

Teachers agree to \$500 pay increase

Written by CAROL POMEDAY

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School Board insisted on rewarding all equally, negating longevity, credits

The Cedar Grove-Belgium School Board reached an agreement on wages with teachers during a negotiation session Aug. 29.

The board was expected to approve the agreement at its meeting Wednesday, Sept. 12.

The Cedar Grove-Belgium Teachers Association ratified the agreement that provides a \$500 increase for all full-time teachers for the 2012-13 school year. Teachers who work less than full time will receive a pro-rated increase based on the number of hours they work, Board President Jim Lautenschlaeger said.

The two sides also agreed that the base pay for teachers is their current salary, which is based on a teacher's longevity and the number of credits he or she has earned.

The salary for a beginning teacher with a bachelor's degree will be \$37,829.

The agreement was reached after two negotiation sessions.

The teachers initially requested a 3.16% pay increase, Lautenschlaeger said, but the board wanted all teachers to be treated equally.

"The board wanted to give an equal amount of increase to all rather than giving more to upper or lower-end people (based on the current pay schedule)," he said. "We believe the pay raise should be for all teachers in good standing with the district, which all our teachers are, so we were able to give everyone the same amount."

The board is working on a new salary schedule that will not have as many steps and ranges as the current schedule, he said.

A teacher-employee handbook that governs conditions for employment was also expected to be approved Wednesday.

In the handbook, it is clear that pay raises may be withheld for employees who are considered deficient in their duties provided they are notified of the deficiencies by March 1. The employee will have one year to correct the deficiency or his or her contract may not be renewed.

Employees will be reimbursed \$100 per credit for classes approved by the district administrator up to \$1,800 a year. The employee must earn at least a B grade in the class to be reimbursed.

The board had considered eliminating the benefit, but decided instead to require the courses be approved.

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Employees who take early retirement will be eligible for a health insurance benefit that is 55% of the premium. The employee will receive one year insurance benefit for every five years with the district to a maximum of five years.

Employees will pay 12% of the health insurance premium. Those who opt not to take the district's health insurance will receive \$3,468 annually, with monthly payments deposited into an annuity.

The board is scheduled to meet in closed session with administrators and support staff on Wednesday.