

DCSD wins decision to negotiate step increases

By Anne Knowles

MINDEN – Some Douglas County School District support staff have to wait another month to receive pay increases due them since July 2012.

The county's school district board of trustees was scheduled this week to vote on ratification of a long-negotiated contract agreement with the Douglas County Support Staff Organization, which is the bargaining unit representing 240 secretaries, food service, custodial personnel and other support staff.



The yearlong negotiations ended up in arbitration when the two parties could not agree on employees so-called step increases, or salary increases, which in the past were automatically triggered when employees met certain time-related milestones.

“Since 1996, they’ve been given to us and have never before been part of the negotiations,” Nancy Hamlett, the organization’s president, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Contract discussions dragged on last year, says Hamlett, over whether the step increases could be negotiated in every contract.

“If I were to rate the negotiations, I would give them an F,” said Hamlett.

After the parties could not come to an agreement at a July 9, 2012, meeting, the issue went to an arbitrator, who decided in the district’s favor. The decision is final and cannot be

appealed. Arbitrator William E. Riker issued his decision Dec. 20.

The employee organization, though, has not had a chance to meet and vote on the contract since finding out the arbitration decision after the holiday break. The board of trustees always votes on contracts after the employees' groups approve them. During the Jan. 8 board meeting, Neil Freitas and other board members said they were worried ratifying the contract first would set a bad precedent and could be misconstrued as trying to force employees into an agreement.

Hamlett said she could hold a vote within the week. Assuming the employees vote to approve, Sharla Hales, president of the board of trustees, said the item could be put on the consent calendar for the board's next meeting on Jan. 25. If the board approves the contract then, employees would receive their step increases in their paychecks issued Feb. 15.

Seventy-three support staff employees are due an average of a 5 percent pay increase. The term of the agreement is from July 1, 2011, to June 30, 2013.

Nevada is a right-to-work state so while the organization bargains for 240 employees, it has 137 members who can vote on the contract.

During Tuesday's meeting, after a closed-door session, the board of trustees also voted to approve an agreement with three types of non-represented employees – confidential employees, classified supervisory and professional employees. The first two don't receive any pay increase, but step and longevity will be paid through 2013 retroactive to July 1, 2012. The professional agreement is from 2011-16 and any pay increases will be based on individual performance.

In other action:

- The board was told no offers were made to buy the Kingsbury

Middle School so the Stateline building will remain on the market. The board may accept the highest qualified bid at or above \$4 million, the property's appraised value.