

Posted on Fri, Aug. 04, 2006

UNION ACCORD

6% pay raise for county teachers

The Broward Teachers Union and school district officials reached a tentative contract agreement Thursday that would set starting teacher salaries at \$37,000.

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All Broward County public school teachers will receive at least a \$2,050 boost in their year's pay under a tentative contract announced Thursday by union and district leaders.

The school district's newest teachers -- those who were expecting to earn about \$35,000 when they report to work next week -- will instead be paid about \$37,000, among the highest starting salaries in the state.

'The starting teachers, they'll be bug-eyed and 'ooh and aah' Monday morning,' said Leonard Sklar, a teacher for 21 years. 'This is a wonderful settlement.'

Officials said the increase amounts to a 6.45 percent average raise. The district will also increase its contribution to employee health insurance.

'This is not an easy year for the district,' said Broward Schools Superintendent Frank Till. 'But this board made difficult decisions to fund this piece.'

Both Till and Broward Teachers Union President Pat Santeramo said they were excited to have reached an agreement before school starts Aug. 14.

Hector Varas, a teacher at Crystal Lake Middle School in Pompano Beach, was happy about the early agreement as well.

'Sometimes it takes months and months,' he said.

School Board Chairman Ben Williams said it would be a relief for teachers to have the issues settled before they start coming back to classrooms next week.

'The teachers don't have to worry about how much they're going to get,' Williams said. 'It takes it off their plate.'

Members of the union still have to ratify the contract, which will then go to the Broward School Board for approval.

Santeramo said the proposed contract would help the district hire and hold on to good teachers.

'In order to have quality education, you have to have quality teachers,' he said. 'In order to have quality teachers, you have to have quality salaries.'

Not every teacher was cheering Wednesday, however.

Donna Shubert, a kindergarten teacher at McNab Elementary in Pompano Beach, held up a sign at Thursday's announcement demanding equity in pay for teachers also.

She and a few other teachers said the pay plan needs to change so teachers in their 17th year aren't earning just \$10,000 more than teachers in their first year.

'We don't see any movement in our salaries,' Shubert said.

Gary DeRosa, going into his 18th year of teaching, said he still won't receive a significant increase for a couple of years.

"I feel like I'm being held hostage," he said.

Still, Shubert said, the \$2,050 increase was a good place to start.

"It's really a beginning," she said. `` Certainly, we can't stop here."

Broward School Board member Robin Bartleman said she hopes more increases are in store for the district's 17,000 public school teachers, guidance counselors, social workers and school psychologists.

"I wish we could pay teachers like we pay professional basketball and football stars," she said. `` I hope next year Tallahassee will fund us accordingly so we can pay them more."