

Ripon Area School District

Press Release
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For Immediate Release

State Mediator Declares Deadlock in Ripon Teachers Negotiations

A state-appointed mediator has verbally informed both the Ripon Board of Education and the Ripon Education Association (REA) that he has concluded that negotiations for the 2007-09 contract are deadlocked. He will be sending his written letter of deadlock in the near future.

The mediator was assigned by the Wisconsin Employment Relations Commission when the REA filed a petition after declaring an impasse following the May 15 bargaining session in response to the Board's settlement offer. That settlement offer had included a 4.2% total compensation increase for each of the two school years covered by the new contract that was supposed to begin on July 1, 2007. Other aspects of the Board's settlement offer included a more cost-effective health insurance plan provided by the teachers union, salary increases for teachers with master's degrees who participate in staff development activities, broadened retirement benefits, and wellness incentives. Subsequently, the REA canceled the remaining negotiations sessions scheduled for May 24 and June 4.

On October 10, the mediator met with both sides to develop a compromise settlement, but the REA stopped the mediation session before a settlement was reached. Within days the REA began picketing and other job actions such as declining to write letters of recommendation for college applications and declining to continue with extra pay duties such as lunch supervision.

In early November the Board made a last attempt "no-strings attached settlement offer" that included the health insurance plan requested by the teachers, the tentative contract language changes that had been agreed to by both sides, and a total compensation package of 4.0% for 2007-08 and 3.8% for 2008-09. The minimum annual compensation increase for teachers is 3.8% under state law.

After being informed by the REA that it would not accept the Board's offer, the mediator canceled the mediation session scheduled for November 14. On November 19 the mediator verbally informed both parties that he was declaring the deadlock. The letter of deadlock is necessary before a Qualified Economic Offer (QEO) can be used by the Board to resolve the deadlock, although the mediator's letter of deadlock does not automatically require the Board to begin the QEO process. The QEO law would mandate a 3.8% compensation increase in each year and a continuation of the current health insurance and contract language through June 30, 2009.

School officials were dismayed by the deadlock and frustrated at the REA's pattern of not responding to Board offers or talking with the Board. "We can't reach a settlement if only one side is willing to talk. We've been unable to have direct discussions with the REA since May," explained Rick Ketter, District Business Manager and member of the Board's negotiating team.

Dr. Richard Zimman, Ripon Superintendent of Schools, was puzzled, "I'm scratching my head as to why the REA leadership would walk away from a no-strings-attached offer that consisted of a higher raise, the health insurance they preferred, and the contract language changes they requested. The QEO will wipe out their higher raise, wipe out their better health insurance plan, and wipe out their desired contract language changes. But the QEO is all that the current REA leadership is leaving the Board with at this point. It doesn't make any sense to me."

For complete details click on "REA Negotiations Update" on the school district's website at www.ripon.k12.wi.us.

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