

AKRON EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

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School Funding: Don't expect much out of Columbus between now and the end of the year. The lame duck legislature probably won't be accomplishing anything of significance between now and then. Once new legislators are seated in January, they will begin work immediately on a new biennial budget, which must be passed by the end of July. "Fixing" school funding remains at the top of the Governor's priority list. Whether he attempts to accomplish a fix through the budgeting process or by way of a ballot initiative remains to be seen.

Democrats Take Over House, Republicans Keep Senate: Governor Strickland pinned hopes of addressing school funding on a take-over of the House by Democrats. That happened on November 4. Republicans still control the Senate, which ensures opposition. But, the split now makes compromise much more possible than during the Governor's first two years in office, when Republicans controlled the House and Senate.

Contract Expires in June: Our contract with the Board expires at the end of June. We are scheduled to begin negotiations on a new Agreement this spring. Much of what takes place relative to the items above will have a direct impact on bargaining.

Elementary Class Sizes: A comparison of class sizes going back ten years shows an interesting trend. While we are better off now than in 1997-98, we are a far cry from the statistics from 2002-03, in the midst of the state's class reduction funding initiative. The table below provides a clear picture of where we've been over the last ten years.

| Year | Number of Elementary Students* | Average Class Size |
|-------|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| 98-99 | 15,400 | 20.78 |
| 02-03 | 13,178 | 16.94 |
| 08-09 | 10,883 | 20.38 |

*Figures for 98-99 include sixth grade sections.

Since 2002-03 (all sixth grades out of elementary schools), enrollment in grades K-5 has dropped from 13,178 to 10,883 (17.4%). The number of classroom teachers has dipped from 778 to 534 (31.4%). Class sizes in 2002-03, grades k-5, averaged 16.47, compared to 20.38 today.

Health Care Advisory Committee: Union representatives are considering the possibility of managing health care coverage in the future through this committee and separately from negotiations. This is a growing trend in public sector labor relations, and a strategy we used last year to modify the health benefits package.

Treasurer to Report on District Finances: Treasurer Jack Pierson will meet with all union presidents on November 20 to present the district's financial outlook. As has become the rule, the district projects huge deficits in its Five-Year Plan, a report that is required of every district in the state. One of the culprits that feeds the cycle of facing deficits within a few years of passing a levy is HB 920, which was passed in 1976 and which "freezes" the amount of money a levy can generate at the amount it generates when passed. In other words, there is no allowance for inflationary adjustments to what a voted millage can raise in the years following passage of the levy. Schools are the only governmental entity that lives with this funding hamstring. Income and sales taxes generate additional revenue as wages rise and the cost of sales goods increases.

Strides Campaign Hugely Successful: At last count, we had surpassed our previous high in raising funds for breast cancer research. We have exceeded \$30,000 and hope and expect to reach \$40,000 by the time a final total is reported to us by the Cancer Society.

AEA Children's Christmas Party: The party is scheduled on December 13 at North High School from 10:00 a.m. until Noon. All members are invited to attend with their children/grandchildren to pay a visit to the Jolly One himself. Coffee, tea, punch and donuts will be served.

So Far, So Good: We haven't had any supervisors going off the deep end since we reached agreement with the administration on a local Employee Code of Conduct (not to be confused with the licensure code). Knock wood.

State Department Mulls Operating Standards: The Ohio Department of Education has convened a task force to study state operating standards for special education. Of particular importance to teachers, especially intervention specialists, is what the committee may recommend with respect to maximum class loads. Thus far, the committee has surveyed individuals state-wide, and continues its work in Columbus. We have the survey results and will provide an electronic copy to any member who requests one. Email us at billaea@akronteach.org for a copy, or just look for the survey online at www.akronteach.org.