

MEA VOICE

ESP Award
Winners
Honored

Higher Ed Faculty
Face New Rules

Join our Flint
Supply Drive!

A Witness
for Public
Schools

Letter to members

MEA offers members a chance to be part of something bigger than themselves.

So where do individual voices come in?



Steven B. Cook
President



Nancy L. Strachan
Vice President



Richard S. Trainor
Secretary-Treasurer

It's true we're stronger when we work together, but it's important to remember that MEA is only as effective as its individual members. And we need our members to stand up and be heard now more than ever.

When it comes to public policy related to education, we are living through unprecedented times. Well-funded enemies of public education attack collective bargaining at every turn. They demonize school employees, squeeze school budgets, and bludgeon hard-working teachers and administrators with scores from ever-changing standardized tests.

These anti-public education forces would like nothing more than to destroy MEA and monetize our neighborhood schools by turning over the keys to corporations and for-profit chains.

Around every legislative corner, we're hit with attacks on our right to bargain collectively. Politicians regularly introduce legislation affecting teaching and learning that overrides the training and judgment of professional educators.

We sometimes ask members to take a stand on these issues, and we understand when they share their fatigue and doubt about whether their voice can make a difference. "What's the point?" they ask. "Why bother?"

We understand those feelings, but we're here to say: Take a stand.

Because we've seen successes. While the so-called school "reformers" have the might of dark money on their side—we have right on our side. When we say stop the testing madness—parents and administrators are with us. When we say return us the freedom to teach about more than bubble tests—businesses join the chorus. When we say give us the resources students need to learn in the 21st Century, our parents and communities stand behind us.

We rounded the corner on the federal

No Child Left Behind policy last December with the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act, after a monumental effort by NEA members to change the course of that ship. ESSA reduces the federal role in education policy and broadens accountability measures to include factors other than standardized tests. Now implementation begins, and with that the hard work must continue.

In another win in Michigan, the Department of Education heard the voices of MEA members and parents from across the state who demanded a reduction in the hours of M-STEP testing that students suffered last spring. The MDE announced exactly that in changes last summer that marked a shift in the tide. Again, there is more work to be done.

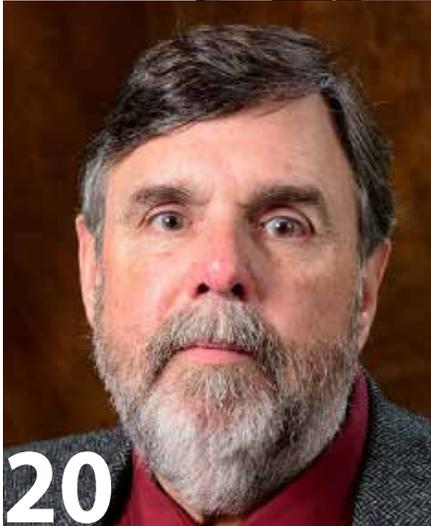
Stand up. Raise your voice. Repeat.

That is the theme of this month's issue of the *MEA Voice*, and it's what makes MEA and public education so great. Examples abound throughout these pages of educators standing up for what they believe in.

Look for Michigan Teacher of the Year Rick Joseph, who has been relentless in witnessing and sharing the story of public schools all over the state for the past year. Read about our newest ESP honorees: Leon Brunner Award winner Andrew Campbell, who volunteers his time building up ESP units all over Michigan, and Hall of Fame inductee Connie Boylan who travels the state and country teaching support staff how to be politically active.

Get inspired by the MEA-Retired members who step out of their normal lives to do face-to-face lobbying at the Capitol; and don't miss the evocative, uplifting prize-winning art from an EMU faculty member who set out to show the power of education in images.

In short, you are not alone. You stand amid a chorus of like-minded people, each one raising a voice to sing a powerful song. **☛**



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Cover photo:

Michigan Teacher of the Year Rick Joseph talks with two students attempting to build a better mousetrap—literally—in Emily Mason's popular Innovative Solutions class at Greenville Public Schools. Joseph, a fifth- and sixth-grade Language Arts and Social Studies teacher from Birmingham Public Schools, has been a tireless advocate for public schools since his crowning last May.

MEA VOICE

Executive Director Gretchen Dziadosz
 Director of Public Affairs Doug Pratt
 Editor Brenda Ortega
 Publications Specialist Shantell Crispin

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Editor's Notebook

by Brenda Ortega, Editor, MEA Voice

A few weeks ago, my eleventh-grade daughter Carmen let it slip in conversation that occasionally it's possible how maybe, um, once in a while she (ahem) thinks about... perhaps? becoming an English teacher.

I honestly didn't mean to clutch my chest and gasp for air when she said it.

I'm sure she interpreted my reaction as a not-so-subtle indication of my feelings about that idea, but she couldn't be more wrong.

You have to understand... I've been an English teacher, on and off, for the past 20 years, and my daughter has witnessed my struggles, triumphs, and tears—lots of tears—since she was little. “Teaching is hard,” she's heard me say more times than I can count. It's rewarding and life-affirming and vital to our future, and it's underpaid, underappreciated and—did I mention?—hard.

Now I've transitioned into a new phase of my life as editor of this magazine, a culmination of my time as an educator and formerly as a journalist at The Associated Press and Los Angeles Times during my 20s—before Carmen was born.

I've been thinking about her comment since that day she said it, and I've concluded this: If she were to ask me the question directly—Mom, should I become a teacher?—I would answer in the grand tradition of the famous 1897 New York Sun editorial, “Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus.”

“Please tell me the truth; is there a Santa Claus?”

That famous question asked by eight-year-old Virginia O'Hanlon inspired the reply that has become history's most reprinted newspaper editorial. Like little Virginia, my 17-year-old Carmen stands at the intersection of innocence and cynicism, hope and doubt, wonder and fear—trying to determine which way to turn.

Just as the Sun's editorial writer did with Virginia, I will point my daughter

toward belief in innocence, hope, and wonder, but I'll frame it in the difficult realities she's beginning to recognize. To borrow words from 120 years ago,

I honestly didn't mean to clutch my chest and gasp for air when she said it.

we live in a “skeptical age,” surrounded by “little minds” incapable of grasping the “boundless world... the whole of truth and knowledge.”

Like many educators, I've battled demoralization over the past decade as the noblest profession became belittled and bullied. Twenty years ago, starting out in my first high school classroom, the conversation about improving schools was broad in scope—challenging, exciting, complex—and it valued school employees as the experts on the ground. We were asked how to make things better, not told what to do by politicians who hadn't been in a classroom in years.

Nowadays dedicated fighters on the front lines are blamed, threatened, and punished instead of supported with the resources they need. Schools are labeled as “failing” and educators are “bad” based on standardized test “data” as the be-all, end-all measure of school performance. Rarely do policy leaders address the role poverty plays in predicting student scores. Nor do they acknowledge all that is lost when we prioritize children's ability to answer multiple choice test questions above everything else.

As the Sun's Francis Pharcellus Church explained to Virginia, “They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds.”

What's buried underneath the testing data are the pillars of learning—creative expression, freedom, curiosity, joy—“the most real things in the world... those that neither children nor men can

see.” Those ideals that draw educators into the profession and inspire students to become their best selves still exist. They do, “as certainly as love and

generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy.”

Yes, Carmen, you can be an English teacher.

You just have to be willing to do what you know is right. You have to spend the time to discover what students really need, what truly matters in the life of a child, and to make that your life's work. Then you have to find your own rewards—when a reluctant student takes a risk for the first time, or a confident one sees the other side of an issue, when the kid who doesn't like English class tells you “That story was good,” or when you cry yourself to sleep reading the essay by the girl who didn't know she could write.

It's not about test scores, so don't look for validation there. It's about guiding young people along their path—smart, funny, maddening, unpredictable, growing human beings who will look to you for everything: love, humor, wisdom, advice.

Whatever you do, it's about finding your voice and raising it.

Yes, Carmen, you can be an English teacher, if you can walk into that classroom knowing what you're up against and still be smart, and strong, and brave enough to do what needs to be done. In fact, the world needs more of you. ◀

Powerful New “Ask Me” Video Highlights (Mis)Perceptions about Educators



“Those who can, do; those who can’t, teach.”

“We’re lazy and play all day.”

“We only work part time and have summers off.”

These are just some of the misperceptions that Michigan school employees hear every day. But it’s important to remember why you got into this profession—chances are, it was to make a difference in the lives of students. And it’s equally important to know that there are people around us who understand and appreciate what we do as school employees.

That’s the focus of MEA’s latest “Ask Me” ad, which began airing around the state in March and continues this month. This new 30-second ad—and the powerful 90-second online video that accompanies it—tap into many of the feelings educators experience.



Check out the full video at www.mea.org/askme. Be sure to share it on Facebook and Twitter.

And while you’re there, click on the “Share Your Story” button to join the “Ask Me” conversation. Tell us your story. You can write out your thoughts or submit a video. Let us know: What’s your job like? What frequent misconceptions of education do you hear? What makes life as an educator tough—and rewarding? 🐼

UPCOMING EVENTS

May 3—Teacher Day/School Family Day, Statewide

Each year, schools and communities observe Teacher Day/School Family Day with local celebrations that pay tribute to the contributions school employees make to our communities and society. Visit NEA.org/grants/teacherday.html for resources.

May 6-7—Spring Representative Assembly (RA), Lansing Center, Lansing

The Representative Assembly is the governing body of the Michigan Education Association which meets twice a year—in fall and spring. At the Spring RA, delegates will vote on the budget for next year. Go to MEA.org/governance for more information.

June 20—MEA Scholarship Golf Outing, Forest Akers Golf Course, Lansing

This annual event helps raise money for college scholarships given by MEA to Michigan public school students. In fifteen years, the golf outing has raised more than \$506,000 for the MEA Scholarship Fund. Since 1997, the fund has awarded more than \$524,000 in scholarships. For more information, go to MEA.org/golfouting.

July 26-28—Summer Leadership Conference, Lake Superior State University, Sault Ste. Marie

Conference sessions provide the skills and trainings to help association leaders and members be informed and engaged MEA members. Topics include advocacy, political action, professional development, legal issues, and communications. For more information, visit the MEA website and look for the Conferences tab.

Lead Expert Delivers “Message o



Chicago pediatrician Dr. Helen Binns, a national expert on the effects of lead ingestion and co-author of the CDC report titled “Educational Interventions for Children Affected by Lead,” presented strategies to Flint-area MEA members in March.

Anationally known expert on the effects of lead poisoning in children delivered an unexpected but welcome message of hope to educators assembled at MEA Flint offices for a recent training session.

Dr. Helen Binns was brought in by MEA to train Flint area educators concerned about young people

is that enriched, supportive home and school environments have the power to greatly offset any damage caused by lead.

“Lead is not the overwhelming influence on a child’s behavior,” she told the crowd. “I am delivering a message of hope that ‘Yes, you can make a difference.’”

“I want teachers to feel confident that they have the tools to really address the issues that they may find,” Binns said in an interview. “They actually have been dealing with this for a long time.”

Having parents talk, sing, and read with children from birth, set boundaries, offer logical consequences, and enforce bedtimes to ensure adequate sleep are all measures that offset lead damage, Binns said. Offering enriched preschool with strong reading readiness programs is important. She pointed to a study involving rats that compared no-lead and high-lead animals in stimulating environments versus isolation. The rats with no lead exposure who lived in isolation were worse off than those with lead contamination experiencing high stimulation.

Ensuring an adequate diet also helps. Children with low iron levels more easily absorb lead, so they need iron-rich foods supplemented with Vitamin C. Breakfast is important, she said. Children who don’t eat breakfast absorb 60 percent more lead from the environment.

Parents and teachers should

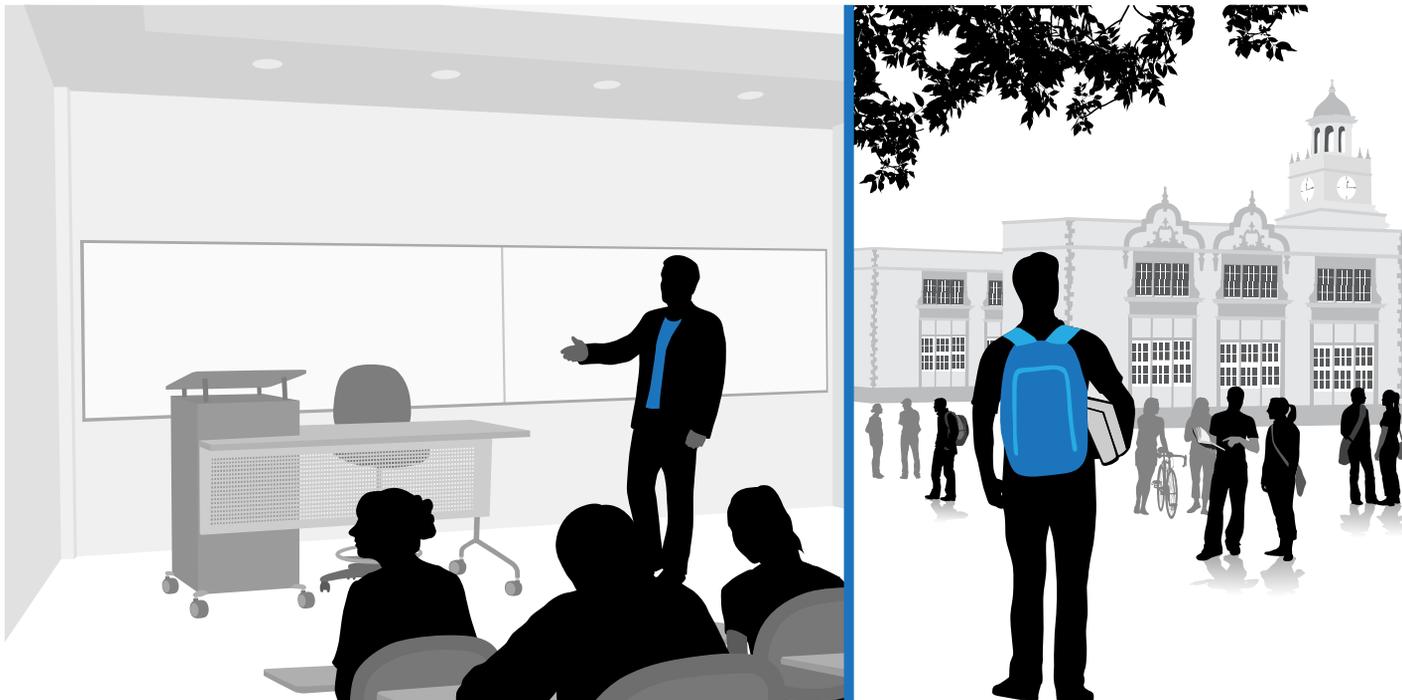
“I am delivering a message of hope that **‘Yes, you can make a difference.’**”

who ingested lead in the city’s tainted water supply. There is no safe level of lead exposure, said Binns, a pediatrician at Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago and a professor of pediatrics and preventive medicine at Northwestern University’s Feinberg School of Medicine.

However, there also is no certainty in the research about lead’s effects on an individual child, she added. The only guarantee Binns could make to educators—one she hopes will make its way to parents—

Binns shared a wealth of data she’s gathered in a career focused on the issue of lead exposure, historically a pervasive and persistent problem in the U.S. For perspective, she noted that between 1976 and 1980, 88 percent of American children had blood lead levels above 10 micrograms per deciliter. In Flint, approximately 5 percent of children who were tested had blood lead levels above 5 micrograms per deciliter. “How high? I don’t know,” Binns said.

New Accreditation Rules for Colleges



Graphic illustration by Rachel Beyer

Assistant Professor David DeBaker runs one of the best-loved classes at Jackson College, where he's president of the faculty union, but new rules might prevent him from teaching the popular Film Series at the downtown Michigan Theater anymore.

The same rules are forcing Assistant Professor of Accounting Lisa Novak, an MEA faculty member at Mott Community College in Flint, to take additional credit hours in Accounting—meaning she's now completing assignments as a student from the identical textbook she uses to assign work as a professor.

And in Escanaba, the stricter rules governing faculty qualifications to teach are generating fears of an instructor shortage that could reduce the number and breadth of course offerings at rural colleges.

Colleges from all over Michigan and beyond are scrambling to address a tightening of rules governing the credentials faculty must possess to teach particular courses. The stricter regula-

tions were issued last June by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), an accreditation agency that oversees more than 1,000 colleges and universities in 19 states.

The new criteria require faculty members to have completed a “program of study” in the discipline or subfield in which they teach or develop curricula that is “at least one level above that of the courses being taught or developed.”

In short, a faculty member teaching undergraduate-level Biology must hold a Master's degree in Biology, or have completed 18 hours of Master's-level coursework in Biology. Less clear is whether an instructor can teach a class in a “subfield” of the discipline in which he or she holds a Master's degree.

When the new guidelines were first issued, specific language stated that—for example—a graduate degree in Political Science would not be adequate to qualify an instructor to teach freshman American Government. Only a Master's degree, or 18 hours of graduate credit,

in American Government would suffice. However, that language disappeared from revisions to the guidelines published recently.

The latest revisions were issued in response to questions raised during a conference call between MEA staff, approximately 35 MEA higher education members, and the CEO of the HLC. The clarifications posted to the HLC's website on March 10 allow for more flexibility in making a case for a faculty member without exact credentials—but who does possess the knowledge and skill to teach a class—through a “peer review process.”

“HLC's reliance on the expertise of its peer corps members—reviewers who are drawn from the member institutions themselves based upon their knowledge and expertise—is an honored and time-tested tradition,” the revised guidelines state.

Widespread confusion about what the guidelines mean is part of the problem. “As faculty and administration

Faculty Spur Confusion, Worry

both, we're stuck with humongous gray areas in how they're written and how poorly they've been implemented," JC's DeBaker said.

That is how MCC's Lisa Novak, a mother of four and full-time instructor, found herself burning the candle at both ends—teaching all day, taxi-driving her kids after school, and taking grad classes in accounting—despite a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from University of Michigan, a Master of Science in Administration from Central Michigan University, several years of accounting experience in the field, and 10 years of teaching accounting at Mott.

"I'm taking classes in accounting from people who haven't even taught it for as long as I have," Novak said.

Enforcement is not set to begin until fall of 2017, and colleges found to be out of compliance will have a grace period in which to make necessary changes. The guidelines explicitly state that "recent revisions... are in no way a mandate from HLC to terminate or no longer renew contracts with current faculty members."

Provisions in the guidelines state that HLC "expects institutions will honor existing contracts with individual faculty or collective bargaining units until such time as institutions have had an opportunity under the contract to renegotiate provisions that relate to faculty credentials if such revisions to the contract are necessary."

Reports of faculty being let go or not assigned classes for the coming fall semester based on the new rules—one year ahead of the scheduled implementation date—prompted the conference call, said Cheryl Conklin, MEA Central Zone Director and liaison to the Michigan Association of Higher Education (MAHE—MEA's membership group for employees in higher education).

"Those administrations are jumping the gun; that's the word we received," Conklin said. "They're saying

the HLC reviewers haven't even been trained yet."

For the past several months, concerns have been raised about faculty who teach subjects that might only be related to their degrees (freshman composition for someone holding a Master's degree in British Literature, for example) or for faculty teaching courses outside of their degree areas.

"The fact of the matter is a lot of good instructors who are doing a damn good job are going to be told they can't do it anymore," said Bill Milligan, president of the faculty union at Bay de Noc Community College in Escanaba.

DeBaker said he'll be "heart-broken" if forced to give up the Film Series class, which screens contemporary and classic movies for students and the general public to enjoy in an ornate historic theater in downtown Jackson, featuring gold embossed columns and velvet curtains with plush braided ropes. The college would be hard-pressed to find someone with a Master's degree in Film to teach the sophomore class focused on critical analysis. DeBaker has a Bachelor's degree in Film and Television, but under the new guidelines that does not qualify him.

"That means a class that's part of the community, a class that supports a historical theater built in the 1930s, a class that's been taught at the college for 40-some years will disappear. All because I didn't spend thousands of dollars taking 18 (graduate credit) hours of classes in film. And that's a tragedy."

As troubling as the loss of effective instructors and popular course offerings is the potential for widespread faculty shortages in rural areas, in-demand career fields, or more obscure disciplines with limited Master's program offerings—for example, American Sign Language.

"Honestly, accounting right now is number-three in the hot jobs in Michigan, so people get a Bachelor's and

they're gone," said Lisa Novak. "They're not going on to get a Master's. They're going into jobs."

Without the properly credentialed faculty to teach classes, community college schedules could constrict, observers fear.

"The end result probably will be a contraction in offerings or in the number of sections of a course that community colleges—especially rural community colleges—will be able to offer," said Chet Jessick, the faculty president at North Central Michigan College in Petoskey.

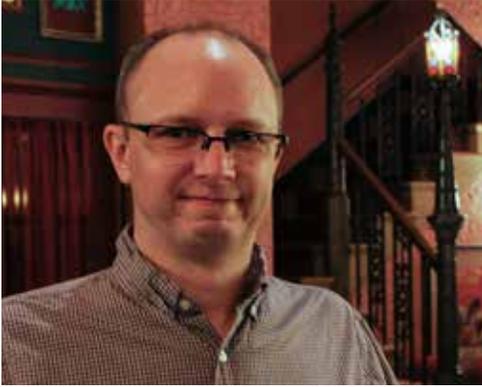
The HLC is allowing some teachers to bypass the minimum education requirements if they possess equivalent "tested experience" in real-world situations relevant to the discipline they would be teaching. However, defining equivalencies is left up to the colleges, which are advised to create a "well-defined policy and procedure for determining when such experience is sufficient"—creating significant room for interpretation and confusion among college administrators, observers say.

Ironically, the tightening of rules governing college faculty grew out of events that occurred off campus.

An explosion of "dual credit" courses—so called because they're college classes taught on high school campuses by high school teachers for high school students—raised worries that minimum standards of quality were not being met in those courses. In those programs, students receive both college and high school credit, but many of their teachers hold Master's degrees in Education instead of the discipline being taught.

HLC conducted a national study of dual credit courses in 2012 that showed a 75 percent increase in dual credit enrollments from 1.16 million in 2003 to 2.04 million in 2011. The study cited "inadequate instructor qualification" as a concern.

"It is critical that the content of the dual credit course match the complexity



Jackson College Faculty Association President David DeBaker says he'll be "heartbroken" if new accreditation rules force him to stop teaching a popular film series course at JC.

and scholarly rigor of the same course delivered to the student population on the college campus," according to the guidelines.

The newly released revisions, however, also provide more flexibility for high school teachers to be considered qualified with relevant life experience

or professional development in place of discipline-related Master's degrees.

Tying the quality of teaching strictly to specific credentials ignores the skills that are required to teach, to motivate, engage and communicate with students, faculty say. Teaching is about more than pouring content into an empty receptacle.

"It flies in the face of modern pedagogy," Bay de Noc's Milligan said.

"I'll take a great teacher over someone with a Master's degree in the subject any day," DeBaker said. "A Master's degree does not necessarily make a great teacher."

Different colleges are taking different approaches in response to the new rules and the fall 2017 enforcement timeline. At some colleges, letters have been sent to all faculty alerting individuals to potential problems that could arise if additional coursework is not completed. Elsewhere, colleges are issuing individual reports to every faculty member that

include action plans and deadlines for credits to be completed.

At Bay de Noc, the administration extended allowances for full-time faculty to use conference and professional development money to pay for necessary credit hours.

MEA has developed bargaining language for teams to use based on clarifications made during the conference call with the HLC, so concerned members should check with their leadership for help navigating the changes, said Conklin.

Many of those interviewed doubted that adjuncts will be willing to spend their own money to keep a part-time teaching position with no benefits or job security. Their loss will be a loss to the higher education institutions they have served, said NCMC's Jessick.

"We've got long-term, loyal, committed master teachers who are no longer credentialed to teach what they're teaching and that's sad," Jessick said. ❧



A House bill to prohibit school calendar as a bargaining topic is yet another example of the state overstepping its role and usurping local authority. Why not ask the experts—educators in the field—what they think?

Why is it important for educators to have a voice in decision-making about the school calendar?

Mike Lerchenfeldt, Chippewa Valley Schools: Teachers need to have a voice in all policy decisions that have an effect on our classrooms. Teachers advocate for their community's parents and students.

About the Importance of Bargaining Calendar

Jamie Buchanan, Petoskey High School: Nothing in education will be successful without the buy-in of the practitioners in the classroom.

Nate Greenwood, Jenison Education Association Vice President: From a teacher's perspective, having a voice in our local calendar gives us the ability to help shape local events within our schools, lets teachers help to decide when important breaks occur, and most importantly, allows us to work with our local administrators to mold our daily schedule to best meet the needs of our kids.

I am a bargaining team member in my local district. Being able to bargain the school calendar is an essential piece of negotiating. It is literally one of the few things left that bargaining unit members can negotiate after the years of systematic attacks by our

one-party government. Our current Michigan government has waged an intelligent war against our rights to bargain, methodically trying to dismantle our union like pulling apart Lego blocks. Our members have worked tirelessly for too long and have sacrificed too much over the years to have yet another right stripped away. What the public doesn't understand, which is the way the politicians want it, is it is not like teachers and ESP members would ever get more pay for more imposed hours, days or weeks worked. I imagine only a non-educator would ever believe that letting politicians or administrators dictate the hours, days and weeks you work will lead to better quality teaching or teaching conditions. Fortunately, in our district we have had amicable, cooperative negotiations with our local administrators. I know that this is rare. ❧

Self-Described Union Basher is “Born Again” Through Arbitration Journey

Genesee County paraeducator Sharon Campbell can't help but see the irony.

For 16 years, she worked with cognitively impaired young adults, teaching them skills to successfully navigate in the world: personal grooming, cooking, and house-keeping. Plus the social skills to land a job and keep it.

“My students were my heart,” she said.

Then she was fired, and the woman whose job was to teach others how to live found her own world spinning out of control. “It’s ironic, isn’t it? I’m getting all emotional now, just talking about it,” she said. “It was absolutely devastating to me.”

There’s a deeper irony, too: Campbell eventually got her job back through arbitration, but she almost missed out on the help she needed if she hadn’t reconsidered dropping her MEA membership.

As a member, the help that saved her job came in the form of an MEA staff attorney, who steered the 50-year-old single mother of two sons through the labyrinth of evidence gathering and hearings. As a result, Campbell was granted back pay, full credit for her years of service, retroactive health expenses, and a return to her job with the district. Most of all, she won vindication.

Now she’s convinced of the value of union membership. “Being able to lean on the union for support, it gave me a voice,” she said.

However, she didn’t always think that way.

Three years ago, after the Michigan Legislature passed the so-called “Right to Work” law that allowed employees to receive the benefits of a union without having to pay their fair share of the costs of representation, Campbell

rushed to drop out of paying dues. She rationalized her decision as a single mom living paycheck to paycheck with no child support.

“I was like, ‘Heck yeah, where do I sign up to not pay dues?’ I was the biggest naysayer... I was a union basher. But now I’m born again. Now I’m the biggest rah-rah union advocate there is.”

Fortunately for her, Campbell reinstated her dues four months before she was fired, when she started to feel unsupported by her district’s administration. As a result, “The MEA was with me every step of the way,” she said. “Without the union, I never would have been able to prove what happened to me.”

According to the arbitrator’s ruling, Campbell’s actions on Dec. 2, 2014—which resulted in her dismissal—were never in dispute. What the two sides disagreed about in arbitration were the disciplinary charges she faced as a result of what happened.

On that day, Campbell and another paraeducator were taking three young adult special education students on a field trip to Bronner’s Christmas Wonderland in Frankenmuth. Twice while driving, Campbell handed an iPad off or reached for it with a student in the back seat. Each time, she glanced at the iPad and touched an icon to activate the camera or switch the camera view from inward to outward orientation.

Once the group returned to school, Campbell’s colleague reported her for violating the district’s policy against use of an electronic device while driving a district-owned vehicle. He said he feared being labeled complicit if information came out later and he hadn’t reported it.



Under questioning at the time, Campbell admitted what she did and acknowledged it was wrong. “I never tried to hide it. I said all along it was a bad decision, and I shouldn’t have done that.”

Initially given a three-day paid leave, Campbell returned for a meeting and learned of her dismissal Dec. 8. One of the hardest aspects of her firing was having to disappear without explanation from her students’ lives. “I didn’t get to say goodbye,” she said.

Campbell filed her grievance several weeks later, in January 2015, the start of a long road back.

Unable to pay her bills, she faced the loss of her Swartz Creek home. She tapped into retirement funds, paying huge penalties, to keep food on the table. Stress-related health problems mounted. Eventually she couldn’t get out of bed, and a counselor diagnosed her with depression and anxiety. That was her rock bottom, she said, but she’s getting better.

continued on page 22

A Master Teacher Tells the (Tru



ue) Story of Public Education

**Spoiler Alert*... There's a happy ending*

Stories by Brenda Ortega

Sheri St. Denis practically glowed in a neon pink and yellow shirt as late afternoon daylight faded from the faculty lounge. It was the end of a long week at Walnut Hills Elementary School in Greenville, a semi-rural community between Grand Rapids and Lansing, and St. Denis was decked out in full Madonna-esque regalia for an 80's-themed fundraiser held in her second-grade classroom that day—including big hair, a stonewashed denim skirt, and fingerless gloves.

Her smile lit the room, too, as she talked with Michigan's Teacher of the Year—Rick Joseph—about the joy of teaching at a school that encourages risk-taking and collaboration, where educators can discuss their challenges and weaknesses without fear. Then St. Denis's face turned somber. A veteran teacher, she's finishing her first year at Walnut Hills after spending the first half of her career in an urban district where test scores remain stubbornly low.

"I'm the same teacher here as I was in my previous school that was in a lower-income area," she told Joseph. "Here I do something, and I get the message, 'Keep going; that's great.' But there I was constantly hearing the message that what I was doing was not good enough, not good enough, not good enough."

Her repetition of the phrase—a signal of her frustration—was fitting. Since Joseph was crowned Michigan Teacher

Michigan Teacher of the Year Rick Joseph talks with a student in Pauline Fuller's Greenville Middle School Language Arts class about her reading self-evaluation.

Photos by Miriam Garcia



Joseph takes photographs at every school visit to document the story of public education in Michigan for an audience that includes the State Board of Education and state legislators.

of the Year last May, he has heard the same complaint over and over and over again, about the unfairness—the full-out inaccuracy—of judging teachers’ performance on test scores. “That idea, that test scores are an unfair standard for measuring excellence, comes up repeatedly,” Joseph said.

St. Denis continued: “I just think teachers all over are doing great things, but they’re not at all viewed the same way, depending on where you are. I reached the point where I wasn’t sure if I could keep going for another 15 years. It’s so hard for people to stick it out.”

“My goal is to offer a counter-narrative to the prevalent media stereotype of the broken public education system in this state.”

Joseph understands the challenges educators face every day in urban and low-income areas; he’s a former bilingual Spanish-English teacher in Chicago. He listened intently to St. Denis and sympathized: “We have to figure out how to help those teachers. If they’re serving a population that is 100 percent free and reduced lunch, then they need more support.”

At a time when public education is un-

der attack and school employee voices have been left out of the policy conversation, Joseph is a breath of fresh air. The district where he works as a fifth- and sixth-grade social studies and English teacher, Birmingham Public Schools, provided him with a substitute for the year, allowing him to treat his award as more than an honor.

Joseph has leveraged his position as Teacher of the Year into a platform: “My goal is to tell the story of education from a teacher’s-eye view and offer a counter-narrative to the prevalent media stereotype of the broken public education system in this state.”

Over the past year, he has toured rural, suburban, and urban districts—public, private, and charter schools—across Michigan, as he did recently in Greenville Public Schools, where he met Sheri St. Denis. A bonafide celebrity at every school where he appears, Joseph talks informally with school employees and turns his camera outward in the hallways and classrooms—reporting his discoveries, observations, and positions on his blog at RickJoseph.org and once a month to the State Board of Education in Lansing.

At the State Board meetings, the photographs from his school visits help him

tell the story of public education in a way that words alone could not. “It’s been phenomenal,” he said. “It’s expanded my mind so much and given me lots of things to think, write, and speak about.”

BEATING THE DRUM FOR EQUITY

One of his pet issues is equity in school funding and opportunity. He’s seen both sides of the coin: Having worked in Chicago Public Schools before his two sons were born, he and his wife moved back to Michigan to be closer to family in 2003, and he landed a job in Birmingham—never expecting to stay. Twelve years later, he’s touring the state as Teacher of the Year.

And he’s using his stature to speak out—testifying before the Legislature, writing op-eds and letters to senators—not wanting to miss the opportunity that a one-year trained spotlight affords him. State Board President John Austin called him a “National Board-certified teacher with a bully pulpit.”

“He has an informed point of view to share about what we need to do if we want to improve educational outcomes for kids,” Austin said.

A recent editorial Joseph wrote for *Bridge* magazine about inequities between rich and poor school districts in Michigan received heavy traffic on social media. Titled “Who am I to judge Detroit teacher sick-outs?” the article contrasted his experiences with deprivation in Chicago and abundance in Birmingham, pointing out a direct correlation between socio-economic status and test scores that educators everywhere understand.

“Yes,” he wrote in the magazine, “there are ineffective educators, just as there are ineffective doctors, lawyers, accountants and engineers. Teachers, however, are not responsible for the inequities that render some children ill-prepared for life in a global society while others are destined for success for reasons that transcend what happens in classrooms.”

In person, too—whether it’s meeting with a local school board president or presenting before the State Board—Jo-

seph pulls no punches when he recognizes flawed approaches to improving the lot of our state's poorest students. He opposes allowing unlimited numbers of for-profit charter schools to drain money away from state coffers with little accountability or transparency in how that money is spent.

He repeatedly beats the drum for sane policies governing the kinds of charter schools we allow and how they're managed, as he did with the president of the Greenville school board, Janet Warnshuis: "Certainly some charter schools are doing good work, but it can't occur at the expense of existing public schools," he said in response to her question about Detroit Public Schools. "For Michigan to be a truly 'choice' state, then everywhere has to be able to offer the kind of quality education students receive in places like Birmingham or DeWitt."

Or perhaps in Greenville—a semi-rural, 3,000-student district spanning seven townships in three counties. In a recent tour there, Joseph observed remarkably cutting-edge programming: a one-of-a-kind self-esteem building program for high school girls (see sidebar), an elementary-age Chinese immersion program, and a creative problem-solving class at the middle school known as the Innovative Solutions course.

Additionally, because Montcalm Community College has a campus directly adjacent to the high school, Greenville Public Schools offers a middle college program in which students can attend high school for one additional year to emerge with a diploma and an Associate of Arts degree.

Greenville is not a wealthy place, said Hollie Stephenson, a part-time teacher and part-time administrator in the district who drove Joseph among school buildings during his visit. Median household income sits at just over \$30,000 a year, far short of the statewide median of \$48,000. Approximately half of the district's students qualify for free and reduced lunch.

A mix of high- and low-income families co-exist in the community, with not many in between—from people living in half-million-dollar houses to those

Teacher of the Year impressed by Greenville Member's Program for At-Risk Girls

Greenville High School World History teacher LaRissa Paras found herself repeating a pattern with at-risk female students. They'd come to her one-on-one, confide their self-doubts, pain and powerlessness—and she'd listen compassionately, maybe give some good advice. Then their lives would continue down the same path as before.

She wanted to intervene, to help them understand what she already knew. "They would be feeling desperate, pouring their hearts out, and I wanted to shoot them with some confidence. It was there, hidden away inside of them; they just didn't know it."

What's that saying about being doomed to repeat history? Paras took action. Five years ago, she secured two grants to launch the Lotus Project, a self-esteem and community-building program for girls that she designed and implemented herself.

With the grant money, Paras recruited high school girls for afterschool enrichment and mentoring that would build a second family for participants. Students were invited to join the eight-week program based on risk factors such as poor attendance, low grades, and struggles at home.

The group went on field trips, took yoga and self-defense classes, participated in professional photo shoots—and even got to Skype with professional photographer Nigel Barker, best known from the television show *America's Next Top Model* and his book *Nigel Barker's Beauty Equation: Revealing a Better and More Beautiful You*.

Teachers volunteered to mentor each girl. The group met weekly in small discussion groups and large seminars to discuss issues surrounding self-image, confidence, health, relationships, gratitude, and responsibility. Paras's goal is to redefine the idea of beauty for the girls, to show them their strengths and help them envision a future for themselves in which they are powerful.

Greenville High School junior Taylor Flanigan said being a part of the Lotus Project was like having a fairy godmother. "There was no judgment," she said. "It showed me how to be confident in myself, so now I'm not afraid to just be me."

Paras is in the process of gathering together the Lotus Project's curricular materials to begin selling a pre-designed package for schools anywhere to try. The project was part of a recent tour of Greenville Public Schools by Michigan Teacher of the Year Rick Joseph, who was so impressed he promised to connect her with education leaders in the state interested in expanding at-risk programming.





Students in Emily Mason's Innovative Solutions class show Joseph their idea for a better mousetrap involving a trap on a string wrapped around an axle from a remote-controlled car.

surviving in mobile homes with rags stuffed in the windows and no working heat source beyond the oven, Stephenson said.

The area is fortunate to have a local grant-making foundation that includes a Youth Advisory Council made up of student members. The foundation often funds programs to fill gaps in the safety net, such as an anti-hunger initiative that sends a sack dinner home four days a week with at-risk elementary students, Stephenson said.

At the middle school, the foundation helps low-income students attend camps and buy equipment to participate in extra-curricular activities, said Linda Gunderson, an office secretary known for administering daily student medications along with a stick of gum as a memory trigger (“If they’re not chewing, they know they forgot to come see me.”)

A WITNESS WHO UNDERSTANDS

First and foremost, Joseph visits schools to serve as a witness—observing with the empathy of someone who shares a deep commitment to the transformative power of public education, but also as someone who’s toiled in the trenches.

The joy with which he’s received in his appearances speaks volumes about the fatigue felt by public school employees. They’re simply tired of a popular culture that seeks to blame and punish educators instead of listening to and supporting them.

Wherever he goes, Joseph asks two questions of educators he encounters: What do you love about your job? And what would you change if you could?

Answers to the first question flow easily: Seeing the light go on in a student’s mind. Watching a kid connect his life to a character from Shakespeare. Interacting with hopeful teens or intervening with hopeless ones.

Then the concerns stumble out. School funding. Student poverty. Class sizes.

At Greenville High School, lunchtime talk in the faculty lounge turned to the frustrations of working with students who are smart, creative, and capable but who can’t see the future because they’re somehow troubled or wounded. These are the kids who don’t understand the relevance of school or the importance of college. They can’t see their own potential. They have the ability to pull A’s or B’s, but they barely get by with D’s—or worse, they fail.

“Some kids just can’t see the connec-

tion between education and what they want to do with their life,” said Christine Loisel, who added she loves working with teens every day—for their energy and humor—despite the challenges of teaching Algebra 2 to students who don’t necessarily want to learn it.

Those students’ problems keep educators awake at night, but their potential keeps educators coming back every day, other Greenville High School teachers agreed.

“A lot of teachers wish there would be more funding available for wraparound services to meet the needs of kids in their communities,” Joseph said. “Kids are coming to school with a lot of needs they didn’t have 30 years ago, and we’re asking teachers now to do more than they ever have.”

His words elicit open gratitude: hugs, smiles, emotion. Teachers, secretaries, custodians, administrators welcome him into their buildings and thank him for his advocacy.

At Greenville’s Lincoln Heights Elementary School—where a banner outside proclaims it a federal Department of Education “Blue Ribbon Exemplary School since 2005”—Joseph observed a lesson in math teacher Jen Bowen’s third-grade class. Afterward she took him aside to lament her students’ low scores on last spring’s first-ever administration of the new M-STEP test, aligned with the Common Core State Standards.

Ironically, she said, the fourth-grade teachers who received those students from last year had praised her for preparing them so well. Then, months later, the test scores arrived. “I see how well those students are doing (in fourth grade), and it makes me question how well the M-STEP is aligned to what we’re doing,” said Bowen, an 18-year veteran teacher.

Joseph reassured her, “At the end of the day, it’s critically important that we trust our instincts and find our validation elsewhere—not from M-STEP scores. And I would say that if you had the highest test scores as well. The reason is, by and large, so many other factors go into making those scores. Take them for what they are.”

Teachers at the middle school greeted him in the hallway as he passed by, sharing their uncertainty about new evaluation tools. Joseph asked them which of the four new state-mandated evaluation methods they were learning, and he discovered their district had chosen the same tool as Birmingham: 5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning.

Stopping to chat, he said, “I was observed by my principal and got my email yesterday with...” Joseph hesitated to recall the 5-D jargon for “feedback.”

In unison, science teachers Stacy DeWeerd and Chelsea Cates chimed: “Noticings and wonderings!”

“That’s it! From what I can see, if it’s used the right way—if it’s not used punitively, but for professional development—it can be a great tool,” he said.

Later at Baldwin Heights Elementary School, media center assistant Kathy Maguire pulled Joseph aside to ask what he thought about parental pressures to shield students from sensitive subjects in the reading materials they’re allowed to see. “Personally, I would never censor,” he told her. “Let them read.”

A VOICE FOR WHAT’S WORKING

It might not be apparent on the nightly news, but Joseph has witnessed many great school employees doing great things in great schools during his year-long tour of the state. His job has been to tell it from the mountain, and that kind of reinforcement is invigorating, Greenville’s Hollie Stephenson said. “The more he sees, and the more he can sing that song and tell that story all over the state, it’s just powerful.”

At Greenville Middle School, the sounds of pounding hammers, slicing saws, and excited chatter emerged from the “Innovative Solutions” classroom before Joseph entered. Inside, the room bustled with middle schoolers working in teams to literally build a better mouse trap from scrap materials found in the supplies area.

Everywhere students hunched over work stations or crouched on the floor testing and revising Rube Goldberg-

style contraptions, implementing the design and engineering principles they’ve learned in math teacher Emily Mason’s popular elective class which gives students the freedom to try hands-on creative problem solving.

Marbles substituting for mice dropped through funnels, pinged off walls, and triggered falling traps. Joseph smiled and snapped pictures and asked questions. “Where did you get that piece?” he asked a boy attaching a pulley with string to a trap. “It’s the axle of an RC car,” the boy answered proudly, holding it up and spinning it around to rewrap the string.

Moments later, as he exited, Joseph said, “I want to stay here and build something.”

Approaching the end of his time as 2016 Teacher of the Year, Joseph said one conclusion he’s come to is that all teachers should be observing each other—within and across districts, buildings, subjects, and grade levels. “You know what’s crazy? We have a class like this where I teach, and I’ve never observed it in my own building. We as teachers need to do this more. It’s amazing what a kindergarten teacher can learn from a physics teacher and

vice versa,” he said.

Just as amazing is what can happen when school employees are empowered to solve problems—rather than being micro-managed or having decisions pushed down from the top. That’s the beauty of Greenville Schools.

For example, the middle school has two math teachers who are able to open the non-permanent wall between their classrooms and share students of different grade levels—sorting them according to needs rather than ages, and allowing students to move fluidly between the teachers as concepts are mastered.

And Stephenson, a French teacher, was instrumental in Greenville Schools becoming one of a handful of districts in the state with a Chinese immersion program at Walnut Elementary School. The program started four years ago with one kindergarten class, and each year it expands up one grade, so it’s now in place in four classrooms from K-3, Stephenson said.

Five years ago, nearly 90 percent of Walnut’s students came from impoverished backgrounds, and enrollment was declining. Now it’s a model of innovation with more parents wanting in than the building has space for—the result of

Media Center assistant Kathy Maguire told Joseph about programs that draw students into reading more books at Baldwin Heights Elementary School in Greenville.





Students in Betsy Gryka's fourth-grade classroom explain the rules of a Junior Achievement game that teaches them about expenditures, profits, and losses by having them play the role of hot dog stand owners.

a team of educators devising a plan and activating it. The group studied model programs in Utah and visited China through the College Board's China Bridge program.

Visitors who enter the classrooms where students have been immersed in Mandarin for two or three years are in for a treat—or a shock. Teacher directives and student responses fly back and forth. Conversations happen. Students laugh at jokes, answer questions, and follow directions—all in Mandarin.

“To watch these little kids from Greenville speaking Chinese back to their teachers is just a powerful thing,” Joseph said after he left Katherine Hsieh's third-grade class.

“Education is a relationship game. It's all about teachers' ability to connect with their students and find points of engagement and points of motivation.”

The students in immersion classes spend half of the day learning subject area content in Chinese, and the other half in English. Some of the teachers

are Chinese citizens living in the United States on permanent visas. Hsieh is a bilingual Michigan State University alumna. The whole school benefits from embedded, in-depth study of Chinese culture.

SPEAKING THE TRUTH

Seeing children in Chinese immersion classrooms soaking up a new language so easily is a great reminder of how their brains are rapidly developing neural pathways that will facilitate future learning, Joseph said. It reinforces another of his most cherished beliefs about teaching.

“There's so much pressure to cover content and curriculum. Why? To what end? The emphasis ought to be on process and instruction. It's all about the primacy of literacy.”

In some of the districts he's visited over the year, Joseph gave presentations about his other pet issues: literacy instruction and growth mindset—teaching kids how to learn instead of what to learn. He's a natural teacher, drawn to the kids when he enters a room and compelled to ask them what and why

they're thinking and learning in everything they do.

They respond back—with their ideas, disappointments, hopes, and dreams. High schoolers in Greenville told him they wanted to be nurses, designers, and computer programmers. They expressed frustration with a new math curriculum that focuses on problem-solving in groups, but they overwhelmingly voiced support for their schools.

“I can't really complain,” one boy told him. “I get a great education here.”

Sophomore Shelby Miller added, “I like that we have teachers we can go to and have personal conversations when we need to, aside from what they teach.”

The students illustrated one of the basic points Joseph has been trying to make all year with the State Board, with state legislators, with “anyone who will listen.” It's the secret every great educator knows. It's the truth he's telling. The starting and ending point of conversations.

“Education is a relationship game,” he says finally. “It's all about teachers' ability to connect with their students and find points of engagement and points of motivation.”

“When that happens, there's effective teaching and learning. Period. And by the way, it is happening—all over this state.”

Joseph is a non-partisan actor in the political dramas playing out in Lansing. He's an MEA member, but he doesn't represent MEA. He pushes no single agenda beyond strengthening public education. To that end, he hopes to be a bridge builder, continuing his work even after the end of his tenure in June.

His dream is to form coalitions of individuals and organizations tired of partisan gridlock in Lansing and Washington, D.C., to bring together the majority of people who value public schools, who don't want to privatize and charter-ize them, who want to fund them fully and fairly to give all children the chance to reach their potential.

“A good public education is a fundamental right and part of the common good,” he said. “It is an institution we must strive to preserve and protect.”

MEA Retirees Step Up to Take on Tough Tasks When Needed

Ted Symons stood casually in an elevator at the Capitol Building, wearing blue jeans, a sweatshirt, and a disheveled canvas jacket, his curly white hair peeking out from under a crumpled baseball cap emblazoned with the number “4,725.”

Next to him, a sophisticated woman in a white coat, black pants, and a black fedora hat watched floor numbers light up, briefly making eye contact with Symons and nodding politely before returning her gaze to the numbered panel above.

He leaned forward to whisper, “Nice hat,” before the elevator doors opened and the woman whisked away down the marbled hallway.

Smiling and friendly, Symons easily could be mistaken for a carefree tourist on a jaunt if not for his partner-in-crime, Jim Pearson, who resembles a hard-nosed CEO or corporate lawyer with his wire glasses, pressed slacks, and coiffed brown hair.

In reality, Symons and Pearson are a dynamic duo of MEA retirees who answer the call to lobby lawmakers when legislation is proposed that’s bad for public education or school employees.

“My parents were both educators, my father rose to be superintendent, so I’ve been involved with education my whole life,” Pearson said, explaining why he’s willing to occasionally give up the comforts of retired life to press state legislators to vote a certain way on bills.

Symons added, “I do think personal contact makes a difference, just like sending a personal letter means more than sending an email.”

Both men spent their careers teaching in Huron Valley Schools in Highland; Pearson taught world history and geography for 40 years, and Symons was a math teacher for 41 years. The number on Symons baseball cap—a gift from his daughter—was supposed to represent the number of students he affected through his long career, but 4,725 is exponentially wrong.

“It should be several thousand more, but that’s OK,” he said, smiling. “I still wear it. It’s the thought that counts.”

The hardest part about lobbying, according to Pearson, is when his short-term memory fails him and he can’t recall a fact or argument he wants to use. Most often, though, he finds that teachers make great lobbyists.

“You have to be friendly and business-like, professional, and I think any school employee or teacher can do that,” he said.

Another MEA-Retired lobbyist agreed. Jo Bird, who retired from Zeeland Public Schools in 2005 after 31 years as a German, English, and Spanish teacher, said she enjoys volunteering for all sorts of union support roles, with her husband Bob—a non-educator—at her side.

“There’s nothing special about us except we’re always willing,” said Bird, who carries materials in a cloth bag that reads “Education Superhero, preserving public education for the future.”

In January, the band of MEA retirees lobbied lawmakers against legislation to punish Detroit teachers for recent sickouts.

The MEA-Retired group hand-delivered packets of information about Detroit Public Schools, including city

inspection reports of wretched building conditions and color photographs showing mold-covered walls and ceilings, rodent droppings, water leaks, and general decay in numerous DPS buildings.

The retirees divided the task of visiting mostly Republican senators and representatives in their offices and on the Senate floor, urging a “No” vote on Senate Bills 713-715. Under the bills, teachers involved in sickouts could lose their credentials and face fines. Their unions could face fines, and their bargaining units could be dissolved for up to five years—even if only one person strikes, and even if that person is not a member of the union.

Some Republican senators that the group met with expressed reservations about the bills. Most listened politely. Some argued that teachers should never protest during school hours to make a point.

No matter what, the team of retirees pressed on.

“You don’t give up,” said Bird. “You can’t just not do anything.”

Bird’s husband Bob said he and Jo have been politically active together for years. “There’s a saying: ‘Bad things happen when good people do nothing,’” Bob said. ❧

MEA-Retired member Jo Bird, a former Zeeland Public Schools teacher, discusses legislation with Rep. Thomas Hooker (R-Byron Center).



Brunner Award Winner: Quality Education Support Professionals Make the Difference

Drew Campbell of Waterford ESP had risen to service on the ESP Caucus Board when he realized there were struggling units around the state that could be helped with a little individual care.

Call it grassroots organizing, or union brotherhood, or simple kindness. Campbell was part of a team that volunteered to reach out to others, often saving units by solving problems and teaching people how to be more effective. “We traveled all over the state, and a lot of times we were very successful,” Campbell said. “Sometimes members just need to hear from members.”

Campbell was awarded the 2016 Leon A. Brunner Award in March for his extraordinary commitment to ESP issues and concerns and his significant contributions to ESP. Campbell was recognized for his tireless efforts to improve the lives and careers of all support professionals regardless of classification.

He is best known for his work on the Statewide Anti-Privatization Committee (SWAP), which helps units respond to privatization threats in their districts. Campbell has trained thousands of members on ways to fight back and has visited other states to present at conferences.

“He has spoken to many school boards about the ill effects of privatization, and I have witnessed firsthand how he is able to help folks see why privatization is not good for their communities,” wrote Troy Beasley, Waterford EA president, in nominating Campbell for

the award.

A key to fighting off the threat is to build a coalition of teachers and support staff to educate the school board and parents about the problems with replacing long-term, loyal, hard-working staff who live in the community with low-paid, transient employees of private companies.

Constant turnover of the privatized staff is just one of the factors the SWAP team discusses with local leaders for use in information campaigns. Other concerns include loss of local control over employee background checks, improper use and handling of chemicals, and poor performance.

“These companies will always come in and lowball a bid to get in the door; then the prices go up, and a lot of that money goes out of the country to places like the UK and France,” he said.

The need for the SWAP team’s services never ends. “We have billionaires out there that ran out of things to buy, so public education seems to be what they want, and they’re taking a lot of jobs away,” he said.

Campbell grew up learning union values and pride from his grandfather, a crane operator, and his father, a steamfitter. Their influence, along with the guidance of various mentors, convinced him to get involved and reject



apathy when collective bargaining or other union rights come under attack.

“Enough is enough!” he told the crowd in his speech at the ESP Conference. “I say our future starts here, now. Let this be the spark to get re-involved, rejuvenated, and reinvent ourselves.”

If dedicated support professionals are replaced with less committed, less invested privatized staff, the children suffer the consequences, he said.

“You watch the kids come into the school on Monday morning, and you can see the ones that haven’t had a meal all weekend,” he said. “We provide such a safe and stable environment for them, more stable than home a lot of times.”

Campbell is known as Mr. Drew at school, where teachers offer challenging students a reward for good behavior of spending an afternoon helping Mr. Drew complete handyman tasks.

“It really brightens up their day,” he said, “and it’s all about what the kids need. I truly feel that.” ❧

MEA ESP Hall of Fame Inductee: “It Takes All of Us to Make Students Successful”

Connie Boylan rose from volunteering at her kids’ school to nurturing students’ love of reading as a Traverse City Area Schools library media paraprofessional to leading the state’s ESP Caucus Executive Board—all because she wasn’t content on the sidelines.

Now her grown sons joke that she bleeds union blood—which makes sense given how MEA has become a family to her, she said. “People here really look out for the needs of the students but also of each other.”

Named to the MEA ESP Hall of Fame in March, Boylan was honored as someone who dedicates herself to improving the lives of others. “Support staff play a vital role in the jobs they do to create a sort of a safe zone for children,” she said. “They’re there because they love what they do, and we’re here fighting to make sure everybody is treated fairly.”

Boylan chairs the Statewide Anti-Privatization (SWAP) Committee, which helps units respond to privatization threats in their districts. As part of that work, she’s experienced the heartbreak of watching members lose the fight, lose their jobs, lose their homes.

But the wins keep her coming back. “We’ve saved more members’ jobs than we have lost over the years,” she said. “We make the point that 75 percent of support staff live in the communities where they work. They have community ties. Privatization erodes the community.”

Boylan cherishes the victories from her years of advocacy, but after one particular success the comment of a member has stayed with her through the years: “He said, ‘You know, you didn’t just save my career. You saved my life.’”

Boylan’s expertise in anti-privatization advocacy has made her a sought-after presenter across the country and at NEA conferences, such as the national ESP conference in Orlando last month. Her extraordinary commitment toward ESP issues and advocacy for support professionals earned her a Leon A. Brunner Award in 2013 in addition to the Hall of Fame induction this year.

Now she’s involved in mentoring others. She identifies emerging ESP leaders to encourage, guide, and plug into NEA training. The way Boylan sees it, she’s paying it forward, following fellow ESP leader Percy Brown’s motto: “Each one reach one teach one.”

“Somebody mentored me,” she said, naming off a list of union leaders who offered guidance and advice. “I wouldn’t have been able to do the things I’ve done so far if not for them. I think one of the most important things all of us can do as leaders is look for people



who can take your place one day.”

Boylan, who now has 10 grandchildren, said she got involved in volunteering in her kids’ school years ago when she first moved from Ohio to Traverse City and jobs were scarce. She spent so much time at the school that one day the principal walked up and said, “You’re her every day; wouldn’t you like to work here?”

That job she was offered ended up being the most difficult and rewarding work she’s ever done, she said. “I love being with children, and to teach a child the joy of reading—to make them want to read instead of being forced to read—is amazing.”

She always belonged to the union, but as her boys grew up and became more independent, she realized, “I wasn’t content not being active.” Her involvement grew, and she found fulfillment in playing a bigger role. Now ESP issues have become her mission in life, she said. “One of my greatest passions is fighting this fight.” ❧

ESP Conference Spurs on “Everyday Heroes”

Union Basher “Born Again”

from page 11

Maury Koffman recalls a school custodian from his youth who used to ask him about his future and listen when he talked. “I didn’t really know it at the time, but for me those conversations were an act of life planning,” he told Education Support Professionals attending the 2016 ESP Statewide Conference in March.

“You’re having the same type of impact on students with things you do each and every day,” said Koffman, a member of the NEA Executive Committee and leader of the 2,400-member Michigan State University Administrative Professional Association.

Koffman’s opening address hit on this year’s conference theme, “The ESP Experience: Switch it On.” He said educational decisions used to be local, but increasingly politicians at the state and federal level are dictating so-called “best practices” that wring the choice out of local districts.

“We can no longer remain silent on the sidelines,” he said, calling for ESP to become politically active and select candidates who pledge to support public schools with resources and decision-making power.

“We are fighting a war with those who want to privatize and cut services to students that are needed.”—NEA Executive Committee member Earl Wiman.

Attendees at the two-day conference learned how to engage members; launch a website; fight privatization; deal with bullying administrators; and represent members, fee payers, and non-members—among other topics in two dozen different sessions.

“I got some good tips at the leadership meeting,” said Kathy Monaghan, a committed but admittedly overwhelmed first-year president of an office support staff unit at Rochester Community Schools. “This has been very motivating.”

Building up the strength and esteem of support professionals is key to restoring and protecting public education, said keynote speaker Earl Wiman, a member of the NEA Executive Committee and former president of the Tennessee Education Association.

Wiman infused his talk with humor—speaking of “so-called education reform experts... They’ve driven by a school, so they know what’s best!”—and then zeroing in on the heart of his listeners: “Those people don’t get the importance of ESP’s, because they don’t understand education and they don’t understand students. They understand dollar signs.”

All categories of ESP—clerical, para-professionals, custodians and maintenance workers, skilled trades, food service, transportation, security, and technical—rise or fall in a common destiny with every other school employee, he said.

Public education is the last pot of public money that corporations want to take. “We are in a war with those who see our salary, our insurance, and our retirement as a burden. We are in a war with those who would replace a quality work force with low wages, with no benefits. And we are fighting a war with those who want to privatize and cut services to students that are needed.”

We will not shut up, sit down, or submit he told the cheering crowd in a stirring conclusion. “We will stand up for you, our heroes, ourselves, and our students until our voice is heard!”

The arbitrator’s ruling was issued Jan. 15, nearly one year to the day after Campbell filed her grievance arguing the discipline she received was out of proportion to the offense committed. “Yeah, I did a wrong thing, and I should have had a consequence for it, but dismissal? No.”

The arbitrator concurred. Some of the grounds for Campbell’s termination were dismissed as “false and/or unsubstantiated” in the ruling. In addition, the district’s decision to fire Campbell ignored “her long service and lack of previous discipline.”

“Being believed... It’s everything to me,” she said. “I’m glad to be able to hold my head up high.”

The ruling means Campbell will receive reimbursement for medical expenses and back pay, minus a five-day unpaid suspension, which the arbitrator ruled a just punishment in this case.

Campbell had a nearly perfect discipline record in 16 years at the district, so she never thought anything like this could happen to her. “I couldn’t have done it without the union there with me, no way, shape, or form,” she said. “I hope this inspires other people to stay informed, stay engaged, and stay involved in their union.”

In January she returned to a different position at a different school. Although it was hard to adjust to new people, she said, “Seeing students again was amazing.”

Veteran K-12 Art Teacher Wins Best in Show at MEA/MAEA Juried Art Exhibition



Dr. Camilla McComb wanted to create art promoting the beauty, joy, hope, and promise of public education in a conceptual form—and she succeeded. The work she produced was awarded this year's Best in Show at the 52nd annual MEA/MAEA Juried Art Purchase Show.

"I was looking for ways to promote the field of education, because there's so much negative rhetoric out there," said McComb, a National Board Certified K-12 art teacher who taught for 25 years in Ohio and now guides aspiring art teachers as a faculty member in Eastern Michigan University's Art Department.

The exhibit, which provides an opportunity to display art by MEA, MAEA and MEA-Retired members in good standing, is open to the public at MEA headquarters in East Lansing (1216 Kendale Blvd.) Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. until May 7.

McComb's pair of framed uncropped digital prints feature an old-fashioned wooden school desk with attached chair displayed in two different natural environments.

In "Assessing the Educational Landscape," the photograph is shot from behind the desk on a brilliantly sunny day at what appears to be high noon. The desk straddles a narrow dirt path that climbs crookedly up a hilly meadow full

of tall grasses and fuzzy wildflowers. In the distance is mostly blue sky dotted with wispy white clouds and part of one unruly tree that tilts asymmetrically out of the frame on one side.

In the second photo of the pair, titled "Contemplation," the desk is shot head-on from a higher angle within a forest of birch trees carpeted with thick ferns, which surround and partially obscure the desk's leg. The shiny seat of the chair reflects a gray sky, mirrored in the gray knotted bark of several skinny birch trees gathered in the foreground with the desk. Tall grasses in the middle ground lead to a thick, dark forest beyond—contributing to a mood of mystery and reverence.

McComb has photographed the desk all over Michigan, Ohio, and West Virginia, and found that people respond to the desk just watching her place it at scenic spots, such as the pier in Petoskey. One stranger even struck up a conversation and told her about how much education has changed his life, "and I thought 'Wow. How gratifying to see how people react.'"

Juror Emily Holtrop, the director of Learning and Interpretation at the Cincinnati Art Museum, judged all 107 entries at the March 5 MEA/MAEA Exhibit, choosing 67 to accept into the show.

Holtrop said she considered subject matter, skill, creativity, and her gut reactions when selecting Best in Show. McComb's pieces won, because they drew her into a place of "wonder and contemplation."

"The images of old school desks placed in the natural world spoke to me and made me want to be a student sitting at those desks," Holtrop said. "In my initial review of the show, these works drew me in and were my imme-

diate favorites. McComb's eye for detail and subject matter should be applauded, and I congratulate her on her Best in Show honor." ❧

Other award winners and purchases were chosen as follows:

Juror's Choice Awards

Diane Brown from Essexville for "Depot in Port Huron"—Watercolor
Rhonda Sherwin from Williamston for "Nest"—Watercolor/Graphite/Ink
Rhonda Sherwin from Williamston for "Roots"—Watercolor/Graphite/Ink
H.J. Slider from Caledonia for "School House Salad"—Assembled Sculpture
Nancy Sly from Royal Oak for "Pinecone"—Stoneware, Oxide Wash
Jasmine Stader from Saginaw for "Impermanence 2"—Mixed Media
Carol Trojanowski from Haslett for "Golden Covers"—Fiber Art

Honorable Mention Awards

Sally Giroux from Saginaw for "A Poppy for Lynne"—Digital Photography
Lynn Gregg from South Lyon for "Popcorn Lady"—Photography on Tiles
Lisa Hermann from Canton for "Sunrise"—Acrylic and Spackling Compound
Carol Lewin from Midland for "The Winter of Rosalyn Lewin"—Colored Pencil & Graphite
Harlan Minor from New Baltimore for "Last Leaves 002"—Oil/Canvas
Amy Philp from Adrian for "Crone's Secret"—Clay
Christina Zardus from Dearborn for "Finger Lace"—Photography

MEA Purchases

Diane Brown from Essexville for "Depot in Port Huron"—Watercolor
Lynn Gregg from South Lyon for "Friendly Greeting"—Photograph on Canvas
Garin Horner from Ann Arbor for "20 Stops of Light, Science and Magic"—Photography
Terry Junger from Perry for "Golden Birth With Red Leaf"—Collage/Mixed
Camilla McComb from Ypsilanti for "Assessing the Educational Landscape"—Uncropped Digital Print
Camilla McComb from Ypsilanti for "Contemplation"—Uncropped Digital Print
H.J. Slider from Caledonia for "School House Salad"—Assembled Sculpture
Carol Trojanowski from Haslett for "Golden Covers"—Fiber Art
Christina Zardus from Dearborn for "Finger Lace"—Photography

MESSA helps members breathe easier

By Ross Wilson, MESSA Executive Director

For the thousands of MESSA members and dependents who have asthma, MESSA is here to help.

MESSA's free Asthma Member Education and Support Program can provide members and their dependents with personal help in effectively managing asthma-related health issues.

Our asthma nurse educator, Susan Jahn, R.N., works with members directly to help them understand asthma, identify common triggers and figure out the right questions to ask at doctor visits. She also provides members with encouragement and guidance, including help with developing an action plan.

By enrolling in the program, members also receive a free asthma education handbook.

To enroll in MESSA's Asthma Member Education and Support Program, call 800-336-0022 and select prompt 3 to speak with a nurse educator. 🗨️



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5 tips for recharging your batteries this summer

During the school year, it's hard to find time for daily exercise and other healthy activities that contribute to your physical and mental well-being. Instead, many teachers and education support professionals find the summer months a good time to renew and refresh.

Take the time you need this summer to focus on your health. Here are a few ideas:

1. Schedule your annual health maintenance exam.

This preventive checkup will help identify high-risk behaviors and screen for chronic and/or life threatening diseases. All MESSA health plans include an annual preventive care checkup with an in-network provider at no cost to the member. While you're scheduling your checkup, also schedule dental and vision exams.

2. Increase physical activity if possible.

For important health benefits, adults need at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensive aerobic activity every week and muscle-strengthening activities on two or more days a week that work all major muscle groups. It's best to talk with your health care provider before you begin a physical activity routine. Ask your doctor about what's appropriate for you.

3. Get adequate sleep.

Insufficient sleep is linked to the development and management of a number of chronic diseases and conditions, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity and depression. The summer months can provide the time you need to catch up on sleep and re-establish good sleep habits.

4. Eat healthfully.

Summer may provide you with the time you need to prepare and eat healthy meals. You also might take some time to make a plan for maintaining healthy eating choices when school is back in session this fall.

5. Take a few deep breaths.

Sign up for a yoga class. Connect with a friend. These are simple ideas to help you manage stress. High levels of stress over time can lead to serious health problems, so find ways to effectively manage stress now—and when school resumes. ☛



Candidates for NEA State Director

Delegates to the MEA Spring Representative Assembly (RA) in Lansing May 6-7 will have the important duty of casting ballots for two members to the NEA Board of Directors for three-year terms beginning Sept. 1, 2016, and ending Aug. 31, 2019.

Candidate statements follow. Statements for the office of president are limited to 750 words, plus biographical information. Statements for other offices are limited to 350 words, plus biographical information.

Editor's note: MEA members who are running for offices are allowed to have information published in the MEA Voice. Each candidate is allowed a short biography, a photo, and a campaign statement. MEA staff writes the biography from information submitted by the candidate; each candidate may also provide a campaign statement that is printed verbatim.



Candidate for NEA State Director Aimee McKeever

Aimee McKeever is a special education teacher in the Pontiac School District where she currently serves as President of the local teachers association. Aimee is a member of Region 7 where she has served as President and Vice-President and currently serves as the Election Chair. Aimee was elected by Region 7 to the MEA Board of Directors where she also serves on the MEA Budget Committee, AFT/MEA Exploratory Committee and the Long Range Bargaining Committee. She has been a building representative and a member of the bargaining team, in addition to serving as an MEA and NEA delegate.

Candidate Statement

I am a proud union member of the Pontiac Education Association where I currently serve as the local President. I have been teaching for 30 years in Special Education with experience at most grade levels and subject areas. I've served in numerous union positions since my very first year as an educator, including local president and a MEA Board member. My experience in these positions has given me valuable insight into the needs of all education employees in public schools. As president of my local association in the Pontiac

School District, and in my travels around our state, I have seen first-hand the results of the attacks of anti-union laws and the sacrifices our members have had to make in deficit districts. Now, more than ever, we must work together to secure our future and the future of public education. I want to work with both state and national legislators to find a way to stop the destruction of our unions, the attacks on our members, and to properly fund all public schools, for the benefit of both students and employees alike. Public school employees can no longer continue to sacrifice under the weight of the deficit district situations, while continuously being attacked by anti-union laws. I have proven myself as a strong, effective leader with over 30 years' experience. I know and understand Michigan's issues and want to be your voice at the National level. I would not only be proud, but honored to be your advocate at the National level. I am asking for your vote to elect me as one of your NEA Directors. Thank you.



Candidate for NEA State Director Reed Bretz

Reed Bretz is a vocal music teacher in Kenowa Hills Public Schools where he serves on the KHEA Executive and Negotiations committees following previous roles as a building representative and crisis chairperson. He is a former Region President, Vice-President, Secretary, and NEA RA Coordinator for Region 9. He currently serves as the NEA Representative Assembly Coordinator and as a MEA RA Delegate and member of the MEA Board of Directors. He is presently serving on three committees: Credentials, Art Acquisition, and Member Budget. As an NEA RA delegate, he sits on the Michigan Strategy Committee.

Candidate Statement

Thank you for taking the time to consider me for the position of NEA Director for the great state of Michigan. I am a proud Union Member of the Kenowa Hills Education Association, where I have taught vocal music for the past 25 years. I am a strong believer in equal rights for all members—both EA, as well as our fellow ESP members. I am looking forward to being a strong voice for all members of the Michigan Education Association. I am up for the challenge, and would appreciate your support. Thank you.

Scholarship Fund Honors Legacy of Former MEA President Larry Chunovich



Candidate for NEA State Director Melinda Smith

Melinda Smith works in Maintenance at Van Buren Public Schools. She is a member of the local Executive Board and serves as Association Trustee, in addition to being a member of the MEA and NEA RA. She belongs to her local Bargaining Team and serves as a Grievance Chair and member of the Screening and Recommendation Committee. Melinda has served as 2E Coordinating Council Vice-Chair, Region 2 Secretary, and as Local Option Secretary/Treasurer. At the MEA level, she has been elected a member of the Board of Directors, the ESP Caucus Executive Board and the MEA PAC Governing Board. She has been appointed to serve as Minority Affairs Chair and as a member of the Professional Development Commission and the MESSA Board. Melinda has been an NEA Director—Alternate and Region 50 Coordinator.

Candidate Statement

As a Proud MEA Union member and leader, it has been my honor to advocate for MEA/NEA members, our students and public education. I want to continue to use my experience, moving us forward as we work to educate the Whole Student, strengthen internal and external labor coalitions, and build community partnerships. I thank you for all the support you have given me in the past and I ask that I have your continued support to the NEA Board of Directors.



Former MEA President Larry Chunovich passed away one year ago following a battle with pancreatic cancer, and his friends and family are trying to keep his name alive forever with a scholarship fund at Oakland University, where he served on the Board of Trustees.

Before he died, the former Southfield High School math teacher was aware of plans for the scholarship to support students interested in studying math—particularly OU students who want to become math teachers, his wife said. Preferential consideration for the annual \$1,000 scholarship will be given to Southfield students.

“He was so thrilled and delighted that his name would be carried on in a legacy like this,” Keitha said.

Chunovich, who served as MEA president from 1983-1991, was respected as a patient, kind, generous man, who valued education and loved the MEA. “The MEA was his second family,” she added.

Grove Sandrock, a former MEA UniServ and Zone director, helped

organize the scholarship. He and Chunovich met in college at Central Michigan University, and their lives paralleled each other. Both ended up teaching in Southfield and became heavily involved in the union.

Chunovich was known for his bargaining skills, said Sandrock, who served on bargaining teams with him. “He would be able to calculate out a salary schedule in a flash, and the board trusted his figures. They had absolute faith in his skills and in his integrity. He was a man of great integrity.”

In the year since his death, the scholarship fund has received about \$12,000 in donations. Friends and family would like to raise at least \$25,000 in the next four years to meet the minimum amount established by Oakland University for keeping a scholarship going in perpetuity.

To donate, send a check payable to Oakland University, with Chunovich Legacy Scholarship in the memo line, to Oakland University, John Dodge House; 2200 North Squirrel Rd.; Rochester, MI 48309. ❧

NOTICE TO UNION MEMBERS

AFTER A PUBLIC HEARING, THE MICHIGAN EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS COMMISSION HAS FOUND THE **STANDISH-STERLING EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT ASSOCIATION, MEA** TO HAVE COMMITTED UNFAIR LABOR PRACTICES IN VIOLATION OF THE MICHIGAN PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS ACT (PERA). PURSUANT TO THE TERMS OF THE COMMISSION'S ORDER, **WE HEREBY NOTIFY OUR MEMBERS THAT: WE WILL NOT** restrain and coerce employees in the exercise of their rights under §9 of PERA to refrain from joining or assisting in labor organizations.

WE WILL NOT maintain or enforce a rule that prohibits members from resigning their union memberships except during the month of August.

WE WILL NOT refuse to accept Mark Norgan's October 3, 2013 resignation from his union membership.

WE WILL affirmatively notify Norgan in writing that his October 3, 2013 resignation from union membership has been accepted.

WE WILL refund to Norgan the dues and assessments he paid for the 2013-2014 membership year, plus interest, less the amount of the reduced service fee paid by objecting nonmembers for that membership year as determined by an impartial arbitrator in the spring of 2014, or, if no such determination was made, less the amount of the reduced service fee for that membership year as calculated by the MEA on or before November 30, 2013.

STANDISH-STERLING EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT ASSOCIATION, MEA

By: *Jean Weiss*
Title: UniServ Director

Date: 2/16/2016

Any questions concerning this notice may be directed to the office of the Michigan Employment Relations Commission, Cadillac Place, 3026 W. Grand Blvd., Suite 2-750, P.O. Box 02988, Detroit, Michigan 48202. Telephone: (313) 456-3510. Case Nos. CU14 B-002/14-002293-MERC

NOTICE TO UNION MEMBERS

AFTER A PUBLIC HEARING, THE MICHIGAN EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS COMMISSION HAS FOUND THE **BATTLE CREEK EDUCATIONAL SECRETARIES ASSOCIATION** AND THE **MICHIGAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION** TO HAVE COMMITTED UNFAIR LABOR PRACTICES IN VIOLATION OF THE MICHIGAN PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS ACT (PERA). PURSUANT TO THE TERMS OF THE COMMISSION'S ORDER, **WE HEREBY NOTIFY OUR MEMBERS THAT: WE WILL NOT** restrain and coerce employees in the exercise of their rights under §9 of PERA to refrain from joining or assisting in labor organizations.

WE WILL NOT maintain or enforce a rule that prohibits members from resigning their union memberships except during the month of August.

WE WILL NOT refuse to accept Alpha Snyder's September 17, 2013 resignation from union membership.

WE WILL affirmatively notify Snyder in writing that her September 17, 2013 resignation from membership has been accepted.

BATTLE CREEK EDUCATIONAL SECRETARIES ASSOCIATION

By: *Justin Scarpanti*
Title: UniServ Director

MICHIGAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

By: *[Signature]*
Title: Executive Director

Date: 3/21/2016

Any questions concerning this notice may be directed to the office of the Michigan Employment Relations Commission, Cadillac Place, 3026 W. Grand Blvd., Suite 2-750, P.O. Box 02988, Detroit, Michigan 48202. Telephone: (313) 456-3510. Case Nos. CU14 C-009/14-004413-MERC

NOTICE TO UNION MEMBERS

AFTER A PUBLIC HEARING, THE MICHIGAN EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS COMMISSION HAS FOUND THE **GRAND BLANC CLERICAL ASSOCIATION, MEA**, AND THE **MICHIGAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION** TO HAVE COMMITTED UNFAIR LABOR PRACTICES IN VIOLATION OF THE MICHIGAN PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS ACT (PERA). PURSUANT TO THE TERMS OF THE COMMISSION'S ORDER, **WE HEREBY NOTIFY OUR MEMBERS THAT: WE WILL NOT** restrain and coerce employees in the exercise of their rights under §9 of PERA to refrain from joining or assisting in labor organizations.

WE WILL NOT maintain or enforce a rule that prohibits members from resigning their union memberships except during the month of August.

WE WILL NOT refuse to accept Mary Carr's November 4, 2013 resignation from her union membership.

WE WILL affirmatively notify Carr in writing that her November 4, 2013 resignation from union membership has been accepted.

GRAND BLANC CLERICAL ASSOCIATION, MEA

By: *Janya L. Pratt*
Title: UniServ Director

MICHIGAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

By: *[Signature]*
Title: Executive Director

Date: 3/21/2016

Any questions concerning this notice may be directed to the office of the Michigan Employment Relations Commission, Cadillac Place, 3026 W. Grand Blvd., Suite 2-750, P.O. Box 02988, Detroit, Michigan 48202. Telephone: (313) 456-3510. Case Nos. CU14 C-020/14-006843-MERC



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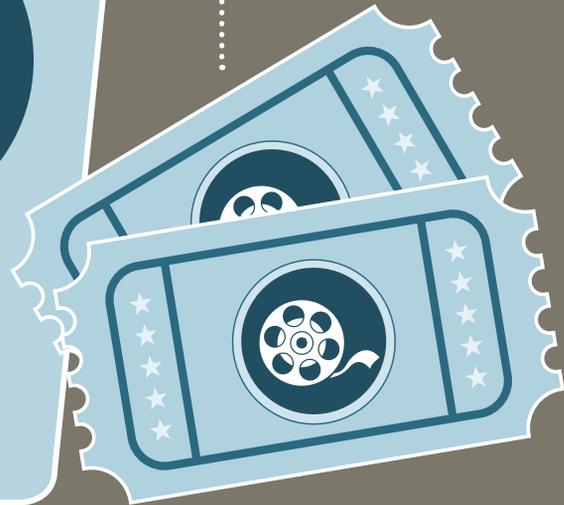
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