

# Strike Suspended: Tentative Agreement Reached For Faculty and Staff At Eastern

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CHARLESTON – At a general membership meeting of the EIU University Professionals of Illinois (EIU UPI, IFT Local 4100) this afternoon, members thoroughly discussed the administration's last, best, final offer. Though the offer was not endorsed by the union's bargaining team, members decided to suspend the six-day strike to officially consider the administration's offer. Faculty and staff will return to work at 8 AM Friday morning.

EIU UPI President Jennifer Stringfellow commented on the difficult decision, “We knew this wouldn’t be easy from the start, and we were right. I am heartened by the unified strength and care that our members showed throughout this process, despite the administration's various attempts to derail and delay. We know our cause is just, and we stood up, together, for the entire campus to demand that this administration prioritize our students and the educators and staff who teach and support them.”

“EIU’s administration has demonstrated how they truly feel about the instruction and instructional support at EIU throughout this negotiation process,” Stringfellow continued. “I have found that I’m no longer surprised when I’m disappointed by the administration of this institution. We would never have been on strike if they had bargained more honestly from the beginning. Now, their refusal to bargain terms to end the strike does not give me much confidence in their respect for our profession of educating students. However, this line in the sand that they have drawn is the reality, and we must accept it. We look forward to being back in our classrooms and offices, teaching and supporting our students.”

The bargaining team could not endorse the administration package at the membership meeting because the administration did not offer union members a chance to do work that was missed during the strike. The absence of this provision, which is a common piece of end-of-strike agreements, is what made this choice so difficult for many of us. EIU UPI members came to a decision to move the process toward ratification, knowing that this matter remains to be resolved. The union hopes for a timely resolution of this outstanding issue, so it doesn’t postpone the ratification vote.

“We always act with our students in mind, and we make decisions with transparency and by involving all of our members because we are a democratic organization that is only strengthened by the participation of everyone,” said Lead Negotiator Billy Hung. “I am tremendously proud of our members and so thoroughly grateful to our supportive students and community members. Because of their support we have gained a contract in which working conditions are significantly improved for all our members. The financial offer remains an effective pay cut, but our members knew that we had to consider this package despite the cost to our own financial well-being because we know that improving conditions for our advisors, counselors, and faculty means improving the learning environment for all of our students.”

“We will bring the contract to our members for ratification. We will vote, and we will accept the results,” said Stringfellow. “Because of this process, EIU faculty and staff are unified now more than ever. We will move forward with resolve to continue improving this university for our students and the people who work every day to serve them.”

The full membership will vote to ratify the agreement sometime next week. A date has not yet been set.

“I’m proud of our members for fighting for critical supports that students need to thrive at EIU,” said UPI President John Miller. “And make no mistake, we’ll continue that fight to constantly improve our public institutions of higher education. Our students deserve universities that put their learning first, and investing in faculty and staff who serve them every day is a necessary way to do so. I’m glad for our members at EIU who get to return to their classrooms and offices tomorrow and get back to normal. I can only hope our UPI members at other campuses can say the same soon as well.”

Faculty and staff have been on strike at Chicago State University since April 3, and at Governors State University since April 11. Northeastern Illinois University held a strike vote this week and authorized a strike if no progress can be made with a mediator soon.