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Contract Bulletin

#7

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This bulletin is part of a series distributed by staff at your school to provide regular updates on our negotiations for the new contract that will succeed our current agreement, which expires on June 30, 2012.

Contract Negotiations

Ongoing contract negotiations between the Chicago Teachers Union and the Chicago Board of Education became more intense last week when the Union presented the scores of proposals our members and committees developed, designed to improve schools and support the professionalism and compensation goals of union members.

At future meetings, which occur weekly, both the CTU and the Board will respond to each other's contract proposals. Unfortunately, the January 20 meeting of the CTU and Board bargaining teams was most notable for the Board's disrespect toward the Union and its negotiating team.

"We are disappointed by the lack of respect for those who make a difference every day," CTU President Karen GJ Lewis said when the session began. She corrected a Board negotiator who rudely referred to the CTU's 40-member negotiating team as "the audience." The teacher, clinician and PSRP participants represent the hundreds of Contract Action Committee members in the schools each day who helped develop CTU's contract proposals.

Lewis noted that a major bone of contention in negotiations was the Board's proposal to remove several critical Articles of the labor contract set to expire June 30, 2012. For instance, the Board's proposals limit prep periods, add additional instructional duties, and make it more difficult for CTU to communicate with members. The Board also announced it will impose a longer school day after the current contract expires, yet it refused to discuss this important decision with the Union.

At the session, Board negotiators continued to take the low road in their remarks and used the deficit they reported in their 2012 proposed budget as an excuse to diminish our bargaining rights. Lewis stated that the Board's central office operates in chaos and the system is in a constant state of flux. She criticized the Board saying, "Instead of reaching across the aisle at this time, you have decided to gut our contract of provisions. Instead of collective bargaining, which you claim to respect, all we see (offered) are management rights and collective begging" as the only role for the Union. She continued on, noting that the Board's negotiations attitude mirrored what our members see every day: "policies which are becoming more punitive, driving joy out of schools, and narrowing the curriculum."

After the January 20 negotiating session ended, special education elementary teacher Sarah Chambers commented that, "President Lewis' opening remarks vigorously advocated for the children of Chicago and the dignity of our profession. This was in stark contrast to the Board's demeaning proposals that insulted the children and educators of Chicago. I felt unity among the bargaining team."

Veteran elementary teacher Jackie Ward agreed, saying, "Let's get organized. We don't have the option to wait on someone else to do it."

It's still early in the bargaining process. We'll determine in the next few months whether the Board will change its ways and give the CTU the respect we deserve, or whether this foreshadows a protracted fight for our bargaining rights.

We know that good working conditions are good learning conditions. These two concepts are intrinsically linked for us as a union of education professionals. Collectively, we must ensure that the interests of our members and the children of Chicago steer our negotiations in the right direction. This means staying informed and getting involved. Sign up for email updates at ctunet.com. Discuss the bargaining process in your Union meetings.

Stay vigilant.