

Teachers get 4.2% wage, benefit hike

Written by Carol Pomeday
Wednesday, 17 February 2010 19:16

Two-year contract is first after end of QEO that set limits on educators' raises

For years, the state-imposed qualified economic offer held the increases for teachers' contracts to 3.79% in total benefits. That's changed as evidenced by a two-year teacher contract approved by the Cedar Grove-Belgium School Board and Teachers Association.

The wage and benefits package for the current year will total 4.2% with a 1.8% salary increase. For the 2010-11 school year, the increase for salary and benefits will be 3.9%.

The teachers unanimously ratified the contract Wednesday, Feb. 10. The board approved it Monday, with Aileen Dahlke being the lone dissenter.

Under the new contract, a beginning teacher will earn \$35,635 and the highest salary will be \$61,833.

Supt. Steve Shaw said the increase was needed to bring teachers' salaries in line with surrounding districts.

"We want to be able to hire the best teachers and retain the best teachers. If we're consistently ranked last, that won't happen," Shaw told the School Board Monday.

Math teacher Scott Tipple, chief negotiator for the teachers' association, said teachers are well aware of the local economy.

"Certainly, we understand that. I have friends who lost jobs during this time," Tipple said. "We're not tied to the economy quite as much as the private sector. It's the nature of the teaching profession that raises are small but steady. Over the last 10 years, it's been in the 1% to 2% range and that included when the economy was good."

The teachers will continue to pay 6% of their health insurance premium, while the district pays 94%. A single plan costs \$7,317 and a family plan is \$16,545 annually with the WEA Trust.

"We may have to go with a different insurance carrier in the future," Shaw said.

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A change in the retirement package will allow teachers to apply \$40 per accumulated sick day to their insurance premium or an annuity. Teachers can accrue 10 sick days a year to a maximum of 90 days.

Teachers will also be allowed to give two sick days to a co-worker who has used up their sick leave benefits. The principal and superintendent must approve the donation.

Teachers are required to work an eight-hour day. The new contract makes it clear the principal sets the hours.

The process for hiring coaches and other extracurricular advisors was also changed. The district may advertise openings to the association and to the public at the same time and interview candidates from both sectors, selecting the most qualified candidate.

“Being a teacher or staff member should be considered part of their qualifications,” Tipple said.

Board member Terry Eernisse said, “As a School Board member, I feel fiscally responsible to the taxpayer and I also feel responsible to the teachers and rewarding them for the excellent job they’ve done. I went over everything (in the contract) and I think our negotiating team has done a good job.”

Dahlke did not state why she opposed the contract, but she asked that a school calendar she submitted to Shaw be considered. Two calendar options were included in the contract package, but it was decided the negotiating teams would meet again to reach agreement on a calendar.