

School Board approves 2.34% increase for one year, asks administrators to develop performance-pay system

The Port Washington-Saukville School Board on Monday approved a 2.34% salary increase for teachers, but then instructed administrators to devise a performance pay system that would change the way educators are compensated in the future.

The increase called for in a one-year agreement that is retroactive to July 1 will be applied to teacher salaries across the board.

That would change under a merit pay system in which teacher compensation would depend on performance as measured by criteria developed by administrators — a departure from a pay-scale system in which tenure was a significant factor in determining salary.

“It’s difficult to describe what the system would look like because we really don’t have one to base it on,” Supt. Michael Weber said. “Thus far, we have not discovered a merit pay system elsewhere that’s effective.

“Compensation would be based on individual performance, not just because you’ve been here a year longer. The concept is if you work another year, have strong performance and contribute to the educational system, you should be compensated for that. If you’re on a plan of improvement, you shouldn’t receive extra compensation until you’ve completed that plan.”

Kelly Green, co-chairman of the Port Washington-Saukville Education Association negotiating committee and a veteran high school teacher, said it’s important that teachers be involved in developing the criteria for a new pay system.

“I just want to be part of the conversation,” he said.

“There’s been no criteria developed and no performance pay system created that has been shown to measurably change student achievement. I think you achieve the same goals in a more productive way by hiring good teachers in the first place.”

When asked if the union has received any indication from the School Board that teachers will be involved in creating the performance pay system, Green said, “We don’t have a clear answer yet. We haven’t been told no, but we don’t know because there hasn’t been a committee formed yet.

“But given the way this district has operated in the past, I have confidence teachers will be involved in the conversation.”

Green said union members voted unanimously to accept the 2.34% salary increase, which is

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slightly less than the maximum 2.58% increase allowed under Act 10.

Wisconsin's Act 10, the law that took most bargaining rights away from most public employees, still requires wages to be negotiated, although it controls the increase based on a formula tied to the rate of inflation. Other components of compensation, such as insurance benefits and pension contributions, are no longer negotiated.

"In negotiations, it's not uncommon for both sides to walk away from talks not being completely happy," Green said. "I suspect the board may have been happier with a smaller salary increase. I would have liked to see a larger increase for teachers."

The School Board's negotiation committee and teachers union have been working on a salary agreement since October.

"Our negotiations with the board were pretty typical, but the law we are bargaining under just isn't fair," Green said.

He noted that while teachers are receiving a pay increase, they are paying higher health insurance premiums and out-of-pocket costs and contributing more to their retirement benefits.

"Even after this increase, we're a long way from where we were," he said.

A sore spot among some teachers is the fact that while the School Board negotiated with its union for a wage increase that is less than the maximum, it approved a 2.8% increase for administrators earlier in the year.

"I think that number (the administrators' increase) is on teachers' minds," Green said. "They understand that everybody in the district works hard, but they feel they are on the front lines of a very people-intensive job and deserve the same increase as administrators."

The School Board also approved 2% wage increases for food service employees and non-union hourly workers. The increase for food service employees is retroactive to Aug. 28, while increases for other hourly workers take effect Jan. 1.

The Negotiations Committee is currently negotiating a pay increase with the support staff union.

Custodians, the district's other unionized group of employees, have a contract through the end of the school year.