

Centennial reaches tentative deal with teachers

By Gary Weckselblatt, staff writer | Posted: Monday, June 13, 2016 4:45 pm

The Centennial School District and its teachers union have reached a tentative contract agreement that would boost wages by 9 percent over the next four years, according to Chris Berdnik, the district's business manager.

The school board is scheduled to vote on the deal Tuesday night.

"I am absolutely thrilled with the four-year agreement," said school board President Chuck Kleinschmidt. "This is a very turbulent time with the state, not really knowing how much money we'll be getting from Harrisburg. And to have labor harmony is a big benefit for everyone."

Salaries would rise 1 percent in each of the contract's first two years and 0.8 percent in each of the final two years. Teachers can also move up a salary matrix, based on education and time served, three times during the length of the contract.

The highest paid teachers, those with a master's degree plus 40 credits, will be paid \$112,986 next year, rising to \$115,949 in 2019-20, according to the salary matrix.

In year one, a starting teacher's salary would be \$48,104. In 2019-20, a first-year teacher would be paid \$49,366.

Forty-six percent of the district's 413 teachers are paid the maximum salary, Kleinschmidt said. "It shows they stay in the district," he said. "It's beneficial to have that consistency."

The cost of health insurance premiums run from about 12 percent for a single teacher to nearly 21 percent for those on a family plan.

Kleinschmidt said Centennial teachers pay the highest health care costs in the area.

Berdnik said that a concession by the union that removes a supplemental plan would save the district \$75,000 a year after the contract's first year.

In anticipation of the Affordable Care Act's implementation of a Cadillac Tax, the contract "calls the parties back to the table," Berdnik said.

In its last contract, signed in 2011, and retroactive to 2010, the union agreed to redo and extend the contract, spreading out salary increases from two years to four years.



(File) The Centennial School District administration building

"I thought it was great that the teachers association was willing to do that when they saw the full financial impact on the district," Kleinschmidt said. "It's a wonderful association to work with. They really do care about the students and the community. Many of them went to school here and still live here."

Woody Martin, president of the Centennial Education Association, said the school board and union have "a very long standing tradition of working very closely" for contracts "that are fair for both sides and for our community. We recognize the need for financial stability for the school district."

He said the membership's "feedback has been positive. ... The ball is pretty much in the school board's court."

Berdnik estimates the new contract would cost the district \$1.75 million over the next four years. The school board is expected to pass a \$111.8 million budget for 2016-17 Tuesday night. It includes a 4.5 percent property tax increase that includes exceptions for retirement and special education costs.

Kleinschmidt said he doesn't expect a unanimous vote on the teachers' deal, "But I feel comfortable the board will approve it."

Centennial Superintendent David Baugh said he's "guardedly optimistic" that rather than budgets and contracts "we're in a new era that focuses on student achievement."

"There's a lot less money coming in from Harrisburg than there should be," he said. "I believe our teachers are doing what they can to preserve educational programming. Everyone realizes that we're in this together."