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Sun Prairie Schools

Sun Prairie teachers ask school board for pay increase

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Sun Prairie Area School District Director of Business and Finance Phil Frei stands in front of several teachers during the July 11 Sun Prairie School Board meeting. The teachers attended the meeting to ask for more compensation.

Chris Mertes/KSUN

Roughly 35 Sun Prairie School District educators attended the school board meeting Monday, July 11 in support of the Sun Prairie Education Association's (SPEA) proposal to increase teacher's salaries more than what the district administration agreed on back in February.

They stood around in the meeting for nearly two hours, waiting for their chance to state their case for a pay hike.

Maiwa Lor, president of the SPEA teachers union, spoke to the board on behalf of the teachers.

"I am speaking on behalf of the Sun Prairie Education Association to support our proposal presented to the district office team on June 21, 2022, which would give every full-time professional educator an increase of about \$2,650," Lor said.

The \$2,650 increase per educator will cost the district an additional \$818,000 compared to what the district agreed on in February. The SPEA calculated this increase by adding the 4.7% increase per educator based on the average educator salary instead of the base educator salary.

"Our educators, students and community deserve better," Lor said. "The educators and community deserve financial stability. The students deserve relational ability with educators and programs they can rely upon, look forward to, and predict."

Lor said that teachers have been told by the district that if they don't like it they can seek employment elsewhere. In the last two years, 160 professional educators have resigned and 29 have retired.

In February, the school board motioned to approve that all employee groups will receive a 4.7% increase that was measured by the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPIU). The 4.7% increase includes any associated supplemental compensation subject to the compensation plans, like professional development increases. The increase took effect on July 1. However, the 4.7% is based on the starting salary for all teachers, and they agreed that it isn't enough with inflation and cost of living rising. All other district employees are getting a 4.7% increase on their individual salaries.

“Giving us what we deserve is to honor and value the dedication, tireless commitment, and adaptability each educator has provided the past two years, pivoting between virtual to concurrent teaching and hybrid teaching to full in-person teaching,” Lor said.

She said that the rise of inflation impacting teachers' ability to live on an income they can depend on is vital so they don't have to work multiple jobs and can focus more on the children.

“Each time we ask for an increase in our salary to remain competitive, we always get the same response: the district cannot afford the increase. However, is there room in the budget for non-student facing positions and administrative retention bonuses?” Lor said.

The SPEA is asking the board to pay professional educators a salary that accurately reflects their higher education degrees and loyalty to the district and community instead of offering everyone a raise based on the starting educator salary.

A few other educators chimed in with similar feelings and shared their stories. Some became emotional when recognizing their colleagues who were forced to leave the profession or the district because of financial restraints.

“The flight of teachers we lost this past year is not only concerning, it’s terrifying,” Sun Prairie West Outreach Teacher Peter Gumina said. “Great schools are made by teachers.”

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