

Non-certified RHAM staff have no contract

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HEBRON — The Regional School District 8 school board and the union for RHAM middle and high school's non-certified staff are headed toward arbitration.

The contract for the non-certified staff — paraprofessionals, custodians, bookkeepers and secretaries — expired in July 2008. Negotiations failed and the two sides went to mediation last November.

This week, the board of education discussed bargaining with the union in executive session, but failed to ratify a new contract.

Both the union representative for the non-certified staff, Matthew O'Connor, and the superintendent of schools, Robert Siminski, said the next step was likely arbitration. "Arbitration dates have been scheduled," Siminski said.

O'Connor, with CSEA/SEIU Local 2001, said union members had been bargaining in good faith, expecting a contract to be ratified by school board members this week.

"The contract our members ratified back in September was, for the most part, put forward by the members of the school board," O'Connor said.

O'Connor released a copy of the new contract ratified by union members last month.

One proposed change approved by the union pertains to health insurance.

The previous contract, covering the years from July 2005 to June 2008, specified that "all employees hired on or before June 30, 2002 and who work a minimum of six and one half hours per day and ten months per year" pay 14 percent toward their health insurance through monthly payroll deductions.

The proposed contract deletes the description of employees and substitutes "all eligible employees choosing to participate in the plan" and proposes the percentages contributed be 15.5 percent in 2009-10, 17 percent in 2010-11, and 17.5 percent in 2011-12.

The proposed contract also adds language pertaining to health savings account in addition

to the current insurance plan, with employees contributing through payroll deductions 12.5 percent in 2009-10, 14 percent in 2010-11, and 14.5 percent in 2011-12.

The proposed contract also proposes a wage increase of 3.75 percent for 2008-09; 2 percent for 2009-10; 4.10 percent in 2010-11, and 4 percent in 2011-12.

O'Connor called the proposed increases "nominal," saying union members understood the difficult economic climate and the figures were based on previous negotiations.

"They've been working under an expired contract for a year and a half," O'Connor said of the non-certified employees. "They are among the lowest paid in their job class in the entire region."

Siminski said he had no comment on what parts of the contract the board of education members might have had concerns about that prevented them from voting to ratify it.

Arbitration dates are scheduled for December and January.