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## Hopeful & Optimistic: Will 13 be the lucky number?

By Sharon K. Sobotta



Lafayette school District teachers picket at Plaza Park. Photo Sharon K. Sobotta

As Lafayette bustled with early trick-or-treaters during the city's annual downtown pre-Halloween event on Oct. 27, teachers picketed in the downtown plaza and outside of Stanley Middle School while crossing their fingers that a deal would be struck at the negotiating table.

Kristi Gingrich is a third- and fourth-grade teacher at Lafayette Elementary School and the president of Lafayette Education Association. "We're in the first of hopefully one mediation meeting with negotiators from the district and the state at the district office. We are staying positive and hopeful that we can come to a resolution today," Gingrich said as she stood beside a dozen other teachers, while the negotiating meeting was still in progress. "We got a text update that things were moving in a positive direction. We just want the mediator to see our presence and see how committed we are to getting a fair contract."

Teachers standing alongside Gingrich wore shirts saying #StudentSuccess and chanted "Students First" and "Lafayette Strong" as a steady flow of drivers and passersby honked and cheered them on. When asked to talk about the slogans and chants, Gingrich reiterated that the contract teachers are seeking - which boils down to a 14% raise, credit for years of service, and more comprehensive healthcare coverage for families - is about the students.

"The misconception is that this contract is for us. It's really all about the kids," Gingrich said. "We've seen a drop in teachers wanting to work here. In order to hire and retain the best teachers for these students, we have to offer competitive compensation. We see the difference when people don't stay or we can't fill positions."

Scott Moe, a fifth-grade teacher at LES was at the negotiating table. Moe said that although he wasn't at liberty to share the details until members had voted and a final agreement is ratified, he is feeling hopeful. "We had a productive meeting with the mediator and are discussing a possible agreement with LEA members at this time," Moe said.

The Lafayette Education Association members were still in the voting process as Lamorinda Weekly went to print. Although Moe stopped short of revealing specific information, he did confirm that a viable offer is under consideration: "In past sessions we did not feel that we could stand behind the offer made and did not bring it to our membership for ratification. The impasse process was positive and we feel that we reached a good settlement for our LEA members."

Even if there's a bit of a waiting game while the LEA votes are tabulated, teachers seem to be breathing easier and carrying a sense of hopeful optimism as they wait for the final word. "I am very proud of how LEA came together to show the district that we are a strong unified team. We fought hard for what we felt was right for our students and teachers and with the support of many community members made our message heard," Moe said. "We appreciate the support from the community; I really think it helped make a difference!"

There is some speculation that perhaps there will be a meeting in the middle between the district's offer of a 12% raise and the teacher's ask for a 14% raise - with a 13% raise. However, neither the teachers nor the district confirmed that. Either way, it seems the impending contract may be days away from being settled. If there is a need to return to the bargaining table, the next meeting will happen on Nov. 9.

Meredith Ranahan is one parent who is crossing her fingers that the teachers get a great contract. As the daughter of a PE and science teacher and a self-described beneficiary of great teachers during her own formative years, Ranahan has deep respect for teachers everywhere. "[As a society], we pay so much for so many careers, but the people who are teaching our children and helping to shape them into productive [citizens of the world] are not being honored," Ranahan says. "My children love school and they love learning. That's what our teachers in Lafayette make possible by setting up a nurturing, loving learning environment."

Ranahan has a second-grader at LES and a sixth-grader at Stanley. "It was a dream for Lyla [my daughter] to get Mrs. Marsden as a teacher. She loves following in the footsteps of her brother who also had Mrs. Marsden," Renahan says. "She feels like her teacher understands her. That's the kind of teachers we have in Lafayette - teachers that make children excited to go to school and learn."

Correction: In a previous story, we referred to the LPIE acronym incorrectly. The correct words in the acronym are Lafayette Partners in Education.

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