

DMEA

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FALL ELECTIONS A MIXED BAG

Des Moines
Education Association
206 Center Street
Des Moines, IA 50309

(515)471-8040
fax - (515)471-8043



Alan Young
President
ayoung@dmea.org

Bill Unger
Executive Director
bunger@isea.org

Sharon Nelson
Office Manager
snelson@isea.org

Doug Smith
Office Assistant
dsmith@isea.org

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The fall elections were a mixed bag for Iowa educators. On the federal level, we can expect a greater push for high stakes testing, vouchers, and privatization. At the statehouse, there is hope for moderation.

Federal: President Bush's reelection means the continued federal promotion of the president's intrusive high-stakes testing and accountability regime. A Kerry presidency may have been slightly better for public education funding, but many public education advocates thought Kerry's policy differed little from Bush's. Kerry has been a long-time advocate of testing and contrived accountability. They argued if Democrats had chosen a candidate willing to attack the so-called No Child Left Behind legislation head on-- instead of supporting its basic principles with weak complaints about implementation-- education could have been a focal issue in the campaign. In an election that pundits say turned on the issue of "moral leadership", would a campaign centered upon the hundreds of thousands of children left behind by the presidents drill and kill approach have turned the tide? With only 120,000 votes in Ohio separating the president from defeat, the question is worth analyzing between now and 2008.

Bush's appointment of senior domestic policy adviser Margaret Spellings for outgoing Secretary of Education Rod Paige is also significant. While the loss of Paige, who once

referred to NEA members as "terrorists" can only be a plus, Spellings' record on education issues leaves little room for celebration. As Bush's educational adviser, she carried out the Texas accountability reforms that became the model for No Child Left Behind; led a campaign to retain third-graders who failed to meet state reading standards; and married an influential Austin attorney active in lobbying for school vouchers in Texas.

State: Here is where the hard work of hundreds of ISEA/DMEA members and grassroots citizen efforts showed fruit. After years of slashed education budgets and misguided policy initiatives under Republican control (3rd grade retention, Stanley Amendment), the Iowa Senate is now effectively controlled (until February) by the Democrats. By all accounts, education was the key issue statewide. Gone are public education obstructionists such as Bryan Sievers of New Liberty (SD 42), Julie Hosch of Cascade (SD 16) and Neal Schuerer of Amana (SD 38), all of whom scored a 0% on the ISEA Education Report Card (based on last session's education-related votes).

Officially the Senate is split 25/25 with both parties sharing power in floor leadership and committee chairmanships. However, Cedar Rapids Republican Chuck Larson is serving heroically in Iraq until at least February, which gives the Democrats a 25-24 voting advantage until his return.

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LESSONS LEARNED - WE DON'T WORK IN A VACUUM

Thirty-three years of Association work has taught me many things. When I first started teaching in 1968 I did not join my local teachers association even though the local dues were \$2.00 per year and I certainly did not join the Vermont Education Association because the dues were too high (\$34.00). I also did not join that far off NEA. Their dues were \$25.00 at the time. Of course my take home pay was \$142 every two weeks. Then something happened. I was asked as a non-member to chair our local association meet - and - confer team. That year we went to talk to the school board and asked for a contribution of \$10.00 per month toward single health coverage and a base salary pay freeze. The board said yes to the freeze, no to the insurance. During the next year we voted to unify membership, and learned about collective bargaining. The next year we bargained a \$1,200 base increase and fully paid family health coverage and a just cause provision for discipline and discharge. Lesson 1 - We had to get involved in our profession to feed and protect our families and no one but us had any interest in our families' security.

Lesson 2 came along soon there after, two teachers were fired for incompetence. Our school administration would not tell them why, indeed had never even been in their classrooms. We grieved, we arbitrated, we won and by winning we gained a process that protected every member. Lesson 2 - just having contract language was not enough - we had to also give that language life. Enforcement was just as much a part

of the process as sitting at the bargaining table.

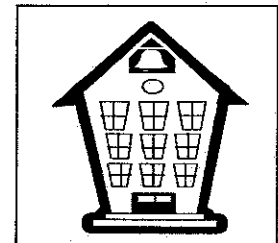
Lesson 3 followed. Once we were active we became more knowledgeable. We discovered the laws needed changing. We enlisted the help of our local state legislator to introduce a bill to protect us from unfair labor practices. The bill became law. Lesson 3 - We don't work in a vacuum. We work in the real world and what occurs in the legislature affects our ability to do our jobs and protect our families.

Moving to Iowa and forward thirty years, in 1998 governor Branstad signed a bill passed by the General Assembly that made it virtually impossible to challenge false and unfair evaluations. In 2002 the General Assembly took away our right to appeal school board policy violations; a right that had been in the Iowa Code since 1858. In 2001 the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners announced a policy that it would not hear ethics complaints filed by school employees. We know what happened to school funding in 2004. What will we lose in 2005?

You have two choices this legislative session. Participate and be heard or stand aside and let others determine your professional future for you. Whichever path you choose I guarantee you will live with your decision for a very long time.

Bill Unger

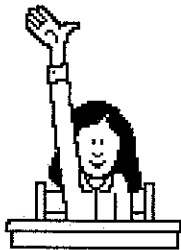
"Participate and be heard or stand aside and let others determine your professional future for you."



RED FLAG MOMENTS

There are moments in the life of an education employee that should cause concern and "raise red flags" for a school employee. In those cases, the employee should consider finding a building rep before participating in a meeting with a building administrator or supervisor.

Many times school employees will acquiesce to questioning without representation. That's not a wise decision. The following list of phrases and situations commonly occur. When faced with the situations and phrases listed members should take it as a silent signal that it's time to find the first available association representative. Check out the phraseology!



When do I need union representation?



- ✓ *You may need a building rep when the building administrator says, "I have concerns. We need to talk."*
- ✓ *You may need a building rep when the building administrator says, "There are rumors in the community about you we need to discuss."*
- ✓ *You **DEFINITELY** need a building rep when the building administrator says, "Do you want a building rep?" THE ANSWER IS ALWAYS, "YES!"* If a building administrator is offering a building rep before the meeting takes place, the member must take it as a clue that the meeting is not going to be a happy event.
- ✓ *You **DEFINITELY** need a building rep when the building administrator uses the following words in the course of the meeting: **discipline, termination, employment status, or negative evaluation.***

- ✓ *You may need a building rep when a building administrator says, "I just want to talk to you for a minute."* When you walk into the office, the parent and principal are seated on the same side of the table.
- ✓ *You may need a building rep when you walk into the office and you're met by two administrators, one is your building principal and the other is from the central office and they didn't bother to tell you what the meeting was about!*
- ✓ *You may need a building rep when the administrator starts getting "hot-under-the-collar" with you and you're alone.*
- ✓ *You may need a building rep when an administrator says, "I've had parent complaints about you."*

*You have Weingarten Rights—
Employee Rights to Union Representation*

What to say if management asks questions that could lead to discipline:

"If this discussion could in any way lead to my being disciplined or terminated, or affect my personal working conditions, I request that union representation be present at the meeting. Without representation, I choose not to answer any questions."

"Look for an article on your Weingarten Rights in the next issue of the DMEA Tempo."



Full-Time Release President Needed

The Staffing Needs Review Committee recently determined that DMEA needs have outpaced our current staffing level because of growth and increased pressure due to unprecedented national, state, and local challenges. We must not only improve our ability to provide service when situations go awry, but must improve our ability to proactively prevent and/or minimize problems in our buildings and district.

It was determined that DMEA needs an increase from halftime to a fulltime president as well as help on the executive director service side. Our uncertainty regarding hiring a new executive director, as well as ISEA's current UniServ service restructuring makes it premature to pursue a second director. A FTR president, however, is just as needed, could provide assistance sooner, is easier to secure *now*, and is far less costly due to possible substantial NEA grant assistance which would ease the transition by spreading dues increases over four years.

Why now? This is for next school year, but must be acted upon now if we are to have a chance for significant NEA grant help. If we delay, it will be two years before we could have a FTR president in place. There are too many local, state, and national challenges ahead for us to not have the ability to influence decisions and plans proactively. For example, the new teacher evaluation program goes into effect next year. We want to be ready for it and other new increasing pressures. To truly improve and protect members working situations, we cannot afford to wait until situations turn bad. We must nip things in the bud with a strong proactive presence.

What would the dues increase be? The increase would minimal, amounting to an annual increase of only about 26 cents per dues deduction the next four years.

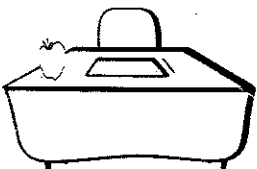
Would the president lose touch with classroom needs? No. Currently, teaching half time, grading, and lesson planning keeps the president more focused on his classroom than *yours*. With over 60 school settings and almost 2200 members, a FTR president is needed to *better* keep in touch with classroom concerns of members and to provide time to improve *your* work situations. The presidency is not an office, but more than a fulltime job in and of itself. To proactively and effectively influence district decisions requires an increased DMEA presence in schools and at morning district meetings. We can no longer solve things only via an executive director on the back end. We must begin to reduce problems on the front end.

Do other urban locals have a FTR president? Yes. Virtually all urban locals (over 90% with 1200 members or more) have a FTR president. We have almost twice that, coupled with these new challenges. Most others switched years ago, realizing the benefit of this proactive service approach. We are long overdue. NEA has been encouraging this via grants since 1988. We too must make the transition to a FTRP, if we are to improve amidst challenging times. *Alan*

Mixed Bag for Iowa Educators (continued from p. 1)

We're on the Web!

See us at:
www.dmea.org



Democrats scored significant gains in the Iowa House moving to within two seats of taking control. Republicans went from 54-46 control to 51-49. Key changes included the defeat of Republicans Dell Hanson (HD 39) and Gene Manternach (HD 31). Both Manternach and Hanson scored 0% on the ISEA Report Card on the six educational funding bills that came before them last session.

At the very least, split control of the two chambers should bring a more moderate approach to education in the upcoming session. Democrats, especially in the Senate, who have been vocal supporters of public education funding while in the minority, will now have a

chance to act on their words and make public education the state's number one priority. Moderate Republicans in the Senate, who flinched at their party's educational hardline and the lowest allowable growth rates in history may now feel empowered to break ranks on key education legislation.

The 2004 election cycle saw the issue of public education on the front burner in Iowa, but essentially absent on the national level. Given the success enjoyed by state candidates running on the issue of support for public education, one can only wonder what might have been if a national candidate had caught the imagination of America by standing up for education of our children. *Dave O'Connor*