

Press Clippings 7/25/2018

---Courier-News---

U46 paraeducators continue push for new contract

U46 paraeducators used the first school board meeting in a month to once again picket and speak in support of a new contract and pay raise.

Several union members filled the board room Monday night, urging district administrators and school board members to find the dollars to give them one. The District U-46 Educational Assistants union representing U46's 600 paraprofessionals continues bargaining for a new contract, which expired more than a year ago.

"(Paraeducators) are hired because a student or school community needs them," union President Sara Moeller told board members. "A deaf or hard of hearing student needs help in communicating to learn from their teachers, a sign language interpreter is there. A student has individual academic, social, emotional or physical needs, a paraeducator is there. Students need books from a well-organized library to continue their learning, a librarian is there. Parents and students need someone to help translate with verbal or written information, a home/school liaison is there."

The group seeks a 75-cent hourly pay raise in order to give employees a livable salary. The median salary among U46 paraprofessionals — a group that is predominantly women — is \$18,406, a figure Moeller argued is below the poverty level for a family of four.

The low pay is one of the main reasons Moeller and others believe there are 64 unfilled paraeducator positions in U46. Supporters argued the district's schools cannot function without union members, and the low pay will keep potential paraeducators away.

"When parents come to our building ... we don't ask them what language do you speak. We ask them how can we help you?" said Norma Bandel, a long-time home/school liaison at Bartlett High School. She compared her job as "customer service" for parents and guardians to get answers they need for their children from the schools.

Prior to Monday's meeting, union members and supporters picketed outside the district's Educational Services Center. Most wore blue shirts emblazoned with the DUEA logo and waved signs.

The paraeducators contract is one of several being negotiated this summer. The U46 teachers contract expires in August, with the first tentative agreement getting rejected by the teachers. At Monday's meeting, board members approved a five-year agreement with the U46 secretaries union.

U46 officials, board members divided on new garbage contract; old deal expires Aug. 1

School District U46 School Board members rejected a new garbage and recycling collection contract Monday, leaving district officials just a few weeks before the start of school to hire a new vendor.

Waste Management of Illinois' contract with the district ends Aug. 1, and district officials had recommended that Groot Industries Inc. be awarded the contract over Advanced Disposal Services. Waste Management was a third finalist but it ranked a distant third in the ranking system the district used, and officials said they had not been satisfied with the company's work when it came to billing and pickup issues.

Some U46 board members said they were concerned about the scoring process used in the evaluation process, which determined Groot was the better fit for the district than Advanced Disposal. The board voted 4-3 to reject the five-year contract with Groot, for which the district would have paid a total of about \$1.2 million.

As a result of the vote, the earliest the board can take action on a new contract is Aug. 6. The first day of school is Aug. 15.

Jeff King, U46's deputy superintendent of operations, said the company had started removing its dumpsters from 10 U46 sites ahead of the end of the contract.

Contract bids were evaluated on a basis of cost, reference feedback and customer service, according to the rubric used by district officials.

Board member Veronica Noland, however, questioned whether Advanced was being punished in the ranking process because its references were more open to answering questions than those of the other two companies. Advanced had four references submit responses to U46 compared to Groot's three.

Robert Propst, a representative for Advanced Disposal, raised a similar point at Monday's meeting, saying he believed the scoring process unfairly hurt his employer. Advanced Disposal came in with the lower bid — \$234,000 to Groot's \$245,000 for a year's service — but were going to lose the bid. Waste Management's bid came in higher, at close to \$269,000 a year.

“If you’re using two (reference responses) for Waste Management, three for Groot and four for Advanced and you don’t adjust for the number of responses you receive ... mathematically, you’re not adjusting for the variable in number of references that you’re using in the calculation,” Noland said.

Bruce Phelps, U46’s senior business official of business services, said he could not control how many references responded to U46’s inquiries during the bidding process, and could only evaluate the information they received. Phelps and his team even delayed presenting the proposal to the board in the hope that more references would respond, he said.

“Each vendor gave us more than two references, they gave us four,” he said. “But we didn’t get the responses from the respondents. A lot of times we’re trying to reach someone and then they don’t call back.”

Board President Donna Smith and board members Jeanette Ward and John Devereux voted in favor of Groot’s bid.

“So now what happens?” Ward asked. U46 CEO Tony Sanders said officials will have to “figure out something before school starts.”

Groot had been notified by the district prior to Monday’s school board meeting that U46 was planning to go with their company for garbage collection and and the company was preparing to move in its dumpsters to U46 school sites.

Because things are in limbo, Waste Management’s King said they may have to pay either Groot or Advanced for temporary refuse and recycling services until the board votes on a contract again.

Next in line: Matt Erlenbaugh excited about taking over as Bartlett's fourth head football coach

Bartlett's returning football players had other things to keep them occupied in the spring.

Of course, there's school work. Many also played other sports.

Still, senior receiver Austin Gates and his teammates had to navigate a few months without knowing a key detail for this season.

"Everyone was wondering who the coach was going to be," Gates said. "We went to get food together, met up. We still wanted to keep the team together. We didn't want to lose our senior year just because our school was struggling to find a coach. We all still tried to fight."

Gates and his teammates found out who their new leader was going to be in early June when Matt Erlenbaugh was named the fourth head coach in the program's history.

His message in his initial meetings with his new team meshed with what Gates and Co. were already building in the spring.

"I was stressing the family stuff," Erlenbaugh said. "I was stressing the fact that we have to come together and build a band of brothers. We have to trust each other.

"You have to be accountable for yourself and hold others accountable as well. If you don't have that, if you have a bunch of guys playing as individuals, you're never going to win."

Erlenbaugh, 34, was content as Solorio Academy's coach in Chicago. His teams reached the playoffs both his seasons.

"I was happy with where I was," Erlenbaugh said. "I was in a good situation. We got ourselves from not knowing how to put on pads to the second round (of the playoffs) with multiple Division I scholarship kids."

He felt the job posted by Bartlett was beckoning him, however.

“I kept seeing it,” Erlenbaugh said. “It’s not filled, it’s not filled. It’s just one of those things where I had a talk with my wife and said, ‘Hey, this is a good opportunity for us, for our family and to continue my career.’”

“So I put in for it late in May. I heard back about a week later, had back-to-back interviews, and then the following day I got hired.”

While the process played out, the players kept it together. Three returning assistant coaches also have helped ease the transition.

“At the start of the summer, we really had nothing,” Gates said. “It was just kids being kids. Then once the coaches came in, everything went great from there. Everyone seems like they really wanted to hop in.

“As much as it stunk (not having a coach for so long), it kind of brought everyone together, realizing that this is it. This is our time.”

Bartlett is coming off the worst season in program history with a 2-7 record. The Hawks are facing a two-year playoff drought. But Erlenbaugh has injected a new energy into the program, and the players have bought in.

After 20 years of road games, there will be another advantage this fall. The Hawks will play their home games on campus. They’ll open their new stadium on Friday, Aug. 31 against Glenbard East.

“It’s home,” Erlenbaugh said. “That’s going to be our saying, too — home-field advantage. The hype around having home games is unbelievable.

“I’m walking into a phenomenal situation. The energy and enthusiasm is so high. The community, I’m blown away with how much they’re excited for this football season.”