



Teachers are paying more toward their retirements, teachers union head Brent McKim said.

# JCPS teachers get raise of 2.5%

## Increase comes as other districts cut

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At a time when many governments and businesses are struggling to balance their books, and when school districts elsewhere are freezing salaries and laying off teachers, employees of Jefferson County Public Schools are getting a 2.5 percent raise this year — the 10th straight year their pay has increased.

The raise, approved by the school board last month as part of a new contract with the Jefferson County Teachers Association, took effect Friday and will cost taxpayers \$14.5 million.

And because of the district's long-standing policy of giving raises to all employees if one group of workers gets one, the 2.5 percent raise will go to not only the district's 6,000 teachers, but also to 7,000 other full-time employees, such as principals, bus drivers, librarians and secretaries.

The raises come after tax increases by the district in each of the last three years to help balance its budget.

"In order to have the best teachers, you have to be able to pay them," said Cordelia Hardin, chief financial officer for the district. "You also have to stay competitive and keep up with the cost of living."

The overall raise is in addition to step increases some staff members will get based on years of service and education.

School board Chairman Steve Imhoff said the raises provide

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"fair compensation to our teachers and enables the district to meet the educational needs of students."

But the raises come as other districts across the state and the country are asking teachers to forgo raises, requiring furloughs or laying off teachers.

"I'm not aware of any other district in the state that is giving that high of a raise — I would say that 2.5 percent leads the state without question," said Brad Hughes, a spokesman for the Kentucky School Boards Association. "In fact, there are more districts this year that are either giving no raises or only a 1 percent raise than in any other year that we can recall."

### \$146.1 million for raises

Since the 2002-03 school year, the school district has spent approximately \$146.1 million on employee raises. In two of the past 10 years, the raises were mandated by the state; the other years the raises were negotiated.

JCTA President Brent McKim called this year's raises a "remarkable bargaining agreement for Jefferson County teachers."

But it's the taxpayers who foot the bill, and not all of them are happy about it.

James Franklin, a Louisville resident, said Friday he questions the amount of money being spent on raises.

"When I see that they've spent almost \$150 million on these raises over the past 10 years, I think about all the money that could have been saved," he said. "Especially since the economy is so poor right now."

### Tax rates increased

Last year, the school board raised the tax rate for real estate and personal property to 67.6 cents per \$100 of assessed value from 64.6 cents — an increase of \$60 for the owner of a house assessed at \$200,000.

In 2008, the board raised the rate to 62.5 cents from 61.5 cents, and in 2009 the rate rose to 64.6 cents.

Hardin acknowledges that the higher tax rates helped pay for raises in the past, but she said it's too early to tell if the district will have to ask for another tax increase this fall.

"It all depends on how the property value assessments come in, and we won't know that until August," she said.

Karen Zelner, a Louis-

ville resident, said she doesn't have a problem with giving teachers raises.

"They have a hard job and they deserve raises," she said. "I don't think that everyone should get a raise, though."

In the past few years, school districts across Kentuckiana have had to cut jobs and raises.

This year, 38 teaching positions in New Albany-Floyd County Schools in Southern Indiana were eliminated to save more than \$2 million. That came a year after budget woes caused the district to close four schools.

In Oldham County, the district had to cut jobs in 2009, but will give all employees a 1.15 percent raise this year.

In Bullitt County, the district approved a budget in May that did not include layoffs or pay increases.

### Big cuts elsewhere

Other districts across the country are facing much steeper cuts.

On Wednesday, Milwaukee Public Schools announced it will lay off 519 staff members — including 354 teachers — because of state budget cuts and the system's efforts to control costs.

And in June, the Chicago Board of Education voted to rescind a 4 percent raise that teachers were supposed to get this fall, citing budget troubles.

Jefferson County is the largest district in the state and the 31st largest in the country, with approximately 100,000 students and more than 13,000 employees.

### Local revenue growth

McKim said unlike other cities, Jefferson County has had some modest growth in revenue.

"Louisville is the largest economic engine in Kentucky and fortunately we have not been hit as hard economically as other places across the state and the country," he said.

McKim said district teachers have agreed to pay more toward their retirements. Last fall, teachers began paying one-quarter of a percent of their salary to the Kentucky Teacher Retirement System, and that will rise to 3 percent over six years.

"Because of that, we have not seen much of an increase in our paychecks," he said.

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