

NEWARK TEACHER PACT

Board unveils new guidelines and benefits for students

By FREDERICK W. BYRD

Members of the Newark Teachers Union voted unanimously in favor of a new three-year contract yesterday, according to School Board President Charles Bell.

"This agreement is a fair package for all involved, the teachers and the board."

"It can have a positive impact on students," Bell said.

"The salary improvements mean we can retain good teachers. We try to keep our salaries competitive."

"Also, we gave teachers additional time to prepare lesson plans."

"We are trying to bring back specialty teachers, more music, art and other specialty teachers, to give the regular classroom teachers this extra time."

"Students will benefit significantly," he added.

Bessie White, budget director for the school board, explained the pact meant an overall increase of \$11 million per year in salaries and benefits to the teachers.

She said that meant an average increase of some \$2,000 for each person covered under the contract.

"It's not as good as it could have been, but it's better than what we had anticipated," said Loretta Maldonado, an arts teacher at West Side High School, declaring her approval of the new contract.

A new teacher with a bachelor's degree will receive \$20,867 as opposed to the old salary of \$19,367, she said. A teacher with 13 years' experience, and a bachelor's degree, will get \$39,320 as opposed to the \$36,820 he receives now. Substitute teachers will earn \$75 a day, compared to \$65 a day under the old contract.

Some 5,200 individuals, including teachers, clerks and aides, are covered by the contract, she added.

And she said, "We are still negotiating with our other bargaining units" covering principals, managers, and other support personnel.

Carol Graves, president of the Newark Teachers' Union, said she was very pleased with the agreement.

Earlier in the day, she had urged support for the new contract.

She told new teachers at a rally, "I am pleased we meet here in an atmosphere of calm and reason."

While the union pondered contract issues, new teachers in the Newark school system got a pep talk and praise yesterday from Mayor Sharpe James and board of education officials who said the theme of the school district this year was improvement of instruction.

"You will bring new energy, new insight and new ideas," said the mayor as he addressed the 75 new teachers during a meeting at E. Alma Flagg School.

At the same time, board officials cautioned parents about a new attendance policy in the district, saying that any student who misses 18 days of classes during the year will not be promoted.

At the orientation of new teachers, the mayor said, "We have lost a generation of young people; all studies show the youngsters 17 to 25 achieved less than the generation before."

"So you have a tremendous challenge to help the next generation. You



Teachers in the E. Alma Flagg School in Newark listen as Mayor Sharpe James delivers an address at the start of the school year

hold the most important key to their dreams, their future," he said.

Eugene Campbell, the executive superintendent, said he would stress "instruction improvement this year."

"This means we will have massive in-service training. We will be emptying out the central Board of Education offices and having the people go directly to the schools."

"We will have school improvement teams in every building, where the action is," he added.

He told the teachers, "We are going to have a system such that when Prudential (Insurance Co. of America), Mutual Benefit (Life Insurance Co.) or Public Service (Electric & Gas Co.) are looking for workers, they will come to our schools."

Eugene Foti, the deputy superintendent for school operations, noted 75 percent of the new teachers in the district actually have had teaching experience in other school systems.

And he also noted that while there are usually 200 new teachers in any one year, this year there are only 75 in the district. Newark has some 5,000 teachers and other instructional staff.

One reason for the reduced number of new teachers, he said, is "female teachers are now taking short maternity leaves of from one to two months, instead of one to two years," evidently because they need money for their families.

Graves also addressed the new teachers.

She noted the system had problems, "but we are not ashamed of them; we work with them."

"I urge you all to get involved with your schools."

"In our system, we have the 'rumor of the day,' so you have to be involved to learn what is actually happening," she added.

Another speaker was Patricia Bradford, president of the District Advisory Council, a parents' group.

"When you meet your children," she said, "make sure you meet their parents."

"Parental involvement is the most important part of this system's success. We are here to help," she added.

During an interview later Daniel Gutmore, assistant superintendent for educational services, responded to questions about Level II monitoring.

The Newark school system is being evaluated by the state Department of Education in what could be a prelude to an attempt by the state to assume control.

Gutmore said state officials have "told us we must improve curriculum implementation."

"We have curriculum guides in place, but we have to assure they are being carried out."

"So we have formed a team to audit classes," he said.

The state has also criticized attendance in the schools. Gutmore commented, "We have attendance counselors who will make evening telephone calls to parents, who will make home visits to chronic truants."

On the issue of attendance, Campbell and Bell sent a letter to all parents telling them of the new, 18-day limit on absences.

Last year we allowed students 30 days of absence. However, in order to meet the state attendance requirement, we must reduce the number of days.

"This is not a punitive measure; it is an important policy that will encourage our young people to take attendance seriously."

Every effort will be made to accommodate those students with unusual circumstances," the letter continued.

We encourage parents to discuss the attendance policy with students and feel free to meet with teachers or principals if additional help is needed," the letter said.

Tax woes may scuttle Newark housing plan

By FREDERICK W. BYRD

A plan to build 39 townhouses for low income families is being delayed because a ruling by the Newark tax assessor would make the tax service charges and, therefore, the cost of the homes prohibitive the city council was told yesterday.

La Casa de Don Pedro, a social service agency plans to build the townhouses on a half square block at Broadway and Kearny Avenue.

At the council conference yesterday, Ramon Rivera, executive director, explained, "We want to sell the homes for \$23,000 to \$27,000 to families earning from \$14,000 to \$21,000."

However, according to the ruling by Tax Assessor Joseph Frisina, the properties' assessment would have to be based not only on the value of the land, but also on the value of the buildings that were on the property before the city foreclosed on it some eight years ago. The amount that would have to be paid to the city under tax abatement is based on that assessment.

Rivera said, "This means instead of paying an average of \$462 a year the homeowners would have to pay \$1,555 a year; it is out of reach for them."

And he added, "This is a Catch-22 for any low-income project."

Councilman Anthony Carrino noted the city council got a ruling from Glenn Grant, the corporation counsel, saying the assessment could be based on the value of the empty land; but Frisina's ruling supersedes that, he added.

I've had this empty lot in my ward for eight years; we get no money from it at all," he said.

And Council President Henry Martinez noted Rivera's group has absorbed a \$400,000 cost for removing construction debris it found buried on the property.

Martinez noted Frisina "is only interpreting the state law as he sees it."

"We need a ruling from the state attorney general on this," he said.

And Councilman Earl Harris suggested the state Legislature be asked to change the law on assessments as they affect low-income housing projects.

Frisina was not available to comment.

Martinez told Rivera, "There is no question you have the unanimous support of the council."

Later, Rivera said "We were ready to begin construction in the early summer, the funding and the contractor

are ready.

"If we don't begin soon, we could lose the project," he added.

On a related issue, Carrino complained La Casa had bought a vacant 20-unit apartment building at 297 Mt Prospect Ave. two months ago; three weeks ago, it was substantially damaged in a fire.

The councilman asked whether the sales price could be lowered to reflect the fire damage; Glenn Grant responded it could not be, under the law.

But Richard Monteilh, the city business administrator, suggested Rivera ask the city Department of Development for funding to help in the rehabilitation of the building.

Rivera said his agency bid \$100,000 for the property and planned to spend \$1 million to renovate it for families earning between \$22,000 and \$30,000.

"Because of the fire, the renovation will cost \$300,000 to \$400,000 more" than planned, he added.

Also during yesterday's council conference, Glenn Grant said the city wants to sell tax sale certificates to private developers.

Under this plan, a private person may buy tax liens on property from the city.

Then, the owner of the property, instead of paying his back taxes to the city, would have to redeem the lien from the new owner.

The new lien owner would collect interest and, if the note is not paid in two years, he would gain possession of the property.

Monteilh said the city has some \$2 million worth of tax liens that may be involved in the sale.

"This is a way for the city to immediately realize what it is owed," he said.

But Harris cautioned some low-income people might lose their property under the plan.

"Is it in the best interest of the small, struggling individual to deal with a private owner of the lien instead of the city?"

"The city is more sensitive and could give him time to pay."

"Now, with our renaissance, I see the vultures ready to descend on Newark," he added.

But Monteilh said terms of interest on the lien and payment plans are the same whether the city or a private individual owns the lien.

State is investigating fatal shooting in raid

By DIANE CURCIO

The state Attorney General's Office is handling the investigation of the fatal shooting by an Essex County Prosecutor's Office investigator during a drug raid last weekend.

John S. Redden, a deputy first assistant prosecutor, said the case is being turned over to the attorney general "because it involved a fatal shooting by an investigator from this office, and it's more appropriate for an agency independent of this office to continue the investigation."

Darren Williams, 26, of Newark was shot and killed in a dimly lit closet at 115 Keer Ave. after he refused to drop a metal object, which was later found to be a large spoon.

Investigator Edward Hall Jr. shot Williams once in the chest after he refused the officer's command to drop the object, according to Redden. The prosecutor's spokesman added Williams was clasp the spoon in front of him like a gun and raised it, instead of obeying Hall's order.

Commenting on the shooting, Redden said, "Based on everything that has been brought to light so far, the investigator had a reasonable belief his life was in imminent danger when he fired the shot."

Williams was pronounced dead in University Hospital.

Redden said his office is awaiting the results of the autopsy and toxicology tests conducted on the victim's blood.

The prosecutor's office learned yesterday there was a fugitive warrant for Williams' arrest on narcotics charges in Middlesex County. Redden said he would have the details today.

Hall has been off-duty since the raid due to the "obviously stressful incident," Redden said. The first deputy said Hall was appointed as a prosecutor's investigator two years ago. He had been a Montclair patrolman for seven years.

The investigator is a member of the Essex County Narcotics Task Force, which executed a search warrant at 115 Keer Ave., a single-family house converted to a boarding home. Redden said the house had been under investigation since May due to neighbors' complaints of alleged drug dealing.

Eleven people were arrested and charged with possession of narcotics and possession with intent to distribute. Some 214 grams of cocaine were also confiscated, along with paper folds, vials, spoons, razor blades, mirrors and freebasing pipes, according to Redden.

could carry, Cobbert said.

But the alertness of a neighbor walking her dog foiled the theft, according to the police director.

Cobbert said the woman telephoned the police after seeing an apartment door ajar at 1:30 a.m.

When the police arrived at the scene, he continued, they found Washington hiding under a bed in the apartment.

Man seized 'tapping' fridge

A 37-year-old man was arrested in Orange yesterday on charges of breaking into an unoccupied garden apartment and trying to steal a variety of refrigerated meats.

Police Director Charles Cobbert identified the suspect as Michael Washington, who has no known address.

Washington was accused of entering a Valley Street residence, near Argyle Street, and taking all the meat he

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