

Teachers . . .

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either place a limit on the time teachers must spend at conferences or meetings after school, or provide compensation for those extra duties.

The district said that eliminating the fixed 7.5-hour work day requirement, and instead basing pay on a 37.5-hour work week, would allow teachers more flexibility in being compensated for work out of school hours.

The arbitrator — and the negotiated contract — went with the district's view.

The arbitrator noted that the teachers union never came up with a specific plan to be compensated for those extra duties, nor did the union identify specific instances where administrators abused their discretion in scheduling after-school work.

"We feel like we're going to have to monitor pretty carefully to make sure there aren't abuses to that," Walter said.

The health insurance provisions in the contract contain the same cost-sharing plan outlined in the previous contract, which expired in June.

Under the formula, teachers have to share the cost of insurance premium increases if the district insurance reserve fund falls below an amount equal to three months premiums.

The union hadn't wanted to renew that cost-sharing arrangement.

The new contract also contains language clarifying that the insurance committee, which includes teachers, is only advisory.

Teachers had questioned that change, but district negotiators and the independent arbitrator said that since the district generally pays the premium, the district should have the final say over matters such as choosing a carrier.

Teachers Approve Proposed Contract

By SEAN COCKERHAM
Sentinel Staff Writer

On the eve of the first day of school, the final ballot tally Monday showed that Sitka's teachers had narrowly accepted the negotiated three-year contract with the Sitka School District.

While declining to release the exact numbers, Sitka Education Association co-president Ann Walter said the margin of acceptance was "fairly narrow."

Although many teachers continue to have concerns about the settlement, Walter said that today they were busy focusing on the start of classes — not brooding over contractual matters.

"You can't help it, when all these little faces walk in your attention is definitely on them," said Walter, who teaches fifth-grade at Verstovia Elementary School.

All that's left in the process is for the Sitka School Board to also ratify the contract.

The school board will vote on it tonight, and is expected to approve the accord. The negotiated contract is nearly identical to the independent advisory arbitration report which the board had previously signed off on.

The two sides called in the arbitrator after negotiations stalled and federal mediation failed.

Walter said the teachers are glad the nearly 10-month process is over. But many have expressed concern regarding the size of the raises, the length of the workweek, and health insurance.

The three-year contract stipulates that the teachers receive a half-percent base pay raise effective July 1, plus salary increases for teachers who have attained more education since last year.

This year, teachers will not move up on the salary scale for gaining another year of experience. Walter said being frozen in place for a year will have a long-term effect.

"For some people it's going to mean having to teach another year past what they intended to in order to be able to have their best retirement benefits," she said.

Next year, teachers will be able to resume moving up on the salary scale for experience and will receive money for educational attainment, but there would be no new cost-of-living raise.

In the third and final year of the contract, the teachers would get a 1 percent cost-of-living raise plus the increases for both acquiring education and years of experience.

A major issue during negotiations was the union's wish that the district

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