Striking teacher Robert Beadle and school worker Hilda Carter man the picket line at LaPlace.

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St. John school workers shout down offer; strike to continue

LAPLACE (AP) — Striking school workers Wednesday night shouted down the take-it-or-leave-it offer from the St. John the Baptist Parish School Board and continued their 16-day-old strike.

About 300 of the 700 strikers — including teachers, aides, cafeteria workers, secretaries and bus drivers — laughed at the board's proposal and shouted “No” when asked if it met their demands.

“Hang in there and let us get a contract that is binding,” teacher Harris Butler told the group. “Don’t weaken. Don’t go back to school.”

Talks broke off late Tuesday at Gov. Edwards' office in New Orleans, where the board and an employee committee had been meeting since Monday morning.

The School Board gave the employees until 7 p.m. to approve the board's settlement plan and give up demands for collective bargaining.

The 12-page proposal, signed by all 10 board members, included guarantees against reprisals and discrimination, a full school year, retroactive pay increases if money becomes available, and a grievance committee consisting of employees and board members.

It did not mention the proposed 5 percent raise teachers requested, but it pledged to give them a raise if money becomes available.

“Frankly, the proposal offers nothing new,” said Rita Williams, a spokeswoman for the Louisiana Association of Educators. “They say should additional funds become available, that money will be used for pay increases retroactive to Sept. 1, 1984.”

Education for the 6,200 St. John public school students was brought to a virtual standstill when the strikers walked out Aug. 28.

Board Chairman Charles Dubon said earlier that the board will not make any offers to employees.

“They'll have to contact us when they're ready to give up collective bargaining,” he said.

The board and employees met for about 12 hours Monday and nine hours Tuesday before talks broke off shortly before 10 p.m.

During the discussions, employees and board members could be heard shouting at each other. Several appeared visibly shaken when spokesmen for the two sides talked to reporters late Tuesday.

Although the two sides appeared to be finished for the night, Robert d'Hemecourt, executive assistant to Edwards and mediator in the talks, tried to get them to resume negotiations early Wednesday. He said he wanted the board and employees to reach a settlement before they left for the night.

But the board said further negotiations would be futile until the strikers give up demands for collective bargaining.