NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

NEWSDAY, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2001

No Deal Yet For Teachers

Archdiocese, union face state board today

By Nick Chiles
STAFF WRITER

Teachers from 10 Catholic schools in the New York area were no closer to a contract settlement with the Archdiocese of New York yesterday, the third day of a strike.

"We're still on strike and no talks have been scheduled," said Henry Kielkucki, head of the Lay Teachers Association, which represents about 450 teachers at the 10 schools.

Most of the 10 schools were forced to close early once again, leading some parents to start calling the schools and threatening to withhold tuition. Though the students have yet to have a normal school day since the strike began Thursday, the archdiocese hasn't yet made a decision about what adjustments, if any, it might make to tuition, archdiocese spokesman Joseph Zwilling said yesterday.

"It is a subject that will be addressed in the future, if necessary," Zwilling said.

The archdiocese and the teachers union are scheduled to appear before the New York State Employment Relations Board today in a hearing on the union's claim that the archdiocese has refused to bargain "in good faith."

The teachers are scheduled to hold a rally before the hearing at 9:30 a.m. in front of the employment relations board on 34th Street and Seventh Avenue.

"The diocese has said they are willing to go back to the table and want to negotiate," Kielkucki said. "The results of this hearing will show they have no intention of bargaining in good faith."

Kielkucki said the proceeding will also provide some legal protection to the striking teachers if the archdiocese tried to permanently replace them.

Zwilling said the union files the same grievance before the Employment Relation Board during contract negotiations every three years, and he couldn't recall the archdiocese ever being found guilty of refusing to bargain in good faith. A decision by the board is legally binding in court.

The Lay Teachers Association is seeking an 18 percent raise over three years and is fighting to keep down teachers' health care costs.

The teachers are paid an average of $31,900 a year. The archdiocese has offered an 8 percent pay raise over three years. Another sticking point is the union's quest for a new pension, which the archdiocese refuses to grant.

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