

LEON -- Teachers are one step closer to getting a raise since the School Board unanimously voted to approve an agreement proposed by the district and the local teachers union. The agreement states the average increase will be about \$1,650, or 3.9 percent, costing the School District \$4.7 million. The base pay for beginning teachers will go from \$33,000 to \$34,100. The most a teacher with a master's degree can earn is \$63,100. Vicki Cammarata, an exceptional-student education teacher at Deerlake Middle School, has been teaching for more than 20 years. She was happy about the agreement made by Leon Classroom Teacher Association and the district. "It wasn't like it has been in the past where you are questioning the county," Cammarata said. "Teachers want what's right, not what's left over." Before a final decision is made, teachers will need to cast a secret ballot for or against the agreement. Their deadline is Nov. 8. The Leon Educational Staff Professional Association was also pleased by its tentative agreement made by the district that will allow 1,200 employees to get a 4.2-percent raise. It represents employees such as instructional aides and office personnel, and it's separate from the teachers union. David Worrell, president of the teachers union, said some Florida districts are debating whether to cut jobs, services and programs, along with changing to a four-day work period, as a result of state's financial troubles. But he said Leon County didn't need to do so since it historically has a conservative budget

PASCO -- Doesn't matter if they're blue, black or pin-striped, Stewart Middle School principal Jackson "Buff" Johnson has no patience for jeans on teachers. He's no fan of tongue studs, either. Since the new school year started, Johnson has made his fashion views clear while attempting to enforce the district's revised "professional appearance" policy. "We want to make sure we dress professionally, because we are held to that standard," Johnson says. The school's teachers agree with the sentiment, but they're not too keen on Johnson's method. Several have filed a grievance against the principal, claiming he has stepped beyond the policy with "arbitrary and capricious" implementation. "It was almost bordering on what we considered creating a uniform," United School Employees of Pasco President Lynne Webb said. Webb suggested that the principal should not be banning types of fabric, certain colors of clothing or styles of shoes. Neither should he suddenly demand a teacher remove the tongue stud she has worn since being hired. If he had concerns, she added, Johnson should have consulted with the staff first, as the School Board stated when adopting the amended policy over the summer. "The teachers, quite frankly, had had enough of being treated like children," Webb said.