

**COLLIER** -- Teachers aren't accepting the Collier County School district's offer of a 1 percent bonus lying down. More than 300 teachers, most dressed in red, turned out for Thursday's Collier County School Board meeting to protest the district's offer of a 1 percent bonus on top of their step increase, which is measured by years of experience. The teachers rallied in the parking lot before the meeting. Many held signs with messages such as, "If we were truly paid by the hour, the School Board still owes me \$12,000." Some of their children toted signs that read "Show mommy the money." "We have to show the community that we are insulted," said Emily Larson, first vice president of the Collier County Education Association and the media specialist at Naples Park Elementary School. "We have the highest cost of living in the state and the lowest percentage of increase of any district in the state. You have got to wonder how other counties are doing better." After the district made the offer to the teachers, the CCEA, which represents 80 percent of the district's teachers, and the district are at an impasse. Because public sector employees like teachers cannot strike, they have to declare an impasse. In an impasse, the district notifies the Public Employees Relation Commission (PERC) and they send a panel of special magistrates that conduct a hearing, much like a jury trial, said Allun Hamblett, executive director of human resources for the district. The panel issues a finding of fact, which it sends to both groups and both decide whether they want to accept or reject the magistrates' decision. If either side rejects it, the School Board would convene and determine whether to impose the magistrates' decision, Hamblett said. The decision came after the district offered the teachers \$5.69 million in compensation increases for the CCEA. The money included \$3.6 million in step increases; \$1.8 million for a 1 percent bonus for all teachers; \$175,000 in middle school athletic supplements; \$42,000 in increased compensation for class coverage and \$35,000 in Webmaster supplement increases. Teachers said the offer was insulting. "I am frustrated," said Claudia Simmons, a Naples Park Elementary teacher with 35 years of experience in Collier County. "We're not in this career to make money, but we do have to live." Von Jeffers, president of CCEA, said that beginning Monday, teachers in the district will "work to rule." That means, they will come in at the contract-approved time and leave at the contract-approved time. Teachers, he said, would not be doing anything above and beyond the 7.5 hour day. Pine Ridge Middle School teacher Tricia Ray said it was sad it had to come to this. "I was just crushed," she said when she heard about the proposed bonus. "I love my job. It is my gift. But I am a single mom with two kids in college. It's not fair. It is a lack of respect."

**Brevard** -- Teachers could have a contract, and some extra money by the holidays, if the agreement is ratified by the union and approved by the Brevard County School Board on Tuesday. This year's tentative contract includes an average raise of 4.5 percent for the district's 5,000-plus educators. Teachers have been voting on the contract the past two weeks and the union will present the results of the vote to the school board. If it's ratified by the union, the school board will be poised to vote on the contract Tuesday. But Anne Spencer, president of Brevard Federation of Teachers, said it's still unclear how the teachers will vote. "I know of one school where they voted 100 percent no and another school where they voted two-thirds yes," she said. Under the new contract, a starting teacher should make \$36,000. Teachers at the top of the pay scale usually make a base salary of \$56,350. Spencer said she expects many elementary school teachers to vote down the contract because of the still-unresolved argument over how educators should spend the 40 minutes of preparation time allotted to them each school day. Elementary school teachers have complained that the preparation time is not their own, as they are often required to meet with the principal, resource teachers or guidance counselors. The union and the district agreed to form a committee to conduct a study this school year on how much non-student planning time is being used for required meetings. But Spencer said that might not be enough because teachers want immediate relief. "More important to them than money, or anything else, is this issue and that can't be ignored," Spencer said. If the teachers reject the contract, it could put the district and union at an impasse.

**SANTA ROSA** -- Santa Rosa County teachers say the School Board's first offer of a 0 percent salary increase does not get a passing grade. Teachers are in annual contract negotiations and have asked for an 8 percent raise, plus the "step increase." The district's counter proposal is zero percent plus step, or cost-of-living increase. "Obviously, the season of Thanksgiving is not one they are practicing," said Marie Locklin, a third-grade teacher at Gulf Breeze Elementary School and a negotiating team member for the Santa Rosa Professional Educators, the teachers' union. "It's not a good philosophy. I'm hoping the next season of Thanksgiving is one they do practice." The district's offer is based on state cutbacks, said Clifford Parker, the board's chief negotiator. Santa Rosa's more than 1,800 teachers want a salary increase comparable to what their counterparts have settled on in Escambia and Okaloosa counties, 8.3 and 7.5 percent, respectively, said Rhonda Chavers, SRPE's president and chief negotiator. The SRPE also negotiates for the district's more than 400 educational support personnel. "We are not pleased with the direction the district is wanting to proceed," she said. "It is not satisfactory." Chavers said the 0 percent proposal would hit the most experienced teachers hard. "The zero percent means the most experienced teachers would get no improvement, and with the additional cost in insurance, that would mean people are working for less this year than last year," she said.