

# the Chronicle

An Independent Newspaper Since 1877

Vol. 127 No. 59

Wednesday, March 11, 2009

Newsstand 75 Cents

## Food workers protest school board plan

### School board to vote on budget tonight

By **DAVID HINCHEY**  
Chronicle Staff Writer

WILLIMANTIC — The board of education will likely vote on a \$41.25 million, 2009-10 budget proposal tonight, though a forum Tuesday brought about concerns from a food service union.

Concerns were also raised over the budget proposal, which is a zero percent increase spending plan that proposes the elimination of 12 teaching positions and 20 paraprofessionals.

The school board meets tonight at 7 in the old Kramer Middle School at 322 Prospect St. Once the budget is finalized, it goes to the board of finance, which can also cut the bottom line. Voters have the final say in May.

Before the budget forum, members from the Connecticut State Employees Association, Service Employees International Union Local 2001 (CSEA/SEIU), rallied

to protest a plan to exploring the outsourcing of food services in the schools.

"We believe the board should not 'outsource' the health and nutrition of Windham's children to the lowest bidder," said Deborah Debord, food services assistant manager and local union president, in a statement distributed to board of education members.

Debord said the union understands the difficult economic crisis and how important it is to work together. "In the meantime, the board should not give in to short-term fixes like contracting-out that will do long-term damage to our community," she said.

"Let me tell you what I know about private food service companies and what has happened in other districts that have outsourced their schools' nutrition services. Private companies are in this for profit," she said in the statement.

"Our schools' cafeteria program does not need to make a profit,

so we can focus exclusively on providing the best quality, nutritious meals to the kids. The only way private companies can make a profit is to lower workers' wages or do-away with their health care, and lower the quality of food they serve," she said.

Windham Board of Education Chairman Kenneth Folan said Windham Superintendent Doreen Fuller will be sending out a request for proposals for food services at Windham public schools.

Folan said it was Fuller doing her "due diligence" to look for potential savings. "It's exploratory and it's the right thing to do," Folan said, adding he doesn't know if there will be a savings.

Folan said the process is to send out an request for proposals, review it at a board of education subcommittee and conduct a public forum before the full board of education takes up the matter.

He added it's not likely a change — if any is made — would be for the 2009-10 year. Savings, if any,

would be in place for the 2010-11 budget, Folan said.

Regarding the proposed budget, Folan said officials are moving forward with a zero percent increase and to maintain current services, it would likely require a 6.1 percent increase.

"It's not a pretty picture," Folan said, adding most of the cuts are at the elementary level since most of the cuts to the current budget were made at the high school level.

"We have to do what we have to do," he said, adding other cuts include a \$200,000 decrease in supplies. "The funds aren't there."

Fuller said school education officials will meet with the school's unions about possible give-backs. Union officials had requested school officials come back to them when they had more firm budget numbers.

"It's exactly the same as last year," Fuller said, adding officials had been working with finance board officials. "We'll manage."