

UTICA TEACHER RAISES AND CUTS



The city school district as well as the Utica Teachers Association has come together on an agreement for a new contract. Under the new contract, a number of cuts would be restored, ranging from a number of sports activities and even full-day kindergarten classes, along with dozens of teacher positions. In the meantime, however, the teachers refuse to give up on their raises, even though 157 employees are going to lose their job. The President of the Union, Larry Custodero, said that the agreement was completed and finalized earlier on in the week and he signed it back on Wednesday. The Superintendent, Bruce Karam, believes that the agreement is favorable, especially because it helps to restore several positions, preventing a number of people from losing their jobs. The district first planned to cut a total of 217 jobs as a way of making up for the budget deficit. However, the district did promise they would restore at least 100 of those positions, as well as full-day kindergarten, as long as the teachers could agree to the evaluation system that was set up for teachers and principals. Back in April, the union chose to reject the plan. With the new plan, 60 jobs would be restored out of the 217 jobs that were going to be cut. Out of the 60 jobs, 15 of the jobs would go to teachers who would be working with kindergarteners, as full-day kindergarten has been restored. The teachers would also get the \$1.5 million salary increase but would not receive a \$500,000 a year raise in addition to the other increase. The teacher evaluation would also be approved and several sports would be restored as well. Karam believes that the outcome is not necessarily a victory but said that something is better than nothing, especially when it comes down to this kind of process. During the week, union members are going to vote on the contract. Many are pleased to be able to vote at this point in time, especially because if they didn't, they would end up having to wait until September and at that point, it would be too late for positions and different programs to be restored. Custodero believes that during the April voting, the union did not do such a great job of telling the teachers what was in store for them on the contract, which caused a lot of confusion and uneasiness amongst union members. He also would not agree to the fact that he was pleased or happy about the new plan. In the meantime, he says he is an optimistic person and that he does understand that this is all that can be done at this point in time.