**Chicago Teachers Strike: Union Members Meet Tuesday To Decide Whether To End Protests**

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\* Contract has compromises on teacher evaluations

\* Union fears mayor will close schools, layoff teachers

\* Judge will hear mayor's request to stop strike Wednesday

By Greg McCune

CHICAGO, Sept 18 (Reuters) - Chicago Teachers Union delegates will meet on Tuesday to decide whether to end a strike that has closed the nation's third-largest school district for more than a week and prompted Mayor Rahm Emanuel to seek a court order to stop it.

Some 800 union delegates representing the 29,000 teachers and support staff in Chicago Public Schools met on Sunday but continued the strike for two days so they could review details of a proposed new contract negotiated with Emanuel.

The meeting on Tuesday will be the second attempt by the union membership to try to get approval from delegates for the compromise deal, which must be approved by a simple majority to suspend the strike.

Union President Karen Lewis said no formal vote was taken at the Sunday meeting but a clear majority wanted to continue the strike.

The outcome of the Tuesday meeting may depend not only on how union delegates feel about the tentative agreement, but also how they react to Emanuel's decision to go to court to stop the strike. A judge scheduled a hearing on the request for Wednesday morning.

In a scathing statement released on Monday, the union called Emanuel a bully and said the legal move was "vindictive."

The union walked out on Sept. 10 for the first time in 25 years to protest Emanuel's demand for sweeping education reforms aimed at improving Chicago's struggling inner city schools. Some 350,000 public school students were out of school for a seventh day on Tuesday in the largest U.S. labor dispute in a year.

The strike has focused attention on a lively national debate over how to improve failing schools. Emanuel, backed by a powerful reform movement, believes poorly performing schools should be closed and reopened with new staff and principals, or converted to "charter" schools which often are non-union and run by private groups or philanthropists.

Teachers want more resources put into neighborhood public schools to help them succeed. Chicago teachers say many of their students live in poor and crime-ridden areas and this affects their learning.

President Barack Obama has been silent about the nasty dispute in his home city pitting his former top White House aide, Emanuel, against a major national labor union that also supports him. As the strike has dragged on there has been concern that the rift would damage union support for Obama and Democrats in the run-up to the Nov. 6 presidential election.

During the first week of the strike most parents of public school students and Chicago voters supported the union, according to opinion polls.

Chicago Public School parent Melissa Lindberg said Emanuel is a Democrat in name only and compared him to Wisconsin Republican Governor Scott Walker, who championed a law stripping public sector unions there of much of their power.

"I think the mayor is just plain wrong and at fault for the current strike," she wrote in an opinion column on Catalyst Chicago, a local education information service. "I think he set out to demonize the teachers, imply they were overpaid and under-performing."

The contract that union delegates will consider includes a compromise on Emanuel's key demand for teacher evaluations based on the results of their students on standardized tests of reading, math and science progress. Test results will be taken into consideration but not as much as Emanuel originally wanted.

Many Chicago public school students perform poorly on the tests and the union fears that Emanuel will close scores of schools with a poor academic record once the strike is called off, leading to mass teacher layoffs.

The deal calls for an average 17.6 percent raise for teachers over four years and some benefit improvements. Chicago teachers make an average of about $76,000 annually, according to the school district.

A decision by the teachers to reject the deal and continue the strike would throw the compromise deal into doubt. Emanuel's chief negotiator, School Board President David Vitale, made clear on Monday that the school district was not interested in reopening negotiations.

If the strike continues, attention would turn to the court hearing on Wednesday where Cook County Circuit Judge Peter Flynn will consider whether the strike is legal.