

FEBRUARY
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THE CATALYST

A Publication of the Mt. Diablo Education Association

Noce Notes.....

From the MDEA President

Happy New Year! This school year has gone by incredibly fast. I hope your first half of the year is going smoothly and you are feeling successful in your teaching this year.

I'd like to thank Anita Johnson, a teacher at Valley View Middle School for volunteering to become the editor of the Catalyst. We lost our past editor, Marsha Tokuyoshi, to another district last year after being our editor for three years. I'm very happy Anita decided to help us out. We'll do our best to meet the article deadline so we can get the Catalyst out on a regular basis. If you have any good news stories or announcements you'd like to share, please email them to mtdiablo1@aol.com and we'll forward them on to Anita. We'd like to share the positive things that are going on at our sites with our members.

MDEA represents over 1900 educators in Mt. Diablo. We have many goals we would like to achieve for our members and students. We would like to be able to keep our members informed through our written correspondence, as well as our website, of the benefits and rights they have as members. We would like to have an informed rep at

each site to be that personal contact our members can go to with questions and concerns. We'd like to investigate all the medical benefits options we have to provide better and more affordable coverage for our members. We would like to help our program improvement schools meet the challenges they face on a daily basis. We would like to build better relationships with our community. We want to be able to get the best contract possible for our members. We want to engage our new members and provide support for their efforts in the classroom and in their career. We'd like to provide professional development opportunities to our reps and members.

So why aren't we doing all these things? MDEA is an organization, not a small group of people. MDEA is a collective of members that it depends on to accomplish its goals. MDEA needs members like Anita Johnson, Samantha Espinosa, Ellen Terminello, Jo Carson, Cindy Bruno and others to serve on committees that will

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Noce Notes... continued

give direction to MDEA's future actions. MDEA relies on informed site reps to build relationships with their staffs to help make a connection between MDEA and its members a real one. Even with three people that work full time, MDEA can't be the organization it needs to be without its members getting involved. Earlier this year we asked each member for 6 hours of their time to help MDEA in achieving its goals. We were able to get members to put their time and energy into valuable activities, but it was only a small fraction of our membership.

MDEA is an organization, not a small group of people.

As a result of our recent bargaining survey, the bargaining team is going to propose a return to district provided medical benefits. 71% of those surveyed want us to return to a medical plan the other district bargaining units enjoy. This is a higher percentage of people than wanted to put medical on the salary schedule in the first place back in 2000. This is not something that will easily be accomplished.

My goal for 2007 is to increase the participation of members in MDEA activities. In order to accomplish any of the MDEA's noble goals we need our members to see they are part of the organization and not just a customer. If any of our goals seem of value and of interest to you, and you want to become involved, give us a call at 676-4664 or talk to us when Tom, Mark or myself come out for a visit at your site.

MDEA is looking for members with some vision that want to help guide MDEA into areas that will make MDEA a more vibrant organization. We've lost many potential leaders to other districts and to the ranks of administrators over the last 5 years. I know we have members who can contribute to making MDEA a stronger and more effective organization. We need these members to step up and share their abilities. The leadership for tomorrow needs to be developing today. In order to regain our medical benefits we need to make MDEA a more member-participatory organization. Let's make 2007 the year we are able to make headway on our most challenging issue and set the groundwork for a better Mt. Diablo Unified School District.

MDEA is a collective of members that it depends on to accomplish its goals.

Mike Noce, President
Mt. Diablo Education Association

Congratulations!

Rich Howard, Sequoia Middle School teacher,
was named Pleasant Hill Educator of the Year!



FROM YOUR VICE PRESIDENT ...

Tom Blanks

United We Bargain, Divided We Beg
(Unionism is a participatory process)

Welcome to a new calendar year and the continuation of the current school year. **Thank you for the privilege, honor and responsibility of representing you**, your students and our District. I am still learning the expectations of my position as MDEA Vice President, and that is a good thing. Mike, Mark and experience are great teachers. I hope that you are all engaged in an equally positive learning environment at your site, as well.

When it comes to representing you, we have three primary tools: experience, good will (rapport), and the contract. The first informs what has worked in previous situations and what may be utilized and/or modified to work better in a similar one. Rapport enhances the good times and assists survival through the difficult moments. The contract is the “rulebook” on which the parties have agreed that issues shall be resolved. As advocates, we use all of these important tools, but the contract is the one which outlives the individual and is subject to recourse.

Eighteen months ago we agreed to a successor contract, thereby removing the tension of having worked without a contract for much of the previous 18 months. We are about to begin bargaining **a successor contract that will govern conditions in our District for the next three years. Our Bargaining Team worked before and during the vacation to bring our Initial Proposals** to the Representative Assembly on Jan.8, 2007. In turn, the Reps will bring this draft initial proposal back **to you for feedback**. Please provide input to your reps this month for them to share at the February R.A.. At that time we will vote to modify, approve, increase and/or delete proposals as you direct your Site Reps. We will need everyone’s help this year to achieve our bargaining goals.

Sadly, at present, about one-third of the schools in our bargaining unit do not have their full complement of reps, which means that the most important link in our governance structure, the site rep, is not fully representing your school site’s interests. **What can you do about this?** Find out if your site is fully represented and, if not, step up to represent the interests of your self, your students, your family and your community. If you are part of the lucky two-thirds who are represented, be glad and find out how else you might assist these people who are working hard on your behalf.

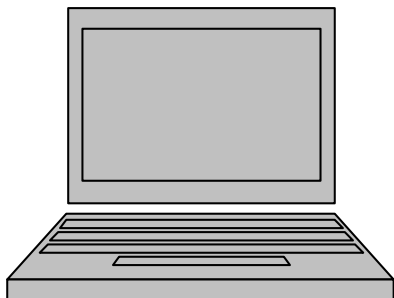
Many of us came from families and classrooms where a part of the ethic was “many hands make the labor lighter.” This maxim applies to union work as well. I realize that after a strenuous day of teaching, paper work, communication with other stakeholders, and family commitments it feels like more work on top of two full-time jobs. (That’s because it may be.) There is a motto oft quoted in organizations “When something important needs doing, look for one of the busier people and ask that one.” (They are already involved.)

Speaking of things that need doing, I encourage each of you to commit to seven in '07. (That is, contribute seven hours this year to make a difference in your District, your Union, and your Life.) It is 2007 and you can make as much of a difference as that last Who in Whoville whose voice joined the other residents to save the community from a very unpleasant consequence. Remember the difference that Margaret Mead spoke of in her quote, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Now multiply that by yourself and our other 1900+ members combined. You start to get the idea that **you hold the key to making a large difference.**

The School District and the School Board must **make choices based upon priorities.** The Superintendent/ School Board are contemplating a new computer/student information system at a projected cost of up to \$10 million. (You have seen in his own Monthly Digest Jan. 2007 page 2 the Superintendent is quoted for four lines saying that "quality personnel [not teachers?] is crucial to our success in serving students well." But by page 3 it is the Student Info System that gets an entire column with suggestions for funding and no mention of how else those monies could have been spent to better deliver quality instruction to our students.) The School Board will be considering this Student Info System at an upcoming Board meeting in January. Three of the Trustees said during their campaigns that salary and compensation had to be addressed in order for our District to be competitive in attracting and retaining high quality teachers. Will they include any discussion of the opportunity cost of this student information system? (That is, for what else could those monies be used?) Could this be **a discussion that you would want to join in with colleagues, Board members, parents, and the press?** \$10 million might go quite a distance toward making good on those campaign statements about providing teachers medical benefits. (I can recall no statement made by any Board candidate to the effect, "Elect me and I will make sure we have the kind of state-of-the-art student information system that will attract and retain the high quality teachers our students and community deserve.) In fact, their first order of business after the election was to extend the Superintendent's contract through 2010. I am reminded of a bargaining refrain we used in 2005, "**Actions speak louder!**"

Step up, Speak out, Move forward...Let your actions speak.

Please, let this be a year to **contribute your thoughts, words and deeds on behalf of your self, your students, your family, your community, and your Union.**



Shauna Hawes, Hidden Valley teacher, has been named the East Bay CUE (Computer-Using Educators) Teacher of the Year. This award recognizes her outstanding leadership in advancing the application of Technology .

Congratulations, Shauna!

MDUSD (The Wal-Mart of Bay Area School Districts)

By Mark York, Executive Director

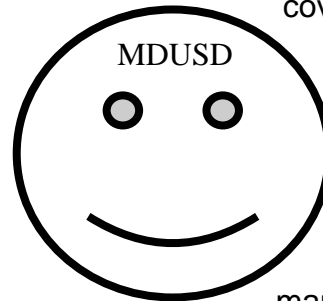
Expect more, pay less! This is the message proudly displayed on the trucking fleet of Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., but it would also be an apt motto for the Mt. Diablo Unified School District.

The similarities in management philosophies between Wal-Mart and MDUSD are striking. Both “companies” offer their employees substandard compensation, (Mt. Diablo’s teachers are the lowest paid in all 23 unified school districts in both Alameda and Contra Costa Counties.) Management personnel at Wal-Mart enjoy fully paid health benefits while their workers are denied even basic health coverage (same as MDUSD) Top managers at Wal-Mart are paid high salaries while their employees barely scrape by, (MDUSD Superintendent McHenry’s compensation was over 25% higher than the average salary paid to Bay Area unified school district superintendents during our last bargaining cycle.) And both MDUSD and Wal-Mart experience high employee turnover due to the poor working conditions under which their employees suffer (MDUSD is currently turning over nearly 20% of its teaching workforce each year.)

The similarities don’t end there. Wal-Mart and MDUSD both have Boards that support the concept of quality “product” and service at discount prices (Mt. Diablo’s Board is all about closing achievement gaps and providing quality education, but they are preparing to allocate \$10 million for the Superintendent’s new

student information system instead of committing to providing teachers health benefits and attracting and retaining a quality workforce.)

Interestingly, Wal-Mart has begun to experience a decline in profitability of late, after years of increasing market share. Industry analysts in a recent article attributed this decline to Wal-Mart’s negative public image surrounding their employees’ substandard compensation and upper management instructing store employees on how to apply for public assistance, rather than providing them with basic health



coverage. (Mt. Diablo’s image as an employer continues to decline as interns from a local teacher college ask to be placed somewhere else, and many teachers who are invested in MDUSD are forced to work two or more jobs to make ends meet.) Some of our teachers earn near the Bay Area poverty level for a family of four, when the impact of out-of-pocket health premiums is considered.

Just like Wal-Mart, MDUSD’s success in the “marketplace” has been built on the backs of its employees. Both “companies” continue to expect more of their employees while paying less, and simply replace employees with new recruits when they have been used up.

Additionally, MDUSD's teachers not only suffer throughout their careers by virtue of their "Wal-Mart" compensation, they also suffer in retirement, since monthly retirement income is calculated on highest earnings during working years.

If all this sounds depressing, it's because it is. The work you perform as a teacher in MDUSD should be compensated at least at the average provided teachers in surrounding districts. Teachers here face some of the most significant challenges in the Bay Area, by virtue of the communities we serve and the rapidly changing demographics within our client base. You should not accept being a second class citizen in the Bay Area teaching workforce simply because you chose to try to make a difference for students and communities within MDUSD's attendance area.

Our upcoming Master Contract negotiation is your chance to demand equity for the work you perform as a MDUSD teacher. Make a commitment to change your own circumstances and get out from under MDUSD's "company store" management model by participating in organizing activities to support bargaining. Your Bargaining Team has put together an initial contract proposal that reflects the deficits in compensation and working conditions you identified in the survey, but we are only five individuals. Without membership's support, we will be able to accomplish very little on your behalf.

Alternatively, if you just don't have the time to get involved in supporting negotiations, or need to take on another part-time job to help pay for your medical benefits, don't despair, I heard there are some openings for greeters at Wal-Mart....

CalSTRS 101

It's never too early or too late to plan for your retirement.

CalSTRS offers several types of workshops to meet the growing need CTA members have for information regarding CalSTRS benefits as well as retirement planning. Each workshop is designed around the needs of educators at different career stages.

1. Demystifying CalSTRS – Recommended for early career educators with one to five years of service credit
2. CalSTRS Fundamentals – Recommended for mid-career educators with ten to twenty years of service credit
3. CalSTRS Retirement Checkup – Recommended for late-career educators who have five years or less before retirement
4. CalSTRS Retirement Income Management Workshop – Recommended for CalSTRS members age 45 and older, and retired educators that are interested in developing a post-retirement plan

As you review the list, choose the one that best fits the stage you are in now. A complete list of workshops can be viewed by visiting

<http://www.peopleware.net/index.cfm?siteId=195&eventDisp=EPD%2006%2F07>.

Register online by visiting

<http://www.calstrs.com/Counseling%20and%20Workshops/LGBO.aspx>

or call your local county office of education by visiting

<http://www.calstrs.com/Counseling%20and%20Workshops/rcs.aspx#face>.