

Tempo!

Des Moines Education Association

February 2008

2/14/08

DMEA Advocacy 101

Greg Harris, DMEA Executive Director



You may or may not have heard the phrase "Grieve don't Gripe." This is a familiar phrase that has great meaning in upholding our negotiated agreement. Everyone has to understand, members as well as potential members; nothing just happens in our schools. Every year during the closing and opening of the association's bargained agreement the bargaining team members meet to start the process of bargaining for the next agreement. This is a long and a time consuming process that is worth every minute of the wait for ratification. It is important to read and understand what is in our negotiated agreement.

The Des Moines Education Association

represents both classified and non classified employees. Knowing and understanding what is in your negotiated agreement is important because when people understand what the rules are before a game the outcomes are positive in their winning efforts. This is the time of year when employees will be receiving evaluations, some favorable and some not so favorable.

If you are approached by your principal or supervisor for a meeting that might be disciplinary in nature, you have the right to have a representative present at the meeting.

Sometimes when you call the DMEA office I might be at another meeting, but if you have a DMEA representative at your building or worksite, you can ask them to sit in the meeting with you and your principal or supervisor. It is important to take good notes in the meeting, and soon after the meeting contact the DMEA executive director to go over the issues that were presented at the meeting for possible follow up, positive solutions and advocacy.

Never go into a meeting to negotiate things that have nothing to do with the contract because this can

comeback to haunt you later. For example, I had a member to go into a meeting alone with the supervisor who was advising the member of things that needed changing in the work place. This member did not call to ask for assistance from our office and only called when the district was contemplating dismissal.

It is always important to start early when addressing a work related performance issue that has been brought to the employee's attention by their principal or immediate supervisor.

Points To Ponder...

- A grievance is a claim made by an employee or the Association about a violation of a specific provision of the negotiated bargain agreement.
- You have a right to know the issues and concerns your supervisor has concerning your job performance.
- You have a right to meet with your principal and/or supervisor and your DMEA representative to be heard fairly.

Inside this issue:

DMEA Advocacy 101 1

President's Note 1

President's Note Cont. 2

Top 10 2

Why Teacher Unions are Good... 3

Top 10 Cont. 4

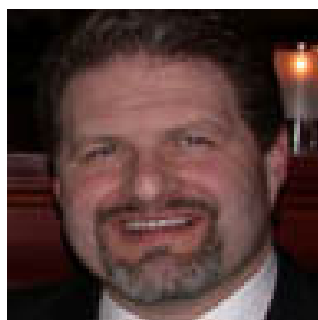
Why Teacher Unions are Good.... Cont. 4

Useful Websites

- <http://dmea.org/>
- <http://ia.nea.org/>
- <http://www.nea.org/>
- <http://www.dmps.k12.ia.us/>
- <http://neamb.com/>

President's Note

Alan Young, DMEA President



For the shortest month of the year, February always seems

long to me. Maybe it is because there is no break in February as it sits in the deep recesses of winter, sandwiched between winter and spring breaks. But it may have to do with just how much work is really being accomplished in our classrooms without break. February wears on many, I think, because we are operating at full capacity, but without fully sensing our results. February is a month where we are working hard, even though it is hard to

sense the light and hope of Spring.

Similarly, DMEA is also in the thick of this time of focused engagement. While our proactive, constructive, and systemic engagement of the district has taken longer than one might wish due to transitioning to a new administration and district reorganization, it is beginning to take hold. Relationships are



ISEA

Presidents Note

(Cont.)

beginning to gel and a working trust established. This is welcome news, but this kind of deep, comprehensive engagement is not easy to keep up with and grow, especially when impatient for long-awaited change. February seems to take its toll on everyone. Fortunately, it is worthwhile.

To be sure, there are decisions where we are still not involved. This tells us that we have areas to work on to better “engage.” (Case in point - the elementary reading adoption last summer, in which we had little say or forewarning.) While we most surely will not solve every issue, we are creating and recreating the district committee infrastructure to begin to systemically address many deep challenges beyond a “quick-fix,” “band-aid,” or “shoot-from-the-hip” approach. Creating this input infrastructure for change is not easy, but is essential if we are to truly create better places to teach, learn, and work. Initial efforts appear hopeful.

While there were a few kinks with only two months to plan and implement, the district’s recent Professional Development Day portends a future where our professional judgment and expertise are respected by providing differentiation, and far greater choice in our professional development. There will be more time to iron out the wrinkles if we choose to do something akin to it next year. But more importantly, DMEA finally appears to have a real voice in district planning and decision-making! The newly revitalized Professional Development Steering Committee will now begin to work on creating recom-

mendation for district PD throughout the year. The new Teacher Quality Committee, also with 50% DMEA membership, made this possible and will also monitor other areas, like teacher evaluation, and making improvement recommendations.

DMEA initiated the creation of other district committees where more member voices will be at the front-end of district problem solving, working on important and challenging issues, through the Planning Time Review Committee, the Student Attendance/ Behavior Task Force, and the Substitute Shortage Task Force. DMEA has at least 50% representation on all of these new district committees as well. These are not easy challenges, but at the heart of our daily experience. To her credit, Dr. Sebring has been supportive of these joint initiatives, referencing these efforts recently at her PD Day presentations as well as at school board meetings.

We continue to engage through other committees as well, like Health Benefits Advisory Committee, the Calendar Committee, the Comprehensive School Improvement Advisory Committee, the Infinite Campus Steering Committee, and more, while having reinvigorated our monthly labor/management collaboration dialogue. We have been very involved shaping the new district “ends” that will have a major influence over much of what we do in our classrooms and schools. We have come a long way from mostly complaining about our lack of participation. We are attempting to establish a new collaborative culture through the creation of input

infrastructure where the voice of education professionals is valued at all levels. Though we are not yet where we want to be, we surely are not where we were.

Much of this is new and has not found its way consistently into the building level yet. And it must . . . soon. But, these emerging efforts are real, as are the challenges we face, and often hard to sense due to the particularities of your school situation. Hopefully you are beginning to sense movement and change in our district . . . yes, even in February. DMEA is committed to elevating the voice of our education professionals in building and district decision-making, ensuring constructive change is actualized at the building level. To accomplish this, as well as influence those things that affect us locally that come from the state or national level, we must continue to grow our own internal capacity to empower and meet the needs of members. So we have much to do, but we are truly beginning to do much. We are working hard and working smart.

So while February sometimes feels long, it is a time when we all are fully and actively engaged, day after day, in our work to make a difference. Keep pushing during this long, cold month. Even though it is sometimes hard to realize “in February,” your efforts now are critical. It may not look like it, but Spring is just around the corner, with more light and hope to come.

Top 10

Here are the top 10 reasons **NOT** to attend the DMEA Legislative Breakfast on Saturday, February 23:

10.

I have no interest in retirement issues since I intend to work until I kick the bucket.

9

I have no interest in the school “allowable growth rate” since my sizable inheritance allows me to work for the mere joy of educating children with no thought of financial compensation.

8

I have no interest in “Teacher Quality” legislation as my current professional in-service development is just peachy, and is meeting all my professional needs.

7

I have no interest in state impose curriculum standards, and I in fact would welcome further state and federal mandates for educators as there just aren’t enough!

6

I have no interest in community college faculty compensation as it’s no skin off my back if they’re ranked 32nd in the nation for faculty salaries. After all, most of my current students won’t eventually attend an Iowa community college, will they?

5

I have no interest in the implementation of a statewide sales tax to replace the local option tax. So what if that money could be (cont.)

Karen Person Monroe Elementary



Why Teacher Unions are Good for Teachers and The Public:

They Protect Teacher's Rights Support Teacher Professionalism, and Check Administrative Power

Diane Ravitch

We live in an era when leaders in business and the media demand that schools function like businesses in a free market economy, competing for students and staff. Many such voices say that such corporate-style school reform is stymied by the teacher unions, which stand in the way of leaders who want unchecked power to assign, reward, punish, or remove their employees. Some academics blame the unions when student achievement remains stagnant. If scores are low, the critics say it must be because of the teachers' contract, not because the district has a weak curriculum or lacks resources or has mediocre leadership. If some teachers are incompetent, it must be because of the contract, not because the district has a flawed, bureaucratic hiring process or has failed to evaluate new teachers before awarding them tenure. These critics want to scrap the contract, throw away teachers' legal protections, and bring teacher unions to their collective knees.

It is worth recalling why teachers joined unions and why unions remain important today. Take tenure, for example. The teacher unions didn't invent tenure, despite widespread beliefs to the contrary. Tenure evolved in the 19th century as one of the few perks available to people who were paid low wages, had classes of 70 or 80 or more, and endured terrible working conditions. In late 19th century New York City, for example, there were no teacher unions, but there was already ironclad, *de facto* teacher tenure. Local school boards controlled the hiring of teachers, and the only way to get a job was to know someone on the local school board, preferably a relative. Once a teacher was hired, she had lifetime tenure in that school, but only in that school. In fact, she could teach in the same school until she retired—without a pension or health benefits—or died.

One problem with this kind of tenure was that it was not portable. If a teacher changed schools, even in the same district, she would lose her tenure in the school where she was first hired, and she would have to go to the end of the line at her new school.

Pay for teaching was meager, but it was one of the few professional jobs open to women, and most teachers were women. Pay scales were blatantly discriminatory. Teachers in the high schools were paid more than those in the elementary schools. Male teachers (regardless of where they taught, though almost all were in

high schools) were paid more than female teachers, on the assumption that they had a family to support and women did not.

I would like to remember some of the forgotten heroes of the movement to establish fair and equitable treatment of teachers in New York City.

First, there was Mary Murphy. She started teaching in the Brooklyn schools in 1891. Ten years later, in 1901, she got married. That was a mistake. When she got married, the Board of Education charged her with gross misconduct and fired her. Teachers were not allowed to marry. She sued the Board. She lost in the lower court, but then won in the state court of appeals, which ruled that marriage "was not misconduct" and ordered the Board of Education to reinstate her.

Second, there was the Interborough Association of Women Teachers. They started a campaign in 1906 to wipe out the salary differentials between male and female teachers. Their slogan was "equal pay for equal work." When the state legislature passed the Association's bill for equal pay, it was vetoed by the governor. These stalwart female teachers finally won pay equity in 1912.

Then there was Bridget Pexitto, a veteran teacher of 18 years in the Bronx. She took advantage of the new right to get married without losing her job. But then she got pregnant. That was a mistake. The Board of Education fired her on charges of "gross negligence by being absent to have a baby." Not only that, the Board ordered the superintendent of schools to discover whether there were any other pregnant teachers in the city's schools. He somehow did a visual inspection of the city's teachers and found 14 of them, and they were promptly suspended from teaching.

Today, the UFT and other teacher unions around the country continue to play important roles in protecting the rights of teachers, especially in the current climate of school reform. There's a common view among corporate-style reformers today that the way to fix low-performing schools is to install an autocratic principal who rules with an iron fist. Many new principals have been trained in quickie programs

of a year or less, which try to teach them to think like corporate leaders. Many of the graduates of these new principal programs have little class-room experience, and some have none at all. Many of them lack the judgment and knowledge to make wise decisions about curriculum and instruction or to evaluate seasoned teachers.

When experienced teachers must work under the control of an inexperienced principal, they need the protection of their union against arbitrary and unwise decisions. Furthermore, to the extent that New York City, where I live, is the wave of the future, then teachers will need their unions more than ever. In New York City, under mayoral control, the mayor—a businessman—and his chancellor—a lawyer—selected a new curriculum in reading and math. They also insisted that all teachers across this system of 1.1 million children adopt exactly the same pedagogical style (the "workshop model"), and they micromanaged teachers' compliance with tight, sometimes daily supervision.

Teachers found that they were in trouble if they did not teach exactly as the mayor and chancellor dictated, if they did not follow the scripted cookie-cutter format of mini-lessons, if their bulletin boards did not meet detailed specifications, or if their classroom furniture was not precisely as prescribed by regulation. In these past few years, I have often been confronted by teachers who asked what they could do when their supervisors and coaches insisted that they teach in ways they (the teachers) believed were wrong. I could only answer that they should be glad they belonged to a union with the power to protect them from "oppressive supervision," to use the term that was familiar to the founders of Local 2 of the AFT.

As it happened, in the contract negotiations of 2005, the UFT successfully added language to the contract that specifically protected teachers from being punished because of: "a) the format of bulletin boards; b) the arrangement of classroom furniture; and c) the exact duration of lesson units."

The union is thus necessary as a protection for teachers against the arbitrary exercise of power by heavy-handed administrators. In our school systems, as in our city, state, and federal governments, we need checks and balances. Just as the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government all act as checks on each (cont.)



Des Moines Education Association

206 Center Street
Des Moines, IA 50309

Phone: 515-471-8040
Fax: 515-471-8043
E-mail: mhowlett@isea.org
United, Protected, Connected.

February Calendar

- Tue 5** DMPS School Board Meeting 5:45pm
- Wed 6** 90 Minute Early Dismissal
- Thu 7** DMEA Executive Board Meeting DMEA Office
- Fri -Sat 8-9** NEA Board Meeting Washington, DC
- Thu 14** DMEA Rep Assembly 4:15pm East Cafeteria Last date for statement of candidacy forms to be available
- Sat 16** Horace Mann Retirement Planning Seminar 9:30-11:30am IPERS
- Tue 19** DMPS School Board Meeting 5:45pm
- Tue 19** Horace Mann Retirement Planning Seminar 6:30-8:30pm Regency Building

Why Teacher Unions Are Good for Teachers and the Public (Cont.)

(cont.) other, we need checks and balances in our school systems. It is unwise to centralize all power in one person: the mayor. We need independent lay school boards to hire the superintendent and to hold open public discussions of administrative decisions, and we need independent teacher unions to assure that teachers' rights are protected, to sound the alarm against un-wise policies, and to advocate on behalf of sound education policies, especially when administrators are non-educators.

In the current climate, when it is in vogue to select non-educators to administer school systems, it is vital that teachers have a voice. School reform cannot possibly succeed when teachers—who are on the frontlines of implementation—are left out of the decision-making process. If there is no "buy-in," if teachers do not willingly concur with the orders handed

down from on high, then reform can-not succeed. If administrators operate by stealth and confrontation, then their plans for reform will founder. They cannot improve what happens in the classroom by humiliating and bossing around the teachers who are in daily contact with the children. Only in an atmosphere of mutual respect can administrators and teachers produce the kind of partnership that will benefit students. And administrators cannot achieve this collaborative atmosphere unless they are willing to talk with and listen to the leaders chosen by teachers to represent them.

The essentials of good education are the same everywhere: a rigorous curriculum, effective instruction, adequate resources, willing students, and a social and cultural climate in which education is encouraged and respected. Teacher unions today, as in the past, must work to make

these essentials available in every district for every school and every student. They cannot do it alone. They must work with administrators and elected officials to advance these goals. The unions will continue to be important, vital, and needed so long as they speak on behalf of the rights and dignity of teachers and essentials of good education.

Diane Ravitch is Research Professor of Education at New York University and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University and the Brookings Institution. She was Assistant Secretary of Education under President George H.W. Bush. Her latest book is The English Reader: What Every Literate Person Needs to Know, which she edited with her son Michael, Oxford University Press.

Top 10 (Cont.)

(cont.) used to expand course offerings at all grade levels and add more opportunities for early childhood education.

4

I have no interest in the "Capitol House of Cards" that gives non educator legislators the power to make significant educational decisions regarding instruction, curriculum, educational infrastructure, and school financing. The only cards I'm interested in are those played with my bridge group over a glass of wine and lots of whine.

3

I have no interest in attending because, once back in ought-ten DMEA supported some obscure issue with which I disagreed. Therefore, I see no need to support DMEA's fight to lobby for quality education this year.

2

I have no interest in attending the DMEA Legislative Breakfast because I'd rather spend Saturday morning washing clothes, cleaning the house, changing the car oil, and all those other tasks that are for more important than advocating for my profession, my salary and the future of my children.

And finally.....

The # 1 reason not to attend the DMEA Legislative Breakfast:

I have no interest in talking with my legislators because I'm already communicating with them on a daily basis regarding education in Iowa. If these reasons do not apply to you, please attend the:

DMEA Legislative Breakfast
Saturday February 23
9:00 am to 10:30 am
NW Community Center
5110 Franklin Avenue, DSM

Continental Breakfast to be Provided



"The knack of flying is learning how to throw yourself at the ground and miss." *Douglas Adams*