

Teachers picket low wages in Sarasota County

A group of approximately 15 people, including adults and children, are standing on a sidewalk and holding up various protest signs. The signs are mostly white with black text, and some are pink. The text on the signs includes: "TEACHERS LEAVING THE PROFESSION BECAUSE OF LOW PAY!", "MONEY FOR CENTRAL OFFICE BEDESIGN MORE IMPORTANT THAN STUDENTS", "SCHOOL BOARD IN SARASOTA DOESN'T CARE ABOUT THEIR TEACHERS!", "SARASOTA TEACHERS, STUDENTS & STAFF DESERVE BETTER!", "AF RE SANZ", and "SARASOTA TEACHERS, STUDENTS & STAFF DESERVE BETTER!". The people are dressed in casual clothing, and the background shows a street with a car and some trees.

Teachers across the county lined up on the side of Tamiami Trail in front of Sarasota School Board buildings. More than 400 teachers, bus drivers and other school employees picketed for better pay Jan. 9. PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE SARASOTA HERALD TRIBUNE

by Tricia Saputera

Asst. Match Editor

Holding signs describing second jobs and financial hardships, the Sarasota Classified Teachers Association (SC/TA) organized over 400 teachers to picket outside the Sarasota County School Board office Jan. 9 to bring attention to teachers' salaries.

For four months, the school district and SC/TA have been unable to agree on a two-year contract regarding how teachers should be paid. The main sticking point is how "grandfathered" teachers hired before July 1, 2011 under the grandfathered salary schedule (GFS) should be paid. The SC/TA is the teacher's union and

strives to achieve equal treatment for all of their members. Out of all the teachers in Sarasota County, 83 percent are in the union; not all teachers are required to be members.

According to a state law, teachers hired after July 1, 2011 are now under the performance salary schedule (PSS), where they will be paid according to an algorithm factoring in their students' performance on standardized tests and performance rating. However, these PSS teachers do not receive tenure unlike grandfathered teachers. Tenure gives grandfathered teachers job security as they are not on an annual contract like the PSS teachers, and tenure allows the teachers to

know they will be rehired for the next school year. Classified employees, such as custodians and administrative assistants, are not under these schedules.

Teachers are rated by the school board based on their students' performance on standardized tests and rating. For the PSS teachers, the school board is currently proposing a \$1,725 salary raise for teachers rated as Effective and a \$2,325 salary raise for teachers rated as Highly Effective. The school board has recently proposed a step and a one-time \$600 bonus to grandfathered teachers. A step is earned after another year of teaching experience and on the GFS this raises their annual salary based on their col-

lepre de process.

On the GFS, once a teacher has been teaching for 29 years, they have reached the highest step and maximum salary. For these teachers with many years of experience under their belt, they are currently offered by the school board a 1.5 percent one-time bonus plus a \$600 one-time bonus. The school board is also allowing grandfathered teachers to switch to the PSS, but the decision cannot be reversed. In short, years of teaching experience are a factor in how teachers under the GFS are paid, but it does not play a role in the PSS.

The SC/TA, representing the teachers, does not agree with the school board's offer and would like a step and a 2 percent raise for the GFS teachers. For the PSS teachers, the SC/TA currently proposes a 3.5 percent salary raise for teachers rated as Effective plus a \$500 raise for teachers rated as Highly Effective. The school board and SC/TA will discuss the contract at bargaining sessions in the future.

If the two sides cannot come to terms, an impasse can be declared by either side and a mediator will be called in to resolve the issue.

"I don't feel that money is the issue anymore. It's more about how that money is distributed, and management has taken the position that if we're going to have a two-year deal, then by the end of that two-year deal we should be in compliance with the spirit of the law," Scott Lempe, Assistant Superintendent/Chief Operating Officer, said. "Being in compliance with that [performance salary] law, I

think is the sticking point."

At the picket Jan. 9, 15 Pine View teachers and classified staff attended. Math teacher Cathy Hollar also noticed the appearance of the 1968 Saratoga Country Schools superintendent joining the teachers. 1968 was the last time teachers demonstrated in Saratoga County.

"I was really pleased with all the positive responses that we got from people supporting the teachers... bonding the horns, the big trucks tooting, them rolling down the windows...," English teacher and Pine View SC/TA representative Linda Lyons said. "[The environment] was very positive, a good feeling from the community" Lyons is one of five union representatives from Pine View, others being third-grade teacher Laura Brady, social studies teacher Roberto Lameh, science teacher Marybeth Torres and office secretary Jennifer Reyna representing Pine View's classified staff.

Because an agreement has not been settled, at



PHOTO PROVIDED BY
RASOTA HERALD TRIBUNE

have been invited.

"[The picket] was awesome," Hollar said. "It was so much fun, there was a lot of excitement, there were teachers that knew each other from other schools...this was very non-threatening and positive."