

Public turned away from hearing

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ensure their wish was carried out.

"We pay your salaries and we pay the salaries of the administrators and you're standing here in this school that we paid for telling us that we can't even listen to them talking about what we are going to pay for the next three years," Walter D. Miller, president of the Wicliester Taxpayers Association and a member of the Board of Selectmen, said to the arbitrators.

The state appoints three arbitrators, one to represent the administrators, one for the town and the third to serve as a moderator. Two receive fees of \$600 a day and one receives \$500 a day.

The Board of Education pays for half of all the arbitrator's fees incurred, or \$350 a day. There is no set length of the proceedings, with some lasting days while others take weeks.

Edgar Bernier, the school department's finance director, said that no money was budgeted for arbitration costs. During the budget cuts the entire line item was drained by the Board of Education, he said.

The arbitration proceedings began after attempts to negotiate a new contract between the administrators and the board broke down.

Apparently it is not just salaries that the two sides cannot agree on. They also could not agree on whether or not the hearings should be open to the public.

The only vote in favor of opening the meeting to the public was cast by Victor M. Muschell, a Torrington attorney who is serving as the Board of Education's arbitrator. According to Muschell, the education board told him it approved of the public's attendance at the meeting.

But the administrators did not feel the same way. The six-member union voted unanimously to conduct the talks in private.

John M. Gesmonde, a Hamden-based attorney who represented the administrators, told the crowd that it was in the best interest of the administrators not to conduct the process in public.

"We have employees that do not want to be subject to public scrutiny and public reaction," he said to the dissatisfied crowd. "They want the process to be free of the emotions and free of the personalities that could endanger the process."

But Gesmonde's description of the administrators as a group that feels intimidated by the public that would attend the negotiations got no sympathy from the residents.

Miller said the arbitration should be open to the public based on a recent ruling by the state Freedom of Information Commission on a Glastonbury case. According to that decision, arbitration is no longer considered a part of negotiations — that the public is excluded from attending.

However, unbeknownst to Miller and the others who sought admission yesterday, a Hartford court put a stay on FOI's Glastonbury decision Tuesday, making it void as a precedent.