

# The Springfield Teacher

The UNITY newsletter of the Springfield Education Association 1000 Wilbraham Road, Springfield, MA 01109  
TEL: 782-8300 FAX: 783-8812 E-mail: [contact@seateachers.com](mailto:contact@seateachers.com) Website: [www.seateachers.com](http://www.seateachers.com)

## President's Message

I hope all of you have a joyous holiday season and a restful, rejuvenating and peaceful vacation; it is well deserved.

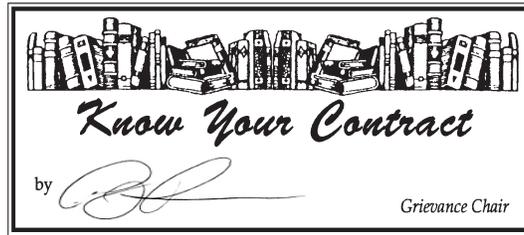
We all need to learn from the recent turnaround DESE made regarding tying your license renewal to your evaluation. MTA members across this commonwealth responded to this DESE proposal with emails, letters, and telephone calls. **Our voices made a difference!**

In the approaching new year, as the MTA fashions our legislative agenda, the detractors of public education will be fashioning theirs. We all need to be watchful and raise our voice as the legislative process plays out. Raising our voice by email, calling, and writing our state representative and state senators can, and does, make a difference. We may not have the financial resources the detractors of public education have, but what we do have is people power. When we, along with our supporters of public education, raise our voices and get legislation passed that will support and enhance public education we will make a difference in our professional lives and in the lives of our students.

Be well. Keep up your good work. Together we can change things for the better.

Yours in solidarity,





A break in the action (school-wise anyway) is near at hand. I hope all of you experience a peaceful and restful holiday season. Forget work for a while and enjoy your family and friends.

I won't go into any specific Articles of the Collective Bargaining Agreement, but rather reach out to all of you once again for some understanding of our common plight. The contractual issues presented to me here at the SEA office are, for the most part, straight forward and rather easily corrected. I'm not claiming timeliness here, but the very nature of the conflict is of the black and white sort. In other words, the contractual language is explicit and just a matter of pointing out the discrepancies to the proper decision maker. Some of these are pay issues such as - - a teacher hasn't received longevity pay but is eligible, an educator was not placed on the correct Step of the salary schedule. Other contractual items that are usually resolved quickly are issues around length of work day, length of PD day, length of extended day, teacher has three different classes to prep for but still has homeroom, and so on.

There are other issues that are contractual that become a matter of interpretation, perceived need, and/or stubbornness. These take longer to get to resolution and involve a good deal of time. To reach a level of agreement, these issues are usually settled with the district further up the food chain than building principals or chiefs – these will be either settled with the Superintendent or his designee or will need to be arbitrated. No matter what the outcome is, the resolution is based on contractual language, MOU, past practice, etc.

The overwhelming majority of concerns, outside of the contractual language, received at the SEA office fall into three categories: workload, evaluation, and personality. The assumption here is that, technically, these types of concerns are not contract based. These are the battles that are the most frustrating to combat because they are so interconnected. I'm just going to throw out a worst-case scenario; you see where you fit.

Obviously, you are an educator in Springfield. You see 27 kids all day and teach them almost all of their subjects or you see 90 - 150 kids per day for your one special subject. You are required to create differentiated, standards-based, template-driven, extremely detailed lesson plans every week and deliver them to administration for feedback (the feedback part is contractual). You are required to fill your room with a plethora of eye-catching displays like Macy's on steroids. By the way, if you want materials, better buy them yourself because copy paper is even a hot commodity these days.

Oh, you had morning duty and your favorite little guy got into your room and trashed it – now it's your responsibility to begin a month-long therapy session with the tyke because discipline is all yours. Twenty minutes later, your evaluator pops in for an unannounced observation – your room is not up to code yet. You ultimately are informed that you are unsatisfactory based on the fact that your data wall, word wall, agenda, student work, standards, etc. are not displayed properly. You try to explain that it's all in the room; it's just in shreds and strewn all over the floor. Now you're open for a Needs Improvement in room tidiness. You attempt to explain that, with such a heavy workload and many of the students getting away with despicable behavior, it has become a real battle ground in the school. You just struck a nerve!

Your room is now being micromanaged, your assignment changes, your duty changes almost daily, you are being blasted in the SEEDS process, you are being ordered to complete unreasonable tasks on your own time. In short, you feel threatened and frustrated. Discussions with colleagues reveal to you that many others are being treated unfairly. There are attempts to address the staff's feelings with the principal which only exacerbate the pressure. Some of your peers begin to bail out – leaving those rooms with day to day coverage, substitutes, or, at best, new staff. The new teachers are being asked to function as veterans in a now toxic environment.

There is only one way to begin to correct the wrongs inflicted on the classrooms. Inform the SEA with detailed examples describing the most pressing issues in your particular building. We fight from here with what we get from you. This

*(continued on page 3)*

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inches us along, but a snail's pace in these times will not suffice. To catapult our efforts we need the physical support of the members of this Association. Lately, we've been seeing a greater number of teachers come to the office (some in rather large representations of their respective buildings) to seek relief. That is a huge step, but we need all those who feel pressured, frustrated, attacked, sickened, outraged etc. to come to us and put forth their case. Only en masse can we begin to turn the tide of the growing number of educator refugees fleeing the autocracy of SPS.

By the way, Keep Smiling!

Peter J. Reese

Professional Relations Associate, SEA

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## Massachusetts Child Raises Winter Clothing Drive to \$300

We are pleased to announce that the Massachusetts Child Board of Directors has voted to increase its annual winter clothing grant to \$300. This means local associations can make purchases up to \$300 for jackets, gloves, boots, and other outerwear for students in need without effecting the annual base grant.

To qualify, winter apparel must be purchased and receipts submitted with the reimbursement form, which can be found on the SEA website, [www.seateachers.com](http://www.seateachers.com), **by March 15, 2015**.

In the 18 years since the MTA established the Massachusetts Child, student needs have changed. When the Massachusetts Child was launched as a charitable program to reimburse educators who purchased basic necessities for students going through hard times, requests were mostly for clothing, classroom staples, and eyeglasses. As the nature of the requests have evolved, the Massachusetts Child Board of Directors has provided clarification to what it can provide. The categories for reimbursement can also be found on the SEA website. What has not changed is the Massachusetts Child's mission: **"To help children in crisis in ways that make it possible for them to succeed in school."** If you know a child in Springfield Public Schools who needs a helping hand, go to the SEA website to find out how you can help through the **Massachusetts Child program**.

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## 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 four vehicles to accomplish this – the SEA website ([www.seateachers.com](http://www.seateachers.com)), SEA Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/SEASpringfieldMA](http://www.facebook.com/SEASpringfieldMA)) 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](http://www.seateachers.com)
  - ==> **Like Us on Facebook** at [www.facebook.com/SEASpringfieldMA](http://www.facebook.com/SEASpringfieldMA)
  - ==> **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](mailto: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](mailto:contact@seateachers.com)) to your personal email contacts so that emails do not go into your junk mailbox
- AND
- ==> Of course, **OPEN** the emails sent by the SEA -- YOUR union!

By utilizing these four 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.

## What's Our Union Doing For Us?

*Maureen Colgan Posner*

I want to thank everyone who supported and helped me during the SEA Executive Board Vice President campaign. I'm looking forward to working for all of you and continuing the work Peter Reese started. I have big shoes to fill in this section of the newsletter. I'm not sure I can ever live up to Peter's clever and insightful monthly posts, but I'll be giving it a go anyway.

My campaign literature was based on the idea that we must maximize children's potential. I don't think we're ever going to be able to do that if kids are just numbers, if students are just some data point on a graph. I was fortunate to spend Thanksgiving with my family. There were many interesting conversations over the long weekend, but one that stuck with me was between my sister-in-law (a first grade teacher near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) and my son who recently returned from South Korea where he taught English for two years. The conversation was interesting and disturbing at the same time. My sister-in-law was talking about being evaluated based on student test scores, wasting time to upload documents into an evaluation form when simply coming into her classroom would be more informative, the unbearable reams of paperwork, the emphasis on testing (even in her suburban community). She noted that she is saddened by all of this because she is watching many great teachers who love teaching retire early or change careers. I could relate to everything she said because her issues are the same as our issues. Then my son pointed out that the United States seems to be trying to replicate the educational model he saw in South Korea. All that matters for children in South Korea are the test scores. My son taught kids who attended regular public school and then came to his school between 4PM and 10PM to get additional instruction in English and Math. My son was instructed that the kids were there to work, there was no time for fun; he was not to play educational games like vocabulary bingo or punctuation jeopardy. They were there to improve their test scores. When he told the students that he played soccer in high school they were amazed. They couldn't understand how he could have played a sport and still gone on to college. Children in South Korea don't take Music or Art or Physical Education during their school day and they certainly don't play sports after school.

South Korea ranks high on the PISA (Program for International Student Assessment). It also ranks high on the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) suicide list and very low on the United Nations Human Development Index which measures happiness based on things like education and health. Is that the model we really want to aspire to? Test scores are driving decisions in this country and driving us toward a model that isn't worth achieving. Creativity, individuality, valuing diversity of talents, inventiveness, all the things that have certainly made this country great are being devalued in search of the almighty test score.

I think this is an exciting time for teachers in Massachusetts. I think our recent action to reverse Mitchell Chester's latest bad idea (tying recertification to evaluation) proves that we are starting to awaken to the power our voices carry when they are unified. We need to use that same powerful voice to let people know that what is going on in education right now is not good for children and not good for our country. We have to challenge people who think we're heading in the right direction in education. Teachers have to start taking the lead.

To that end, I have been attending meetings with a group called Pioneer Valley Project. They are looking for teachers who can educate the community on the real educational challenges we are facing here in Springfield. If you are available to share your knowledge with people who want to help, please let me know by sending an email to [contact@seateachers.com](mailto:contact@seateachers.com) (type Pioneer Valley Project in the subject line of the email).

I hope you'll get involved and share your insight with the community. I think very few people really understand what it means to compete with a country like South Korea, what sacrifices children make to rank high on an international assessment. Ranking students while ignoring children is no education at all! We need to use our voices to save public education, protect children, and preserve our profession.

Maureen Colgan Posner

# **P**ROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*Maureen Colgan Posner*

The SEA Professional Development Committee met with Kate Fenton and Katie O’Sullivan on December 2. The committee raised two concerns. First, is the concern that the current way Professional Development is being done is so broad and indiscriminate that, if a teacher was audited by the state when they went to renew a license, it would be hard to prove the necessary PDPs in each category were attained. Kate assured us that Professional Development is carefully planned and all teachers should be keeping the agendas which will be able to show how the PDPs in each session could be distributed across the areas of pedagogy and content. Our second concern is that the current broad and non-differentiated Professional Development is not meeting the needs of teachers as laid out in their SEEDs assessments. We suggested that looking at data doesn’t develop teachers, but Kate disagreed and said teachers want to look at data. We agreed to disagree on that point and proposed we go back to a “menu” type of Professional Development program like we had many years ago where teachers could pick what they needed, not be dictated to as a building or staff. We also suggested maybe five days of building based Professional Development is too much and it should be two days building based and five days teacher based. Kate said it is something to think about, but principals feel very strongly about the building based Professional Development and want the staff together because it is good for their schools. I suggested to Kate that this is not about developing schools but rather about developing teachers. It is a concept we have to continue to work towards.

If you received a “needs improvement” in any area on your evaluation, you will need to advocate for yourself with your principal (we can certainly support you in this, if you need help) for professional development that occurs during the remaining two days of school based Professional Development that meets your needs. Kate assured us there are a variety of courses being offered that your principal can enroll you in if you need to improve some part of your practice. Perhaps this is one positive thing that could come out of SEEDs. If it is used as a tool to *develop* teachers, then it can also be a tool *we* use to redefine how Professional Development is organized, chosen and delivered to teachers. We *all* need to keep pushing to *develop* Professional Development that *develops* us!

## **Save The Date**

### **SEA Building Rep & Membership Training**

**Saturday, January 31, 2015**  
(snow date – February 7, 2015)

**SEA Office**  
**1000 Wilbraham Road**  
**Springfield, MA**

**8:30 A.M. – 9:00 A.M.**  
**Full Breakfast**

**9:00 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.**  
**Having Difficult Conversations**  
**with Administrators & Colleagues**

## **SEA Executive Board Election Results**

**Congratulations to:**

**Vice President**  
**Maureen Colgan Posner (Sumner)**

**Members-At-Large**  
**Peter Reese (SEA)**  
**Matthew West (Putnam)**

## ***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.

## STUDENT LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITY

The Massachusetts Developmental Disability Council's Self-Advocacy Leadership Series (S.A.L.S.) is a great opportunity for our students who are 18+ years of age and have a developmental or intellectual disability. Participants in this free program will be involved in activities that build self-confidence, leadership skills, and broaden their social networks and communication skills.

The next class will be held at the Southwick Public Library for nine consecutive Tuesdays, 5:30p.m. – 7:30p.m. beginning January 20, 2015. Applications will be accepted until January 6, 2015. Don't miss out on this opportunity for your students.

Contact Debra Askwith for an application at 413-205-1642 or [Debra.Askwithmddc@gmail.com](mailto:Debra.Askwithmddc@gmail.com)

## School Committee Meeting Dates

Below are the School Committee meeting dates for December 2014 and January 2015. The full calendar for the 2014 – 2015 school year can be found on the SEA website, [www.seateachers.com](http://www.seateachers.com).

Unless otherwise indicated, all regular meetings will be held in Room 220, City Hall, 36 Court Street; Springfield, MA. Working Sessions will be held at a location of the committee's choice. The regular meetings will begin at 6:30 P.M. Working Sessions, Speak Outs, and Meetings with Student Representatives will begin at 6:00 P.M.

December 18, 2014	6:00 Speak Out 6:30 Regular Session
January 5, 2015	12:30 Organizational Meeting
January 8, 2015	6:00 Middle School Reps. 6:30 Regular Session
January 22, 2015	6:00 Working Session 6:30 Regular Session

## Extended Day

Extended Days are to be held on the first and third Monday or Tuesday of each month (for a maximum of twenty work weeks during the school year). All teachers shall remain one hour and fifteen minutes, for the one hour extended day meeting, beyond the end of the instructional day. In the event the first or third Monday or Tuesday of the month occurs during a vacation week, the day will be made-up the following week. The district posted a calendar for the Extended Days so that there is no confusion as to when an Extended Day is to be held.

*Article 5, Section K.1 of the Agreement Between the Springfield School Committee and the Springfield Education Association states "The School Centered Decision Making Team in each school shall determine whether the extended day shall occur on Mondays or Tuesdays, and will develop a plan to make-up school cancellation days (but not on a Friday or the day before a holiday or school vacation)."*

**With the winter months approaching and the potential for cancellation of school due to inclement weather, the School Centered Decision Making Team in your school should have a plan in place in the event school is canceled on an extended day.**



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Interior • Exterior



## Painting

**Mike**

Free Estimates

(413)537-8476

Springfield Teacher



## Week-End Backpack Program

Students who go to bed hungry, especially on weekends when schools are not in session, is something that should never occur, and Sodexo (a leading organization in the fight against hunger), in conjunction with the schools, is determined to prevent that as much as possible.

Started in October 2007, Sodexo, along with school principals and counselors, have been providing “filled backpacks” to students in need who can use a meal or two during weekends. For the past seven years, over 7,500 backpacks filled with food have been distributed anonymously to students in the Springfield area.

In short, here is how it works; the principal, along with their counselor(s) and/or teachers will designate a student or a family (up to five per school) that can benefit from a backpack filled with food to supplement them over the weekend. The student will pick up the backpack in the office or kitchen right before the end of day on Friday. The student is then expected to return the empty backpack on Monday or Tuesday. The food items come from three possible sources; The Western MA Food Bank, donated nonperishable food items, and monetary donations used for food purchases at local stores.

If you have questions about the Week-End Backpack program, would like to recommend a student/family, and/or would like to make a donation, please call Joyce at 413-732-1121.

## I'm Your Handyman!

Plumbing, electrical, carpentry

Large or small, I do it all

Bud Wagner

(former Putnam Vocational Teacher)

**860-657-5709**

# Tools 4 Teaching



*Recycling Store for Springfield Teachers*

## FREE FREE FREE FREE FREE

Established in August of 2013, the SEA Committee of Retired Teachers created an environmentally responsible way for recycling resources to help Springfield Public School teachers. On a monthly basis, retiring teachers, teachers who are taking new assignments, local businesses and organizations are given the opportunity to divert usable materials – both purchased and homemade - which are then repurposed, organized, and made available to current teachers.

Teachers, if you don't have time, your para may shop for you.

**When:** **Second AND Third Thursday** of each month.

Springfield Public School I.D. needed for shopping

**Time:** 3:00 P.M. - 5:30 P.M.

**Location:** 70 Tapley St. in the Congressman Richard E. Neal Municipal Operations Center at the corner of St. James Avenue and Tapley Street (behind the big green storage tank) and across the street from Oak Grove Cemetery. Please use glassed-in front entrance and follow signs for Tools 4 Teaching.

Tools 4 Teaching will follow the SPS schedule for school closings (snow days and/or emergencies).

Please support our 2014 – 2015 contributors: STCU and Big Y.



[www.facebook.com/tools4teachingma](http://www.facebook.com/tools4teachingma)

# Are you a new teacher?

## Join us for a SPECIAL EVENT

(just for new teachers in your first 3 years of teaching in Springfield)

Tuesday, January 13, 2015 4:15 - 7 pm

John Boyle O'Reilly Club

33 Progress Street

Springfield

*Come celebrate with us!*

Please RSVP by January 6, 2015 to: [sfornitorres@seateachers.com](mailto:sfornitorres@seateachers.com)

**SEA** Springfield  
Education  
Association  
Helping Teachers Teach

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Patricia Sullivan

#### SEA E-MAIL ADDRESSES

Timothy Collins  
[contact@seateachers.com](mailto:contact@seateachers.com)

Charlene Lonczak  
[clonczak@seateachers.com](mailto:clonczak@seateachers.com)

Sandra Forni-Torres  
[sfornitorres@seateachers.com](mailto:sfornitorres@seateachers.com)

Peter J. Reese  
[preese@seateachers.com](mailto:preese@seateachers.com)

Paige Lawor  
[plawor@seateachers.com](mailto:plawor@seateachers.com)

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