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Mounds View School Board approves 1% raises, higher premiums

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SHOREVIEW — Mounds View teachers will see 1 percent salary increases for each of the next two years, but they'll also see more expensive health care coverage.

The Mounds View School Board approved a contract with the Mounds View Education Association (MVEA) bargaining unit Sept. 22. The vote was 5-2.

Board member Jon Tynjala, who voted in favor of the measure, made it clear that the district will have to make accommodations to keep the plan.

"In a perfect world, we as a society would value our teachers much differently than we do, or we wouldn't be having these discussions," Tynjala said. "But the fact of the matter is we have limited resources that we need to allocate as a district, so hard decisions have to be made."

District officials summarizing the contract say the main merit of the 2009-2011 collective bargaining agreement is that it will help the schools contain costs.

"We went into it with some guiding principles," said Operations and Human Services Director John Ward. "We wanted to stay within budget and we wanted to recognize the value (of) our employees. And at the same time, we wanted to see an increase of employees' share of health insurance coverage."

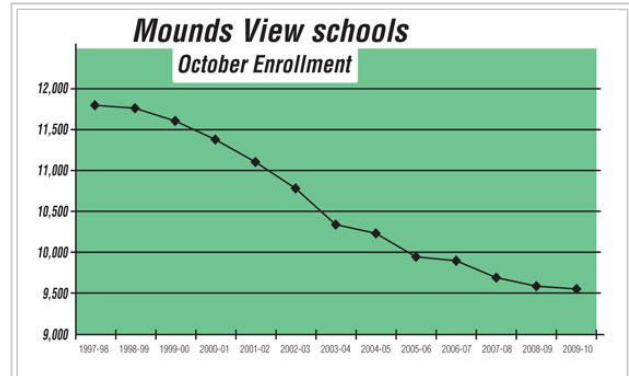
Included in the contract are increases in the amount the schools contribute toward each employee's monthly health insurance, to \$1,280 per month effective July 1 to Dec. 31. That amount will increase to \$1,443 per month in 2010. The district also agreed to bid multiple plan designs to try to reduce costs.

When asked how the contract compares to proposals from other districts, Ward said the numbers are comparable and there's no developing pattern when comparing benefits. The two board members who voted against the proposal, Barb Bollum and Lisa Sjobeck, argued that negative effects of the contract would go well past its 2011 expiration. Both made clear that their votes were in no way critical of the teachers they represent, but they mentioned economic difficulties faced by district residents.

"While it is true that K-12 education didn't experience the same cuts that cities and counties experienced, it is important to remember that zero percent on the per-pupil funding formula does not even begin to keep pace with inflation — never mind declining enrollment," Sjobeck said.

After the contract ratification, the board unanimously certified the district's maximum 2010 property tax levy at \$41.3 million. That represents a 0.3 percent increase. The next step is the mailing of truth-in-taxation notices by Ramsey County, tentatively set for mid-November. The board will approve a final levy and budget after a public hearing at its Dec. 8 meeting.

Later in the meeting, Director of Finance Carole Nielson led an update on enrollment figures for the 2009-2010 school year. The most recent district total of 9,610 students is about 30 less than in



The district's decline in enrollment has slowed in the past two years. - Graphic by Brian Nosan

October of last year. It is 95 students more than projected. According to Nielson, enrollment is still declining, but the rate has slowed in the past two years.

In a brief report on alternative enrollment options, the numbers remain similar to last year. Twenty-three students attend through the open enrollment program and 93 attend as non-residents. Thirty-three students were approved for in-district transfers to attend schools other than those geographically assigned to them.

The next regular School Board meeting is Oct. 13.

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