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School officials defend secret vote, payraise

A News staff report

BEVERLY — School officials Tuesday defended their closed-door vote earlier this year to give Assistant Superintendent Harry K. Harutunian an 11-percent salary increase, a decision that has angered teachers who saw their own raises cancelled.

The 5-3 vote giving Harutunian an increase from \$62,000 to \$69,500 was made at an executive session meeting held in June and only disclosed last week.

Teachers, after hearing the news, said they would cut back on activities scheduled outside of regular school hours to call attention to the pay increase they lost because of budget cuts.

School Committee Chairman Constance C. Krueger said a raise for the assistant superintendent was approved because the committee felt that Harutunian "should not have been making less than the high school principal."

When Harutunian assumed the job in 1991, he received a \$62,000 salary. Beverly High School Principal Keith R. Manville earns about \$67,000, while Superintendent Jean Perron makes about \$72,000.

School Committee member Donald K. Hannable took the blame, saying he misread figures in determining Harutunian's salary.

"We were going to remedy the situation at the time," Krueger said.

She said money had been put in last year's budget to increase Harutunian's salary, but the money was cut.

"Rather than anger people, we backed down," she said.

Then, the School Committee met June 29 behind closed doors to discuss Harutunian's contract. He had a three-year contract with the final two years to be negotiated.

Harutunian reportedly requested that his salary be set half-way between that of the superintendent and high school principal for the year.

Harutunian also reportedly sought a three-year contract each year with a rollover provision, meaning that he would keep working a three-year contract, asked to attend conferences for professional development, and asked to do consulting work on his own time with the endorsement of the superintendent.

The committee voted 5-3 to approve the contract with Elizabeth H. Frutiger, Nancy M. Winter and Hannable voting against it.

Voting in favor were Kenneth H. Broderick, Linda B. Goode-nough, Russell C. Bjork, Prunella J. Pollard and Krueger.

Mayor F. John Monahan was absent.

Hannable said Tuesday he



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Harry Harutunian, assistant superintendent

voted against the contract because he opposed the rollover clause. "I wholeheartedly supported the raise," he said, adding, "I think it is too early to guarantee a three-year contract."

Frutiger said she "felt somewhat of a raise was in order," although she thought it should have been less than what was approved. She added that she would support the majority decision.

"At the time we voted on it, we felt the city was in good financial shape," Frutiger said.

But in June, it was also clear that the School Committee would have to cut its budget request of \$24.1 million this school year.

The budget for the schools was trimmed by \$1 million by Monahan and the Board of Aldermen.

To accomplish that, the committee reopened negotiations with teachers was related to an effort to make up the \$1 million shortfall.

Krueger said she had not been called by any residents about the decision.

Perron said the decision was kept quiet because "frankly, it has an impact on other negotiations ... We wanted to protect the school system because we would probably invoke the funding clause."

By invoking the clause and citing the under-funded budget, the committee was able to renegotiate its contract with the teachers.

Harutunian was tight-lipped about the raise.

"This is a very sensitive issue," he said. "Obviously, it is an uncomfortable issue for me."

"I'm real uncomfortable talking about myself because it is such a hot potato," he said.