



The 2010 Mercedes-Benz E-Class.
 3.90% APR up to 66 months* Now through January 4, 2010.
 CLICK HERE FOR YOUR LOCAL MERCEDES-BENZ DEALER

Education

Home » News » Education

Tools

TEXT SIZE AA +

print

e-mail

Yahoo! Buzz	Newsvine
reddit	Digg it
Delicious	Technorati
facebook	Mixx

With QEO gone, schools bargain harder on teachers' contracts

By Amy Hetzner of the Journal Sentinel

Posted: Dec. 12, 2009

School Zone Blog



The Journal Sentinel education reporters offer news and notes from their beat

Two Milwaukee high schools on U.S. News' best list

Lawyer in Elmbrook church suit cites loss in sheriff's appeal

MPS committee approves condom distribution

[More blog posts](#)

When negotiators for the Whitnall School District and its teachers union head back to the bargaining table this week to continue work on a 2009-'11 contract, they'll encounter a vastly different environment than when they last met in May.

Since then, the state Legislature ended the 16-year cap on teacher compensation increases that has allowed school districts to avoid arbitration if they offer a 3.8% increase in salaries and benefits. The state also cut aid to schools and restricted the amount that school districts could raise in property taxes to make up for lost state funds.

The result is that teachers are likely to find it difficult to benefit from the repeal of the qualified economic offer law, which they sought to kill since its inception.

So far this school year, the approximately 100 school districts that have reached agreements with their teachers have average settlements that increase salaries and benefits by 3.75%, according to Bob Butler, staff counsel for the Wisconsin Association of School Boards. That compares with an average total compensation increase of 4.11% for teachers in the 2008-'09 school year.

Given that settlements tend to go down the longer negotiations take, Butler said the average increases for 2009-'10 and 2010-'11 are likely to be below what they have been in the past and what was considered a minimum settlement under the QEO law.

The recession, even in growing and financially stable districts, is the main reason behind the settlement drops, Butler said. Even though the Legislature removed the QEO salary restrictions, it left revenue limits in place so that any increase in teacher compensation almost certainly means staff cuts, he said.

In addition, facing pressure from taxpayers, some school districts, such as Whitnall, refused to enact a tax levy up to their state-imposed revenue limits this year.

"We have seen such a drastic reduction in the amount of money we have coming in from the state, it would have been hard to settle at 3.8% even if the QEO still stood there," Whitnall School Board President Bill Osterndorf said.

Whitnall was among a dozen school districts in the Milwaukee area and nearly 100 statewide that saw their general state aid decrease by 15% in 2009-'10. General aid is the largest state source of funding for Wisconsin schools.

After district residents protested the prospect of a double-digit tax increase to help replace lost aid, the Whitnall School Board reduced its budget by nearly \$1 million, all of which was taken out of projected increases in teacher compensation.

In difficult economic times, teachers should expect to bear some of the burden, school officials said.

The Waukesha School District recently changed its teachers' health insurance provider over their protests, citing an estimated \$1.4 million saving for the next school year. Teachers also are not likely to get overall compensation increases as high as they've received in previous years, Waukesha School Board member Patricia Madden said.

She said she sees the elimination of the QEO as a good thing in that respect.

"We don't have to give them a package of at least 3.8% and, with the economic times that we're in, I don't think that we will," Madden said.

Game changer

Don Casey, one of the head negotiators for Waukesha teachers, said the absence of the QEO "changes the whole color" of negotiations. Before, the district would have had to put any health care savings toward teacher salaries unless the union agreed otherwise. Now the district can use the money for other purposes, he said.

In addition, where school districts viewed the 3.8% compensation increase as a minimum previously, they now are looking even lower, he said.

TOP STORIES

Milwaukee schools face booming retiree health care costs

Milwaukee child welfare system can learn from Pittsburgh area

Leaders vow more child-care oversight

Maymon leaving Marquette

Woods needs to look within for answers

MORE NEWS

Milwaukee child welfare system can learn from Pittsburgh area

Milwaukee schools face booming retiree health care costs

GAO rules against Oshkosh; Army told to review \$3 billion contract

Medicare expansion may be out

Panel sides with Walker on domestic partner benefit veto

Leaders vow more child-care oversight

Tosa officer 'ambushed' responding to robbery

Obama's next job - create more of them

advertisement

M&I BANK

Happy Holidays from M&I Bank!

Visit Storybook Village

November 30th - January 4th

LEARN MORE

Member FDIC

Most Popular - News

most read e-mailed

Milwaukee schools face booming retiree health care costs

Tosa officer 'ambushed' responding to robbery

Neighborhood group wants cited jewelry stores closed

Panel sides with Walker on domestic partner benefit veto

Chef found guilty of feeding pot-laced brownies to co-workers

"I think all the districts in the state will work very hard to come up with offers to the union groups that are less than 3.8% combination benefit and salary," Casey said. "Now, a district can try to go to zero."

Some districts have, in fact, suggested pay freezes, said Butler, who negotiates on behalf of school systems throughout the state. Some also have successfully sought unpaid furloughs and agreements that allow them to reopen talks based on economic conditions, he said.

The Germantown School District went ahead with a one-year contract, even though two years is the norm, to take advantage of savings from a health plan switch in 2009-'10, said Mark Kapocius, the district's director of human resources.

Final costs for Germantown's settlement for the current year have yet to be determined, but Kapocius said it would be close to the agreement reached in the Hamilton School District, where teachers received a 3.55% increase in salaries and benefits for the current school year.

Germantown schools have not yet started bargaining for 2010-'11. "No one knows what it's going to look like," Kapocius said.

[more most popular content...](#)

Sponsored Links

Acai Berry EXPOSED (Health News Flash)
We Investigate Acai Berry. Is Acai a Miracle Diet or Internet Scam?
ConsumerHealthNews

"Killer White Teeth"
Dentists DO NOT want you to know THIS #1 teeth whitening secret!
ConsumersTeethReport.com

Refinance at 4.25% FIXED!
No hidden fees-4.4% APR! No obligation. Get 4 free quotes. No SSN req.
www.LendGo.com

[Buy a link here](#)



E-mail Newsletter

The latest local news delivered to your inbox Monday-Friday during the 2 p.m. hour.

Elsewhere on JSONline

Readers' Picks



Best catering in Milwaukee

Holiday TV



Listing of holiday TV specials

Holiday Calendar



Holiday events, concerts, and shows

Giving Guide



See how you can help area groups

Snow Quiz



Test your knowledge of the white stuff

Cookie Contest



Top designs, simple cookies and more

YOU need a phone that gets you. HTC HERO™ [Learn more](#) hTC quietly brilliant™ Replay

JSONline | MyCommunityNOW | Living Lake Country | SportsBubbler | MilwaukeeMoms | Today's TMJ4 | Newsradio 620 | 94.5 Lake FM

PRIVACY POLICY/YOUR CALIFORNIA PRIVACY RIGHTS

| [Terms of Use](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Subscription Services](#) | [Place an Ad](#) | [About Our Ads](#)

© 2009, Journal Sentinel Inc. All rights reserved.

Powered by Clickability.

Produced and Managed by Journal Interactive.

