

Random Notes

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District Gears Up for Race to the Top

Akron is among the 327 Ohio public school districts (not counting charters) awarded funding by the State Department of Education through the federal Race to the Top (RttT) grants to states. Five of Ohio's eight largest urban districts join Akron as participants in the reform initiative. Akron's award totals more than \$9 million over the four-year life of the grant. A committee, known as the District Transformation Team, has spent a great deal of time this year planning strategies for the next three years. RttT has not evolved without controversy and misunderstanding. For that reason, this, and future issues of Random Notes, will include articles intended to address required RttT strategies and how they will impact the district and, in particular, classroom teachers.

OVERSIGHT

The responsibility for overseeing RttT reform initiatives rests with the District Transformation Team. Federal guidelines require that the teachers' union appoint at least half the team. Akron's Team includes: **Jeff Moats**, AEA President; **Ellen McWilliams**, Assistant Superintendent, C&I; **Bill Siegfert**, AEA RttT Liaison; **Kathy McVey**, Human Resources Executive Director; **Janell Brown**, teacher, Crouse CLC; **Karen Gegick**, Executive Director of Teaching & Learning; **Susanne Grywalski**, teacher, Firestone High School; **Charles Jones**, principal, Findley CLC, **Melissa Powers**, teacher, Buchtel High School; **Carla Sibley**, Director of Community Partnerships; **Angela Vassolotti**, teacher, Literacy Instructional Coach; **Tammy Brady**, Sped. Coordinator; **Keith Liechty**, Teacher, Instructional Technology Coach; and, **Peggy Greiner**, Coordinator, Supplemental Education.

"SCOPE OF WORK"

In order to qualify for RttT funds, districts were required to submit a "Scope of Work" to the state acknowledging the district's commitment to support Ohio's RttT plan, adhering to federal RttT requirements and outlining strategies for implementing reform and innovative programs. Ellen McWilliams was primarily responsible for the plan, assisted along the way by the Transformation Team.

The boilerplate for the Scope of Work includes four "Assurance Areas" into which all local efforts are organized. The four areas are Assurance Area B., Standards and Assessments, Assurance Area C., Using Data to Improve Instruction, Assurance Area D., Improving Teacher and Principal Effectiveness Based on Performance, and Assurance Area E., Turning Around the Lowest Achieving Schools. There are several sub-categories in each of the Assurance Areas.

The following is a summary of each Assurance Area. Future editions of the *Notes* will address each in greater detail.

B. Standards and Assessments.

Nearly \$1.5 million will be spent in this area between now and the end of the 2013-2014 school year. Akron will revise curricula wherever necessary so that it is completely aligned with the revised state academic standards. Teachers will be provided considerable

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Kasich Targets Teacher Health Care, Collective Bargaining, Pension Plan

It should come as a surprise to no one that Gov. John Kasich has embarked on an all-out attack against public employees, including teachers. In fact, if Kasich has his way, the destruction he will inflict on pension and health care plans and collective bargaining will make Hollywood's John Rambo look like a disciple of Mother Teresa.

While Kasich made no secret of his dislike for public employee collective bargaining during his gubernatorial campaign, he



State Senator Shannon Jones (R) is the sole sponsor of Senate Bill 5.

offered no formal plan of action until the introduction of Ohio Senate Bill 5. Carrying the water for Kasich is bill sponsor Senator Shannon Jones from Springboro in the southwestern-most part of Ohio.

Jones' total years of elected service include one term as state representative (2007-2009) and her current term as a state senator (2009-present).

Jones introduced the bill on February 1. An analysis of the bill was not available on the Ohio Senate website as of the date of this publication. However, a quick scan of the 339-page legislation reveals several proposals that would effectively gut the

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professional development over the next three years in the new academic content standards and in formative and summative assessments adopted by the district and/or state.

C. Using Data to Improve Instruction.

Akron will spend just over \$1 million of its RttT funding in this area. Its centerpiece is the requirement that every district implement an “Instructional Improvement System (IIS)” which the feds define as “technology based tools and other strategies that provide teachers and others with meaningful support and actionable data to systemically manage continuous improvement.” In plain English this means being able to get on a computer and quickly access a myriad of student test scores to determine (1) what to teach and (2) if the student is learning what you’ve taught. Districts have the option of using their own IIS as long as it is functioning, or using ODE’s model IIS.

D. Great Teachers and Leaders.

If by no other measure, the budget set-aside for Assurance Area D. (\$5.6 million) underscores how critical it is in the overall RttT strategy. This Area will test the relationship between labor and management and teachers and principals more than all of the other Assurance Areas combined.

Assurance Area D. includes four sub-categories: Evaluation Systems; Equitable Distribution of Effective Teachers; Measuring Student Growth and Effective Support for Teachers and Principals. Many of the initiatives in this area will conflict with rules in our Collective Bargaining Agreement and will require side agreements, or Memoranda of Understanding, in order to implement them.

E. Turning Around the Lowest Achieving Schools.

Ohio has identified schools whose performance falls within the lowest 5% statewide. These schools are required to adopt a state approved intervention model. The Akron Opportunity Center was identified among the list. The faculty there has already begun work toward implementing STEM programming at the school. They applied for a state School Improvement Grant to assist in accomplishing the transition.

The District Transformation Team has nearly completed assembling committees to work in each of the RttT Assurance Areas. We expect the committees to duplicate the high level of collaboration that has characterized the Transformation Team’s work thus far, maintaining the RttT spirit of improving instruction and increasing student achievement without threat and finding fault.

The next issue of the *Notes* will examine more closely Assurance Area D., Great Teachers and Leaders.

Kasich Targets Teachers

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Collective Bargaining Bill passed in 1983 and several other pieces of school-related legislation that pre-dated the Bill. For example, step and longevity increases would be deleted from teacher pay scales, employers would not be permitted to pay for more than 80% of employees’ health care coverage and health care coverage would no longer be a mandatory subject of bargaining. Seniority rules governing teacher layoffs would be scrapped and such decisions would be left to the discretion of school administrators.

We will pass along a more thorough analysis of Senate Bill 5 and
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notify members of steps they may take to oppose passage of the bill. We will also inform you of statewide efforts by teachers and other public employees to oppose this bill as they develop.

In a separate slap at public education, Kasich early last week announced the creation of a cabinet position for education. The move is being perceived by many (actually, it’s quite obvious) as an attempt to wrest more control over Ohio education policy from the State Department of Education and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. The position will be filled by Robert Sommers, a gentleman with considerable charter school experience. Sommers’ job will be to coordinate K-12 policy and charter schools and school choice initiatives.

AEA Leadership Elections Scheduled for May

Five officer positions and all secondary Board of Trustees positions are up for election in May. Members interested in running for President, First Vice President, Elementary Vice President, Secondary Vice President and Secretary-Treasurer may request a petition from the building rep or the AEA office. Officer terms are for two years and begin July 1, 2011. Petitions must be signed by 50 AEA members and are due in the AEA office by Wednesday, March 2.

The membership status of petition signers will be checked. The Nominating Committee suggests that candidates turn in petitions prior to the deadline in case additional signatures are needed, or that candidates collect more than the minimum 50 signatures required. The election will be held in buildings Tuesday, May 3 and Wednesday, May 4.

In order to be elected an officer a candidate must be tenured (continuing contract) and must have been a full time member of AEA for at least two years immediately prior to the year of the election, must be a current full time member and shall be neither the spouse of nor a member of the immediate household of any person serving in an administrative capacity or who performs an administrative function.

The Elections Committee received petitions for all secondary districts with the exception of Kenmore and North. Members interested in filling one of these vacancies can secure a petition (10 signatures required) from the AEA office. Eligibility requirements for district representative are the same as officer positions. Petitions for vacancies may be submitted to AEA at any time.

► **Applications for job-sharing due 2/28.**

► **Unless changed by legislation, make-up day for students is Friday, June 5. Last day for teachers is Monday, June 13.**