

School talks drag along

December 10, 2019

Del Norte Unified School District administrators and the Del Norte Teachers Association have reached tentative agreements on minor contract issues - but reportedly are no closer to resolving issues of pay increases and benefits, despite two days of mediation with a neutral third party last week.

Meantime, teachers' association president Marshall Jones oversaw a "strike school" workshop last Saturday, which outlined for teachers their legal grounds should the union choose to strike.

Jones said the earliest that association members could strike would be Jan. 15, 2020.

Guillermo "Memo" Durgin, a union organizer for the region that stretches from San Francisco to Del Norte County, spoke during the workshop. Del Norte has never had a strike before, so Durgin outlined what teachers could and could not do as a result.

Jones said about half of the Del Norte Teachers Association's members attended Saturday's meeting.

"We don't want to strike, but we will if we have to. And we're going to keep preparing for that," Jones told The Triplicate.

"It's very expensive and time consuming, but necessary, because the district doesn't want to work with us. We'll be ready when and if (a strike) does happen."

He added that about 80% of the union's members would support a strike.

At issue is the school district's latest, best offer of a 1% guaranteed pay increase, plus a one-time 1% pay increase if the district's student enrollment doesn't drop, according to district spokesman Michael Hawkins.

Hawkins said the overall raises offered by the district to teachers for this year is 2%, which includes "a hidden cost to the district that is not shown here from retirement and other benefits."

That comes out to about a 2.6% cost increase, said Hawkins, to allow for a 2% salary raise for the teachers.

Jones said the teachers' union disagrees, that in fact the district's offer really doesn't amount to that substantial a pay increase.

Hawkins said the tentative agreements are contingent on the two sides reaching agreement on an overall pay and benefits increase.

He said that last Thursday, the two sides agreed to additional days of annual personal illness or injury leave time, and a new share program that allows personal illness or injury leave to be donated to the Employee

Donated Sick Leave Program.

Hawkins said the tentative agreement also outlined staff meeting notification requirements, planning periods and professional development time.

District human resources director Colleen Parker said last month that if the teachers strike, the Del Norte schools will remain open, although the teachers will not be paid and would not receive retirement credit for their days on strike.

On Monday, the parties met once again with the mediator.