

Teachers' art work emphasizes union's unhappiness with district

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Vibrant signs covered the Del Norte County Unified School District's boardroom walls at the school board meeting Thursday night, each representing tensions between the district and its teachers' union.

The meeting produced the promise of action from both sides of the negotiations, including a written offer and a board recall.

The meeting marked 329 days of teacher negotiations, according to the Del Norte Teachers Association.

For the past few months, scores of teachers in bright-red shirts have filled the room, taking the public comment section to demand a pay increase.

This week, the union posted a notice on Facebook requesting people to bring poster boards to decorate the meeting room both to save teachers' time and to attempt a new avenue of protest.

“We have all been to A LOT of board meetings this year, and this time we want to do something different. We want to honor the time of teachers and the community members, and ask that instead of speaking, we’d like everyone to “Poster Board the Boardroom.” They’ve heard our message, now we thought we’d try visual aides to go along with it,” the Facebook post read.

This week’s public comment was filled again with the passionate sentiments of teachers and parents, with an often-repeated comment, “2% is not enough.”

A 2% increase in both teachers’ salaries and teacher flat-dollar stipends is part of the solution in a report made by a mediator for the state Public Employees Relations Board.

The district has stated they agree with the report’s recommendations, but teachers insist the increase is not enough to counter rising health-care costs.

Former teachers’ union representative Mike Mealue also spoke during the public comment period, regarding a school board recall. He announced that he is moving forward on the recall, including publishing his notice in the local newspaper and acquiring 75 volunteers to get signatures on the recall petitions.

A separate recall petition must be submitted for each individual school board member and would require approximately 3,000 signatures, 20% of all Del Norte County registered voters.

Mealue is seeking to remove district Superintendent Jeff Harris and recall all of the board members save Frank Magarino, whose term ends in 2020.

Mealue also stressed that a successful recall would cost the district \$60,000 in special-election expenses.

He also stated he had entered his name into consideration for Roger Daley’s seat on the school board. Daley submitted a letter of resignation Jan. 9, having served served on the board for three years.

After the public comment, Harris said the district was ready to release a written agreement for negotiation this week. This will be the first written proposal since Oct. 22.