

## The MEA Advantage

## New Member Tips K-12

## **▶** Get to Know Your Partners in Education

By now you've met a lot of new people—teachers, parents, administrators—but if you haven't taken the time to meet the Education Support Professionals (ESP) in your building and in your district, you're missing out on knowing some of the most powerful advocates for education. Custodians, food service employees, bus drivers, secretaries, paraeducators and security guards may not be required to hold professional teaching certificates but they have as great an impact on children as teachers do.

- Many times they are the first adults a child sees each day (yes, even before they get to you) who wishes them good morning and asks how they are.
- The ESP usually have the most comprehensive knowledge of the community. Over 75 percent of ESP live in the school district in which they work. If you're looking for a community resource to help with a lesson, check with your ESP colleagues.
- This group of professionals probably knows more about school traditions and district history than you do. If you're thinking of changing one of those traditions, check with the ESP and they can tell you what the reaction will be from the school district and the community.
- Our MEA ESP members are on the front lines, too, just like you. They can offer valuable
  information on safety, nutrition and health issues. Since they live in the community and know
  many of the students and their parents, you might want to consider talking to them about a
  problem student. However be mindful of the districts policies on student privacy
- If your ESP colleagues are organized, they will have a contract. Take a look at it. While some of
  their rights and working conditions are different than yours, you can see how they are treated as
  employees.