



New leadership offers hope for Dist. 211 contract talks

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Palatine-Schaumburg High School District 211 board members haven't said much about negotiations surrounding a new teachers contract.

Talks have not started; however, on Thursday the board scheduled a special closed session meeting for May 28 to discuss the contract, which expires June 30.

That meeting is just for the board. Board President Robert LeFevre said Thursday he didn't have any information about when talks with teachers would fire up.

Teachers union President Jason Spoor did not return a phone call seeking comment. Thursday's board meeting was the first full meeting with the new board and officers seated since the April election. With two new board members, Edward Yung and Theresa Tracy, talks may wait until they are better acclimated.

Another reason for the delay may be timing. The contract expires in the summer, meaning both sides could have until late August to negotiate a deal without affecting the new school year.

The last batch of negotiations was heated, and the union authorized a strike in November 2007 after months of talks. Classes weren't disrupted, as the school board approved the union's proposal, but that wasn't before both sides threatened to cancel athletic events and other extracurricular activities. Teachers also waved signs outside Schaumburg High School.

The 2007 agreement renegotiated the final year of the expiring contract and extended the deal through June. Teachers ended up paying higher insurance costs, reflecting increases many have felt in the private sector. However, salary remained the primary concern. The agreement stipulated base raises would depend on the CPI-U, the urban consumer price index, a measure of inflation. In 2007, CPI-U was at 2.8 percent, and district officials said that number would stay stable during the life of the contract. The latest CPI-U statistics are to be released this morning by the government.

It would have been the first strike in the history of the state's largest high school district and its five schools.

Besides the two new board members, District 211 has a new superintendent in Nancy Robb and the union has a new president in Spoor. It wasn't any secret that former Superintendent Roger Thornton and former union President John Braglia weren't fans of each other. The two sides hope the new leadership will help soothe matters. However, neither side could have predicted the current economic uncertainty.

Barrington Area Unit School District 220 also will negotiate a new teachers contract this year.