

School Board keeps contract on hold

Written by Mark Jaeger
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Officials reluctant to OK pact with district teachers because of unsettled law

The waiting game continues, as the Northern Ozaukee School Board voted Monday to defer action on a tentative contract with the Fredonia Education Association until its June meeting.

The action came on the recommendation of board member Stacie Stark, chairman of the Negotiations Committee.

Stark made a motion to place the pending contract on hold “until things are settled in Madison.”

Board members voted 8-1 in support of the motion. Tom Hoffmann cast the lone dissenting vote.

Hoffmann failed to get the board to pursue a voluntary settlement with the union as soon as possible to maintain good relations with the teaching staff.

In February, the board reached a tentative agreement with the Fredonia Education Association, but a vote was delayed while Gov. Scott Walker’s budget-repair bill was being sorted out.

The teachers’ union had already endorsed the agreement, which would only cover the past two school years. Teachers have been working without a contract since the 2009-10 school year.

In March, a contract vote by the board was again delayed because officials were uncertain about the implications of the then-approved state bill. Final implementation of the bill is now being held up by a legal challenge.

In an administrative memo on the contract mess, board members were urged to consider several factors.

Among those factors are “the current state of the district, as well as the general community’s viewpoint on the issue and the perception of the Northern Ozaukee School District.”

Another consideration, the memo said, should be “the board’s future relationship with district employees, and attracting and retaining viable and effective educators.”

Although Supt. Bill Harbron was out of town for the board meeting, his memo offered a caveat about the risk of putting off action on the agreement.

“Continued tabling of the agreement may be harmful to the future relationship between the board and teachers, and the possibility of diminished trust,” Harbron wrote.

Only one resident, Town of Saukville resident Dan Bloecher, spoke about the district’s contract talks during the board meeting.

Bloecher urged officials to take a hard-line stand in negotiating with teachers.

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“The level of benefits we have been offering our teachers is insane. What we pay is incredible,” he said. “When we do finally get a new contract, it will be very different.”

The tentative agreement freezes teacher salaries, and would terminate on June 30. That means even after a contract is endorsed, labor talks will continue for the next agreement.

The board did approve the retirement of four more teachers at Monday’s meeting. They include high school English teacher Sandra Didier, middle school physical education teacher Mike Falkner, elementary school second-grade teacher Kathy Pixler and Wisconsin Virtual Learning teacher Cheryl Frye.