was unavailable. The Association had indicated it would be willing to meet with the school board’s bargaining team without the mediator being present; however, the Board indicated that it would not meet with the WREA negotiations team without the mediator even though there are no regulations prohibiting such a meeting.

The Association is seeking a fair and equitable salary settlement whereby all members within the bargaining unit will receive some form of salary increase, **Ric Stephenson** of Region 6 of the Illinois Education Association, said.

“Of the 94 bargaining unit members, certified and non-certified, 24 senior employees will have moved off of the salary schedule over the next two years,” Stephenson said. “The District is denying the most experienced employees any form of salary increase even though it has a Working Cash Fund balance of \$2 million dollars and has consistently held the state’s highest financial rating – Recognition.”

To date, WREA members have refrained from taking a strike vote so as to demonstrate their desire to conclude negotiations on a positive note,” Stephenson added.

“It was disappointing to the members when the Board canceled the last bargaining session,” he said. “The next bargaining session with the mediator is on December 14, 2015.”