

Gloom and Doom

By Russ Fisher, DMEA Bargaining Committee Chair

The image of the Des Moines School District has been in a free-fall for several years. It took another beating last week when the Superintendent told a surprised School Board that unless adjustments were made in the current 97-98 budget, all or most of the districts' reserve dollars would be depleted.

The 97-98 budget was approved and certified as required by law last April. Budget adjustments throughout the year are normal in this district and in all Iowa districts.

So what is unusual about this budget? To begin with, the district cites bargaining settlements for the current year that exceeded their estimates by 2 million dollars. The settlement was average. Our \$600 base increase on the teacher's salary schedule and similar increases for the clerical and associate contracts compare favorably with other large districts in Iowa but were not budget-busters.

The fact is that the district budget makers did a miserable job of estimating the increase when they set the budget

The district also claims that health insurance costs are up in excess of 1 million. Yes, but they knew that at budget-making time.

Other items mentioned by the Superintendent include higher than anticipated Special Education costs (they will be reimbursed eventually), an influx of ESL students and an inability to make the personnel cuts contemplated last spring.

The announcement coincided with the opening of bargaining for the 98-99 contract. The DMEA opened on December 3rd and the district will respond on December 17th. The Superintendent's call for austerity came on December 9th.

The DMEA bargaining team does not appreciate the timing of the "doom and gloom". We will move ahead on our same schedule fully expecting a fair settlement for our members. The district is assured enough new dollars from the State foundation formula to fund a fair settlement. We will be in touch.

January Calendar

5	GA Committee	4:15 p.m. DMEA office
8	Executive Board	4:00 p.m. DMEA office
12	Human Relations	4:00 p.m. DMEA office
13	Dept. of Associates	4:15 p.m. DMEA office
15	Faculty Reps	4:00 p.m. North Cafeteria
22	Executive Board	4:00 p.m. DMEA office

Postscript

Following the Superintendent's explanation of the money woes last week, the Des Moines Register wrote an editorial critical of the money management in the district. That was expected.

But buried in the editorial was a comment by the editorial writer that district employees should pay a portion of their health premium. Where did that shot come from??

It is true that our employees enjoy a good fringe benefit program that is fully paid by the district. This is the result of 20 years of bargaining and a careful balance between salary and fringes that reflect the desires of our members. The district has for years tried to force employees to pay part of the premium.

But the fringe program is also a recruitment device for the district. Answer the following: The best and the brightest can be recruited to teach in Des Moines by stressing the following;

- fantastic working conditions
- the district's public image
- high salaries
- an excellent fringe benefit program
- the wit and charm of the central administrators



John
Carol
Paul
Bev

READ ACROSS AMERICA CAMPAIGN

By President Paul Mann

Read Across American is a nationwide project sponsored by NEA to emphasize to children and to the entire community the importance of reading for all children. With the help of Dr. Seuss Enterprises and many other partners, we are calling for every child in every school in every community in America to be in the company of a book on the evening of March 2nd, the 94th anniversary of Dr. Seuss's birthday.

We in the DMEA believe that this provides us with an excellent opportunity to work with parents, ministers, librarians, police and fire fighters, PTAs, the media, business and labor leaders, public officials, and others in our community to make a difference in the lives of our students.

We hope to have many "celebrity" readers from all of the groups mentioned above.

We are tentatively planning to schedule afternoon and early evening reading groups at the public libraries, the Botanical Center, and, perhaps, at day care centers and elementary schools.

The DMEA IPD Committee under the leadership of Marcia Minear, is coordinating and will provide you with details as we approach the event.

Briefly

- * **The US Department of Education** has issued new guidelines regarding the discipline of students with disabilities. It is a short question and answer summary. Call the DMEA office if you want to receive a copy.
- * **We have been asked to correct a few misunderstandings about the ISEA/NEA Attorney Referral Program.** Members are entitled to a free consultation and discounted fees but the privilege does not extend to an adult child of a NEA member unless that adult child is also a member.
- * **Scholarships**
 1. Check with your high school counselor for applications for the DMEA \$1000 Fischer Scholarship given each year to 2 graduating high school students who are dependents of a DMEA member.
 2. ISEA Scholarship applications are available upon request in the DMEA office. Application deadline for this scholarship is February 1, 1998.
 3. Horace Mann Scholarship information is available by calling Bob Hodson, 278-4333. Application deadline is February 28, 1998.
 4. EdCo Credit Union Scholarship applications are available by contacting EdCo Credit Union at 274-4100 Ext.9.



✓ Excerpted from a press release issued by ISEA President Bob Gilchrist:

"The 1996-97 beginning salary for B.A. degree teachers in Iowa was \$22,088. This compares with an U.S. average of \$26,000 estimated by the American Federation of Teachers.

Iowa teachers lag even more when comparing the average pay for all teachers. According to the latest state-by-state teacher salary rankings compiled by the NEA, Iowa ranks 34th with \$33,275; or more than \$5,000 below the U.S. average of \$38,509.

Iowa teachers now earn from \$9,000 to \$1,000 less than their colleagues in four bordering states. They trail Illinois by \$9,000; Wisconsin by \$5,000; Minnesota by \$4,000; and Missouri by more than \$1,000.

It is important to continue to upgrade technology in the schools. More emphasis must be placed on early childhood education and greater resources must be allocated to help students at risk of failing to graduate. We must increase parent involvement and develop closer relationships with the business community.

If we do all of these things without making teacher salaries more competitive, we will fail in our goal of making education in Iowa schools as good as it must be. The teacher is the most important ingredient in the teaching and learning process."

NOTE: *The average Iowa public school teacher is 42.3 years old and has 15.8 years of experience. Females comprise 68.5 percent of the teachers employed by Iowa's public schools. Some 27.8 percent of Iowa's teachers have earned graduate degrees.*