

Alton School District and Alton Education Association meet in afternoon to discuss issues

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON – An important meeting between the **Alton School District** and the **Alton Education Association** is set for 4 p.m. today at the high school in an effort to alleviate the possibility of a district-wide strike.

Both sides of the issue agree they hope a compromise can be reached to resolve the situation, but a lot of that depends on what transpires ahead in discussions.

Brenda Powers, a spokesperson for the Alton Education Association said: “It’s a tough situation. We are going to meet again today. By rules of negotiation, we were forced to issue a 10-day notice to strike. It is truly not our intention to leave the students or the classroom, but we cannot continue to be the most underpaid people in education in the

county and lose benefits. The members have taken concessions and reductions in staff. We have lost teachers and done everything we could to help the district, but it is never enough. We are not in a position to do that anymore.”

Alton School District Administrator **Chris Norman** said: “We understand they did reject the boards’ most recent proposal. Certainly the board and administration understand their frustration a lot of us feel in education right now. The union felt it worked three years ago to reduce the salary schedule and did it with the hope and goal for more on a consistent basis, but unfortunately, the economic climate still isn’t showing signs of improving.”

Norman said he doesn’t believe the two sides are ridiculously far apart from each other in what they expect in the outcome of this negotiation.

“We have a couple issues we are trying to work out and get an agreement on,” he said. “We have always had a commitment of resolution and that is still our goal. Based on media reports, Mr. Ric Stephenson (Regional Director for the Illinois Education Association) said he will bring a proposal he think will help. I am cautiously optimistic.”

Norman pointed out that the vote by the Alton Education Association simply authorized their leadership to file the strike intent, but they have not actually set a strike date yet.

“Part of the process change two or three years ago to my understanding is now one side or the other must notify the Illinois Education Labor Relations Board,” said Powers. “The two sides are at an impasse and one last and final offer can be submitted. That is posted on the IELRB’s website for 14 days and that can run concurrently with the 10-day strike notice so that is a three-week process. Even at that point, negotiations can still go on.”

Powers says the process is ongoing and there is more to come in negotiations and discussions, to be included the meeting this afternoon.

“Keeping our benefits is paramount to certified and non-certified staff,” said Powers. “When you get a 95 percent vote to strike, that means a lot of people are unhappy. It is rare to get that kind of strike vote. Financially to certain extent, I always been of the mind we are team and work together, but right now I don’t feel they are honest with us.”

Powers said overall, this is “a tough situation.”

“We have good, sound people who work at a much lower scale than other in their craft and now we are hiring them for 11 months,” she said. “They (the district) don’t want to pay vacation money. It is very scary. It is a real sad time in our district that we have this

going on. My motto has always been 'work together,' but we are not feeling that right now. It is tough when we are building a nice sports complex and our union members have to pay for their own health insurance.”

"We are hoping to come to a better solution that will help the district and help the employees.”