



District 15 financial future bleak, but union members get raises

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Five-year financial projections show Palatine Township Elementary District 15's operating fund balance shrinking from a healthy \$51 million to nearly \$7 million in the red in 2015.

Despite those figures, the school board by a 5-2 vote has approved a four-year contract with the district's newly formed transportation union that includes annual salary increases averaging 2.9 percent.

The teachers union is also in its first year of a new three-year contract, which, on top of step raises based on years of service, calls for salary hikes of 0.75, 1.19 and 1.45 percent, respectively.

"I believe it's these types of unsustainable decisions that we make that get us into that trouble," said board member Tim Millar, who cast one of the two dissenting votes.

Other District 15 officials were pleased with the deal including Superintendent Dan Lukich, who said the agreement achieves a balance between keeping in line with the market and maintaining quality service for students and their families.

The union represents 190 bus drivers and transportation aides. Bargaining teams for the school board and union met 20 times before reaching an agreement, according to a district news release.

Shortly before the contract got approval, board member Rich Bokor read a statement from Mike Loizzi, an attorney for District 15 who led the board's negotiating team. Loizzi said that he has not recommended any agreement more wholeheartedly than the one with the transportation union.

District 15 officials wouldn't release a copy of the contract, saying signatures are still needed. But Millar said it includes an extra paid holiday and retirement bonus for employees with at least 10 years of service. Those who retire get \$350 per year of service up to 20 years.

Board member Peggy Babcock said the entire board agreed on parameters going into negotiations, a statement that Millar and fellow dissenter Sue Quinn disputed.

Quinn expressed concern that financial projections show the number of teachers employed by the district won't decline at the same rate as enrollment is expected to drop.

"We're spending down \$50 million in five years because we have basically deficit spending due to our general operation expenses (due to) our full-time equivalent staff," Quinn said.