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Teachers To Hear Lower Offer Is Best

Board members respond to a march by classified employees by promising to hear individual grievances. Page B3.

By Sigrid Bathen
Bee Staff Writer

Bargaining representatives of the San Juan Teachers Association will recommend to members tonight that they accept a lower salary settlement — with better benefits — than the proposal favored by school district negotiators.

Ironically, association members say the higher percentage settlement favored by district officials would cost the district \$120,000 more annually than the proposal favored by the association.

San Juan Unified School District officials say they would not accept the association proposal, which was one of two suggested Monday by a state mediator. Both sides in the heated contract dispute are making strike preparations pending a 7 o'clock association meeting tonight at La Sierra High School.

To allow members to vote on the mediation proposal, the teachers associ-

ation postponed until Thursday a strike originally scheduled for today.

At the same time, representatives of the district's non-teaching or "classified" personnel scheduled meetings at 10 a.m. today at the district's Walnut Avenue headquarters, and 7 p.m. in the district parking lot. Tony Mutoza, chairman of local chapter 127 of the California School Employees Association, which represents 1,700 San Juan workers — cafeteria employees, bus drivers, maintenance workers and others — said the association voted Thursday to strike because of dissatisfaction with negotiations in a contract reopener.

"We're tired of dilly-dallying around," Mutoza said. "Our people are fit to be tied."

Mutoza said the district's offer of a 5.25 per cent raise was unsatisfactory. The association wants 10 per cent. He said cafeteria workers currently make \$581 to \$707 per month, while top-scale bus drivers earn \$948 per month.

Tuesday night, approximately 200

members of the classified workers union assembled at the district office on Walnut Avenue to protest the district wage offer.

In a press conference Tuesday afternoon, San Juan board President Janice Garfinkle said in a prepared statement that the board had agreed to accept the mediator's proposal, which would allow for an overall 7.6 per cent increase in teacher salaries. Earlier, district negotiators had stood firm on a 7.06 per cent increase.

District officials say annual wages now range from \$10,577 to \$23,193.

Teachers Association President John Berger said the teachers' bargaining team would recommend approval of the mediator's alternate proposal, which calls for a 6.15 per cent salary increase, but would include slight reductions in class size and eliminate other duties such as meeting attendance and required unpaid chaperoning at school functions.

San Juan budget director William Pieper said short-term costs of the 6.15 per cent proposal would be less, "but long-term costs motivated the board" to approve the higher percentage increase.

Garfinkle said the board is committed "to be honest and open in our communications with the public and with our teachers and staff." She said the board is "making every effort to avert a work stoppage," but would continue to provide school services if one occurs.

The district has been hurriedly taking applications for \$80-per-day substitute teaching positions, and Garfinkle said more than 500 applications are now on file.

To meet the 7.6 per cent increase, Garfinkle said, the board would "ask for direction from the teachers, staff and public on cuts in our budget in order to be fiscally responsible."

Garfinkle also accused association leaders of "misinforming" their members, and said she based her conclusions partly on telephone calls she had received from teachers and "parents who have been in close contact with teachers."

"Teachers should seriously consider the conflict within the leadership ranks before any preparations are made for a work stoppage," she said.

Berger characterized Garfinkle's allegations as "a dodge" that "doesn't deserve further comment."

"Teachers are willing to accept a little less salary for significant improvements in class size and in their contract," Berger said. "We are completely and totally frustrated with the (district negotiators') refusal to deal with the issues that have been before them since last February."

Under the proposal favored by negotiators for the teachers, Berger said, class size would be reduced by approximately two students, depending on the type of class.

In addition, he said, the proposal would put a limit on the number of meetings teachers could be required to attend and would require administrators "to make a reasonable effort to assign non-instructional duties" — such as chaperoning school dances — on instructional days. Berger said that would mean a teacher couldn't be "required to chaperone a dance for free."

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Bee photo by Owen Brewer

San Juan School District employees armed with picket signs attended Tuesday night's school board meeting.

