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Geneva Education Association sets strike date

GENEVA — The Geneva Education Association (GEA) set a strike date for Tuesday but will continue to bargain with the Geneva School District 304 Board of Education in hope of avoiding a strike and reaching a tentative agreement.

“A strike is GEA’s absolute last resort,” said GEA President Kevin Gannon of the Dec. 4 date. “We are still hopeful we can reach a fair agreement. We would much rather be in our classrooms with our students, but the bottom line is, if we have to go out on strike we will. Our students, schools and community are worth fighting for.”

Gannon continued, “The board’s proposed schedule is a departure from a traditional model that every other district in Kane County is using. It is an untested, novel approach to determining salaries for educators and the GEA has concerns about “trying out” this new system.”

On Wed., Nov. 28, the board of education delivered a proposal to the GEA negotiating team. The team made the decision to hold informational meetings about this proposal with its members on Thursday and Friday. The purpose of these meetings was to provide an explanation and gather feedback from GEA members regarding the board’s proposal.

Aside from the board’s offer not containing a traditional step-and-lane salary schedule, the offer also lacks equity when it comes to salary increases. The BOE proposal gives a much higher percentage raise to newer educators, while giving smaller percentage raises to experienced educators. The district has communicated that the starting salary will increase by 17 percent during the four years of the contract. During the same four year period, the ending salary on the board’s proposed schedule would increase by only 1.2 percent.

“The board’s proposal does little to address the retention of quality educators. Their latest proposal creates an enormous disparity between salary increases for beginning career educators and what they’re offering our more experienced educators,” Gannon said. “We plan to counter the board’s latest proposal at our next negotiating session, and we hope the community will continue to call on the board to accept our proposal to avoid a strike and to avoid a disruption to our students’ education.”

The GEA represents 459 teachers in District 304’s nine schools and serves the district’s 5,800 students. The GEA and Geneva School District 304 have been in negotiations since February. GEA teachers have been working without a contract since Aug. 15. In September, GEA members voted overwhelmingly to authorize a strike.

The next negotiation session is tomorrow, Dec. 2, at 4 p.m. at Coultrap Educational Services Center (227 N. 4th Street, Geneva). On Mon., Dec. 3, there is a rally tentatively scheduled for 4 p.m., also at Coultrap Educational Services Center (227 N. 4th St., Geneva). More details will be forthcoming. Unless a tentative agreement is reached, the GEA membership will strike on Dec. 4.

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At 135,000 members strong, the Illinois Education Association (IEA-NEA) is the largest union in Illinois. The IEA represents preK-12 teachers outside of the city of Chicago and education support staff, higher education faculty and support staff, retired education employees and students preparing to become teachers, statewide.