

NESHAMINY

Board offers administrators deal similar to teachers

The school board is hoping a deal with the administrators will force the teachers to acquiesce as well.

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The Neshaminy school board has offered the district's nearly three dozen administrators a deal identical to the package the teachers union rejected, officials said Wednesday.

Board members said they're hoping that if the proposal's accepted, the educators will follow suit.

That offer includes a 3 percent annual salary increase and a requirement that employees pay 15 percent toward health care premiums the first year of the three-year deal, 16 percent the second year, and 17 percent the third year, board members said in a statement.

Like the teachers, administrators do not contribute to their insurance premiums. This contract would save taxpayers \$250,000 next year, officials said.

"If the administrators take it, we'll expect the teachers to take it," said board President Ritchie Webb.

The newspaper was unsuccessful in reaching teacher union President Louise Boyd Wednesday for comment. The board has been holding "meet-and-discuss" dialogues with the administrators' organization since February to negotiate a new agreement to replace the one that expires June 30.

Paul Minotti, director of facilities and president of the administrators' association, confirmed the preliminary proposal. He added that he'll be meeting with the 30-plus members of the group early next week to discuss the offer.

"We're making headway," Minotti said. "We should have something done shortly."

If approved, the contract would change the medical plan from Blue Cross PC15 to a less expensive PC 20/30/70 and the drug plan from Rx 5/20 to a cheaper Rx 5/30. But administrators still would have the option of a Keystone HMO, according to the board's statement.

The agreement would remove the full benefits package and a \$27,000 incentive upon retirement, as well as the single source item, which allows employees to pay a \$5 generic fee for \$20 brand name drugs when generics aren't available, the same as proposed to the teachers union. The proposal also calls for reducing opt-out sharing from 37 percent to 25 percent; that's the amount of the premiums the district pays to employees who use their spouse's insurance, said Webb.

And, finally, the deal would eliminate any future annual, long-term service bonuses, which are \$1,750 for employees with 20 to 24 years, \$2,150 for 25 to 29 years, \$2,550 for 30 to 34 years and \$3,000 for 35 years or more, officials said.

The district's 500-plus support staff contract is also scheduled to expire in June. Officials are working out the details for a new proposal, but they said support staff members, who tend to make less than teachers, also will be asked to contribute to their health care premiums.

While the support staff belongs to a union with striking power just like the Neshaminy Federation of Teachers, the administrators' group does not, officials said.

And, although that organization — the Neshaminy School District Administrators Association — meets to discuss bargaining, it excludes cabinet members like the superintendent, business manager and directors of human resources and secondary education, said Webb.

Those administrators can negotiate their own deal, but the highlights often mimic the association's, officials said.

Administrators' salaries, excluding cabinet members, can range from about \$100,000 to \$124,000. For example, an assistant principal at the high school could earn about \$100,000 for a 10.5-month spot, or roughly \$108,000 for 12 months, according to acting Superintendent Lou Muenker.

After three years, that same assistant could be making \$120,000. An elementary school principal might begin at about \$111,000, while a middle school principal could earn \$112,000 to start and \$124,000 after three years, Muenker said.

The teachers union counteroffered a 6 percent annual salary increase, including steps, and a requirement for no change in the medical insurance package. No further bargaining sessions have been scheduled, administrators said.

Neshaminy, which operates 14 public schools in Middletown, Lower Southampton, Pennel, Langhorne Manor and Hulmeville, is the only district in Bucks County where employees pay nothing toward health insurance premiums. Union members pay \$15 for doctor visits and \$5 and \$20 for generic and brandname drugs through Personal Choice, the district's human resources department reported.

The district pays at least \$22,000 per year to cover a family of four's health care. The average employer contribution for a similar package is roughly \$12,700, according to the National Coalition on Health Care.

District educator salaries start at an average of \$51,976 and top out at roughly \$95,923. The average Neshaminy teacher's salary is \$76,000, administrators said. The salary and benefits for the district's staff, which includes more than 700 teachers, accounts for more than 80 percent of Neshaminy's budget, officials said.

District officials are still trying to figure out how to balance a potential \$14 million deficit and avoid a possible \$500 tax increase. And the teachers have been working without a contract since June, administrators said.

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