

# Don't hide 'step and lane' raises

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STORY

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The salary schedule for Madison teachers is frozen for the next school year.

But teachers will still get raises.

That's because, outside of the general salary schedule, Madison teachers are financially rewarded for their years of experience and for the higher education coursework they complete toward advanced degrees.

These "step and lane" raises, as they are called, will average 2.3 percent next school year for Madison teachers.

Madison School District Superintendent Dan Nerad and two School Board members didn't know what

this figure was when they met with the State Journal editorial board three weeks ago.

One School Board member even suggested the average teacher raise for years of experience and higher education credits would be so small it was hardly worth considering.

But a 2.3 percent raise sounds pretty good to private sector workers who have endured real pay freezes, furloughs and layoffs for years now because of the recession and slow economic recovery. The school district calculated the 2.3 percent figure last week at the State Journal's request.

Nobody is suggesting that Madison teachers will have it easy next fall. They will have to start paying half the cost of their pension contributions. School district officials have highlighted this hit, saying it will reduce take-home pay for school employees by 5.8 percent.

Ouch!

Then again, a slew of private sector workers have long contributed at least half of the money going to their retirement accounts. And those accounts don't come with guaranteed payouts.

But here's the bottom line: Madison teachers won't see a nearly 6 percent cut in their take-home pay, as some school officials have suggested. The 2.3 percent average pay raise for teachers will soften the blow. Subtract one from the other, and the real hit to take-home pay is more like 3.5 percent.

Taxpayers and dedicated school teachers deserve a complete picture of how state and local school budgets will affect them. School districts across Wisconsin should routinely calculate and announce "step and lane" raises whenever teacher contracts are signed.

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