

Child care available if teachers walk out

Several child care facilities say they are ready to accept children temporarily if Dallas teachers strike. And the Dallas Taxpayer Forum has lined up caregivers who will take children in their homes until schools reopen.

Little People Day Care, which rents space in the Back Mountain Memorial Library building, will keep children all day who now stay only before and after school. While preference for additional children would be given to previous students at the school, others might be accommodated. Call Miss Kohler at 675-6557.

Wee Care Foundation, which has a facility on West Center Street in Shavertown, would make arrangements to keep before and after school children all day, and may be able to accept more on a temporary basis. Call Lori Snee at 675-8382.

The Child Development Council of Northeastern Pennsylvania operates several locations, including one in the Back Mountain. While space is limited, John Hogan, coordinator of child care, said that many home day care facilities are available, and his office would direct parents to them. He may be called at 822-6500.

The operators also suggested that since older students who babysit will be available if the schools are closed, parents should get in touch with their regular sitters.

Steve Werner, president of the Dallas Taxpayers' Forum, said his group was setting up an informal referral service for parents needing child care. "People are excited and willing to do this," Werner said.

Werner can be called at 696-3516.

Stalemate

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John Cleary said that translates into approximately 1 1/3 mill tax increase for each percentage point.

"It seems to me that they ought to be able to live with it, especially in view of the current economic conditions and Casey's budget," said Cleary. "It wasn't frivolous. I thought it was something the teachers and the citizens can live with."

Wycallis said Dallas is expected to receive \$151,000 less in state subsidies this year than last year.

A 4% increase would have meant approximately a \$225,000 increase in the district's payroll, which the teachers union assigns to the salary steps they choose. Richardson said that one thing the board insisted upon was the lowest salary step get at least a 4% increase.

Cleary says that "top loading" salary schedules so those at the top get the biggest increases has been a problem at Dallas.

"It's dramatically unfair, but when you look at the dynamics of a group and you have 140 people at the top of the group, where are the votes going?" asked Cleary.

A negotiating session had been tenta-

tively scheduled for February 12. The boards' negotiating committee includes Richardson, Cleary, and Ernest Ashbridge Jr., who was away on vacation during the February 10 meeting.

Teachers want parity with other districts

Wagner did not appreciate Richardson's summary of the negotiations.

"Unlike Mr. Richardson, I believe negotiation is a topic to be discussed between the association and the school board," said Wagner.

Parity with other districts is what the teachers want, charging both in flyers handed out at the meeting and in testimony that if they accepted the offer, they would be the lowest paid in the area.

"I personally would have been the lowest paid teacher in Luzerne County with my qualifications," said Rita Mundy, a teacher and resident of Dallas, of the board's latest proposal. "We don't have to be the highest paid. We probably can't even be average, but we don't want to be the lowest paid."

Members of the public weren't sympathetic.

"I am professional. I'm a nurse. I make \$8.08 an hour base pay," said Susan Sylvia of Dallas Township. "I don't make half of what a Dallas teacher makes. On my nurse's

salary I can't afford to pay the teacher's salary. I have a second job. Not all of those who are educated, dedicated and committed make that kind of money."

"I've paid my dues, but I will not make as much money as you will this year," said Andrew France of Shavertown, who owns his own metal fabrication business. France said that his work as a welder has taken its toll on his eyes and his lungs, and that he pays \$2,000 a month in overhead before he makes a dime.

Robert Frey of Dallas challenged Wagner's assertion that the teachers have been working harmoniously with the school board.

"How harmonious could you have worked with the school board if in over a year you haven't reached an agreement?"

"I would say this union will not let the teachers accept anything but an 8 or 9 percent increase," said Frey. "If these people decide to strike, and I don't think they will because I think they're better teachers than that, but if they do, they walk out that door, you'll have no health benefits, you'll have no salary, and we're going to replace you."

Wagner said that a strike has not been planned, but the teachers meet every day. "There are other things we can do besides

strike," said Wagner, who wouldn't elaborate.

If it does come to a strike, superintendent Wycallis said the district is ready.

Students question schedule change to seven periods

Though talk of the teacher contract negotiations dominated Monday's school board meeting, some other issues were discussed.

Approximately 100 students clustered together in a part of the auditorium to protest the district's plan to change from eight class periods to seven longer class periods next fall.

"We as students live with a seven period day and I haven't talked to one student who agreed with it," said Kristen Gurdin for the students present.

Gurdin also questioned if the Taxpayers Forum has a plan to implement the merit pay program they've been calling for.

During the regular board meeting, Catherine Wega was appointed to the sixth-grade teaching position in the Middle School left open by Anthony Martinelli, who was made principal of the school.

Wega was one of the five teachers furloughed over the summer by the school board, and had requested sabbatical leave.

Fringe benefit increases add to contract value

Though salaries have been the biggest roadblock in contract negotiations with the teachers, other issues have been dealt with as well.

Here's a list of the other parts of the latest plan that the school board's negotiating committee offered the district's teachers.

- The board offered to:
- increase pay for department chairs and extra curricular positions such as coaches by 3 1/2%.
 - increase home school and summer school rates, as well as unused sick leave pay.
 - increase Blue Cross/Blue Shield major medical coverage from \$250,000 to \$1 million.
 - increase coverage for mental and nervous sickness from \$2,500 to \$50,000.
 - increase life insurance \$3,000 a year from its current \$34,000.
 - add an extra personal day, making it two for the school year.
 - increase reimbursement for school credits from \$90 a credit now to 50% the first year, 60% the second year, and 70% the third year for graduate credits. Undergraduate credits would be reimbursed at 10% less each year and in-service courses would be paid for entirely by the district.

Salaries

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make? The latest state survey of wages in the Scranton-Wilkes-Barre area, conducted in the fall of 1988 computed the hourly wage of teachers by dividing their yearly salary by the number of hours they would put in if they worked 52 weeks a year. The average elementary teacher in the area at that time made \$18.39 an hour; more than the average registered nurse (\$12.47), mechanical engineer (\$16.65), electrical engineer (\$18.25), civil engineer (\$15.22), accountant (\$12.11), or pharmacist (\$17.49).

The only more highly paid professionals were secondary teachers (\$19.13) and vocational educational counselors (\$19.42).

Today, if the average Dallas teacher's salary is divided as if they worked 40 hours, 52 weeks a year, the hourly wage would be \$18.57.

If the hourly wage were figured based on 185 eight-hour days (which includes in-service days), the average hourly wage is \$26.11.

Do extra credits add value?

One of the justifications given for teacher salaries is the level of education they achieve.

At Dallas the average teacher has 22 years of experience, and most are at an M or ME step level plus additional credits, which helps determine their pay.

The M stands for a master's degree, the ME for master's equivalency, and they are not the same. A master's degree is granted by an accredited college, and is focused in a particular area.

For a master's equivalency, a teacher must take 18 credits from an approved college; the remaining 18 credits can be in-service courses approved by the state department of education.

The in-service courses aren't necessarily focused in a particular subject, and some school board members are concerned that they're not as challenging as they should be.

There's also a difference in the cost involved. A regular three-credit graduate course can cost about \$900, which the district will reimburse the teacher for \$90 a credit.

"I took a course last year; it was \$915 for three graduate credits at Wilkes. I was reimbursed \$270," says Wagner. "If you want to get a degree in another field, they don't reimburse you for that."

In comparison, an in-service course costs between \$30 and \$45 a credit, more than covered by the district's reimbursement.

About 65 teachers in the district have a master's degree, with about an equal number with their master's equivalency. While there may be a big difference in the amount of money a teacher invests in the additional credits, the extra

pay is the same for both.

"I think when we talk about the educational level of the teachers, we have to look past the M plus 36," said John Cleary, a member of the school board. "What kind of credits are they? Are they in-service courses, travel courses, video courses? The majority of courses in the past few years have not been the normal courses."

School board member Ellen Nagy, a former teacher, said that the board is concerned with the quality of the in-service courses.

"Some of the in-service courses are very good, and some of them you wish they were a little more involved," said Nagy. "I know the negotiating team has addressed the issue. The board would like to tighten up the kinds of courses being offered."

The district had a problem with course offered several years ago by University of California at Santa Barbara. A year after some teachers took the course, the district found that it wasn't a graduate level course. An arbitrator ruled that the district had to reimburse the teachers for the course anyway because they had taken it in good faith, said Superintendent Gerald Wycallis.

Board member Thomas Stitzer, a reading specialist in the Wilkes-

Barre Area School District, feels that in-service courses should be prohibited beyond the master's level.

While the in-service courses are not always as challenging as a regular graduate course, Nagy, Stitzer, and superintendent Gerald Wycallis say that sometimes they are more relevant to what the teachers do in the classroom.

"Personally I think there's a lot of benefit for our teachers to get a master's degree," said Wycallis. He points out however, that it's difficult for an elementary teacher to apply what they learn from working on a masters in administration directly in the classroom.

Stitzer adds that the in-service courses encourage older teachers, who may not be willing to spend \$600 on a regular class, to continue their education.

"There are some good in-service courses," said Wycallis, naming courses in classroom management and teaching the visually impaired as examples. "But where do you draw the line. One thing I try to do is see what kind of courses the person has taken before I approve it. If the person has five or six course in computers I say, don't you think you've had enough, or I may just disapprove it. It's done on an individual basis."

Food

(continued from page 1)

United Methodist Committee On Relief. It is part of a nationwide effort run in cooperation with the Russian Orthodox Church and the Soviet Peace Fund to send relief to the troubled country.

Of the approximately 18 Back Mountain churches contacted to assist with the collection, six have responded so far, Shillebeer said.

St. Therese's, Dallas Baptist, Dallas United Methodist, Shavertown United Methodist and Courtdale United Methodist churches are helping Trucksville United Methodist Church with the collection.

For further information, contact church secretary Cathy Barlow at 696-3897.

These items are needed

- These are the specific food items requested by the church:
- Five-pound packages of flour, sugar, pasta, rice and powdered milk.
 - Six-ounce cans of canned meat (approximately 12 equals 5 lbs.)
 - One-pound packages of tea bags, dehydrated soups, solid chocolate bars and dehydrated Vitamin C-enriched fruit juice drink.
 - Two-pound cans of shortening.
- No plastic or glass containers will be accepted for shipping. The church will pack individual boxes containing one of each item for distribution to a Russian family. The UMCOR will add a postcard in Russian explaining what is in the box and how it was acquired.

Meyers class of '37 plans reunion

The E.L. Meyers class of 1937 is planning their 55th reunion. All class members are urged to meet at the Mark II at the end of Blackman Street on March 12 at 6 p.m. for a dinner meeting.



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