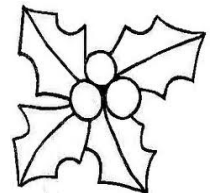
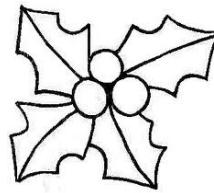


Random Notes

December 13, 2010

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Visit our Website at www.akronteach.org



The Staff, Officers and Board of Trustees of the Akron Education Association wish each of you and your family a wonderful winter holiday recess.

State Approves Akron's RttT Work Plan; Now the Hard Work Begins

The Ohio Department of Education has approved Akron's Race to the Top (RttT) work plan, praising it as one of the best among plans submitted by districts across the state. Officially known as the "Scope of Work," the plan is a roadmap the district will follow the rest of this year and for the next three years that includes initiatives designed to improve instruction, student performance and teacher and principal performance. Akron will receive in excess of \$9 million over the life of the RttT grant.

Many of the reform issues districts were required to adopt in order to be eligible for the federal grant are the same as those embodied in the ESEA Reauthorization and Ohio's education reform bill, better known as House Bill 1. For example, reforms such as developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments, improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance and providing effective support to teachers and principals are initiatives found in all three.

Since many of the RttT strategies impact directly on our contract, we plan to write a number of MOU's before the end of the year to accommodate piloting those issues. The present contract language will not change, and the MOU's will expire at the end of the grant period, or upon either side withdrawing from RttT. At that time, either the Board or the Association is free to memorialize any of the MOU's through normal negotiations.

In January, we will begin a campaign to increase members' awareness of RttT, particularly in "Assurance Area D." That portion of the Scope of Work affects our contract and members far more directly than any other area. Also in January, we will begin to offer opportunities for members to get involved in the RttT program by serving on one of the many labor-management committees that will be required to design our program.

Members Needed for Service on PLC, Sick Day Abuse Committees

The contract we signed last fall included the creation of two labor-management committees. The first is responsible for creating a plan to implement PLC's in all buildings within the next four years. The second, the Chronic Sick Day Abuse Review Committee, will be a permanent group charged with reviewing cases of alleged abuse of sick day usage and, if it is determined that abuse is occurring, writing a plan to improve the problem.

Members interested in serving on either committee can download an interest form from our website or contact AEA President Jeff Moats by email (jeff.akronteach.org) or phone (330.434.2181). Although not required, we are particularly interested in members who may have prior experience or background in the work of the committee they're interested in joining.

Akron Principal Captures Solution to Education's Woes

Since the inception of public education in this great country of ours, the system has always been flawed in one way or another and, over the years, countless gurus have weighed in with their thoughts on how to fix it. Myriad panaceas have been offered and tried. The end result has always been the same...the antidote fails, so we move on to hitch our wagon to the next and newest cure-all.

It now appears that we are on the brink of freeing ourselves from this ages-old redundancy thanks to a 21st century Akron principal who has discovered the puzzle's solution, and all along it has been, literally and embarrassingly, right under our noses. Halitosis: Noticeably unpleasant odors exhaled in breathing; bad breath.

The theory was first published in an email to the school's faculty and others. The principal disclosed having spoken "with several of you" in private "who were unaware of a problem with your breath." The correspondence suggested to all, afflicted or not, that a small bottle of mouthwash, or perhaps breath mints, be kept at the ready should the need arise. The theory helps explain the existence of achievement gaps, low attendance and graduation rates and generally miserable performance by too many students on various assessments: "It must be very difficult," the principal wrote, "for our students to approach us for academic or arts help when they don't want to get near us."

The principal offered no statistical correlation between the percentage of proficient students in a given building and the number of their teachers having rotten breath. That's O.K. by us; we've seen too many cases of alleged positive correlations that proved retrospectively to be more the result of creative manipulation than a reflection of reality. We've got sufficient Race to the Top Funds to keep everyone supplied with mints and mouthwash well into the 22nd century. In consideration of the bleak school funding forecast for the immediate future, any fix as cheap as that is worth a try ☺

“Instructional Rounds” Generate Support, Resistance Among Membership

As the use of Instructional Rounds becomes more widespread across the district, teacher reaction to the practice has ranged from enthusiastic support to cynical distrust. In a nutshell, instructional rounds involves a team of educators visiting a classroom, scripting what takes place during the visit, then meeting to compare notes on what was observed as it relates to the school’s problem of practice. The process is intended to be strictly non-judgmental and anonymous; in fact, the names of teachers visited by the team are never recorded and individual teachers are not singled out for praise or criticism.

We are satisfied at this time that the practice does not conflict with the observation and evaluation portions of our contract. While the opportunity for conflict clearly exists, thus far we’ve had only one instance in which a teacher was singled out and spoken to by a principal about what was scripted in his/her classroom by the rounds team. We’ve been assured by the administration that they will reinforce regularly with teams and principals that instructional rounds are not to be used in any fashion that might even remotely appear to be evaluative.

Plans are for every building in the district to be involved in instructional rounds over the next four years. It is not certain whether the practice will continue after the completion of one cycle. To date, participation in instructional rounds, either as a team member or a teacher visited by the team, has been voluntary.

Fitness 19 Offers Member Discounts

AEA members can now join the two area Fitness 19 Clubs (West Akron/Fairlawn and Stow) at discounted rates. After an enrollment fee of just \$49, members pay only \$10 a month to take advantage of the numerous cardio machines, weight machines and free weights. Memberships are good at both clubs. For an additional fee, members can take advantage of babysitting and/or personal training services. Visit our website to download an enrollment form.

U of A Offers Sped Cohort

Akron University is offering a 33-hour masters cohort in special education with a focus on Pervasive Development/Autism for practicing special education teachers. For information about the program, contact Barbara Jenkins at (330)-972-2777 or outreachgal@uakron.edu. Additional information is available on the AEA website.

See more party pics on the website!

Kids Chat with Santa, and then Some

Over 150 members' children and grandchildren gave Santa a last minute reminder of critical needs come December 25th during AEA's annual Children's Christmas Party last Saturday at North High School. After lobbying the Jolly Old Elf, the kids enjoyed craft activities led by a corps of outstanding Ellet High School students, a magic show, balloon sculpturing, doughnuts and punch. Below are a few sights from the day's festivities.



That look on A.J. Stidd's face means he's sure Santa got his message. A.J. is the son of Amanda (Innes).



Adam Brown puts the finishing touches on a designer ornament. Adam is the son of Christy Becknell-Brown.



Caleb and Brady Fillmore take a doughnut break with mom, Jen (Bettes).



Cecilia O'Neil (Larry, Early College) shows off a hand tattoo (temporary, of course), compliments of Jessica Crofford, niece of party chair Jean Crofford (Betty Jane).