

Random Notes

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William E. Siegfirth, President
billaea@akronteach.org

Michael Rusnak, Vice President
mike@akronteach.org

Visit our Website at www.akronteach.org

Discussions to Continue on Exam Schedule

Residents and business owners complained about kids being on the streets in the middle of the day...Neighbors raised questions about half-empty employee parking lots...A few principals ignored directions from senior staff not to release teachers early on exam days. An occasional non-teaching employee thought it unfair that teachers could leave, but they had to stay. All of these circumstances, according to the administration, led to the district's decision to change the high school semester exam schedule. The change has raised the hackles of many teachers and not just because the practice of early release is history. It's a classic case of the actions of a few ruining a privilege enjoyed by many.

Within days of publication of the new schedule, we began receiving daily complaints that there was not adequate time to grade the exams before final grades were to be posted. The administration agreed to our request to talk about the problem. We solicited the help of three classroom teachers to articulate the concerns. One outgrowth of that meeting

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What Next?

As if IPDP's, licensure, staying highly qualified and attending enough high quality staff development activities didn't give teachers enough to worry about, the state has now passed Senate Bill 2, better known as the master teacher legislation. (This legislation is not to be confused with "a teacher who holds a Masters degree!" In Ohio, those who hold such a degree are not really "master teachers.")

In a nutshell, teachers wishing to earn the designation must meet eligibility standards to apply. Then, a local

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Farewell, Dr. Small

Sylvester Small is calling it quits after 38 years as an educator, including the last six years as Akron superintendent.

No one can question Small's commitment to the students of the Akron Public Schools. He worked tirelessly at the local and state level as a champion of urban education. Small's strength is curriculum; regardless of how often Columbus changed the standards by which success was measured, Small adapted. Under his leadership, Akron was among the highest performing of Ohio's urban districts.

Small's door was always open to AEA. The number of serious disagreements between us was few. To his credit, Small supported interest-based bargaining and the use of a permanent mediator in negotiations, a practice which began in the mid-90's by AEA and Small's predecessor, Brian Williams. On more than one occasion, Small went to the mat with a board member or two to defend the process and keep private attorneys out of the talks. In doing so, he preserved the relatively peaceful and highly successful record that has characterized negotiations since the process began.

While Small has finished his work in Akron, we doubt he will sever his work in education completely. Whatever he pursues during his retirement years, we wish him success and good health.

Exam Schedule

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was to extend the deadline for submitting grades until after the winter break. A second was an agreement by the administration to convene a committee of teachers to assess the second semester schedule and to consider alternatives to it. The committee selected an alternative that provided for earlier testing in May, allowing time for teachers to grade exams well before final grades were due in June. The committee's final recommendation was adjusted slightly to accommodate issues with food service, transportation and trans-opt students. The committee's work was a good faith effort to address the teacher complaints raised prior to the first semester exams. Unfortunately, the alternative schedule gave rise to new—and legitimate—concerns such as what to do with students during the final two weeks following exam week and what to do about an expected high number of flicks.

The district is within its rights to schedule exams at a time it deems appropriate. It is not likely there will ever be a return to the "old" exam schedule that is the overwhelming favorite among teachers. That notwithstanding, the dialogue which began in the spring between teachers and the administration will continue in hopes of finding a more teacher and student-friendly way to schedule exams. As evidenced by the suggestions we've received from many members, there are ways to reach that goal.

Master Teacher

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committee, the majority of whom must be teachers, will rate each applicant using a set of criteria developed by the Educator Standards Board. The committee will use a state-supplied rubric to evaluate each applicant. The applicant must achieve "exemplary scores" in at least four of the five criteria.

Sounds harmless enough at first blush. However, the number of master teachers in each district and in each school will be made a matter of record by way of publication (by number only, not name) on the district's and building's local report card. There will no doubt be pressure from some building-level managers for every teacher in the building who is eligible to apply. There will certainly be those who try to attribute a building's success (or failure) to the number, or lack thereof, of master teachers in the building. This strategy will only

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be used in a relatively successful building with a relatively high number of master teachers. Otherwise, some other nugget of illogic will apply.

Members interested in learning more about this program may visit the ODE website. Members interested in the concept of highly qualified or master legislators should write their state senator or representative.

Ohio Health Care Board Identifies Four "Best Practices"

The School Employees Health Care Board (SEHCB) has identified four "best practices" it expects every local health care plan to include. They are: an employee wellness plan; a disease state management program (education and support activities designed to increase awareness and understanding of a prescribed list of diseases); access to specialty networks for certain complex medical conditions; periodic dependent eligibility audits. The best practices must be incorporated into health care plans that are issued or renewed after the expiration of a current collective bargaining agreement.

In Akron, our plan must include these components in the next negotiated agreement. The current agreement expires in June of 2009.

The district's Health Benefits Advisory Committee endorsed a dependent eligibility audit even before SEHCB included such audits as a best practice. Frequently, audits uncover several cases of individuals receiving benefits who are not eligible to receive them. Audits usually generate considerable savings for the health care plan.

Details of each best practice mandated by SEHCB will be published during the 2008-09 school year. It is not expected that incorporating the practices in the next agreement will be a source of controversy.

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RELAXING SUMMER
RECESS. AEA IS OPEN
THROUGHOUT THE
RECESS.**