

## Greg Harris Who Moved My Cheese?

DMEA Executive Director



There continues to be a lot of confusion related to employees

who are being declared excess. The district has said publicly at school board meetings and to us in labor management meetings that the district is committed to doing everything possible to not lay off any staff. Does this mean no one will be laid off? No. This statement does not mean the district will not lay off any staff, but it means they will do everything humanly possible to keep their current staff employed. We are still waiting to hear from the legislators in terms of how the ARRA (federal stimulus) dollars will be coming to the district. This may well offset many of the district's current decisions. We are working closely with ISEA and as we get updated information we will respond to our members accordingly.

Just because you are declared excess does not mean that you will not have a job next school year. We are hearing a lot of different things being said about being declared excess.

Some members believe when you are declared excess you will not have a job for next school year. This is not a true statement. **Remember that being declared excess is not the same as receiving a notice that you are being laid off. Being declared excess, means that you are excess to a building or program NOT that you are losing a job with the district.** Review your collective bargaining agreement for **Procedures for staff reductions.**

We have been working with DMEA members both individually and collectively to make sure that the process concerning **excess employees** is fair and consistent with our labor contracts. No one wants their cheese moved, and because of the changes we are facing in our federal, state, and local economy everybody is saying, **"Who Moved My Cheese?"** I remember reading a book of the same title, we all get caught up in the maze of life and we are all trying to figure it out. The various cuts on both the federal and state level have had an impact on many state school budgets across the country. We find ourselves in this maze wondering, "Who moved my cheese?" and, "Why did my cheese have to be moved, I was perfectly happy the way things

were." We all know from time to time things will happen in life that will change everything. Just the other day an international crisis happened in the Indian Ocean where a captain and his crew members' ship was over powered by Somalia Pirates. This event not only affected the United States, it had an impact on the world. I am glad that the outcome was positive. During this time of year everyone is stressed to the max. I would like to close by offering some points to ponder.

### Greg's Points to Ponder:

**Always document events that are happening at your worksite that could have a disciplinary impact on your employment.**

**Never go into a disciplinary meeting alone. Always take a DMEA representative with you.**

**If you address an issue or building concern with your supervisor and they do not get back with you in a timely manner, it is always good to follow up with them by putting your issue or concern in writing and waiting to get an response. This helps you when there is a need for supporting documentation.**

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### Special points of interest:

- Recognition Dinner is Thursday, April 23rd
- Rep Election tallies are due in the office Friday, May 22nd
- Reps, please turn in notebooks at May Rep Assembly!
- Last 08-09 Rep Assembly Thursday, May 14



These are frustrating times. This economic crunch has certainly yielded systemic repercussions throughout the district, as well as the state, nation,

and world. I am not saying anything you do not already know. Declarations of excess (remember - not the same as being laid off), new secondary staffing formulas, reconstitution, transfers, budget cuts, and more are not easy things to deal with. Nor were they expected as we started out this year with hope.

I have not lost hope, but I know there are far more dark clouds in the sky than when the year started. Certainly there are many states and districts in far worse shape than ours. So there is reason for hope as well as some early indications that the economy may just be starting to turn around. We also have some not too distant enrollment projections that show our district should start growing again in 2011.

But any decline still matters and is troubling. The financial downturn certainly looms large in impacting our situation, but there are other things cropping up that cause pause. The next year or two will not be disastrous by any stretch, but they do pose a real challenge. I don't want to "sugar-coat" the issue. But I do not want you to despair either. The federal fiscal stimulus package, with the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (that NEA proposed) has considerable funds in it to

help weather the storm. It will not be nearly as bad as it might have been. We do not know if it will last long enough to get us all the way through, but it will help immensely in the short-term. It is vital that we be at our best the next two years to keep things going as smoothly as possible.

It is not that dealing with these matters cannot be expected when economic times turn sour. The question is not *that* we are dealing with these issues, but *how*. While none of these realities are pleasant to deal with, there are still better and worse ways to deal with the myriad of challenges and possibilities facing our district right now.

We have never been a part of the district's problem solving and decision-making on the DMPS budget. I believe we may have been able to offer other ideas for dealing with the situation than occurred. So while we have increased our engagement and effectiveness with the district, we still have some distance to go. Where we have engaged and been afforded serious input, positive impact has emerged. We just have not been afforded the same opportunity on the budget planning and development side.

Again, this is not the time or place, nor is it my desire in this article, to nitpick each district decision. Nor do I think that every decision was flawed or that we have all the answers. But surely there were and are more ways we could have met this challenge. Surely those who are entrusted with the very lives of our community's youth and who are responsible for implementing the vast amount of the budget should have some good say and insights regarding how best to do so.

DMEA values the increasing constructive engagement we have been afforded in many areas. We believe we have "prevented bad" and "created good" when we have worked together. It is our

goal to take the proactive, constructive, and systemic engagement of the district to an even higher level.

Fortunately, we are poised to do so. Our decision to increase DMEA's capacity and staffing infrastructure was timely to meet this unexpected challenge. It has allowed us to deal with this year's emerging issues much better than when we were understaffed. That position is essential for our growth and effectiveness, but has also proven critical in times of crisis.

It is critical we maintain and increase our presence and effectiveness in these trying times. Our members need the benefits of collective organizing now more than ever. This year we are finally staffed at the level we should be for an urban local as large as we are. We are at an all-time high of nearly 2,300 members and still growing.

So while waters have become a bit choppy of late, please know that DMEA is still here fighting for you daily, with better capacity than ever. While we cannot always work miracles in the face of an unforeseen economic tsunami, we have been able to prevent and mitigate many problems, one by one. We are working daily to keep jobs, make sure you are valued in you salary, benefits, and teaching, learning, and working conditions. And we are here to assure that the district sticks to the promises agreed to in our comprehensive agreement.

So please know that we have been and will continue to be here fighting for your ability to make a difference and to make sure you are valued for the difference you make. Thank you for being a part of the DMEA team and for all that you do. We are stronger together than we are apart.



Glad to be back! As many of you know, my family and I left the United States a couple of weeks ago to have our Green Card interview at the American Consulate in the

Netherlands. While in the Netherlands we enjoyed reconnecting with our family and sampling Dutch food. Our interview at the consulate was successful and we are relieved to be back in Des Moines. Many thanks to all of you who supported us in becoming permanent residents of the United States!

The current economic downturn is real, but so is the willingness of people to fight against policies that try to make

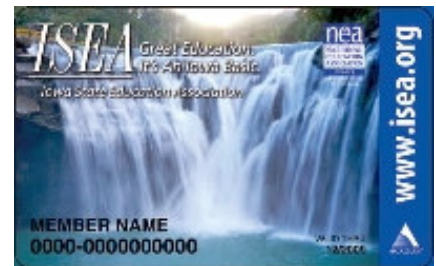
ordinary folks pay for the economy's woes. On March 9 a million people in France went on strike and demonstrated against the policies of their government. On April 1, during the G-20 meeting, protesters in London stormed a branch of the Royal Bank of Scotland. So what does this mean for our negotiations with the district for a new contract?

It means that the district needs to give us a fair settlement, especially since economic stimulus money is on the way. We also know that school districts around Iowa have been able to reach reasonable settlements, which is just what DMEA will do. We do not have to settle for a bad agreement. Finally, there is no better way to get the economy back on track than to pay your employees a reasonable increase. This increase will enable employees to keep spending money and boost the economy.

The Fair Share bill for Iowa has not come up for discussion on the House floor. This bill would make it possible for unions to negotiate with their employer the payment of so-called agency fees by non-union members (for contract services the union legally has to provide to them). The bill could come up again just before the legislative session ends. Would the uncertainty about the bill's fate have something to do with the lack of a grassroots movement? Let us hope that Fair Share and an extension of the scope of bargaining on topics such as planning time (so-called Chapter 20 changes) do come up before the legislative session ends. If they do not, for a second year in a row, we will have missed another opportunity. We should not accept such an outcome — remember this during elections in Iowa next year.

## Use your ISEA Access to Savings

card for discounts on car rentals, hotels, restaurants, dry cleaning, and much more!



## Joanne Tubbs to Attend Yale Symposium on Music Education

DMEA member Joanne Tubbs has been selected to attend the Yale Symposium on Music Education this summer. Invitations were extended to only 50 people nationwide. These distinguished music educators will attend a 2-day symposium



at the Yale University school of Music, all expenses paid. The Yale Symposium is a highly regarded think-tank committed to advancing the future of music education.

Joanne is currently the music consultant for DMPS. She directed bands for the Urbandale and Johnston schools.

She has been an active DMEA member for her entire career and currently serves on the Bargaining Team and on the Professional Development Advisory Committee for the DMEA. Congratulations, Joanne! For additional information on the Yale Symposium, go to <http://music.yale.edu/community/honorees.html>.

# FILLING OUT A MEMBERSHIP FORM:

When helping a new member fill out a membership form, please have them do the following:

1. Sign and date their form!
2. Read the small print, they are signing an annual, renewing contract.
3. Fill out and mail in the very back page, the NEA Complimentary Life Insurance (DUES-TAB). This is a free benefit.
4. It is important that we have their social security number. This is how we identify them with payroll for dues deductions.

This will cut the number of phone calls to reps and new members from our office to get this information. Thanks for all you do for the association!

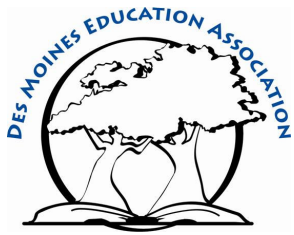
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## April Calendar

**2-3** ISEA Delegate Assembly

**Tue 7** DMPS School Board Meeting 5:45pm

**Thu 9** DMEA Executive Board Meeting DMEA Office

**Thu 16** DMEA Rep Assembly Plymouth Congregational Church

**Tue 21** DMPS School Board Meeting 5:45pm

**Thu 23** **DMEA Recognition Dinner**

**Fri 24** No High School Classes—Drake Relays

## May Calendar

**1-2** NEA Board Meeting

**Tue 5** DMPS School Board Meeting 5:45pm

**Thu 7** DMEA Executive Board Meeting DMEA Office

**Thu 14** DMEA Rep Assembly Plymouth Congregational Church

**Tue 19** DMPS School Board Meeting 5:45pm