Written by Mark Jaeger
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Officials' refusal to budge on June timetable criticized as costing district savings

The Northern Ozaukee School Board refused last week to budge from an April vote to delay action on a contract with the teachers' union until June.

Even though members of the Fredonia Education Association have been working without a contract for nearly two years, board members decided the uncertainty in Madison over Gov. Scott Walker's budget-repair law made the timing for a new union pact unwise.

FEA lead negotiator Charles Schwartz said the board's shelving of contract talks represents "missed opportunity."

Schwartz said union members are willing to make substantial concessions, but the board has not looked into how much teachers are willing to give up to reach a contract accord.

"You never even tried … costing the district three months of possible savings. You should know the teachers love it here and don't want to go anywhere," he said.

Board member Tom Hoffmann shared that view, saying the refusal to keep working toward a contract settlement serves no one.

"We are not bargaining in good faith. We need to look at taking the contract off the table. Next month may be too late," Hoffmann said.

Board President Paul Krause told Hoffmann a vote to reconsider the teacher contract could not be taken because the item was not on the board agenda.

Instead, a straw poll of the board members showed officials are content to wait until June to take up the teachers' contract.

Hoffmann, Krause and Tim Burmesch said they would support a special meeting to consider the contract before the June session.

The teachers' union has already endorsed a tentative agreement that would only cover the past two school years. Teachers have been working without a contract since the 2009-10 school year.

The board met in closed session Tuesday night to consider staffing for the 2011-12 school year.