

## Negotiators agree to 6.45 percent raises for Broward teachers

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Tamarac -- Broward County's 1,800 new public school teachers could get a \$2,000 raise before they step foot in a classroom this year, making them among the highest-paid neophyte teachers in the state.

The new teachers' salaries would jump from \$35,000 to \$37,000 under a tentative agreement reached Thursday between the Broward School Board and union leaders. Each of the county's roughly 17,000 teachers would get at least a \$2,050 raise. The most experienced teachers would get an additional \$2,488, bumping their base pay to just under \$70,000.

The salaries would be raised to recruit and retain teachers, as years of skyrocketing housing prices have put homeownership out of reach for many, union and school officials said.

Pat Santeramo, president of the Broward Teachers Union, said more teachers are leaving at the start of their careers, those with five, six or seven years of experience.

Rookie teachers in Broward will be paid more than those in Palm Beach and Miami-Dade counties, where they earn \$33,830 and \$34,000, respectively.

Overall, Broward teacher salaries are set to increase 6.45 percent and the district will pick up the cost of rising health care premiums. Salary contracts are negotiated annually.

To fatten teachers' paychecks, the School Board shrank administrative costs by about \$85 million, Superintendent Frank Till said. Department budgets were trimmed, some vacant positions weren't filled and functions, such as information technology, were consolidated into one department, officials said.

The School Board also received more state and federal grants to pay for such things as teacher training and professional development. It also will sell some of the classroom curriculum it developed to other districts, as well as ad space in certain School Board publications.

"The whole thing was not to impact the classroom," said district spokesman Keith Bromery.

This raise would be in addition to the automatic 3.7 percent raise teachers and other instructional staff would receive for the 2007-08 school year next July.

The union will have to ratify the contract, which then would go to the School Board for a vote. Negotiations, however, are not done. Items, such as disability benefits and early retirement, were left for bargaining as the school year progresses, union officials said.

But taking care of salaries before school started Aug. 14 was important to the union and the district, officials said.

"I'm glad this was settled when it was," said Marianne Maffia, a union steward and speech

language pathologist at Rock Island Elementary School. "I'm glad they put money at the bottom and the top. You need to get new teachers and retain the ones at the top."

Still, not everyone was pleased with the raise.

Some said that while the salary gap between starting and more experienced teachers shrinks, the teachers in between barely see their paychecks swell from year to year.

Gary De Rosa, a math teacher at Walter C. Young Middle School, is going into his 18th year with the district. He said he made about \$47,426 in 2002 and only about \$268 more in 2006. But, in four years, his salary will jump to \$67,488.

"I feel like I'm being held hostage," he said. Santeramo said the union tried to address the issue with this year's across-the-board raise and academic incentives. Teachers with master's degrees can earn \$3,650 more; specialist degrees \$6,000; and doctorate degrees \$8,000, he said.

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