

Dividing issue is how to define base salary as district's first negotiations under Act 10 continue

The Cedar Grove-Belgium School Board and Cedar Grove-Belgium Teachers Association exchanged salary proposals on July 19 that are far apart.

The board proposed a 1% increase in the base pay of teachers, which totals about \$29,000 that would be divided among about 80 teachers, said Scott Tipple, head of the teacher's negotiating team.

A beginning teacher's salary is currently \$37,329.

The teachers asked for a 3.16% increase based on the teachers' highest base pay, which takes into account longevity but not education credits, Tipple said.

He estimated the cost of the teacher's proposal would be between \$90,000 and \$100,000.

The 3.16% is the current cost-of-living index and the highest raise allowed under Act 10, the state law that removed most collective bargaining rights for public employees and limits bargaining to base salary.

The two sides had different interpretations of base salary, School Board President Jim Lautenschlaeger said.

The School Board interprets it as the pay for a beginning teacher.

"We went with a 1% increase because we're not really sure where our financial situation is yet," Lautenschlaeger said. "We thought we would be \$400,000 in the hole and now we learn we're getting more state aid that we thought.

"It's hard to give someone a raise if you don't know if you can afford it. I think we'll have more of an idea of where our budget is at in the next couple of weeks."

The board must also consider salary increases for support staff and administrators, which in the past has been based on the teachers' raises, he said.

Tipple said the teachers went for the maximum allowed because of the uncertain economic climate.

"We're proposing the maximum allowed because next year the cost of living may be 1.5%," Tipple said.

Lautenschlaeger said he's hopeful the negotiations can be completed before students return to classes in September.

Teachers, board far apart on pay

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“I don’t think we’re that far apart,” he said. “I hope we can get things done and not have to worry about back pay and teachers not knowing what their salaries are going to be.

“I want everybody to be focused on educating kids when school starts.”

The next negotiation session will be in closed session on Tuesday, Aug. 14.