

Board rejects

(continued from page 1)

"It would cost over 10%, near the 11% mark if we gave them all the benefit packages that they're asking for," said Ashbridge.

"The teachers are doing a great job, we don't say they are not," said Ashbridge. "I don't think the association is being reasonable when they ask for that kind of increase."

Ashbridge feels that a reasonable increase in today's market would be a cost-of-living increase.

"The three board members, they were asking to be realistic, but that fell on deaf ears," said Ashbridge. "There are steps so that a teacher's salary, if they were to continue with their current contract, they would automatically get a raise. What they want to do is get 8.5% on top of their step."

The highest increase in salary would be about \$8,800 in a single year, said Ashbridge.

Among the school board's concerns in negotiating the contract is a possible change in funding from the state. State support decreased from 44.7% of the district's budget in 1986-87, to 37.9 percent in 1991-92.

"We don't know where the state funding is. It's really a whole different ballgame. We have to walk lighter than we have been," said board member John George. "I'm not in favor of anything but a two-

year contract, possibly a three. I would be for a status quo. Just stay where you are and see where you're going."

Steve Werner, president of the Dallas Taxpayers Forum, said that one of the objectives of his organization is to change the way teachers bargain with the school district.

"We don't want to hurt the teachers," said Werner. "There are some very fine ones. Our goal is to evolve a system where we don't have contracts every two or three years, but where the teachers are judged by merit."

The Taxpayers Forum has presented the school board with 1,176 signatures asking for a two-year salary freeze and the implementation of a merit pay program.

Bargaining between the district and teachers began in January of 1991, and the teachers have been working without a contract since September of this year.

Wagner says that the teachers have not discussed striking, but added that it's "always an option." "My hope is that we'll be back at the table," said Wagner. The teachers will meet in early January to discuss their next move.

Ashbridge said that negotiations would commence in the middle of January.

Dallas board upholds 4 teacher furloughs

By ERIC FOSTER
Post Staff

The Dallas School Board voted 5 to 3 to uphold the furloughs of four teachers at a special meeting December 17.

The district held a two-night hearing on October 21 and 22 to determine if it was legal for the four teachers to have been furloughed, and one teacher changed from full, to part-time status. The teachers, represented by attorney Charles Herring of Philadelphia, argued that they were furloughed for economic reasons, which is contrary to state law.

The school district, through the testimony of superintendent Gerald Wycallis, argued that the furloughs were because of changes in the district's curriculum.

The teachers were furloughed on July 8, and include Catherine Wega, Mary Ann Storz, Carol Harding, Margaret Schuler, and Paul Brown. Harding withdrew her request for a hearing, to be replaced by Nancy Ferko, who was demoted from full to part-time status. Brown and Storz are currently filling in for teachers who are on leave, while Schuler, Wega and Ferko are on sabbatical.

Board members John George, Thomas Stitzer, and Clarence Michael voted against accepting the "Findings of Fact" document prepared by attorney Robert Panowicz under the board's direction. Ernest Ashbridge, Ellen Nagy, James Richardson, Richard Coslett and John Cleary voted to uphold the furloughs.

Board member Thomas Landon

was absent from the meeting because of military reserve duty.

The report concludes that the furloughs were done because of curriculum changes, were approved by the Department of Education, and were not arbitrary, capricious, and an abuse of discretion.

The four furloughed teachers may appeal the decision to Luzerne County Court, while Ferko may appeal to the state Secretary of Education.

Assistant superintendent appointed

The school directors also voted 6 to 2 to appoint middle school principal Dr. Gilbert Griffiths to the position of assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction.

Stitzer and George both voted against the appointment because they felt a new administrative position is not needed.

"Mr. Griffiths is an excellent principal, we just don't have the money," said Stitzer. "I don't know how we can go ahead and spend \$40,000 or \$50,000 when we don't have a contract with our teachers."

"I think we need a superintendent of curriculum and instruction, but not with four teachers furloughed," said William Wagner, president of the Dallas teachers' union. "This puts the administration at status quo. They have the same number of administrators they had last year. But we are still short our four teachers. That's at a cost of \$30,000 to \$40,000."

While Griffiths' position as middle school principal will be posted, for the time period, he says he will wear both hats, and earn the same salary as he now does, which is approximately \$45,000.

"There are no additional funds being spent," said board member James Richardson in defense of the appointment.

"I feel we are tremendously short-handed in management,"

said board member Ellen Nagy. "This is a \$14 million dollar business we're talking about and you have to have management people there. It's not a new position. It was done before by Mr. (Fred) Templin and Mr. Wycallis."

Templin, who had been supervisor of curriculum and instruction, retired at the end of the spring 1991 semester, and his position was not filled at that time.

Fact-finder

(continued from page 1)

what percentage increases other districts have given their teachers in recent years.

"The state made a big thing on doing this," said Cleary of the hearing, which lasted for about six hours on October 24. Cleary said that Hamrick showed up at the hearing without enough cassette tapes to record all the testimony.

"He had Pavarotti tapes he didn't want to tape over," said Cleary. "You couldn't possibly sit through that without a stenographic record. What he recommended was no meeting in the middle."

"I think some of the factors were not taken into consideration," said Dallas superintendent Gerald Wycallis. "... the state of the economy. The economy is not in good stead. I personally think that this has to come into play."

Wycallis wouldn't comment on the Pavarotti tapes, except to say that there was some difficulty in taping the hearing, and the taping is not required.

"If our teachers were grossly underpaid, I would be the first to lead the charge," said Cleary, but he points out, they're the best paid in the area. "Both of my parents were teachers. My mother, I can remember days when she was making half of what the guys in the UAW were."

"First and foremost we have to acknowledge that we have some excellent teachers," said Cleary. "I have a business, and I would very much like to make what I made last year. The benefit package that exists now is twice what I can afford for my company and myself."

For his part, Ernest Ashbridge, president of the school board, and a member of the negotiating committee along with Cleary and James Richardson, says he wasn't surprised by the report.

"I was not surprised at all with the outcome," said Ashbridge, who is in his fifth term as a school board member. "It's really what I expected."

Report

(continued from page 1)

educational excellence of the School District and they both realize that the objective requires sacrifice and compromise on both sides.

The School District raised its original proposal from \$2,100.00 per year for two years to \$2,450.00 over its proposed three year contract. By its own computation such increase would amount to 17.68% for the three year period. The Association's proposal ranged from an 11.93% for the 1991-92 school year to 8.12% for the 1995-96 school year or the fifth year of the contract. By the Association's computation such increase would average 9.85% over the five year contract.

An examination of the evidence indicates that average salary increases in the contiguous school districts shows an average increase of 8.25% in 1991-92; an 8.9% increase in 1992-93; a 9.0% in 1993-94; a 9.6% increase in 1994-95. A closer examination of those average increases indicates that the Hazleton Area School District, which in the school year 1990-91 had an average salary of \$31,915.00, had the lowest average salary of the twelve school districts in L.I.U. 18. Meanwhile, Dallas School District had the highest average salary of \$39,620.00 in 1990-91, which was over \$3,800.00 above the average for the districts of \$35,789.00.

As a result of the above figures, Hazleton Area School District has increased its salary by 9.6% in 1991-92; 14.95% in 1992-93; 13.01% in 1993-94 and 11.51% in

1994-95. Obviously the teachers in that school district are playing "catch-up". However, those percentage increases definitely skew the average percentage increases noted in the foregoing paragraph. For instance, the percentage increases for nine of the districts, excluding Hazleton Area, range from 7.5% to 8.54% in 1990-91. For eight districts in 1992-93, again excluding Hazleton Area's 14.95% increase, the range is from 7.8% to 8.26%. For six districts in 1993-94, the range is 8.0% to 8.78% compared to Hazleton's 13.01%. For three districts in 1994-95, the range is 8.19% to 9.78% compared to Hazleton's 11.51%.

RECOMMENDATION: My recommendations regarding salary increases are as follows:

- 1991-92 - 8.50%
- 1992-93 - 8.75%
- 1993-94 - 8.75%
- 1994-95 - 9.00%

The percentage increases are to be applied to the rates set forth in the 1990-91 salary schedule at each of the steps and to each of the columns. The columnar differences are to remain as in the current contract.

Realizing the complexity of the salary question and the obvious emphasis given to the salary proposals by the respective parties, this Fact-Finder would be receptive to assisting the parties upon their request. It should be understood that such offer of assistance is restricted to the question of salary.

John M. Hamrick
Fact Finder

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