

GEDC celebrates summer interns



Miners heading into week three



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Four-year contract for Unit 1 educators

BY ANN GILL
EDITOR

In the final days leading up to the new academic year, an agreement has been reached between the Unit 1 Board of Education and teachers union that includes an annual salary increase of just over 5%.

"The Board of Education recognized that the teacher shortage and inflation has had an impact on certified staff recruitment and retention, post the pandemic," said a news release issued by the Board of Education following a special meeting on the morning of Aug. 11.

The meeting came one day after union members overwhelmingly ratified the agreement that serves the district's 161 certified staff members.

The four-year contract with the Coal City Community Unit Education Association took effect on Monday as the district's certified staff headed back to school. The terms of the agreement

will be in place through the 2026-2027 school year.

In terms of salary, Superintendent Chris Spencer said the increase figures out to about \$2.3 million in new dollars over the life of the contract.

Contract negotiations began in November 2022 as the prior five-year agreement was set to expire on the day preceding the start of the 2023-2024 academic term.

"From the beginning, both sides worked collaboratively to develop solutions for identified areas of concern, while maintaining the Board's philosophy of fiscal responsibility," the Board said in the issued news release.

Spencer said the union did not have an interest in bargaining the base pay for new and incoming staff members. Thus the Board gained the ability to set the rate on an annual basis and for the 2023-2024 school year it is \$46,686.49.

This allows the district, "to better react to the limited candidate pool for

particular positions."

According to the superintendent, the base rate is one of the highest in the area as the Board also assumes staff contributions to the Teachers Retirement System [TRS].

The base rate of pay also determines stipend compensation for extracurricular positions—athletics, clubs and organizations, performing arts, extensions of classroom duties and leadership. Each position is assigned a percentage that is calculated on the base rate.

Enhancements contained within the agreement come with changes in the areas of retirement incentives, professional development, personal leave and sick leave.

In regard to sick leave—time granted per school year without the loss of pay—the new agreement provides educators credits for years of service.

As an example, Spencer said a teacher with 0-5 years of service

receives six days of sick leave automatically each year and those who accumulate less than 75 days will receive an additional six days. The number of days increases in five-year increments so a teacher with 6-10 years of service receives seven sick days per year and earns an additional seven days with 75-124 accumulated days.

"The more days they accumulate, the more days they can earn. It rewards people who are here," Spencer said.

When it comes to professional development, changes included in the contract provide incentives to ensure National Board Certified teachers maintain their certification.

The agreement changes the way non-tenured staff receive tuition reimbursement for courses completed. The previous tiered system is replaced with one that allows teachers to collect up to six hours of course credits per fiscal year.

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"THE BOARD IS GRATEFUL THAT THIS FOUR-YEAR AGREEMENT HAS BEEN REACHED AND IS CONFIDENT THAT THE SALARY AND BENEFIT PACKAGE WILL CONTINUE TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN THE BEST EDUCATORS FOR THE STUDENTS OF DISTRICT 1."

UNIT 1 BOARD OF EDUCATION

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Dancing for a cause

BY ANN GILL
EDITOR

Amelia Fritz headed back-to-school for her senior year, and she began the first week of classes by completing a graduation requirement.

In order to receive her diploma in May, Fritz was charged with completing a service project as part of her civics instruction and she took the assignment to a new level.

"I have a tendency to go above and beyond," Fritz said.

In completing the assignment, Fritz wanted to do a charity event and raise funds for a good cause—autism awareness and advocacy.

As a student of dance, Fritz has found a passion for the art and it was the catalyst for her service project.

Working with her dance instructors at Broadway Dance Center, Fritz put together a day of master classes focused on various forms of dance and movement.

The classes, held Monday, provided professional instruction in contemporary dance, an introduction to ballet, dancing in heels and yoga.

The idea of holding the classes in the final days of summer break were seen as one last fun event before everyone heads back in a classroom. From those taking part, it certainly turned out to be fun event.

A minimal participation fee was charged to support two autism organizations—Autistic Self Advocacy Network [ASAN] and Help Hopes, a local non-profit that focuses on promoting local scholarships, research and advocacy, along with establishing the Hope Helps All Inclusive Playground in Coal



Photo by Ann Gill

LEAPING AND TURNING across the dance floor in a contemporary class are Jaycee Chase and Emberlyn Paquette. The two dancers took part in a master class hosted by Broadway Dance Center in Diamond. The class was part of a school assignment for Amelia Fritz, a member of the studio's On Broadway Dancers. The day of dance for a cause was a community service project Fritz organized to raise funds for autism awareness and advocacy. Class fees were collected and will be donated locally to Hope Helps, the organization that established the Hope Helps All Inclusive Playground, and nationally to the Autistic Self Advocacy Network.

City's Lions Park.

ASAN is a national non-profit that works to have autistic individuals advocate for themselves through policy and legal advocacy.

Autism is a developmental disability and as Fritz points out not everyone experiences autism the same way.

It is a condition that

often affects sensory processing, fine motor skills, communication and socialization, among others.

Many well known and successful people were autistic including artist Vincent Van Gogh, inventors Benjamin Franklin and Henry Ford, writer Jane Austen and comedian/actor Jerry

Seinfeld.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], around 75 million people have autism spectrum disorder and Fritz shared she recently discovered her own diagnosis.

Broadway Dance Center, where Fritz takes classes and

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The public's right to know

BY ANN GILL
EDITOR

The Illinois Open Meetings Act, created in 1957, serves to protect the public's right to know. It's the same foundation for which the Freedom of Information Act was put into law 10 years later.

The Open Meeting Act [OMA] ensures citizens are provided notice of and the right to attend meetings of the public body. And, the Freedom of Information Act [FOIA] provides the public with access to the records of those public bodies—municipal governments, school boards, township and county boards among them.

There are some exceptions—nine under FOIA—that limit the public's access to obtain information with regard to matters that include personal information, negotiations, criminal investigations and data that could endanger life of physical safety.

The public body must designate a FOIA officer to accept and fulfill records requests.

The village of Coal City has four designated FOIA officers including the village administrator, village clerk and deputy clerk and police department's record keeper.

Coal City amended its designated officers at a meeting last week by naming the recently elected village clerk, Alexis Stone, and appointed deputy clerk, Linda Sula, as FOIA officers.

The two were also named as OMA compliance officers, a role also held by the village administrator.

In this capacity they must carryout the requirement of the law that guarantees the posting and holding of public meetings.

Citizens are to be given

advance notice of and the right to attend all meetings at which the business of a public body is discussed and acted upon.

Notice of such meetings are to be made annually and the agenda of each meeting is to be posted at least 48 hours in advance of a regular or special meeting. There are provisions for emergency situations, but even then the agenda must be posted in advance of the meeting.

A meeting is any gathering of a majority of the members of the public body. So in the case of the village board and school board that's three of the seven members.

The OMA also has exceptions and strictly limit what public officials may discuss in a closed meeting.

Topics including the appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance or dismissal of specific employees or individuals, matters of collective bargaining, real estate, security, litigation and for school board's student matters.

Just as minutes must be kept of open meetings, a verbatim record of the closed session must be taken.

A review of the minutes taken in closed session must be held and a determination made to keep closed or released for public inspection, where as the minutes taken during a public meeting must be available for public inspection within seven days of their approval by the public body.

To assure an understanding of the OMA, all public offi-

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