

The Springfield Teacher

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

This is the most dangerous time for Springfield public schools that I have seen in my 32 years in public education.

On the national level, President Bush's reenactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which he calls No Child Left Behind, is woefully underfunded and its accountability system is totally unrealistic. Under this system eventually every school in the commonwealth will fail to meet its Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). However, for Springfield and other urban areas, the affects of this accountability system are being felt right now. Some of our Chapter I funds are currently being diverted to private-for-profit companies to provide tutorial services to the children in our schools who have not met their AYP. These vendors are not required to hire highly qualified teachers and do not face the same accountability system that we in the public schools must face.

On the state level, not only has Mitt Romney not fulfilled his campaign promise to provide resources so that districts could set-up programs for habitually disruptive students, but also in his first two years in office he has reduced funds for all educational programs, e.g., class size, full day kindergarten, charter school reimbursements, special education, just to name a few. Romney's budget for next year will not make up for the loss of funds schools absorbed in his first two budgets. Now, Mr. Romney is showing his true colors as a venture capitalist. He wants to raid our retirement fund. He appears to believe he can strip this state of its long term assets and make it look good in the short term so he can realize personal profit. The profit for him will be how he spins this in the 2008 presidential primary race. The loss will be for the people of this state. Who, in their right mind, would want to go into public service in a state where, not only do you forfeit a large percentage of your social security benefits, but you also have a state retirement plan that pays out a benefit insufficient to live on from your very first day of retirement?

On the local level, over the last several years this city has contributed only the minimum amount of money that state law required for education. Even if our new mayor feels a moral obligation and civic responsibility to support the schools in an appropriate manner, he has inherited a city that is close to going into receivership.

Our schools and our school system are the most vulnerable because there are not large numbers of active and politically savvy parents to form the basis of a constituency group that will fight for public education.

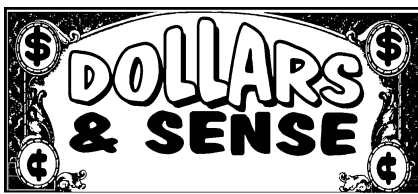
President's Message, on page 2

President's Message.

continued from page 1

It is imperative that we become involved in lobbying our elected officials - national, state, and local - to support public education. This support must be demonstrated in each of their budgets.

If we do not respond en masse to this crisis, and, if we ourselves do not form the basis of a constituency group that is willing to fight for public education, who will? If the public schools in urban areas like Springfield are lost, public schools across the commonwealth will be next. We cannot allow these selfish for-profit privatizers to prevail.



**SEA/MTA/NEA -
Dues for Year 2003**

January – June

13 Pay Periods
@ \$27.87 = \$362.31

August – December

10 Pay Periods
@ \$28.14 = \$281.40

TOTAL \$643.71

When comparing dues paid from previous years, please note that dues for August – December 2003 reflect ten pay periods (because of the Wednesday, December 31, 2003 payday) not the typical nine pay periods reflected in most yearly dues.

WHAT'S OUR UNION DOING FOR US?



We have been reviewing the work of the SEA committees throughout the year. Let's take a look at other committees that work hard for you.

GRIEVANCE COMMITTEE

This committee works to defend and protect the working rights of the bargaining unit members. This work is done through the grievance process that usually begins at the building level. The SEA has a full-time Professional Relations staff person who is also the grievance chairperson. The grievance chairperson oversees all grievances.

SICK LEAVE COMMITTEE

This committee works with administration to review requests for extended sick leave. New members are assessed one day of sick leave when they are hired. All members are assessed when the number of days in the sick bank reaches the level of 500 or less.

COMMITTEE OF POLITICAL EDUCATION (COPE)

This committee functions as the liaison between Association members and the School Committee, City Council, and state representatives and senators. They lobby for educational issues and keep members informed about important political decisions being made in education.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

This committee works with the school department to give input into the four professional days provided through the Contract. Through an application process, this committee also disburses money for members to attend professional development conferences and take college courses. On a first come-first serve basis, members can receive \$150 every other year for this purpose.

ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

The Elections Committee is responsible for conducting annual elections and for meeting the requirements of special elections. Although the work of this committee is not done on a consistent monthly basis, when they do work for you, they work very hard. Counting the votes of membership with integrity means giving up a night or two immediately following the elections. This committee always welcomes additional members.

BYLAWS COMMITTEE

This committee consists of a chairperson and six members appointed by the President representing a cross section of the membership. They solicit bylaw amendments from membership. Then, they review, edit, and recommend proposed bylaw amendments. They also write an impact statement for each proposed amendment. It is their responsibility to notify membership of proposed bylaw amendments.

CITY-WIDE SCHOOL CENTERED DECISION MAKING TEAMS

This team acts as a resource for all S.C.D.M. teams. This can include an orientation that explains the theory and practice of school-based management teams. They also provide training in the skills that are necessary to develop and implement effective S.C.D.M. teams.

Consider becoming a member of an Association committee!

A LETTER TO TOM ASHE

By: Mary Chamberlain

The following letter was sent to Tom Ashe and copied to all of the School Committee Members.

I recently read in the *Republican* that, under your supervision as the Vice Chair of the Springfield School Committee, the Meline Kasparian Professional Development Center is being considered as the future home of the Parent Information Center.

There is no doubt that PIC needs a new home. The parking situation seems to make the PDC an ideal spot. However, if one considers what is being displaced, then the PD Center is not the appropriate place.

As a past recipient of the Patricia Hunter Teacher Leader Award, I need to voice my objection to the placement of the Parent Information Center at the Meline Kasparian Professional Development Center.

Patricia Hunter was a staunch advocate of professional development. She encouraged many teachers in the Springfield Public Schools to become teacher leaders and to present at professional development workshops. She brought a new level of professional collegiality to the Springfield Public School system. Although her death was untimely, her spirit lives on in the halls and rooms of the PD Center.

It's not surprising that Pat took this direction in her educational career. Pat was a student teacher under the tutelage of Meline Kasparian. As a past president of the Springfield Education Association, Meline had the foresight to bring the Springfield Public Schools to a new realm of rich professional development before the Education Reform Act of 1993 mandated it. Meline was also known as a staunch advocate of public education, of Springfield students, and of professionalism. After her passing, the building was named the Meline Kasparian Professional Development Center to honor Meline and her life's work. To take that away would be a public showing of a lack of respect for both Meline and Pat.

Springfield is known for its high level of professional development. It is known for its Professional Development Center. Even representatives from the MA Department of Education have commented on the wisdom of the Springfield Public Schools in supporting such a center. I have had the fortunate experience of working out of the PD Center for the last few years. I see the multitude of professional experiences that happen in this building. There are many workshops and meetings for administrators. There are numerous teacher-oriented workshops and meetings. It is a place that people in the community can gather and work for a common cause. More importantly, it is a place where teachers and administrators have professional conversations. It is a place that shows respect for adult learning.

The Meline Kasparian Professional Development Center has many resources that support teachers in other ways. Teachers and aspiring administrators need to take the MTEL (Literacy and Communication test) for licensure. Tutorial support sessions are run two weeks before each test. The Teacher Resource room is available for laminating, making poster copies, and creating different materials for lessons and units. There are rooms available where teachers can work at computers. Sometimes, these are the only computers available to some teachers. Removing these resources would have a tremendous negative effect on teaching and learning in our school system.

It is a time of low morale for the teaching staff of the Springfield Public Schools. The School Committee will not extend the present contract. There is not a cost factor in renewing the contract except the cost of losing spirit. The teachers have been denied step raises and salary advancement for coursework. There seems to be no significant progress in settling contract negotiations. Now there are plans to remove the place where teachers come together to grow professionally in order to increase student achievement.

What will be next?

It seems that, in order to do the Parent Information Center and the Meline Kasparian Professional Development Center justice, a study of appropriate places to house PIC should be allowed to happen.

I urge you to consider this option.

CORRECTION!

Last month's issue of the *Springfield Teacher* did not indicate the dollar amount of the donation made by David Cruise to the SEA's Meline Kasparian Scholarship Fund. Again, Kudos to David Cruise for donating the \$1,520.00 retirement gift he received from grateful teachers to the SEA's Meline Kasparian Scholarship Fund.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Nancy S. Retchen

The SEA Professional Development Committee met on Wednesday, January 18, 2004 to discuss the issues of next year's program and the current cycle's recertification/relicensure process. While we only received feedback on our survey from thirty-two of our constituents, we did pass the collected information on to Mary Kate Fenton, Professional Development Supervisor. One issue that appeared to recur was the request for classroom set up time during the week before school. It was suggested that teachers approach their SCDM Teams to request that a portion of the day before students start school be devoted to classroom set-up.

The big news is that Springfield Public School's Professional Development registration is going on-line this spring. Teachers will be able to register online for their four Fall professional development days and a database will keep track of the courses. However, the database will not be equipped initially to keep track of an individual teacher's professional development history. So, please continue to closely monitor your certificates. More information will be distributed as the online registration implementation date approaches.

Mary Kate Fenton is suggesting that teachers recertify/relicense as early as possible. This is especially true for those who will be using a hard copy rather than going on-line. Please remember that there is a difference between being certified and being highly qualified.

Certification is done through the Massachusetts Department of Education and is necessary to maintain your license. For those who need to recertify/relicense and miss the deadline, you will be considered inactive and will need to get 150 PDP's within 2 years. Those who don't recertify/relicense for 5 years are considered invalid and also need 150 PDP's to be considered active again. So, whether you are out on a leave or need assistance, make sure you do what is necessary within the prescribed deadline.

Please be advised that there are several workshops available for you to attend to assist you in the recertification/relicensure process. The Professional Development Center distributed flyers to your buildings listing the dates of the workshops. If you plan to attend, bring your certification and PDP documentation with you. Review your documents and organize them ahead of time. Remember, that if there are large crowds, it may not be possible for the presenters to answer a multitude of questions that are particular to you alone.

If you cannot attend, we have been assured that the actual recertification/relicensure process on-line is fairly simple and very fast. Here, too, a little groundwork done before assures a smooth encounter with the recertification/relicensure process. To facilitate this process for you, a License Renewal Worksheet and instructions on how to navigate the DOE's recertification/relicensure web site has been provided for you in this newsletter. The worksheet and instructions are also available through the SEA web site at www.seateachers.com. Please complete the worksheet before you go on-line. If you wish to review the Professional Development Center's presentation for recertification/relicensure for further clarification, it is available at www.sps.springfield.ma.us.

Things to remember for recertification/relicensure:

1. You need your principal's final endorsement (a sign off) of your Professional Development Plan.
2. You will need a charge card to recertify/relicense on-line. If you elect to mail the payment separately, you could encounter a problem.
3. Have your certificates and the completed activities worksheet in front of you.

There are browsers on the top or buttons on the bottom to help you navigate through the DOE web site.

4. Make copies of your new certificate(s). Personnel will want them, as a list of those who have recertified/relicensed will come out May 8, 2004.

Good luck and please let an SEA Professional Development Committee member know if there is any other additional way that we can assist you. The Committee members are: Chairperson Nancy Retchen, Kennedy; Margaret Ashe, School of Professional Development; Timothy Collins, SEA; Maureen O'Shea, Forest Park; and Lesley Webb, Gerena.

ARE YOU REQUIRED TO TAKE THE MASSACHUSETTS TESTS FOR EDUCATOR LICENSURE? HELP HAS ARRIVED!

What kind of help? Tutors will conduct help sessions to prepare you for the Communication and Literacy Skills portion of the test. The focus of the sessions will be on reading comprehension, writing, vocabulary, and dictation.

Where? All of the tutorial sessions will be held at the Meline Kasparian Professional Development Center.

When? See the schedule for 2003-2004 below. The sessions will run from 3:30-5:00. You may come in at any time during those hours.

What is the cost? FREE!

SCHEDULE OF TUTORIAL SESSIONS 2003-2004

TEST: February 28 (Register by January 16 to avoid late fee.)

Tutorial Sessions: February 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27

TEST: May 15 (Register by April 2 to avoid late fee.)

Tutorial Sessions: May 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14

TEST: July 24 (Register by June 11 to avoid fee.)

Tutorial Sessions: June 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11

Test Registration Bulletins are available at the Office of the Licensure Mentors located at the PD Center, area colleges, or can be sent to your home if you call (413) 256-2892. If you have any questions, please contact Mary Chamberlain or Linda Christofori (750-2148).

WANTED:

Finance Advisory Committee Members

According to the SEA's Bylaws, the Finance Advisory Committee consists of two Executive Board members, two Legislative Board members, and five members at large appointed by the President. We are looking to expand the committee by three new members.

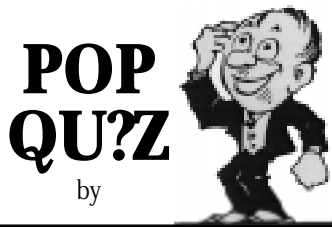
We meet on a bimonthly basis. Sometimes it is necessary to schedule extra meetings around budget time. This committee works with the Treasurer's office to prepare a yearly line item budget and to make recommendations for budgetary adjustments to the Executive Board. Call SEA President, Tim Collins, if you are interested in serving on this committee at 782-8300.



Meline Kasparian Scholarship

The SEA Scholarship Committee wishes to announce the availability of applications for the Meline Kasparian Scholarship Fund (formerly the Robson Scholarship). To be eligible for this scholarship one must be related to an SEA member. Up to six \$1,000 scholarships will be awarded. Because of a donation from David Cruise, we are able to award an extra Scholarship this year. **The deadline for completed applications is May 1, 2004.** Please keep in mind, this year, May 1st falls on a Saturday. The SEA office hours are Monday through Friday. **Applications delivered to the SEA Office on Monday, May 3, 2004 will be considered late.**

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



1. Is there a minimum time for the posting of extended day schedules? Does the Agreement require the posting of the schedule for extended days? Can the principal schedule a “double extended day?”

Schedules for extended days are SCDM decisions and should appear in the SCDM minutes. SCDM minutes must be posted, therefore, the extended day schedule would be posted as part of those minutes. Scheduling of “double extended days” is not a principal or a SCDM decision. Any request for a double extended day program must be made, in writing, by the SCDM Team to both the Superintendent of Schools and the President of the SEA. This written request should detail the nature of the program to be conducted and an explanation as to why the double extended day is necessary for the successful implementation of the program. The SCDM Team must also provide some alternative for any teacher who cannot stay beyond the regular time to make-up the second hour and fifteen minutes. (*Article 6*)

2. Many teachers receive a “Please see me” note from the principal. Once the teacher is in the office, they’re sanctioned orally for whatever reason. Does the teacher have a right to refute this at a later date with an Association Rep?

If a teacher is summoned by the principal, at the beginning of the meeting, the teacher should ask if the meeting is of a disciplinary nature or could it lead to disciplinary action. If the answer is yes, to either of these questions, the teacher is entitled to representation. If during a meeting it turns in this direction, the teacher is entitled to request a recess of the meeting until s/he can secure union representation. (*Article 21-A*)

3. Can the principal plan a conference for you during your prep time?

No, your prep period is your own time for preparation. You do, however, have an obligation to meet with parents in a timely manner. (*Article 5-L.5, Article 5-S*) (*Article 5-Q.4*)

4. Can my principal insist on meeting with me during prep time? Can I decline?

You may decline to meet during your prep time. If your principal insists in the form of an order or directive, attend the meeting, explain the reason why you declined (e.g. had to prepare for next class), offer to meet with him/her at a mutually convenient time and ask to be allowed to return to your work.

5. Should specialists (physical education, music, technology, etc.) be given a list of SPED students in inclusion classrooms and the reason for being in SPED?

All teachers should be informed of SPED students who are assigned to them and should be given access to the IEP of the students.

6. If a student’s IEP states that s/he may tape record a class, can the teacher refuse? What about the teacher’s rights? Why should a student’s “rights” be more important than the teacher’s “rights”? One teacher feels very uncomfortable being taped – nervous, etc. Does she have the right to say no?

If the student’s IEP calls for teacher’s lecture and/or lesson to be taped, this must occur. The teacher can be the person in control of the tape recorder so that s/he can turn it on and off to edit things out other than the lesson.

TIPS FOR TEACHERS

The following tips for the month were taken from the MTA’s published Teachers’ Calendar/Planner.

Time Management

- Sponsoring an activity will take about twice as much time as anyone ever tells you it will take. Ask questions about the expectations and time commitments before accepting a new duty.
- Remember that it is easier to say no initially than to say yes and then try to get out of a commitment.
- Keep a calendar with all commitments, appointments, “to do” items.
- Set priorities.
- Schedule downtime!

January 29, 2004

Letters to the editor
The Republican
P O Box 2350
Springfield, MA 01102-2350

Dear Sir,

In your editorial of Thursday, January 29, 2004, you reported your support for the decision by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court to reject a request to strike down the MCAS as a graduation requirement.

You close the editorial with an admonition to MCAS opponents that they “focus on lobbying for more resources to make sure that the graduation test is a hurdle that every student can surmount.”

What then are the resources for which we should be lobbying? They are safe, modern schools with a qualified teacher in every classroom.

With regards to the first “resource,” I would ask, how many of Springfield’s public schools are at or near the hundred-year mark? Why are young children being taught in hallways, basements and supply closets? Where is the editorial voice of the Republican raising the outcry over the deplorable conditions in which our students are being prepared to “surmount the hurdle?” Unfortunately, the Republican has been as silent on this issue as it has been outspoken in supporting MCAS.

In a recent front-page article, the Republican reported on a critical and growing shortage of teachers, particularly in Springfield and other urban districts. The article pointed out the difficulty of getting new teachers into these districts and keeping them there. Another problem facing Springfield schools is the number of qualified teachers leaving for greener pastures in Connecticut and surrounding suburban communities.

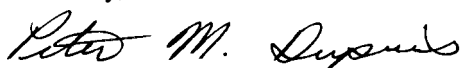
It is an indisputable fact that high student test scores are the result of years of hard work by devoted teachers. In other words, if you are sincere about “lobbying for resources,” your voice should be among the loudest proponents of making Springfield an attractive place to teach.

But, what is the reality of teaching in Springfield? Teachers have been without a contract for two years. During this same period every other city employee, including the Superintendent and the school administrators, have had their contracts renewed. The former Mayor has frozen the salary increases to which the city contractually agreed. The current Mayor has given no indication that he will either extend the teachers’ contract or lift the pay freeze.

What is the message this lack of action sends to perspective teachers? Where is the incentive for good teachers to come to Springfield or to stay working here? The answer is none.

If the Republican is sincere in supporting the call for “more resources,” it is time they step up and lead the fight to give Springfield teachers the respect they deserve and a fair and equitable contract. In short, it is time for the supporters of MCAS to put your money where your mouth is.

Sincerely,



Peter M. Dupuis
Professional Relations Associate

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE BYLAWS

Proposed amendments to the bylaws shall be submitted in writing prior to 5:00 p.m. on March 15, 2004 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.

MTA/NEA CONVENTIONS 2004

The MTA Convention will be held May 21 and 22 in Boston and the NEA Convention will be held in Washington D.C. from July 2 – July 7 (tentative dates). Please see your Association Representative for **self-nomination forms**. These forms are **due at the SEA office before 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, February 24, 2004**. A sample ballot listing all candidates will be posted in each building from March 7 to March 15, 2004. Elections will be held in all buildings on March 15 and 16, 2004 during extended day.

HAS YOUR ADDRESS CHANGED?

If your address, telephone number, or e-mail address has changed, please e-mail the SEA office at contact@seateachers.com or call us at 782-8300. We will also inform the MTA and the NEA of the address change so you can receive the mailings from our affiliated associations (and your union card, which you should have received by now).

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Union and Cambridge College)



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NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

- Kudos to Sally Suomala, Lynch School. What a great letter to the editor!!! Again, everyone should visit the SEA web site at www.seateachers.com for samples of letters to the editor and talking points. Then, using these samples, write your own letter to the editor and send copies to the School Committee, Mayor, and the SEA.
- How can parents best help their child against the playground bully? Check out “Can We Talk?,” two new parent-tested and kid-approved workshop programs on bullying, harassment, and drugs. Designed for five to fifteen-year-olds, these workshops are perfect for school, the community center, or brown bag presentations at work. For details, visit www.canwetalk.org.
- NEA opposed the new Medicare/prescription drug law that includes \$3,600 coverage gap. The law could encourage employers to eliminate existing retiree coverage, favor privatization, shift costs to the consumer through Health Savings Accounts, and more. For details, go to www.nea.org/lac/overview/medicare.htm
- Confused about what changes are possible in the pending Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)? From mandatory funding to a reduction in paperwork, learn more about NEA’s priorities as the reauthorization of the IDEA Bill slowly moves through Congress on the updated web site at www.nea.org/specialed.
- Is your school ready to access its organizational conditions and practices that support teaching and learning? If so, e-mail rhodge@nea.org to get *KEYS 2.0* action guide and information kit. This school based improvement system is designed for education employees, parents, and the community. Learn more at www.keysonline.org.
- Protect our children, families, and communities, while respecting the rights of lawful gun owners. The Senate will debate firearms legislation (S.659) in early 2004. If Congress passes the Bill, it must include a renewal of the Assault Weapons Ban and close the gun-show loophole. Send a message to your member of Congress at www.nea.org/lac/arcgi1003.html#ban
- Learn more about the impact of Culture, Abilities, Resilience, and Effort (C.A.R.E.) in closing the achievement gap. Discover research-based resources to improve your practice. Share your experience on turning around a school to meet “adequate yearly progress” requirements. How? Subscribe to CAREshare, the monthly online newsletter, at mgreen@nea.org.
- February is Library Lovers’ Month, a celebration of school, public, and private libraries of all types and a time for everyone to recognize the value of libraries and to work to assure that the nation’s libraries will continue to serve.
- February is Black History Month. Celebrate African-American culture through children’s literature. Visit www.nea.org/readacross for a new book list highlighting African-American culture.
- March 2, 2004 is NEA’s Read Across America Day and the anniversary of Ted Geisel’s, otherwise known as Dr. Seuss, 100th birthday. For resources on how to celebrate this important date, go to www.nea.org/readacross.