

WL board, secretaries try for accord

By LeAnne Rogers
special writer

Some progress was reported in negotiations between Walled Lake Schools and its secretarial employees following a recent session with a state mediator. The district serves students living in the northwest part of Farmington Hills.

"We had minimal progress but got tentative agreements on a couple of contract articles," said union bargainer Karen Filar. "I don't want to downplay this. It is better than a poke in the eye with a sharp stick."

Secretaries working in the district have been working without contracts since 1984. Both sides agree that a major point of disagreement is the secretaries' demand for a 5 percent pay increase retroactive to the 1984-85 school year.

The secretaries, represented by the Michigan Educational Support Personnel Association (MESPA), had their work days reduced 30 minutes each day in 1983-84. The board took that action as a cost-cutting measure and other employees had their wages reduced 5 percent.

Rita Thomas of the Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB) is the Walled Lake Board of Education's negotiator. Thomas said the 5 percent sought by the secretaries is payment for hours not worked in the 1982-83 school year.

According to Thomas, the board does not intend to pay the secretaries for time not worked. "The other MESPA local received a 5 percent wage reduction which the secretaries did not," Thomas said.

Another issue still unresolved is contract language dealing with the use of volunteers. Previous contracts have prohibited volunteers from performing secretarial duties while there are secretarial workers who have not been released from layoffs.

"The secretaries really encourage volunteers in the schools but don't want them used to take jobs or have hours reduced so secretaries don't get benefits," commented Filar.

THE BOARD IS seeking to exclude volunteers from that contract provision, Thomas said. If volunteers were omitted the district would still be restricted in the use of aides and federal job program workers.

The board is seeking a 10 percent cap on insurance costs for secretaries. "Over the last seven to 10 years the costs for insurance have risen tremendously, probably 100 percent," said Thomas. "If the costs increase more than 10 percent the employees pay the difference. The teachers have accepted this but these employees don't want it."

Another MESPA unit representing custodial, maintenance, food service and other support employees is also in contract mediation. MESPA is affiliated with the Michigan Education Association (MEA).

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ALTHOUGH THE 5 percent raise was requested based on the reduced hours, the increase is not sought as retroactive to 1982-83. Filar said the 5 percent is being sought for 1984-85 when the secretaries had no contract and received no salary increase.

"I am sorry we got into the rationale on why we were asking for the 5 percent," Filar said. "These people did lose 5 percent when their hours were cut."



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