

Teachers' strike now a possibility as negotiators head to mediation

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The possibility of a teachers strike now looms if the school district and the union cannot reach an agreement on contract negotiations.

After negotiations stalled again Oct. 22, the Del Norte Teachers Association and the Del Norte Unified School District are headed to a fact finding session with a state mediator Dec. 5.

Coleen Parker, district human resource director, said the fact finding session charts legal services and compares DNUSD to other like school districts.

“Ours and (teachers’) panel members meet with an arbiter who makes a non-binding recommendation,” Parker said. “We’ve never been all the way through fact finding.”

Parker said teacher unions can strike in California, but first must go all the way through fact finding. If no agreement is reached, she said the district then implements its last, best offer.

“If we don’t come to an agreement, then they can do a job action,” Parker said.

DNTA President Marshall Jones said in media reports Friday the union is taking steps to prepare for a worst case scenario. The union is scheduled to go to a training session Dec. 7, or “strike school” for DNTA members hosted by a California Teachers Association representative.

He said the next step after a failed fact finding is to take the district’s best offer back to his membership. They could take or decline the offer. A no vote would free up the union to a strike option. The union would be surveyed once more on whether to strike and go from there, Jones said. He added teachers could strike as early as Jan. 15.

According to district officials, if teachers do vote to strike, school would remain open, but teachers would not be paid and would not receive retirement credit for they days they’re on strike.

Negotiations broke down again Oct. 22, where DNTA lead negotiator Paige Thompson told the school board the district returned to the bargaining table unprepared to negotiate.

Parker said as district negotiator it was the intent at that meeting to “deliver our concept” of a slightly reworked offer based on revised student enrollment numbers and other contingency language.

“The board then authorized us to go up higher,” Parker said. “We offered another 1% in cola and through ‘step and column,’ (a regular pay increase schedule). Our offer was now up to 5 percent at this point.”

Parker said the union didn’t agree the combined factors added to 5% and rejected the offer.

Jones said the DNTA’s last offer was for a 3.54 percent pay raise and a \$795 increase to their health and welfare benefits.

Parker said the problem from the union’s perspective is an increase in retirement and in health and welfare benefits, at the end of day, doesn’t feel like a raise. For example, new teachers at the bottom of the step and column pay schedule don’t get a raise, Parker added.