

Chapman: 'Alton is a great district,' they just need to pay their teachers more'

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - After voting overwhelmingly against a recent contract from the Alton School District, a coalition of nearly 200 teachers, staff, parents and students hosted "an informational picket in front of the district office on Broadway.

The picket was bringing awareness to the ongoing negotiations between the Alton Education Association and the district before Tuesday night's 7 p.m. board meeting. Professional Negotiations Chair of the Alton Education Association Jason Chapman, who also teaches fifth grade at North Elementary School, said the board needs to prioritize teachers.

"We've been working without a contract since August, and we started negotiations in November," Chapman said. "Two weeks ago, we voted overwhelmingly against a contract and filed an intent to strike."

The daunting thought of a teachers' strike should not be an immediate fear. Chapman said he is optimistic a deal can be reached with the district through negotiations Wednesday night. He said several representatives were going to speak at Tuesday's school board meeting regarding the possible strike as well as what teachers in the district expect.

"I don't think Alton is a bad district at all - especially when it comes to our programs for students with special needs," one picketing teacher said. "Alton is a great district, they just need to pay their teachers more."

That was a sentiment, which seemed to be shared by Chapman. He said teachers have made concessions such as pay freezes and deductions due to state funding issues in the past.

"We've made lots of concessions in the past," he said. "We can't do it anymore. We cut instructional costs, but administrative costs have gone up. We need to get great teachers for our students. We need to make teachers a priority."

Chapman said it is increasingly difficult to recruit and keep teachers within the district, adding Alton is 15th of 16 local districts in terms of teacher pay.

The earliest date for a strike would be mid-April due to what Chapman described as "hoops," including Illinois Labor Board public postings, assembling crisis teams and ensuring the financial well-being of teachers in the event of a strike.

