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U-46 board approves three-year contract with food service workers

By: Madhu Krishnamurthy

The Elgin Area School District U-46 school board has approved a three-year contract with food service workers granting an average yearly salary increase of 3 percent, officials said.

The agreement was ratified two weeks ago by the Service Employees International Union.

The contract is retroactive to July 1, 2018, and affects about 130 food service workers, said Jeff King, U-46 deputy superintendent of operations and chief school business official.

It was approved 5-2 with school board members Jeanette Ward and Phil Costello casting the dissenting votes.

Ward opposed the agreement because it guarantees yearly raises not based on merit. She also said the district's share of health insurance premium costs -- 85 percent with the remaining 15 percent borne by employees -- is too high.

"This contract provides that raises are automatic and only require that an employee be rated as proficient in order to receive a raise in 2021 and beyond," she said. "It is very rare in the private sector to receive guaranteed raises not based on performance."

She said the agreement also allows employees hired on or before June 30 to retire at age 55 with a bonus paid in the last four months of employment. That would increase an employee's Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund earnings in the final 12 months of employment by exactly 6 percent "so as to be just below the amount that would incur penalties," she said.

"Given that the state has currently \$129 billion in unfunded pension liability, I don't think that pension spiking should be permitted at all," Ward said. "This contract is not on par with the private sector and contracts like this perpetuate Illinois' fiscal problems."

District U46 voters oust 'lightning rod' school board member Jeanette Ward: 'You either loved me or hated me'

By: Rafael Guerrero



School District U46 board member Jeanette Ward did not win re-election Tuesday, finishing fifth in the race for four school board seats. The West Chicago resident has served on the board since 2015.

Controversial District U46 School Board member Jeanette Ward won't be serving a second term following the results of this week's election in which one incumbent and three newcomers landed board seats.

Ward, who placed fifth among eight candidates, was philosophical about her loss the day after the Tuesday election.

"The voters have spoken. Hopefully they will be happy with their representation," said Ward, of West Chicago. "Some people said I was a little bit of a lightning rod — you either loved me or hated me."

The top vote-getter was incumbent Sue Kerr, of Bartlett, who received 7,134 votes from U46 residents living in Kane, DuPage and Cook counties. The results won't be official until April 23, when the numbers are certified.

Appointed board member John Devereux, of Bartlett, won his first elected term, coming in second with 6,665 votes. Also elected were newcomers Eva Porter, of Hanover Park, with 6,505 votes, and Kate Thommes, of Elgin, with 6,442 votes.

Ward finished in fifth place with 5,310 votes, followed by challengers Daniel Hancock, of Bartlett, with 4,683 votes; Tina Rio, of Bartlett, with 4,564 votes; and Ina Silva-Sobolewski, of Hanover Park, with 3,640 votes.

Ward's board tenure was a bumpy one in which statements she made and positions she took drew as much criticism as they did support.

Among her more talked-about actions stemmed from comments she made in opposition to the district adopting a new policy regarding transgender students and in reference to

a class assignment her daughter received that she said took a religious position with which she did not agree.

Ward was also outspoken in her belief that some materials and textbooks being approved by the board showed a bias on such topics as history and climate change.

It was her positions on those issues, as well as her support for Elgin's first charter school and her pursuit of closed session records, of which she is most proud, she said.

On Wednesday, Ward thanked her supporters and pledged she would remain active in U46 since her two daughters attend district schools.

She also thanked fellow candidates Hancock, Rio and Silva-Sobolewski for joining her in door-to-door canvassing in the final days of the campaign, although she said she was disappointed by the overall low voter turnout.

"Unfortunately, we fell short and did not prevail over the union-endorsed candidates," Ward wrote in a post on her [Facebook](#) page.

Devereux thanked Ward for her time and commitment to the board and said he appreciated the discussions they had, even if "we did not see eye to eye" every time.

Kerr also thanked Ward online following Tuesday night's results.

"While Jeanette and I have not always agreed, I appreciate the transparency and the diversity of thought she brought to the board," Kerr wrote on her Facebook page.

This was the first election for Thommes, an instructor at Elgin Community College who has children in U46 schools.

Porter, a former teacher and educator, interviewed last year for the school board seat that ultimately went to Devereux. She is a trustee and secretary for the Poplar Creek Public Library Board in Streamwood. Her husband, Herb Porter, was also elected Tuesday night, receiving a new term on the Hanover Park Village Board.

"I am not a politician. I am a retired teacher, a wife, a mother, a grandmother and a community member," Porter wrote on her Facebook campaign page following election night. "I decided to run because I truly believed that I could make a difference. I saw a need in the district and answered the call, stepping outside my comfort zone."

Devereux is an actuary with Chicago-based Ryan Specialty Group. He was chosen last year to complete the unfinished term of Traci O'Neal Ellis.

Devereux said Wednesday he initially was uncertain if he'd run for a four-year board seat but quickly realized it was work he wanted to continue.

"I'm glad to be part of this," he said. "The election results suggest folks are willing to give us a chance to make the investments."

Kerr, a former programmer and analyst for the University of Chicago library, was elected to a second term. She currently serves as the board's vice president.

Longtime trustee, newcomer win 6-year terms on Elgin Community College board

By: Rafael Guerrero



Elgin Community College Board Trustee Clare Ollayos has secured a sixth term, receiving the second highest vote out of five candidates.

Voters have elected an incumbent to her fifth term and a newcomer to his first in the Elgin Community College Board of Trustees election, according to unofficial vote results.

With all precincts from Kane, DuPage, Cook and McHenry counties reporting, newcomer Shane Nowak was the top vote-getter out of the five candidates running in the Tuesday contest. He received a total of 7,897 votes, followed by four-term board member Clare Ollayos, who netted 7,693 votes.

Both Elgin residents will serve six-year terms. The election results are considered unofficial until the numbers are certified later this month.

Appointed Trustee Ryan Weiss, of Elgin, lost his election bid, coming in fourth with 6,832 votes. He was appointed to fill a board vacancy in 2017 and is a 1997 ECC graduate who served as a student trustee to the board while in college.

Challenger Adriana Barriga-Green, of Elgin, came in third with 7,666 votes and Nazneen Hashmi, of Streamwood, received 5,389 votes.

Nowak is a 2002 graduate of Elgin Community College. He has prior work experience in the higher education field and returned to Elgin Community College to obtain an emergency medical technician license, according to a questionnaire compiled by the Elgin Area League of Women Voters.

It was his second attempt at being elected to the board, having lost in 2017.

Ollayos, a chiropractic physician in Elgin, won her first board election in 1995. She has served as the board chairman in past.

Elgin Community College District 509 spans parts of four counties and in addition to Elgin also includes the towns of Bartlett, Carpentersville and St. Charles. School districts **U46**, 300, 301 and 303 are part of the district.