

Tempo!

Des Moines Education Association

February/March Issue

3/3/09

Executive Director's Report

Greg Harris

The Groundhog has seen his shadow and we have had more days of Winter Wonderland. The Des Moines Education Association has been involved in advocating for children and public education for many years. Whether we believe it or not, when we bargain for ourselves we bargain for children and public education. Every decision made about public education is a political decision: the curriculum you teach, starting and ending times of school, pay and benefits you receive as an educational employee. These did not just happen, they were all based on someone's political decision, whether on the federal, state, or local level.

Many of our teachers and other educational members will tell you they care deeply about the children they serve in the school district and are proud to go the extra mile to help the needs of their students. We do not need to take a back seat when it

comes to standing up for our own rights and responsibilities as educators. Some would have you believe there is no money, just the doom and gloom that goes along with the economic downturn of the economy. I believe we must be educated on the issues, and after being educated, make an informed decision based on accurate facts.

In the year of 1929, the United States experienced a downturn in the economy that is known as **The Great Depression**. The Great Depression was similar to what is happening in today's financial market crises. The economic downturn started in most places in 1929 and ended in different times in the 1930s or early 1940s for different countries. President Franklin Roosevelt had to make some difficult decisions during that time because of the downturn of the economy. Franklin D. Roosevelt said: "There is nothing to

fear but fear itself." As we move forward in the bargaining process we must remain united because together everyone achieves more...

The **DMEA** bargaining team met with the district on three different occasions:

January 26, 2009, DMEA Public Bargaining meeting

February 9, 2009, DMPS Public Bargaining meeting

February 23, 2009, DMEA and DMPS first official meeting

The bargaining team members have taken the surveys you completed and segmented the data. We will continue to advocate for you until we get an agreement to bring back to the membership for ratification. Let's stay committed throughout the process.



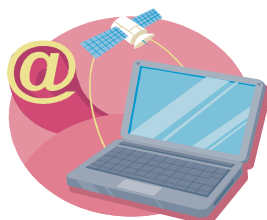
Special Points of Interest:

Thanks to the work of SLA Chair Joshua Brown, and DMEA Executive Board Secretary Stefanie Rosenberg-Cortés, the DMEA now has the capability to help members share lesson plan ideas, useful websites, and much more through an online wiki site.

Visit dmea.wikispaces.com and take advantage of this new resource.

Email Your Legislators

The [ISEA Website](#) provides a fast, easy means of contacting your legislators. Click on the "At the Capitol" tab, followed by the "Contact Your Legislators" link.



If there is no contrary policy in your school district, you may use a school computer or an e-mail address that is accessed through a school server to provide information

to legislators about how proposed legislation will impact your students, your classroom, and/or your district. However, you **cannot** advocate that legislators specifically vote for or against the legislation.

President's Report

Alan Young



How we approach the uncertainty of change is influenced by our perceptions about our power in the situation to affect desired change. More simply, when we are fearful and feel threatened, we may participate in change differently than when we are hopeful and feel empowered. Knowledge, information, and experience increase confidence and decrease the fear or powerlessness one perceives when approaching a situation. This is also true for our current bargaining situation. So when we have knowledge of things that others may not, it may influence how we approach a situation. We may approach things during bargaining differently than those who are privy to less knowledge, because we may know some things they don't. The main thing is that we get to bargain and have some say. Negotiations are just a formal way of trying to create the best reality possible between parties of interest - how we collectively forge certainty from uncertainty.

The problem comes from those who misunderstand, misconstrue, or overreact to isolated bits and pieces of the process. When members of the media, administrators, legislators, or even our members pull out just a few data points and only some of the priorities in this context of change, it artificially (and inaccurately) portrays matters out of context. While it may understandable and even natural to react to such hyped, partial information, it does not make it reasonable, constructive, or legitimate. This is why we don't negotiate via the media or via staff meetings. It is also why negotiations are not an event, like an initial offer, but a process of purposeful, deliberative dialogical engagement. It is why DMEA employs specialists, offers training for committee members, and

works countless hours to pour over data most do not have at their fingertips with support from ISEA and NEA.

Unlike some, I do not believe this is simply a game. Things matter. Nothing is taken lightly. Our first offer was not just some unrealistic stab in the dark, steeped in naïve, idealistic oblivion, or just how the "game is played." We understand the power of public perception, but also realize how little the public knows about the realities of our particular situation. First offers are just the beginning point of the formal negotiations process and they reflect competing priorities and perspectives of the current situation. They establish some preliminary, public boundaries for which negotiations and good faith discussions can take place to sort things out. They are beginning points that allow us to start the process.

I say these things so we might understand that just because we are in uncertain times, prone to elements manufactured to promote fear, threat, or resignation, now is not the time to panic or overreact. *More is known than what is manufactured at the surface to elicit reaction.* Exercise patience, reflectivity, and a little faith in the longstanding, good faith process of negotiations. There are competent, well-meaning, and thoughtful people at the table, with a solid process for achieving a negotiated common ground. Rest assured, the collective bargaining process is designed to sort out differences and forge compromise and agreement. It is not in anyone's best interest to have this be played out in the media, in staff meetings, or in side conversations in and out of school.

Our collective ability to bargain, maintain, improve, and enforce

the contract certainly does not come free. As the only recognized bargaining agent, we pool our dues and pay for what it costs. While we go far beyond this, our collective dues assure this. We hire staff and create a governance infrastructure that allows us to constructively and effectively engage the district and advocate for and support our members year round to promote better teaching, learning, and working conditions for staff and students. It would be impossible to create such organizational capacity that benefits all in our bargaining units without collective dues. The benefits of collective organizing are so much better than each person being on their own. It is that fundamental agreement that unites us.

Those who do not pool their dues also benefit daily from our collective advocacy. Whether it is the increases in salary, insurance and other benefits, protections, the significant teacher comp salary supplement, the gains that will be coming from a federal stimulus package, securing due process and protecting rights at work, the benefits are too many to enumerate here. If you know prospective members, please ask them to join so that we can become even stronger at and away from the bargaining table and more effective as an association in terms of advocacy and support. When all who benefit shoulder a fair share of the costs of advocacy, representation, support, and the maintenance and enforcement of the comprehensive agreement that helps us all, the responsibility is lighter on all of us.

So hang in there. The sky is not falling, no matter what some may say. There is much to be considered. Let the bargaining process play out and know that DMEA is there for you.



Strengthening Local Associations

Josh Brown, Goodrell

The strength of our association is only as strong as its members. Thank you for all that you are doing to help strengthen our union.

We are continuing our spring membership campaign. Remember that education professionals can join for the rest of the year for half-time dues. We're offering rewards to those who recruit new members. One incentive is a rebate of your DMEA

dues of \$5 for the first member, \$10 for the second, \$15 for the third, and \$15 for each additional member you recruit. In addition to the previously announced rewards, the top two elementary schools, the top middle school, and the top high school with the highest overall membership percentage will win either a pizza party or donuts delivered to your school by a DMEA executive.

Join us for DMEA Hockey Night with the Iowa Chops on Saturday, April 11th, 2009. Members and their families can receive half price tickets. To purchase your ticket, contact Ron Schreurs at 564-8722 or

Please feel free to contact me with any questions, comments, or concerns. Thank you for all that you do for DMEA.

Associate Director's Report

Marinus van Kuilenburg

Contract negotiations have started. Negotiations will be tough this year especially given the district's perception of the current economic climate. Nevertheless, we should not despair and we should not agree to anything less than a fair settlement! It is also important to keep in mind that the bargaining table is not the only place where we can make our voices heard. On the state and national level legislation is under consideration that would make it easier for workers to organize and fight for better working conditions.

One such piece of legislation on the national level is the Employee Free Choice Act. While this legislation only impacts private sector workers, it is essential that as public sector workers we support this. One reason is that we might need the support of other unions when

we need legislation passed favorable to us. Another reason is that this legislation could serve as an example for the public sector. The Employee Free Choice Act would allow workers to organize themselves through a majority of the workers signing union authorization cards without the need for an election. The Act would also provide for stronger penalties for employers who try to hinder unionization efforts.

The Fair Share bill which will be considered in the Iowa legislature this session will impact both public and private sector workers. Right now Iowa is a Right to Work state. This means that non-members represented by a union at their workplace cannot be made to join the union or pay any fees. This is regardless of the fact that the union has done the hard work to get

benefits which union and non-union members alike enjoy. Implementation of Fair Share would mean that non-union members would have to make a choice between joining the union or pay a so-called agency fee for the services they receive already.

A Living Wage is not under consideration in the Iowa legislature at this time, but DMEA and ISEA are working hard to get us there. The DMEA Living Wage Committee had a working session during a weekend in February to further develop strategies we need to achieve a Living Wage. One thing became clear; to achieve change such as an Employee Free Choice Act, Fair Share, or a Living Wage we need members and member involvement. Together we can achieve anything; there is power in numbers!





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.

MARCH CALENDAR

- Thu 5 DMEA Rep Assembly
- Tue 10 DMPS School Board
- Wed 11 Parent Teacher Conferences
- Thu 12 Parent-Teacher Conference
- 12-15 ESP National Conference
- Fri 13 No Classes –Award Nominations Due
- 16-20 Spring Break
- Mon 23 ISEA Delegate Orientation
- Thu 26 DMEA Executive Board

Department of Associates

Rhonda Anderson

Wow, can you believe that it is just a few short work days from spring break! If you are like me, the rest of the time will just fly by. How did you like having that Monday, February 16th off and the wonderful 3 day week-end?? I thought it was great and really a good break for February. I think it is like this for next year, providing that the legislature provides the funds for the certificated staff to hold this inservice.

We held our first all district Living Wage ESP meeting on Tuesday, February 24, at the East High Cafeteria and we had a wonderful turn out. This and the future meetings are intended for ALL district ESP and interested parties. No supervisor can

tell anyone in the district that they cannot attend. These meetings are open to anyone and everyone that wishes to find out more and/or be there for moral support. All are welcome.

Les Buchanan is the chair of the committee along with hard working members like Judy Campbell, Paula Reszel, Joan Mickle, Rhonda Anderson, Chris Costello, Ann Downey, Rita Rogers, Janet Walters, Heather McClelland, Phil Carlson, Marinus van Kuilenburg, and volunteer Nicola van Kuilenburg.

The living wage is different from the cost of living and the information now flooding our televisions. This is a wage that one

person can earn and live off of and be totally independent of any public resources and/or help from family or friends. I know that many of you know of some of our Education Support Professionals (ESPs) who are, or could be considered, homeless. They are living with family because they cannot support themselves or their family. This is tragic, and we are all responsible for the outcome of this issue. It could be me or it could even happen to you.

Along with a respectful salary comes self esteem and pride in yourself, family, and work. It is a good thing, and we need everyone's help to strive for this goal for us one and all.

