

The Springfield Teacher

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

As we head into 2011, I hope all of you have a joyous, restful, and rejuvenating break. We have our work cut out for us in the upcoming year. The federal stimulus money will be gone. The district wisely decided to spend the lion's share of the federal education jobs money next year. This will lessen the impact of the lost federal stimulus money, but it does not fully replace it. We will all need to become advocates, contacting our state legislators for state funding for our schools. (State legislators' contact information may be found by going to www.seateachers.com and clicking on Contact Your Elected Officials.)

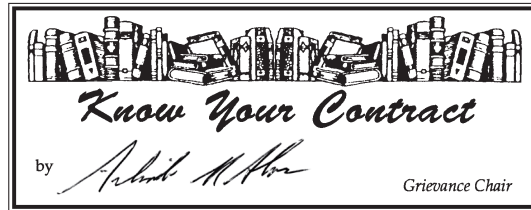
The district is hard at work trying to support the ten Level 4 schools and working with the twenty-three Level 3 schools. We have a brief reprieve because there will be no new Level 4 schools designated next year, but in the following year there is a real possibility that a number of the twenty-three Level 3 schools could move to Level 4. The work we do together over the next year, or two, will make the difference.

If we are to be successful in this work, teachers' voices, and the voices of all those who work in schools, must be heard. There needs to be a safe working environment where honest and open discussion can take place about how we should be moving forward. When this happens, we will find there are many things we agree on. We need to put our energy into addressing and resolving the issues and concerns that a critical mass of people working in a school environment believe will make a difference in the lives of the children in our charge. Collectively working on the issues we believe in will make a difference in our working environment as well as our students' learning environment.

Once again, enjoy your time off. You richly deserve it. I wish all the best to you and yours for the New Year!



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ACCOUNTABILITY

Periodically, teachers find themselves being questioned by an administrator as to why a student is failing, what the teacher is doing to address the student's needs, and how the teacher has involved the parent.

I believe we are all in agreement with the importance of parental involvement with their children's education. The number of notes written, progress reports sent and phone calls made attest to it. Many team meetings and extended days are devoted to parent conferences, and cries of protest from teachers are heard anytime scheduling changes threaten that opportunity. As stated in *Article 5.Q.3 of The Agreement Between the Springfield School Committee And The Springfield Education Association*, "The (Springfield Education) Association agrees that teacher-parent communication is a crucial element of a successful educational program."

Teachers should always be prepared to provide a very clear accounting of a student's progress. At the beginning of each school year, teachers are required by contract to provide, in writing, the goals and expectations for the school year/course for students and parents, including information about curriculum content, classroom management, assessment techniques, homework expectations, attendance expectations, procedures regarding absences for make-up work, method for parents to communicate with teacher, and method(s) for students to receive assistance. (*Article 5.Q.3*) This information can be used as a record-keeping guide for each student's performance.

Also, teachers should maintain a record of all communication with administrators, parents and students regarding a student's progress. By making copies of all written communication and a record of the date and summary of any conversations, the teacher will be able to clearly demonstrate to an administrator how both the student and parent are being kept informed of any difficulties as well as any interventions made.

At the same time, in trying to address a student's needs, we need to make certain that any requests by the administrator or parent are reasonable. According to *Article 5-E*, "Lesson plans are expected to include activities for the class/week that are consistent with the instructional goals of that class including homework, where applicable." That is, the lesson plans are designed to meet the needs of the **class**, not a separate plan for individual students. Similarly, individual education plans are required only for special education students and it has long been recognized that extra time must to be provided for teachers to develop those plans. Neither administrators nor parents should be asking for teachers to design education plans for individual regular education students. While phone calls and notes home can be very important in maintaining the lines of communication, those calls and notes should not be required on a daily basis unless there is agreement between all parties affected that it is appropriate and temporary due to a specific problem that needs to be addressed.

Teachers work very long hours. We must guard against requiring the hours beyond the classroom from being so taken up by plans, reports, phone calls and other such work that we are sapping away the time and energy needed for the classroom. Nothing is more important than what happens when teachers are with their students. We must continue to ensure that the energy and effort is concentrated there.

What's Our Union Doing for Us?

By 

The main storyline for this month's article was to be a review of SEA initiatives and progress towards enhanced communication and participation. The more I tried to write, the more I felt I've said it all before. The ever present question kept popping up: WHERE HAVE ALL THE GANDHI'S GONE?* the answer is "I don't know." Is there anyone out there making decisions who is genuinely concerned with the welfare of our students? Is there anyone out there writing the laws and regulations who is not motivated by selfish, petty, ill-informed motives? I hope so, but I see little evidence.

This month's newsletter will reach you just before a rather abbreviated holiday hiatus – take some time to reflect on the nature of the attacks on educators and support staff. Think of the road we're on. Think of where it leads, not only for us but for students and future educators. Seek to empathize with those who have gone before us. Reflect on the actions taken by Gandhi, the people of India, Martin Luther King, the Civil Rights protesters, Thomas Paine, the American revolutionaries, union organizers of the 20th century, the myriad of folks protesting America's role in Vietnam, the millions who daily look for a better way. The structures are in place to divide us. How can we turn the tide?

Happy Holidays and Keep Smiling,

Peter J. Reese
Vice President

*Sung to the tune of "Where have all the flowers gone?"

Communicating To Our Members

Keeping our members informed about issues affecting public education, your profession, and the children of Springfield is vital. The SEA offers three vehicles to accomplish this – the SEA website (www.seateachers.com), this monthly newsletter (*The Springfield Teacher*), and blast emails sent to your personal email address.

Remember to:

- ⇒ **Check Out** your website at www.seateachers.com
 - ⇒ **Look for** *The Springfield Teacher* distributed to your school every month
 - ⇒ **Submit** your personal email address (SPS CANNOT be used) by sending an email to mailing@seateachers.com* indicating your full name and school (please type "email address" in the subject line of the email)
 - ⇒ **Add** the Springfield Education Association email address (contact@seateachers.com) to your personal email contacts so that it does not go into your junk mailbox
- AND
- ⇒ Of course, **OPEN** the emails sent by the SEA -- YOUR union!

By utilizing these three vehicles of communication, you will stay informed and on top of important information affecting you and the children in your charge.

* This email address is being used for the sole purpose of gathering information and should not be used for regular correspondence with the SEA office.



December is Books Across America Month! Books Across America is an NEA effort to help replenish public school libraries. You can donate a book by reading a book online. Go to www.nea.org/readacross for more information.

December 5-11 is Computer Science Education Week! In the fall of 2009, Congress designated the first full week of December as Computer Science Education Week to recognize the transformative role of computing and the need to bolster computer science at all educational levels. See the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) materials at www.acm.org and more educator resources at the Computer Science Teachers Association, www.csta.acm.org.

December 15 is Bill of Rights Adoption Day! The Bill of Rights is the name the first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution are known. Introduced in 1789 as a series of articles, they came into effect on December 15, 1791, after ratification by three-fourths of the States. For resources see the Bill of Rights Institute website at billofrightsinstitute.org.

December 16 is the Boston Tea Party Anniversary! The Boston Tea Party was a direct action by colonists in Boston against the British government. On December 16, 1773, after officials in Boston refused to return three shiploads of taxed tea to Britain, a group of colonists boarded the ships and destroyed the tea by throwing it into Boston Harbor. See the Boston Tea Party Historical Society website, www.boston-tea-party.org for more information.

December 17 is the Anniversary of the Wright Brothers' Flight! The Wright Brothers forever changed human travel at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, on December 17, 1903, with their heavier-than-air powered flight, which traveled 120 feet. For more resources, go to www.thewrightbrothers.org.

December 21 is Winter Solstice! The winter solstice occurs exactly when the Earth's axial tilt is farthest away from the sun. It is the shortest day and longest night. The seasonal significance of the Winter Solstice is in the reversal of the gradual lengthening of nights and shortening of days. There are two winter solstices: winter in the northern hemisphere and winter in the southern hemisphere. The winter solstice here is the summer solstice there.

December 26 is the Anniversary of the Disbanding of the Soviet Union! On December 26, 1991, the Soviet Union was officially disbanded, breaking up fifteen constituent parts, thereby ending the world's largest and influential communist state, leaving People's Republic of China to that position.

SPS District-Based MTEL Preparation Class Schedule 2010-2011

Springfield Public Schools has published the MTEL Classes and Resource Guide again this year. To view and download the guide go to <http://sps.springfield.ma.us/Staff/default.asp> and click on "MTEL Classes and Resource Guide 2010-2011."

DELAYED OPENINGS

The "Policies and Procedures" Reference Manual states: "The Springfield Public Schools expects you to use reasonable judgment and caution, but to understand your employment responsibility in this matter." In other words, you are expected to be in your building as soon as it is reasonably safe. If you know you are going to be late, you are expected to call and let your principal know. You are not expected to endanger yourself.

Spring Contract Courses

The Unit A Contract calls for the Springfield School Committee to offer two graduate courses per semester for Unit A members.

The three courses listed below are being offer. SPS Professional Development is working on the specifics of each course and will have the postings available to Unit A staff as soon as possible. Check the SPS website for the postings or contact Linda Christofori at christofori@sps.springfield.ma.us for further information about the Spring Contract Courses.

Better Beginnings (for new teachers) – the deadline date of December 8, 2010 has been extended. Visit the SPS website for the updated information.

Structured English Immersion Content for English Language Learners (possible 3 credit hours through AIC).

Differentiating Instructional Practices (through MTA – offering Framingham State College credits).

Teachers interested in enrolling in the above courses should do so by indicating it in writing to: Department of Human Resources, 1550 Main Street, Springfield, MA 01103-1410 by **Wednesday, December 15, 2010**. Please include your full name, school location, and contact information.

**It's That
Time
of Year
Again!**



Get Extra

Holiday Cash
By Skipping Your Next Loan Payment!

Members of STCU Credit Union can participate in our Holiday-Skip-A-Payment program. This means that you may skip your December or January payment on your Credit Union loan and if you have more than one loan, you can skip a payment on each.



145 Industry Ave., Springfield
413-732-9812

453 East Main Street, Westfield
413-562-4092



*For consumer loans only. Interest will continue to accrue on the loan.
A \$25 processing fee will be deducted from your account. See your branch for details.

Kenneth Shea - Bankruptcy Law

*Are you overwhelmed by debt?
Are you being harassed by creditors?
Have you received a summons from collection agency?
Have you exhausted your options?
Are you looking for honest legal advice?
I understand.*

Call for a free consultation or

Visit my website at:

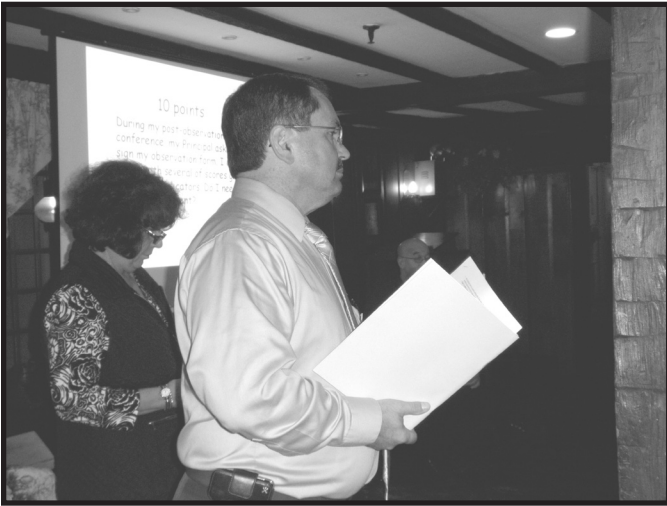
www.attorneykenshea.com

**200 North Main Street
East Longmeadow, Ma 01028**

413-525-1313



Legislative Board Training



Alindo Alves, SEA Professional Relations Associate, and Mary Chamberlain, SEA Retiree, present Contract Jeopardy



Peter Reese, SEA Vice President, & Carolyn Harris, SEA Recording Secretary, role playing scenarios.

Training for Association Representatives was held on November 5 and 6, 2010. Friday evening kicked off with a “Contract Jeopardy” game. It was a fun way for Reps to get to know the Contract. On Saturday, the Reps were presented with ways to mobilize a communication network in their school, brainstormed ‘what do I do if...’ scenarios, learned the grievance procedure and process, and role played dealing with members and administration. When asked what was helpful about the training some responses were: “EVERYTHING! The organized, concise presenting was a good foundational experience for me.” “Going over the contract; using various scenarios to figure out how the contract helps us rectify certain situations.” “Listening to questions I had myself and to solutions to issues that have come up in my building. I feel more informed about the contract & ways to deal with administration.” “It was informational and it also was skill-building which will give me more confidence to fill this role.”



Kudos to the following Association Representatives who attended the training: Constance Ryder, Balliet; Christina Stebbins, Boland; Brenda Dunn and Melanie Kornacki, Brunton; Donna Billard-Gabriel, Theresa Bryant, and Elaine Sguglia, DeBerry; Rose Sattler, Dryden; Ivelisse Lescano, Freedman; Lisa Mahan and Jean Whitlock-Bushey, Glickman; Miranda Hamerly, Cynthia Karotki, and Linda Powers, Johnson; Marianne Gleason and Maryann Taylor, Liberty; Heather Heinz, Lincoln; Joyce Welch, Pottenger; Marguerite Foster Franklin and Barbara Dismuke, Sumner; Theresa Russell, Warner; Marisol Rivas-Nunez, White; Ruth Tate, Zanetti; Marie Ryan, Forest Park; Elizabeth Kwasnik and Catherine Maccini, Kiley; Madria Hall, Van Sickle; Phillip Dowgiert and Patricia Sullivan, Central; Victor Anoje and Susan Schack, Sci Tech; Lynn Russell, New Leadership; Denise Cote and Kirsten Pittenger, Renaissance; Elizabeth Tongue, SAFE Elementary; and Karin Johnson, SAFE Middle!