

Random Notes

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Ratification Buys Two Years of Peace; Course of Future Negotiations Clouded

The contract ratified earlier this month by AEA and the Board of Education covers this and next school year. That means that as soon as fourteen months from now, negotiations will begin again. As has been the case in every negotiations since 1996, a settlement was reached without the need for outside intervention in the form of an impasse panel or fact finder. It's true that we were scheduled to go to fact-finding—an initial hearing was scheduled just two weeks from the date of the tentative agreement—but a flurry of bottom-of-the-ninth meetings yielded a settlement.

Members who joined Akron during the mid-nineties and later have never experienced the anxiety that typically surrounded negotiations during the seventies, eighties and early nineties, when threats of work stoppages and settlements the day before school began were the rule, not the exception. Like many others, a group of local business leaders, collectively known as Akron Tomorrow, grew tired of the uncertainty and acrimony that accompanied every round of talks during those years and, in 1996, offered to help change the pattern. They volunteered to underwrite the cost of a mediator to attend every single negotiating session as a facilitator to keep negotiations moving forward, and saber-rattling to a minimum. That year, negotiations began on March 1 and were settled in record time—teachers and the Board ratified a new agreement in mid-May, well before summer recess began and six weeks before the existing contract expired. The entire community was numb; in fact, an editorial that appeared in the **Beacon Journal** on Sunday, May 5, 1996, entitled "*Early Delivery*" stated, "Something remarkable has happened in Akron, and it shouldn't pass without acknowledgement." The editorial contrasted the animosity surrounding prior rounds of negotiations with the "smoothness with which the negotiations were conducted, even when the teams couldn't agree on some issues..." The column further noted how both sides "...have nothing but praise for the

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District Transformation Team Submits Race to the Top Plan

Members of the APS Race to the Top Transformation Team met three times during the month of October to finalize the district's plan and budget for meeting the state and federal guidelines required to receive funding. The documents were submitted to the state by the October 22nd deadline. The State Department of Education will review Akron's submission and either approve it or return it to the district for further work.

The district's plan, known as the Scope of Work, outlines the reform measures the district will undertake over the course of the funding period. Akron's share of the Ohio grant is in excess of \$9 million over the four-year period. The district could stand to receive more than that amount if other districts in Ohio who applied last summer decide not to participate, or fail to submit a Scope of Work to the state.

Members of the Transformation Team, whose membership is divided equally between teachers and administrators, include: **Angela Vassalotti** (Schumacher), **Carla Sibley** (Adm.), **Melissa Powers** (Buchtel), **Jeff Moats** (AEA President), **Ellen McWilliams** (Adm.), **Kathy McVey** (Adm.), **Keith Lieghty** (Ott), **Charles Jones** (Adm.), Bill Siegferth (AEA

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Future Negotiations Clouded

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skills of the facilitator..." The editorial concluded, "Akron should heartily applaud the maturity that has been so evident in the approach of Rob Stein (the mediator)...whose behind-the-scenes contributions have defined a standard of labor negotiations that will serve the schools and city well."

How prophetic the editorial turned out to be. For the next 10+ years covering five contract negotiations, the parties reached settlements under Stein's guidance in a timely and amicable fashion. In fact, both sides were so impressed with Stein's expertise that he was appointed permanent mediator in grievance disputes. His record in that capacity speaks for itself—not once since 1996 has a grievance been formally arbitrated, due entirely to Stein's skill in mediating disputes before they reach arbitration.

Unfortunately, in recent years there has been an undercurrent of disenchantment with Stein from the management side; an implicit murmuring that he is "too friendly toward the union." *It would be unfair to pin the subtle dissatisfaction solely on the James administration or the current board.* The sentiment pre-dates both. But James and the Board get all the credit for advancing the subtle to the obvious by throwing Stein out of the process after we declared impasse last June. If the idiomatic expression "familiarity breeds contempt" is at play in management's thinking, their version of familiarity is distorted. From our standpoint, the more familiar we became with Stein, the more we considered him a consummate neutral, notwithstanding a number of grievance mediation cases he decided less in our favor than we preferred.

There certainly is no rational argument the administration can advance or evidence they can point to that Stein was or is too "union friendly," and the current Board doesn't have sufficient experience with him to justify the opinion. The decision to show him the door in June isn't quite as officious as the Mayor's demand that the state inspector general investigate the arbitrator in the city's spat with the police. Both smack of a spoiled child taking his ball and going home because things weren't going his way.

The administration has been non-committal about the future use of Rob Stein as a negotiations facilitator or grievance mediator. In the wake of the events of this past summer, we're not betting the farm he'll be back, or for that matter, that he'll want to come back. The loss of his services and skills won't do anything to enhance labor-management relations going forward. If the district chooses to shun, as the **Beacon Journal** described, "the maturity that (is) so evident in the approach of Rob Stein," then the likelihood that the negotiations landscape will become much bumpier is a certainty.

That is something remarkable that shouldn't pass without acknowledgment by the membership.

Transformation

Liaison), **Susanne Grywalski** (Firestone), **Charlie Glasgow** (Adm.), **Karen Gegick** (Adm.), **Janell Brown** (Crouse) and **Tammy Brady** (Adm.).

Akron joins six other urban districts (Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, Dayton and Toledo) and over 500 districts statewide as participants in the RttT program. Year one will be devoted primarily to planning how to implement reforms. We will keep members informed on a regular basis as planning progresses, and of opportunities to join various sub-committees of the Transformation team as they are created to assist in planning RttT implementation.

Education-friendly Candidates Win AEA Endorsement

We won't risk upsetting anyone at the FCC by describing our views on the political landscape in Ohio and, for that matter, in the nation. There are huge issues to be addressed in both arenas that will directly impact public schools in general and teachers in particular. We've done our best to set aside the rhetoric on both sides and identify candidates who will be supportive of public education when casting votes. Here are those candidates:

41st District Ohio House

X **Brian Williams**

42nd District Ohio House

X **Mike Moran**

43rd District Ohio House

X **Steven Dyer**

Ohio Senate District 27

X **Frank Comunale**

Strides Campaign Another Huge Success

Although donations are still being counted, from all indications, the AEA 2010 Making Strides Against Breast Cancer campaign has been another smashing success. Several schools reported exceeding last year's effort and a record number of members, spouses, friends and children participated in the October 16 Walk at Akron's Lock 3. A sincere thanks to all who walked and/or contributed to the effort. As is the case every year, the campaign is only as successful as our group of dedicated, hard working team captains:

AEA, Mikelann Adams♥ Administration Building, Mary DeShane and Kathy McVey♥ Arnold, Anne Griffith♥ Barber, Heather Nehlson and Carol Caughron♥ Barrett, Kelly Goodpasture♥ Bettes, Kathy Rodgers♥ Betty Jane, Jeanne Crofford and Laura Jatich♥ Bridges, Maria Meeker♥ Case, Sandi Wells♥ Crouse, Patty McCluskey♥ Essex, Lisa Feist♥ Findley, Kathleen Shippy♥ Firestone Park, Ann Gruska♥ Forest Hill, Marianne Pramuka♥ Glover, Cindy Rochford♥ Harris, Sharon Fraunfelker♥ Hatton, RaDonna Mair♥ Hill, Barb Vitale♥ King, Patty Gonzalez♥ Lawndale, Chris Mathews♥ Leggett, Lisa O'Rourke♥ Mason, Judy Lalli♥ McEbright, Sue Shreve♥ Pfeiffer, Ranay Hatherill♥ Portage Path, Kathy Robbins♥ Rankin, Stephanie Baugh♥ Resnick, Tami Semelsberger♥ Rimer, Sherry Fogarty♥ Ritzman, Lorri Schur♥ Robinson, Cleo Clifford♥ Sam Salem, Dan Bartel♥ Schumacher, Kim Joseph♥ Voris, Joan Smart♥ Windemere, Julia Sues and Dee Williams♥ Buchtel, Marjorie Clements♥ East, Reggie Warner♥ Ellet, Tracy Ebner♥ Firestone, Chris Pashke♥ Garfield, Amanda Seiler♥ Kenmore, Carmel Oberdorfer♥ North, Rich Cola and Nicole Delahanty♥ Goodyear, Alisa Gross-Dann♥ Hyre, Deb Firtha♥ Innes, Melissa Hileman♥ Jennings, Steve Culp♥ Kent, Tami Porter♥ Litchfield, Nancy Camburn♥ Miller-South, Donna Kopcsik♥ Perkins, Stacy Nedolast♥ Alternative, Laura DiLoreti and Becky Mise♥ Practical Nurses, Barb Dawson♥ Child Study, Stacy Ambrose♥ Early College, Darlene Hensley♥ Ott, Jim Perge♥ Akron Opportunity Center, Mary Carter-Berry.

Many thanks to all for your time and generosity!

Again this year, AEA sponsored a prize raffle the day of the Walk. All prizes were donated, so the proceeds from raffle ticket sales—\$921—went entirely to the strides campaign



Anne Griffith presents a Strides gift basket to raffle winner Barb Oldham, counselor at Schumacher. Anne's school, Helen Arnold, donated the basket for the raffle.



Kaylah Green, a student at Firestone High School, kicked off the Walk with a beautiful rendition of the Star Spangled Banner.



Perennial All-Star captains Dee Williams (Windemere) and Jean Crofford (Betty Jane) flash winning smiles after completing the Walk.

STRS Revises Pension Reform Plan

STRS has modified its proposed pension reform plan. In September of 2009, the STRS Board voted on a series of changes to the pension plan. The changes were to be legislated this calendar year. In the meantime, a group known as the Healthcare and Pension Advocates (HPA) for STRS, which represents a coalition of member, employer and retiree groups under STRS, met for several months with STRS officials and ultimately proposed modifications to the Board's original plan. At its October, 2010 meeting, the Board incorporated the changes suggested by HPA as listed below in the reform package.

Increase the COLA for members retiring after 7/1/2011 from 1.5% to 2%. However, members who fall in this group will have to wait until 36 months pass between the date of their retirement and the first COLA payment.

Abandon the five year Final Average Salary calculation (scheduled to become effective August 1, 2015) in favor of requesting statutory authority to set a three-, four- or five year FAS. This permits STRS to make a better informed decision about how to calculate FAS since the Board will not have to make a decision until closer to the date of implementation.

Phase in the transition period for qualifying for a retirement benefit at 35 years of service from 30 years of service under the following timetable: 30 years of service until 8/1/2015; 31 years of service 8/1/2015 through 7/31/2017; 32 years of service 8/1/2017 through 7/31/2019; 33 years of service 8/1/2019 through 7/31/2021; 34 years of service 8/1/2021 through 7/31/2023 and 35 years of service from 8/1/2023 and beyond.

Members who are nearing retirement are strongly urged to contact STRS or attend a regional retirement conference for a personalized assessment of the impact of these changes on their retirement benefit. Legislation to enact the reform package is not expected until after the November election.

U of A Masters Cohort to Meet at AEA

Akron University will hold an informational meeting, hosted by AEA, on November 3rd at 4:00 p.m. The AEA office is located at 681 N. Main Street. This program allows members to earn a Master's Degree in one of a number of areas (depending on interest) at a reduced rate. Akron will again offer the popular "take 6 pay for 5" scholarships for enrollees. Classes will meet at off-site locations. Members interested in the program should contact Barbara Jenkins at (330) 972-2777 or email Barb at bmj@uakron.edu.

Worth Note-ing

Mark your calendars and notepads for these upcoming events and opportunities:

- Annual AEA Retirement Dinner, November 8 at Guy's Party Centre. Cost per person is \$25. Cocktails at 6:00 p.m., dinner at 7:00 p.m. RSVP to madams@akronteach.org.
- Cleveland's Playhouse Square is offering discounts for AEA members to selected performances. Visit www.playhousesquare.org/ceo to book tickets on line. Also, see the flyer on our website for additional information.
- November 2nd is Election Day and a waiver day
- AEA Children's Christmas Party, December 11 at North High School. Watch for applications in your building.
- AEA Website Poll – Tell us what you think about the portrayal of public schools in *Waiting for Superman*.
- Board of Trustee Openings. Vacancies presently exist for the Ellet Secondary seat and the North Elementary and Secondary seats. Petitions are available from AEA, 330-434-2181.

Oops! Our Bad

We apologize for an inadvertent omission in the package distributed to members at the ratification meeting. One of the days under Justifiable Absence which we agreed to eliminate did not appear in the package. The Justifiable Absence day to attend an STRS conference (once per career) should have appeared in the list. We made a verbal note of this during our presentation to the Board of Trustees, but overlooked commenting on it during the ratification meeting.

We apologize for the error.