

Parents demand answers but get few

Teachers lack of trust is key problem

BY CATHERINE EDMAN
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Angry parents demanded plenty of answers from striking Glenbard high school teachers Thursday night, but they peppered them with one question:

"Why can't you negotiate while you're teaching?" parent Laura Anne Welch asked.

Teachers told the crowd of about 400 parents, students and teachers who filled the sanctuary of Grace Lutheran Church in Glen Ellyn there's simply a lack of trust between teachers and the school board.

The Glenbard High School District 87 teachers union opened themselves up to any questions parents in the four-school district wanted to ask during the meeting. That didn't mean, though, the answers always sat well with the crowd.

"Take it and run," one man yelled after union negotiators explained the school board's rejected contract offer.

The union suggested a three-year contract with a 5 percent raise the first year and four percent raises the last two years.

They also would have gotten \$3,000 in stipends and contributions to retirement funds, teacher Mike Kolodziej said.

The board, he continued, coun-

tered with a three-year contract with a 4 percent raise the first year, 3 percent the second year and 3.25 percent the third year, plus a one-time \$500 stipend.

Kolodziej said that offer didn't fairly compensate teachers who've fallen behind their peers in recent years with raises of less than 2 percent, he said.

Union negotiators told parents they feel the board is negotiating in "bad faith," saying the board repeatedly predicted budget deficits and then justified low raises only to have multimillion-dollar surpluses show up later.

That didn't satisfy many in the crowd, who cheered and clapped at every insistence that teachers return to their classrooms.

Salaries in the nearly 8,000-student district range from \$31,738 to \$76,170.

That's fair enough, parent Mike Perry told teachers, particularly when it's in the top 2 percent of the state.

"If I was in the top 5 percent for my trade, I'd be pretty happy," he said.

Ultimately, it's the students being hurt most by the strike, Glenbard East student Andy Bryant told teachers.

"We know what the strike is doing to students, what have the students ever done to you?" he asked.

STRIKE: Both sides battle to sway public's opinion

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West Suburban Teachers Union, which represents Villa Park-based DuPage High School District 88.

Each side must make a public relations effort to sway opinion, he said.

Along those lines, the union held a forum Thursday night to explain its side and will stage a teachers rally this evening.

Board members, meanwhile, have set up a Web page and phone hotline to publicize their cause.

Thursday's message told callers teachers had rejected a package that would have made top-of-the-scale teachers the highest paid in DuPage County.

Almost half the Glenbard teachers are at the top of the scale, which now stands at more than \$76,000.

Before the talks that ended Thursday morning, the union had asked for a one-year contract, with a 5 percent raise and \$3,000 bonus for top-paid teachers.

Union leaders' new offer in

the talks was a three-year pact, with a 5 percent raise the first year and 4 percent raises each of the next two years, as well as the \$3,000 bonus.

In the last two years, the union also wanted the board to kick in a 1 percent pension fund contribution.

That provision drew the ire of school board President Joy Talsma.

"Essentially what you have is their offer, repackaged," she said.

The 4 percent raises, plus 1 percent pension contributions, roughly equal the same 5 percent raise the union requested before, Talsma said.

The board, which previously had offered increases of 4, 3, and 3 percent over three years, came up with a new offer of 4, 3, and 3.25 percent raises, with a \$500 bonus.

Union president Bill Wright dismissed the offer as insignificant and "very disappointing." The union also contested the board's claim that its offer would've made some teachers the highest-paid in the county.