

## NEW UNIONISM

By President Paul Mann

Tired of politics? Tired of NEA working on behalf of member "self-interest" issues such as higher teacher salaries, shorter working hours, and better working conditions for members? Want the association to spend more of your dues and staff time on curriculum, licensure, evaluation, staff development and instruction issues? Want the NEA to change its image as a staunch defender of members' human, civil and employment rights? Want the NEA (or the ISEA or the DMEA) to demand that incompetent teachers be removed from the classroom? Want the NEA to assist local associations in setting up mentoring systems for new hires, establishing tougher teacher training and licensure provisions, and helping get rid of ineffective teachers through peer review evaluation? Want to spend your association dues hiring lawyers to work both sides of grievance arbitrations/court cases, one defending a member who feels unfairly evaluated and one defending the "peer reviewer" (member) who gave the negative evaluation? Want your NEA to develop an image that is less defensive and more accommodating to our critics?

Delegates to the NEA Representative Assembly this summer wrestled with those questions as they dealt with NEA President Chase's initiative for significant changes in the way NEA does business. The changes, described as "New Unionism", called for us to become a true "Profession" by doing many but not all of the things listed above. As a delegate, I spoke against the peer review process and moved to amend peer review out of the motion, so we could support the rest of the changes described in "New Unionism". My efforts failed, and "New Unionism" passed on a close vote.

For the past two years, NEA leaders have signaled to state and local leaders that they believed we could no longer accomplish our traditional goals using traditional tactics. In order to appease our critics (and, some would argue, because our critics were right), we have changed our NEA Strategic Plan to focus on meeting the social and educational needs of children and not members. Most of us believe this change helps us stay focused on our ultimate goals and is very

beneficial to NEA in the public relations and legislative arenas. We have made other changes as well.

In the past two years, we have changed our long-standing opposition to "high-stakes" standardized testing. We have retreated somewhat on our staunch defense of minority rights, as signaled by our retreat on celebrating the accomplishments of ethnic minority Americans and gay and lesbian Americans. We are moving closer to merger with the AFT, which has advocated stronger educational reforms than NEA. We have changed our opposition to members evaluating members (peer review). Proponents of peer review argued that the 1-3% of our membership that are "bad" teachers are a serious problem that must be handled by other NEA members.

In the past NEA would have argued that evaluation was an administrative responsibility. (Indeed, in Iowa administrators are required by law to take many class hours in the area of evaluation to be qualified to evaluate staff.) Now, NEA is saying we must be involved in evaluation if we are to become a true profession.

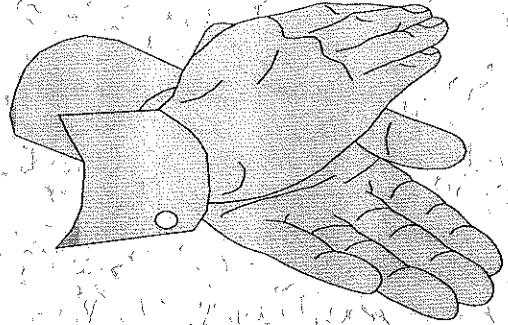
What we did NOT talk about at the RA was as significant as what we DID talk about. Not once was improving salaries mentioned as a concern. Collective bargaining was not discussed nearly as much as in the past. Therefore, I do NOT believe that the changes proposed are mere "window-dressing". Those of you who applaud these changes as long overdue should be elated and should be urging non-member friends who have never joined because "NEA protects bad teachers" to get out their checkbooks. Those of you who are dismayed should not be surprised by future association involvement in evaluation issues.

This is not just idle talk. Dr. Wegenke has signaled that he is interested in looking at new ways to evaluate staff and hopes the NEA members in Des Moines schools will cooperate in developing a new system. Despite my concerns with peer review, I intend to cooperate in the appointment of DMEA members to District Committees to study and recommend changes in the current evaluation process. This may become a bargaining issue. If you would like to be part of this effort, contact me soon.

## News Briefs

- ◆ Membership in the DMEA is up again. It has been steadily increasing over the past several years. This year's total is currently 2070, an increase of about 60. Congratulations go to our Faculty Representatives and other leaders for an excellent recruiting effort. And a special welcome to our new members. Potential members can still sign up. The DMEA will bill monthly or quarterly for those wanting to join the effort.
- ◆ Need an attorney? Your membership will get you one if the matter is employment related. If not employment related, we have another service for our members. It's called the Attorney Referral Program and members receive 2 thirty-minute sessions free and then a 30% discount on the work if you decide to use the attorney. You can use the attorney's services for wills and estates, real estate, domestic relations, consumer protection or traffic violations. Call DMEA to get names of local attorneys who are part of the program.
- ◆ Many of you filled out a survey showing your preferences for the 1998-99 school calendar. Full results are available at the office. Results show the following: DMEA members prefer to start early (August 24 or August 27) and prefer 2 full weeks at the winter break. The DMEA serves only in an advisory capacity. We will be giving the administration some "advice".
- ◆ There is still time to register to attend our DMEA Workshop on October 27 starting at 4:00 p.m. at the Botanical Center. Dinner is on us. Topics include the Pomerantz report, member rights, health insurance and the Learning Organization. Call DMEA to reserve a place at the table.
- ◆ How is Iowa doing in its drive to make our average teachers' salary equal to the national average? NOT WELL! The most recent figures are for 1995-96. Iowa's average is \$5,317 below the national average. We are in better shape in Des Moines. Here our average is \$2,767 below the national average.
- ◆ A new video titled "Collaborating for Kids" will be shown on the Iowa Cable Network Tuesday, October 28, Thursday, October 30 and Tuesday, November 4 at 7 p.m. It features 6 programs for at risk students including the SUCCESS program here in Des Moines.

- ◆ Due to the content and harsh language of the district's Internet Access renewal form, several members have refused to sign it, despite warnings that they would be disconnected from the net this week. After President Mann explained their concerns at the Technology Coordinating Council last week, Greg Davis, Director of Technology, announced that they would look at revising the form and would not disconnect staff in the meantime.



## Congratulations

What a week!! Two long time members received recognition as outstanding teachers early this month.

Sharon Fisher, a science teacher for 29 years, received a Milken Family Foundation award for years of exemplary work in the classroom. Sharon is currently at North High School. This award for teaching is unusual in that it includes a cash grant.

But it did not end there. We then learned that East High Drama teacher Ruth Ann Gaines was named Teacher of the Year by the Iowa Department of Education. This award comes with a one-year sabbatical so Ruth Ann can spend the year serving as ambassador for education around the State.

Both make all of us proud. But we end with this lament. There simply are not enough awards to go around to all the great teachers in this system.

### NOVEMBER CALENDAR

3	GA Committee	4:15 p.m.	DMEA
6	Executive Board	4:00 p.m.	DMEA
11	Dept. of Associates/ AR's and Ex. Board	4:00 p.m.	DMEA
13	Faculty Representatives	4:00 p.m.	NORTH
20	Executive Board	4:00 p.m.	DMEA