

Alton School District and Alton Education Association still working toward contract

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON – Members of the Alton Education Association (employee union/collective bargaining unit) voted to reject the Alton School District Board of Education's final offer during a membership meeting on Monday evening.

In addition to rejecting the proposed contract, Alton Education Association members also voted to approve issuing an intent to strike. The district employs over 830 staff members.

Alton School District Superintendent Mark Cappel made a statement after the vote that Alton teachers and staff are outstanding and valued but the State of Illinois' financial woes have left the district financially crippled by making late payments, even no payments in some cases, with funding that is still due to Alton schools. He said the dilemma with the state compounds the district board's opportunities in negotiations.

"There is no question that our board of education believes our teachers and staff deserve as much money as we can possibly give them and even more," the superintendent said. "We wish it could be more because they certainly deserve it. However, we had to borrow \$10 million in working cash bonds just to make payroll and keep our doors open this school year. That is money that has to be paid back and provided by taxpayers. Therefore, we are limited in what we can offer teachers and we worked at great lengths to derive enough cost reductions to even provide our current offer."

The latest offer to the membership is the highest salary increase the district has offered in comparison to the three previously-approved contracts. The board's salary offer included the following proposed increases:

Teachers/Certified Staff:

2017-18

\$1,296 Increase (Step Movement + \$100 to each salary cell)

100% Employer-Paid Health, Dental and Life Insurance Continued

2018-19

\$1,296 Increase (Step Movement + \$100 to each salary cell)

100% Employer-Paid Health, Dental and Life Insurance Continued

Educational Support Staff/Non-Certified

2017-18

Increase of 35 cents per hour

100% Employer-Paid Health, Dental and Life Insurance Continued

2018-19

Increase of 35 cents per hour

100% Employer-Paid Health, Dental and Life Insurance Continued

The Alton School District is a priority school district for the new evidenced-based funding formula and considered to be underfunded by the state. However, while the state's new evidenced-based funding formula will eventually generate an additional \$900,000 in revenue, Alton's nearly \$1.3 million loss in Corporate Personal Property Replacement Tax (CPPRT) revenue will more than wash away that increase, Cappel said.

However, Cappel remains hopeful that an agreement can be reached prior to a strike.

"We hope to return very soon to the bargaining table in an effort to reach an agreement with the AEA," he said. "The one priority that both sides have in common is our commitment to our students and because of that, we will certainly do everything within our ability to come to a mutual agreement."