

WILMETTE SCHOOL BOARD ULTIMATUM TRIGGERS CRISIS “Last best offer” puts District 39 on the brink of shutdown

September 16, 2008 – Wilmette The surprise decision by the District 39 Board of Education to issue an ultimatum to teachers has put Wilmette schools on the verge of a shutdown.

Members of the Wilmette Education Association (WEA) voted overwhelmingly Monday to approve the filing of a “ten-day notice of intent to strike” with the Illinois Education Labor Relations Board.

“We have been working without a contract for three weeks, and our salaries have been frozen. We believed the school board was serious about negotiating a fair, affordable contract with the teachers,” said WEA co-spokesperson, Kelly Jackson.

According to Jackson, the board’s decision to go on the attack against teachers mere hours after a lengthy bargaining session ended shows a lack of concern for both teachers and students.

“The board simultaneously issued an ultimatum and started a misinformation campaign designed to mislead the public into thinking the board has offered a fair contract. It appears the board wants the schools closed and the teachers on picket lines,” co-spokesperson, Debby Atwater said. “This is disappointing, considering the climate of collaboration that we have been experiencing for the past five years.”

The board has been publicizing misleading information about its offer to teachers and about the contracts other nearby similar districts have bargained with their teachers.

“We are looking for equity with comparable area districts, nothing more. The salary increase offered to Wilmette teachers is not equitable with our peers and the benefits package is not comparable to those offered to teachers elsewhere.”

Jackson and Atwater said the contract Wilmette teachers are after would benefit current and future students, as well as the district’s homeowners, by allowing Wilmette to continue to attract and retain high quality teachers.

“Great schools are the reason families move to Wilmette and great schools require great teachers. Wilmette must be able to compete for the best teachers by offering compensation packages comparable to those in other nearby districts,” Jackson said.

The filing of the intent to strike is the last legal hurdle required before school employees can go on strike, but it does not ensure there will be a strike. At this time, no additional bargaining session has been scheduled. For more information, please visit the WEA website at www.wea39.org