

DMEA Tempo

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Des Moines Education Association

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The Worst School Board Decision Last Year

By President Paul Mann

Ever notice how each spring/summer the Des Moines school board does something really dumb? They usually do it at the busiest time of the year for staff or during the summer when most of us are not watching or are out of town.

Two years ago it was trying to change collaboration time too quickly without enough community/staff involvement. Last summer it was changing the no-nonsense attendance policy.

Although it is still a little early to document the results of their actions, initial reports from teachers, attendance personnel and principals are grim.

Under the guise of making the policy "more consistent", they significantly weakened the policy (some say "gutted it"). There are now eight categories for "excused" absences compared with only four "exempt" reasons last year. Last year parental "excuses" didn't change the absence to excused, and the absence counted as one of the 6 allowed, even if a parent didn't like it. If a parent requested a 7 day absence hearing, reasons could be evaluated then and proper administrative responses made to exempt unusual absences.

Now attendance personnel take almost any reason given by parents as an excuse for a student absence. The sad truth is that some parents lie to cover for the truancies/absences of their student. That has led some teachers to the conclusion that now it takes 7 truancies, not just 7 absences, before attendance sanctions will kick in.

Recently at Lincoln, a parent called in that the student should be excused due to a dental appointment, but when the student reported in, she said she had no appointment at all. She had just overslept. (The absence was not excused.) This is but one example of dozens of suspicious excuses given daily by parents. This does not take into account that mature students can call in disguised as other students' parents. Think this doesn't happen? Better think again.

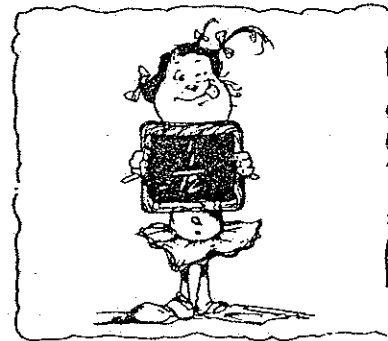
Most troubling of all to our teachers (and should be to the administration and school board as well) is the likelihood that grades will decline as absences mount. Perhaps only when school improvement student achievement objectives are not met will the school board realize that they have shot themselves and us in the foot!

One Lincoln High teacher has correlated the grades and absences of his 60 math students this year to reveal their average absence by grades earned. He has found that 12 students earning an "A" have an average absence of less than one day (0.91); 14 "B" students have an average absence of 2.57 days; 13 "C" students have an average absence of 3.53 days; 5 "D" students have an average absence of 5.2 days; and 16 "No Pass" students have an average absence of 13.5 days. It would be interesting if other teachers would do the same and report their results to DMEA.

Within a month or two we will have the necessary documentation to see the results of the school board changes in our attendance policy. Perhaps then we will be able to convince the school board to revisit their decision.

Dear Teacher:

I kept Monica at home today because she was not feeling too bright.



✓ F.Y.I.



• Walt Galvin Scholarship

The dependents of all DMEA members who are in a pre-education program and considered a college senior are eligible to apply for a Walt Galvin Scholarship. Applications and criteria are available by calling the DMEA office.

• DMEA Leadership Development Workshop

All DMEA members will be receiving with this issue of TEMPO a flyer inviting you to attend the workshop to be held **Monday, October 27th at 4 - 8:00 p.m. at the Botanical Center**. The meal will be provided. The State Capitol bus tour is optional. Registration is necessary!

DMTRS AND IPERS

by President Paul Mann

For the past two years there has been unprecedented member interest in making improvements in the two retirement systems available to Des Moines teachers, the Des Moines Teachers Retirement System and the Iowa Public Employees Retirement System.

ISEA has been able to win such significant improvement in IPERS over the past few years, that, for the first time, IPERS is viewed by many as superior (in some respects) to the DMTRS. Those improvements have generated pressure on the DMTRS to also improve benefits or watch its base of new teacher contributors steadily dwindle. (Last year, out of over 125 new teachers, only 10 chose DMTRS.)

The DMTRS Advisory Board is composed of representatives of both active and retired members. As DMEA President, I sit on the Advisory Board as an ex officio member. The board meets periodically to review financial reports and propose recommendations to the school board, who are the trustees of the DMTRS. Recently, Dave Wilkinson was elected to chair the Advisory Board, replacing Jim Tredway, who has been an excellent leader in difficult times as we researched many complex options for improving DMTRS.

Over the past two years the Advisory Board thoroughly researched the possibility of ending the DMTRS by establishing annuities for retired members and rolling all active members into IPERS. All research into this possibility came to a crashing halt when IPERS reported that they would only let active members roll over into IPERS at today's contribution rates, not the low rates paid in previous years. No active member would have enough money in his/her DMTRS account to buy back many years at this rate. Therefore, this is not a viable option and is not being pursued.

What must be pursued are options to improve the benefits of the DMTRS so that new teachers will again elect to join DMTRS in sufficient numbers. The Advisory Board will be looking at ways to improve the benefits, more effective ways to communicate those benefits, and new policies to support the system. One new policy decision that is already in place is a decision by the district to place all new teachers into the DMTRS if they fail to notify the district which retirement system they prefer. Previously, they would have been placed in IPERS.

I have appointed a DMEA Ad Hoc Retirement Committee composed of both active and retired members and of both IPERS and DMTRS to help study and propose necessary changes in our two retirement systems. I have invited Roger Hudson and Lowell Dauenbaugh from the ISEA staff, to conduct another information session on DMTRS and IPERS benefits at the DMEA workshop

at the Botanical Center on October 27. Plan now to attend for the latest update and watch the TEMPO for further information on retirement benefits.

CALENDAR

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|------------|---------------------------------|-----------|
| October 2 | Executive Board | 4:00 p.m. |
| October 6 | GA Committee | 4:15 p.m. |
| October 9 | Nurses | 4:15 p.m. |
| October 14 | Executive Board | 4:00 p.m. |
| October 16 | Faculty Rep | 4:00 p.m. |
| October 27 | Leadership Development Workshop | |

ISEA PAC ELECTION

by President Paul Mann

ISEA PAC is the political action arm of the ISEA. It is governed by the ISEA-PAC Central Committee composed of an equal number of Republicans and Democrats and is chaired by the ISEA President.

The DMEA has three Republican and three Democratic representatives who attend several Saturday meetings a year to help set ISEA PAC policies and develop activities for lobbying, interviewing candidates, and coordination of financial and volunteer support of friends of education.

As DMEA President, I am allowed to appoint our representatives but I strongly believe that these positions should be elected by the Faculty Representatives. That election needs to take place at the October FR meeting. Every DMEA member who lives or works within Des Moines is eligible to run.

In order to be a candidate for one of these positions, simply call DMEA (277-6271) by October 15 to nominate a member or yourself. Be sure to specify whether you are a Democrat or a Republican. You may also be nominated (or self-nominate) from the floor at the October FR meeting.

All candidates will be given the opportunity to speak for one minute. If we have more candidates than positions to fill, we will use written ballots until all positions are filled.

Please recognize the important tasks and responsibilities of these positions and consider placing your name in nomination.

