

# The Springfield Teacher

The UNITY newsletter of the Springfield Education Association 1000 Wilbraham Road, Springfield, MA 01109  
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## President's Message

Once more into the fray! With the financial situation in the world, the nation, the state, and the city, once again we will need to organize and mobilize our membership to lobby all our elected officials in order to protect our working conditions, our jobs, and our salaries. To contact your legislators go to the SEA website [www.seateachers.com](http://www.seateachers.com), scroll down and click on the appropriate contact box.

Over the years, all the elected officials have said education is a priority and they believe in family values. However, when a family is experiencing financial difficulties, the last place cuts should be made are to those that hurt children. We all need to pressure elected officials to be true to their words and raise the revenue (in the most equitable way possible) necessary to keep the children in our public schools out of harm's way.

Sixty-six to seventy-five percent of the teachers in this district have, in essence, had their wages frozen for the past seven years – four years from the imposed freeze under the Finance Control Board (FCB) and the last three years because the percentage raise was not applied to the steps (1 - 11) as it is in every other district in the Commonwealth. The remaining twenty-five percent, or so, of our membership are our most veteran members who have stuck with the Springfield Public Schools through difficult times and who have yet to recover financially from the prior financial crisis the city faced. These veteran members' loyalty to the city and the children in the Springfield Public Schools should not be rewarded by once again having their wages frozen. These veteran members who have been dedicated to the children of this city should not be repaid by having their retirement income threatened because their wages were frozen.

We have trouble attracting and retaining licensed and "highly qualified" teachers as it is. At this point, because of the Contract the FCB basically forced on us, we are once again some of the lowest paid teachers in Hampden County. We deserve better. The children in the Springfield Public Schools deserve better. If we are to reverse this situation, we will have to fight in the political arena to accomplish it.

Everyone needs to contribute what they can as was done in our campaign to defeat Question 1 last November. We need to expand the SEA's Committee On Political Education (C.O.P.E.) so each building is actively organized to accomplish our goal. Send an e-mail to [contact@seateachers.com](mailto:contact@seateachers.com) (please type COPE in the subject line) if you are willing to support this effort in any way you feel you can contribute. Our jobs, our salaries, and our working conditions, which are our students' learning conditions, are at stake. The children in our charge have only one shot at an education and it should not be destroyed because of the actions of some greedy Wall Street bankers and the lack of courage on the part of our elected officials to do the right thing for this generation of children in our public schools.





## LEAVES OF ABSENCE

I have received a number of calls this year regarding Leaves of Absence. As always, people are asking about the usual types of leaves -- health, maternity and leaves without pay. Below are some of the more common types of leaves that teachers inquire about.

**Article 13** of our Agreement deals with **Leaves Without Pay**. *Section E-3* of the article states, "Teachers with professional status may be granted an unpaid leave." It goes on to list the reasons for unpaid leave. The key word is "may." The School Department may grant unpaid leaves, not must grant those leaves.

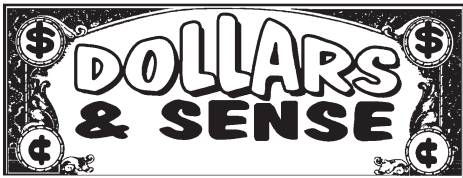
I also get calls from expectant fathers asking about "paternity leave." First, let's be clear, there is no "paternity leave." A new dad who needs to be at home following delivery can request unpaid leave for the reason "necessities of the home." If there are medical complications to either mother, baby or both that require him to be there, he can request Emergency Sick Leave which is a paid leave. A doctor's letter affirming the need for him to be at home must accompany a request for this type of leave. Emergency Leave days are charged against his accrued sick days.

**Article 12** covers **Leaves with Pay**. Basically, it defines the conditions under which we can use our fifteen days annual sick leave. It also addresses the Sick Bank because Sick Bank days come from our combined sick days. On a side note, members cannot voluntarily give their days to another member. Article 12 then goes on to list the reasons for using sick days and the method for applying to use those days. Again, if you are planning to apply, give me a call and I will be happy to assist in any way I can.

Expectant mothers should remember there are two types of maternity leave -- paid and unpaid. Paid maternity leave, (**Article 12**), says that, if you have enough sick days accumulated, you can take six weeks with pay following a normal delivery or eight weeks following a caesarian delivery.

**Article 13** provides up to two and one half years of unpaid Maternity Leave following the end of the above mentioned six or eight week leave.

There are some cases in which the city will continue to pay its share of your medical insurance during an unpaid leave. If you are going to be on unpaid leave, be sure to call me so we can make sure you will continue to receive all the benefits to which you are entitled.



SEA/MTA/NEA  
Dues for Year 2008

|                   |                                     |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| January – June    | 13 Pay Periods @ \$32.69 = \$424.97 |
| August – December | 9 Pay Periods @ \$34.00 = \$306.00  |
|                   | \$730.97                            |

# What's Our Union Doing for Us?

By: 

The Oscars have come and gone. I don't follow the action, but I know the theme. Professionals work long and hard with other professionals to present to the public an hour and a half (or so) film. These pros then congratulate the cream of the crop for various roles well done. All manner of support is in place to ensure the final product is top-notch. There are more players behind the scenes than one could even imagine on screen. The films and humans are judged on the final cut – after many re-takes and editing! Even then, so many movies are not even slightly entertaining. There are huge bombs out there! But that's show biz and we applaud.

Teachers also work long and hard hours preparing for a ninety-minute or so performance. We are more like stage actors. We perform in front of a live interactive audience who don't pay the big bucks to get into the theatre. Much of our audience is there against their will. The professional support for our performances is thin and getting thinner. The producers are either cutting the funds or diverting them outside the actors' guild. Non-professionals have created a system that calls for more editing and re-takes, but guess what? We can't re-shoot a lesson, term or year with our students. All the consultants and corporate school-businesses are shooting digital; we're shooting 8mm. We're asked to not only write the screenplay but direct, act, choreograph, edit, create special effects, film, advertise, and premier the whole shooting match. Then, do our peers judge our performance? No! Management observes about twenty minutes of the show and then decides who gets the Oscar! Even if we use the all too limited script and the official pentameter, we're not guaranteed an honor. Why? The critics are asking the audience if we've created entertainment worthy of them. If the critics (and even the audience) missed something, they then come to us and ask us to prove that we performed well on what they missed. This is somewhat bizarre.

I don't know how often I must state that the vast majority of the teaching professionals in Springfield Public Schools are highly dedicated and hard working individuals with the best intentions for their students. Many are relatively new to the city and/or the profession and must not be judged as veterans. With imminent cuts due to the financial meltdown, there will be staffing considerations to be made. It's where these cuts will occur that troubles me. We are assured that cuts will be carried out as far from the classroom as possible. I'll believe that when I see it. Other districts will be cutting staff also. The newer hires that survive layoffs won't be able to simply move on to a more attractive school system; they will remain here and therefore become, in a few years, highly trained and super-competent professionals. As the economic picture brightens, surrounding towns will tap into Springfield's vast pool of superstars. Soon, our versions of Meryl Streep and Robert Redford will be successfully teaching in other systems. As mentioned above: the support system has vanished. We're asking our staff to deal effectively with more and more difficult behavioral, emotional and cognitive issues in the regular classrooms. Effective alternative settings are disappearing and the blame is shifted to the neophytes and veterans alike. We are failing the students with serious needs by not providing them with viable alternatives; we are failing the other students by not providing said alternatives. We are failing the ever dwindling number of professionals that have chosen to come to (or stay in) Springfield by not providing true support and well thought out programs coupled with competitive salaries.

With all the hurdles we face daily, with the reduction of support and funds, with the addition of responsibilities and paperwork, with the increase in workload and busy-work, with the onus of performance measures placed squarely on our shoulders you'd think we'd get together as one and move the decision makers to change! A true opportunity to show our solidarity is with the FCB's initiative on Time Labor Management. Call, email, snail-mail, and/or visit any politician who'll listen (go to [www.seateachers.com](http://www.seateachers.com), scroll down, and click on the appropriate contact box). We need to edit this film.

Last month I mentioned the SEA social held in January. I alluded to the number of attendees aiming for some feedback. One of our colleagues emailed the SEA office to express her appreciation for the opportunities throughout the year to simply gather. I want to thank her and all others who find the time to attend and for their belief in the union as a sort of extended family. It really is what you (the rank and file) do for the association, not what the association does for you. So, thank you!

Keep Smiling,

Peter J. Reese  
Vice President

**Health Insurance  
Open Enrollment Schedule 2009**

**Open Enrollment is April 13, 2009 – May 15, 2009**

**SAVE THE DATE!**

**ENROLLMENT EVENTS FOR MEDICAL ONLY**

**Friday, April 17, 2009**

**3pm-6pm**

Central High School (cafeteria)  
1840 Roosevelt Avenue  
Springfield

**Monday, May 11, 2009**

**12pm-4pm**

Holyoke Community College  
Bartley Center  
303 Homestead Avenue  
Holyoke

**Tuesday, May 12, 2009**

**10am-2pm**

UMASS Amherst  
Student Union Ballroom  
Amherst

If you have any questions or desire additional information, you can visit the Personnel Department in Room 18, City Hall. The hours of operation are Monday thru Wednesday from 8:15 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.; Thursdays from 8:15 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. (4/30/09, 5/7/09, and 5/14/09); and Fridays from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.; or you may contact the City Insurance Department by email at [benefits@springfieldcityhall.com](mailto:benefits@springfieldcityhall.com), or by phone at 413-787-7842 or 413-787-6055.

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**ENROLLMENT FOR NON MEDICAL PRODUCTS**

(You may enroll in and make changes to your health insurance plan during the time periods listed below; however, **NO** GIC representative will be present. If you would like additional dates & locations where a GIC representative will be present, please visit [www.mass.gov/gic](http://www.mass.gov/gic))

**FSA, DEFERRED COMPENSATION, DENTAL & VISION, SAVINGS BONDS, DISABILITY, and LIFE**

**April 13 – May 15, 2008**

**City Hall  
Springfield**

**during regular hours listed above**

**&**

**April 30, May 7, and May 14, 2009  
8:15am – 6pm**

**Additional location & times TBA**

## Pioneer Valley Project 2009 M.I.C.A.H. Dinner

On January 31, 2009, the Pioneer Valley Project (PVP) held their 2009 M.I.C.A.H. (Ministry in Community Action Honorees) Dinner at the Sinai Temple. Tim Collins, SEA President, and Nancy deProsse, MTA Field Representative were among the honorees.



The Pioneer Valley Project wrote, "Tim Collins played a central role as President of the Springfield Education Association in defeating Question 1 on the November, 2008 ballot, the initiative that would have ended the income tax. He spoke passionately about the issue from early in the election process, and educated many people including PVP leaders about the threat to schools and the community. With his leadership, the SEA organized teachers school by school to understand the issues, to sign up others to vote no, and to turn out the vote on Election Day. His leadership helped to defeat Question 1 by 75% to 25% in Springfield, and 70% to 30% statewide. This work set the stage for a wider discussion about tax policy that can bring needed funds into our schools and communities." Tim was honored by the Pioneer Valley Central Labor Council International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 7. Congratulations Tim!



The Pioneer Valley Project wrote about Nancy deProsse, "The Springfield Education Association (SEA) is proud to honor Nancy deProsse as our MICAHA Award recipient. Nancy is the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA) field representative for the SEA. All of her adult life, Nancy has been an advocate for children (Pre-K through Higher Education), workers, living wage jobs, and social justice for all people. Nancy's spirit, dedication and hard work, with and for the SEA and Pioneer Valley Project, have been an example and an inspiration to all of us in the SEA. She personifies the human qualities that are needed to make our community and our world a better place." Thank you and congratulations Nancy!

### ***WILD in the Winter West*** *Organizing in the New Economy*

**Saturday, March 14, 2009**

**8:30 A.M. – 1:30 P.M.**

**UMass Labor Center, Gordon Hall  
418 N. Pleasant Street  
Amherst, MA**

Join the Women's Institute for Leadership Development and the UMass-Amherst Labor Extension Program for an exciting morning program – a workshop on understanding the causes and impact of the economic crisis PLUS WILD Women Live!, interviews with inspiring women who lead their unions and community organizations – followed by lunch and conversation with other labor movement women!

\$20 Registration Fee

Childcare reimbursement is available.

For more information and to register (**deadline is March 12, 2009**) send an e-mail to [dmelcher@Irrc.umass.edu](mailto:dmelcher@Irrc.umass.edu) or call 413-545-6166.



### **Meline Kasparian Scholarship**

The SEA Scholarship Committee wishes to announce the availability of applications for the Meline Kasparian Scholarship Fund. **To be eligible for this scholarship one must be related to an SEA member.** Up to five \$1,000 scholarships will be awarded. **The deadline for completed applications is May 1, 2009.**

If you would like an application, one can be downloaded from the SEA web site at [www.seateachers.com](http://www.seateachers.com) or please send a self-addressed envelope, along with your request to: Springfield Education Association, 1000 Wilbraham Road, Springfield, MA 01109, or stop by the office.

## Tools for Schools Crew

By Debra Askwith

Springfield Public Schools were well represented at the Environmental Protection Agency's Ninth Annual Tools for Schools Symposium. Team Springfield included Michele Foley, a Springfield school nurse; Lisa Bakowski, Principal at Sumner Avenue School; Barbara Dismuke, a teacher at Sumner Avenue School; and me. The two and half day event was held at the Grand Hyatt in Washington, D.C. in December.

Michele Foley wanted to learn more about the program and have an opportunity to network with other schools that have adopted the Tools for Schools (TfS) Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) model. She went on to say, "The EPA and school districts utilizing TfS seemed very enthusiastic in sharing their views and best practices. As the Nursing Department for Springfield Public Schools, we are interested in working with other staff within the district as well as the Asthma Coalition to delve further into the impact IAQ has on asthma and the overall health of the school population." Michele has been involved with providing education to some of the city nurses prior to her attendance at the symposium. She feels the next step would be to "...discern what is already being done in Springfield, how effective it has been, and to get more staff involved."

Lisa Bakowski welcomed the opportunity to attend Tools for Schools due to her concern for the health of her staff. During her first year as principal of Sumner Avenue School, Lisa had many staff members who were sick, including seven that had pneumonia. In the 2007-2008 school year, Lisa wholeheartedly welcomed the opportunity for Sumner Avenue School to be one of the pilot schools for the Springfield Environmental Initiative, organized by Patrick Sullivan, Executive Director of PBRM. Lisa states, "It was one of the best conferences I ever attended. I became more passionate about IAQ as a result of the symposium. The event motivated me to create an action plan with concrete steps."

Barbara Dismuke's advocacy for environmental health and safety began before she went to the Tools for Schools Symposium. She's attended SEA and MTA Environmental Health and Safety meetings,

and arranged an extended day program on the basics of IAQ for her colleagues. Barbara is looking to add more teachers to their IAQ team at Sumner Avenue School. At future meetings their committee will, "...discuss simple housekeeping maintenance in classrooms, gather data, look for hot spots, and do walk throughs..." Barbara went on to add, "We will get there! It takes time and a collaborative effort!"

The EPA provided funding for Lisa and Michele, and the MTA Environmental Health & Safety Committee secured a grant from the NEA for its members to attend the conference. For more information on this program go to [www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/symposium.html](http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/symposium.html)

*Elms College offers the following programs in education:*

**CAGS IN EDUCATION**

**MASTER OF ARTS IN TEACHING**

*leading to initial and professional licensure*

**MASTER OF EDUCATION**

**MIDDLE SCHOOL MATH  
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Springfield public school teachers.

Summer and Fall registration begins April 13.

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413-265-2490 or [mccarryj@elms.edu](mailto:mccarryj@elms.edu)



Did your school hold the biggest funniest, most unusual Read Across America event in the country on March 2nd? Save your photos, videos, and stories and enter the 2009 Read Across America Awards. For rules, categories, and an application, go to [www.nea.org/readacross](http://www.nea.org/readacross).

Remember, NEA's Read Across America also provides NEA members, parents, caregivers, and children the resources and activities they need to keep reading on the calendar 365 days a year.



**March** is Women's History Month. Each year, March is designated as National Women's History Month to ensure that the history of women will be recognized and celebrated in schools, workplaces, and communities throughout the country. The stories of women's historic achievements present an expanded view of the complexity and fulfillment of living a purposeful life. For more information, go to [www.nwhp.org](http://www.nwhp.org).



**March 8 – 14** – Teen Tech Week connecting teens with different technologies, especially those available through the library. Go to [www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org) for more details.



**April** is National Poetry Month. Plan ahead by going to [www.nea.org/readacross](http://www.nea.org/readacross) for resources and information. April is also School Library Media Month. For tips on this event, go to [www.ala.org/aasl](http://www.ala.org/aasl).



**April 2** – International Children's Book Day. For more information, go to [www.ibby.org](http://www.ibby.org). IBBY is The International Board on Books for Young People, a non-profit organization which represents an international network of people from all over the world who are committed to bringing books and children together.

## PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE BYLAWS

Proposed amendments to the bylaws shall be submitted in writing prior to 5:00 P.M. on March 16, 2009 to the Committee on Bylaws, SEA Office.

Proposed amendments to the bylaws, submitted by individual members, shall be reviewed, and, if necessary, combined and/or edited without substantive change by the Bylaws Committee and then submitted to the membership at the Annual Meeting.

The Bylaws Committee shall, within 30 days of taking action on a proposed amendment, issue a report of its action to the submitter of the amendment.

Prior to the March deadline, the committee will make reasonable effort to assist interested members in achieving their intent so that proposals are legally worded and are consistent with other sections of the bylaws.

The Bylaws Committee shall recommend to the Annual Meeting procedures for consideration of amendments to the bylaws.

All bylaws must be in accordance with MTA-NEA bylaws.

*Elms College is pleased to offer two week-long summer courses for math teachers:*

### **"Putting Rigor in Your Math Course"**

Audience: teachers grades 5-10.

August 10-14, 2009, 8 a.m.-3 p.m.

### **"Pre-Calculus for Middle School and High School Teachers"**

Audience: teachers in grades 7-12.

August 17-21, 2009, 8 a.m.-3 p.m.

**Instructor: Eliel Gonzalez, M.Ed.**, has been a math teacher in the East Longmeadow public schools for 19 years. He has been a Mathcounts coach, the math league coach at East Longmeadow, and the College Board K-12 professional development project manager in mathematics, AP annual conference steering committee member, and national leader.

**50 percent tuition discount for Springfield public school teachers.**

**Summer and Fall registration begins April 13.**



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413-265-2490 or [mccarryj@elms.edu](mailto:mccarryj@elms.edu)

## Important E-mail Blast Update!

Approximately 1,650 (66%) of our members are currently on the SEA's e-mail blast system. If you have provided the SEA with your e-mail address and have not been receiving e-mails from us it may be because: 1.) SPAM is blocking the mails, 2.) you provided the SEA with your sps e-mail address and/or 3.) you only check your sps mail and not your personal mail. Be sure to add [contact@seateachers.com](mailto:contact@seateachers.com) to your e-mail address book in order to prevent mail from being blocked. Make sure the SEA has your personal e-mail address. Your sps address cannot be used for union business. If you did provide the SEA with your personal e-mail address, but only check your sps mail, check your personal mail. **The SEA cannot send e-mails to sps addresses!**

If you haven't submitted your e-mail address to the SEA, you may do so by sending us an e-mail (again, sps cannot be used) at [mailing@seateachers.com](mailto:mailing@seateachers.com). This SEA address is being used for the sole purpose of gathering your e-mail information and should not be used for regular correspondence with the office. When you e-mail us, **be sure to indicate your full name and school.** This is essential for identification purposes. Also, please indicate e-mail address in the subject line. You may also see an Association Representative in your building and provide them with your e-mail address, name, and school or jot it down and send it to us at the SEA Office, 1000 Wilbraham Road, Springfield, MA 01109. **Write legibly please!**

Don't be left out on receiving up-to-date communications on issues that affect public education and YOU!

## 2009 MTEL Tutorial Schedule

*Open to SPS Teachers, Long-Term Subs  
and Paraprofessionals*

**No Registration Required**

**Locations Will Be Announced  
60 Alton Street, Springfield, MA  
From 4:00 P.M. – 5:30 P.M.**

Each session will cover Communication & Literacy, English Language Learners, General Curriculum, and Foundations of Reading. Dates for Math tutorial sessions are contingent upon funding. Test dates are in all five areas. For updates and to obtain additional information, go to <http://sps.springfield.ma.us/>. If you have any further questions, call Mariola Niedzwiadek at 413-787-6575.

### SCHEDULE OF TUTORIAL SESSIONS 2009

**TEST: March 7**

Tutorial: March 5, 6

**TEST: May 9**

Tutorial: April 27, 28, 29, 30 May 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

**TEST: July 11**

Tutorial June 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

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