

# SAYING GOODBYE: LADUE RETIREMENT PACKAGE SHAKES UP SCHOOL STAFF

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In her 28th year of teaching, English teacher Lisa Crawford decided to retire. Like many other teachers and staff members, Crawford will retire through the retirement incentive program. The noticeable increase in faculty members retiring this year is due to this year being the third and final year of the district's Early Separation Incentive Program, commonly known as ESIP.

## INSIDE THE RETIREMENT PROCESS

The ESIP has two options that are available to district staff. The first option is the single payment plan, which allowed eligible staff members to retire by the end of the 2016-17 school year, while the other is the multiple payment plan, which includes three payments — one for each consecutive year. This year's retirement packages consist of the three-year buy-out. At Ladue, one of the requirements of the ESIP is completing at least seven years of service within the district, including the final year of teaching. Additionally, the state of Missouri requires include the teacher's total years of service and age.

"I qualified under what's called the rule of 80," retiring social studies teacher Bob Westerholt said. "If your age plus the number of years you worked add up to 80, [that] is when you can first draw up retirement."

Throughout the past two years of the program, a total of 22 staff members have retired. This year, there are 15 staff members retiring from the high school and a total of 29 teachers, counselors, librarians and specialists retiring throughout the district. Once a teacher qualifies for the Missouri retirement system, they can teach at any other school not part of the ESIP. At Ladue, while retirement incentive programs are not typically offered every year, the ESIP eligible teachers were given two separate options for their retirement in this package.

"There is no guarantee that they are going to [offer] it again in one or two years," retiring social studies teacher Candice Spector said. "Maybe I could have made it another year or two, but if they are not offering a big incentive, that would be really stupid of me to not jump on the retirement incentive plan."

In addition to meeting the requirements, faculty members eligible for the ESIP must declare their withdrawal in a letter to the district and retirement system. The district must then approve the letter, and the information inside must be confirmed by the retirement system.

"The process to retire is straightforward," Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources Ken Rossics said. "The employee submits a letter of retirement with the separation date noted."



## CONFERENCES

Junior Madalyn Abady listens to English teacher Lisa Crawford's suggestions for her research paper on education in AP English Language. After about three decades of teaching, she decided to retire. "[The retirement package] definitely made me excited about doing something different, Crawford said. "Even though I love teaching, the hours are exhausting." (Photo by Nicole Kalishman)

## REASONS FOR CHANGE

The purpose of the ESIP is to provide a financial incentive for staff who want to retire early from the Ladue School District while also saving money for the district. According to the Board of Education, there will not be another ESIP before the 2021-22 school year if there are no drastic changes in financial, staffing or other pressing circumstances. However, the board said that there is no certainty for another ESIP in the future. For faculty, the package provides a rare opportunity to receive a financial bonus with retiring.

"I am ready to do something that doesn't require as much time as this job entails, and I am excited to travel more, spend time with my daughter, get a dog and relax," Crawford said. "I still plan on working, just not full time."

Even though the incentive program helps the teachers, it also benefits the district. Since most retirees are higher-paid teachers, next year the school can pay for more staff members at a lower cost.

"The district had a two-prong approach to lower the salary or the amount of money that was being paid out to all of the teachers," Westerholt said. "What they did was they incentivized us to leave by giving us a buy-out, but they also de-incentivized us to stay by lowering the raises of the top end of the pay scale."

## FUTURE HIRING PLANS

With a high number of staff members retiring, the administration started the large-scale hiring process

for new staff Oct. 1. The school district publicized its job openings through events like the career fair Oct. 27 and by reaching out to local universities. In previous years, the hiring process started in late January and usually ended in March.

Although the district is starting the hiring process earlier than usual, Crawford feels that there could be certain disadvantages for the school when it comes to the hiring process.

"I think there may be stress in hiring such a large number of people at the same time," Crawford said. "I don't think it is a disadvantage for the people who are leaving, because the people who are leaving want to."

Ladue begins the hiring process when a position is open. The district then review applications and then finally interviews the prospective candidates. Rossics said that this system is employed in order to ensure that all candidates are treated fairly and consistently throughout the hiring process.

"The processes in place are used all the time," Rossics said. "The difference this year is the increased numbers of staff to hire."

Ladue will continue looking for new staff members throughout the spring. For many teachers, the three-year ESIP encouraged them to retire, but they also felt for a change in lifestyle. Junior Faith Connally believes that the high school will change greatly because of the large number of staff retiring.

"The past few years a lot of teachers have retired, and I think it's going to be interesting because the school is going to have to completely turn around," Connally said. ❖