

Random Notes

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Retirement Benefit Changes Loom

The smart money is betting legislation will be introduced in Columbus before the end of the calendar year proposing sweeping changes in benefits for retired teachers. Last month, the State Teachers Retirement System (STRS) recommended to the Ohio Retirement Study Council (ORSC) several benefit modifications designed to improve the future fiscal well being of the System. ORSC is an oversight commission responsible for public pension policy and for recommending changes in pension law to the legislature. Although an independent board elected by STRS members governs STRS, benefits paid to retired members are set by statute.

For the most part, any changes approved by the legislature are expected to become effective August 1, 2015. There has been no talk to date about exempting, or “grand fathering,” members who began contributing to the system prior to the effective date of any changes. The only exception may apply to members who are eligible to retire when the changes become effective, but elect to continue working. In those cases, members’ benefits will be computed using the formula currently in place.

A summary of the changes recommended by STRS appears on the next page. Whether or not all, or a modified version of some or all of them are included in a bill remains to be seen.

Thus far, talk of the changes has caused more frustration than anger among members who will not be eligible to retire by 2015. On one hand, members want to know they will have a sound retirement system and a secure pension when it’s their time to retire; on the other, they want the most generous benefit package possible. STRS believes its recommendations strike a balance between fiscal responsibility and maintaining an outstanding pension plan. The proposal causing the most frustration, particularly among those for whom retirement is in sight, but not before 2015, is the elimination of the enhanced benefit at 35 years and the establishment of a minimum retirement age.

As the recommended pension changes make their way through the legislative process, there will undoubtedly be active lobbying for and
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HATHORN LEAVING HUMAN RESOURCES

Dr. Connie Hathorn, the district’s HR Director since 2003, is being reassigned from HR to the position of Executive Director, Pupil Support Services.

During his tenure in HR, Hathorn earned the respect and trust of the district’s union leaders. He did so by adhering to each group’s contract with the Board, and insisting that all parties, including building principals, do likewise. This quality separated Hathorn from many of his predecessors who often would go to absurd lengths to defend principals guilty of violating the contract. We’ve had occasional differences with Hathorn, but even then, his firm but affable personality helped minimize acrimony and rancor when we did disagree.

Superintendent James has every right to organize his senior staff as he believes will best benefit the district. He owes no explanations for the moves he decides to make. If he believes that reassigning Hathorn to the newly created Pupil Support position will improve the effectiveness of the departments under that umbrella, we agree. However, James is taking on a degree
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Retirement Changes

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against changes. We will keep you advised and notify you of opportunities to join the lobbying effort.

Below is a summary of the changes recommended by STRS to the ORSC:

	Current Law	Board Recommendation
Contribution rate	Employee: 10% Of pay Employer: 14% of pay	Employee: 12.5% of pay (.5% increases phased in 2011-2016) Employer: 16.5% of pay (.5% increases phased in 2016-2021)
Retirement eligibility @ full benefits	30 years at any age; at least 5 years at age 65	35 years of service at any age; 30 years at age 60; 5 years of service at age 65. Eff. 8/2015.
Early retirement eligibility	25 years of service at age 55; 5 years at age 60 (includes reductions in retirement formula)	30 years of service at age 55; 5 years of service at age 60 (benefits actuarially reduced). Eff. 8/2015
Final average salary computation	Average of three highest years	Average of five highest years. Eff 8/2015
Cost of living allowance	3%/year, based on first year retirement benefit	2%/year eff. 7/1/2011; 1.5%/year for those retiring after 7/1/2011.

Strides Campaign in Full Swing For Final Week

The *Making Strides Against Breast Cancer* campaign entered its final week with fundraising activities continuing in most schools and a happy hour and blue jeans day planned for the day before the walk. The campaign started mid-summer with a citywide kick-off breakfast. We attended and were pleased and proud to listen as our own **Char Tabata** (King Elementary) shared her story as the breakfast's keynote survivor speaker. With her permission, we reprint Char's story here:

I stand before you today to tell you my journey. This is a story of my journey and the milestones and pitfalls along the way.

My journey began four and a half years ago. It actually began with my sister's journey. I learned of my sister's cancer in the middle of January. She had shared her news with me and my three other sisters during a family gathering. (Yes, there are 5 girls for those of you who are doing the math now, and 5 brothers, by the way, but that's another story altogether.) Once the initial shock wore off a little, we all were concerned about the other's mammograms as well. When it came to me, I couldn't assure them that I was okay. I hadn't yet had a mammogram. I was 37 and had recently stopped nursing my son, who was 18 months at that time. Having a mammogram was the last thing on my mind. But I promised that I would make an appointment to be screened just to be sure and to put everyone's mind at ease. Even before my diagnosis, my age was a barrier to my treatment. I was denied an appointment for a mammogram because I was only 37, and would need a doctor's request before they would even schedule it. Fortunately, I was able to get that

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Hathorn to Leave HR

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of risk in replacing the popular Hathorn. Beyond keeping the peace with labor and nurturing the cooperative relationship that now exists between management and labor, the new HR director will have staffing and countless personnel issues to tackle every year.

Over 150 applicants responded to the HR job posting. Only two candidates remain. One, **Kathy McVey**, is a current APS employee. She is on the HR staff and is primarily responsible for managing fringe benefits and workers' comp claims. We communicate almost daily with McVey and our relationship with her has been positive. While we are certain she would bring some change to HR, her candidacy is the only one that would ensure a level of continuity in the HR leadership transition. That's a huge plus in our minds.

We are not familiar with the second finalist and know only that his current job is in HR at an Ohio university. It would be inappropriate for us to speculate on his potential to succeed—from our perspective—as the new HR director, other than to say his learning curve would be considerably longer than McVey's.

Several have held the HR post in Akron over the past forty years (which represents the extent of our memory). Only one was appointed without the benefit of prior Akron administrative service. And while her tenure, in our opinion, was not a disaster, the lack of an "insider's" knowledge of the district caused some problems.

Regardless of who is appointed, we are prepared to do our part to continue the relationship that presently exists between us and 70 N. Broadway. We commend Connie Hathorn for his integrity, his honesty and his genuine concern for all employees of the district. More so than any of his predecessors, he understood the "human" half of human resources. We wish him well in his new position.

How H.B. 1 Affects You and Your Classroom

Last July, the Ohio legislature passed Governor Strickland's budget bill, better known as H.B. 1. The legislation includes unprecedented changes in the way Ohio schools—public and charter—operate. The centerpiece of the new school provisions is the Ohio Evidence Based Funding Model. However, the law goes well-beyond funding matters. Teachers would be well served to visit the links below to learn more about H.B. 1 and its impact on schools, learning and the teaching profession. In the meantime, we have summarized below what we believe are portions of the law that most directly impact classroom teachers.

Four-tiered Licensure Resembling a Career Ladder (2011)

- Resident Educator License for entry into the profession.
- Professional Educator License for practicing professionals.
- Senior Professional Educator License for differentiated roles and responsibilities.
- Lead Professional Educator License for professional development leaders.

Tenure (2011)

- Teachers eligible for tenure after seven years instead of three. Applies to teachers employed for the first time on or after Jan. 1, 2011. Supercedes collective bargaining agreement language on tenure.

Termination (10/16/2009)

- “Good and Just Cause” is statutory grounds for teacher dismissal. “Gross inefficiency and immorality” and “willful and persistent violations of reasonable regulations of the board of education” are eliminated from the statute.

Calamity Days (2010-2011)

- Reduced from five to three annually

All-Day Kindergarten (2010-2011)

- All districts required to offer ADK unless granted a waiver by the state.

Assessments TBD

- OGT to be replaced nationally standardized assessment (ACT).
- End of course assessments in core subjects (Math, Reading, English/Language Arts, Social Studies).

Dispensing Drugs to Students (2011-2012)

- Only licensed health professionals may administer prescription drugs to students

Licensure Renewal (2011)

- Requires Educators Standards Board to develop a way to tie student achievement to license renewal.

Class Size (2010-2011)

- Student-teacher ratio is 19:1 for K-3 and 25:1 in grades 4-5, 6-8, and 9-12.
- K-3 ratio drops to 17:1 in FY 2012 and FY 2013 and to 15:1 in FY 2014.

Extended School Year

- Legislation did not extend school year.
- State Superintendent to report recommendations to General Assembly by 12/2010.

Teacher Training (10/16/2011)

- Four hour inservice training in child and drug abuse and violence prevention, previously limited to elementary teachers, now includes middle and high school teachers.

Records Checks (10/16/2009)

- Only FBI background checks will be required of educators applying for issuance of a license if (1) there is a previous BCI check done for licensure or employment purposes, and (2) the educator can prove continuous Ohio residency for the previous five year period.

The State Department is responsible for writing the rules and regulations (by the dates in parentheses above) for implementing the changes enacted in H.B. 1. There is a strong likelihood that debates will arise over the exact intent of the new laws as rules are being written, as is the case right now with records checks. In any event, Ohio's public school landscape will change dramatically over the next several years. As suggested earlier, members may read complete summaries and/or view slide shows about H.B. 1 at <http://oh.aft.org/index.cfm> (follow simple registration to view) or <http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=523>.

mammogram, but that was only because my sister had just been diagnosed. Odd, isn't it, I was "fortunate" because my sister had found her cancer? Unfortunately, the screening mammogram showed a "suspicious" area that would require a more detailed mammogram. My gynecologist assured me that most likely this area lit up because I had just stopped nursing. But the follow up confirmed my deepest fear, as the radiologist told me the spot showed a "starburst pattern" which indicated it was most likely cancer. I recognized that pattern from doing research online about my sister's cancer.

Of course, I was angry that I probably had cancer. Yet what angered me most was how much I had to fight to get follow up appointments to begin my fight. "Our first available appointment is three to four weeks from now." What? I can barely manage to keep food down because I am so freaked out, and now you're telling me that I have to wait three to four weeks? No. Not happening. I did everything I could to get in early. The gloves were off, and I was not going to sit idly by and wait to be seen. I was shocked and amazed by how unconcerned an unapologetic many office workers seemed to be. Through my family doctor, I was able to get an appointment early the next week. When I met with the first doctors, dealing with my breast cancer was first and foremost, as it should have been. Yet I was so much more than my cancer. And I still am. I was a young, intelligent woman who knew that breast cancer was not necessarily a death sentence. It could be. Trust me, that I am aware of.

The day I was diagnosed was the same day that my husband and I had signed papers to begin the IVF process. We had struggled with infertility issues, but our doctors were extremely hopeful that the newest procedures would be perfect for our situation.

My first surgeons didn't seem to take my desire to have more children into consideration. My fertility concerns were of no concern to them. And so I did the research. Research that the American Cancer Society has helped to fund. Research that I felt my doctors should have been aware of to present options to me. I fought for my rights as a young survivor, and found a team of doctors, social workers and the like who had not only understood, but had dealt with survivors like me. And they understood, as well, the challenges that I would be facing. Like not only wanting to save my life, but by not having to worry about ever having the cancer recur in my other breast, therefore wanting a double mastectomy. Like wanting reconstruction. Like wanting to look forward to the rest of my life. Like hope. Like doing what I could to make sure the rest of my family didn't have to deal with this if we could avoid it. Genetic counseling and testing found out that it wasn't genetic, but it didn't explain why two of us were fighting the beast.

I thought I had prepared myself for the initial fight: surgery, chemo and radiation. I just wanted to live. Period. Bald? I'd wear scarves. Nausea? Thank goodness for the newest round of anti-nausea drugs. That part of the journey was tough. And while all journeys have memories, some of these I'd like to forget. "Chemo smells" I call them. The orange Popsicles that I had to munch on so I wouldn't get mouth sores from the Red Devil. The metallic taste that everything had, even water. The constant runny nose that came from the lack of nose hairs. Or memories like losing my hair in droves as I sat by my two-year old son's bedside in Children's Hospital as he received treatment for dehydration from the stomach flu. He later wiping the sweat from my baldhead as the hot flashes took hold again. Each mile marker along the way I prided myself on how well I was fighting. What I wasn't prepared for was the next part of my journey. I am glad to be on this part of my journey. I understand that many people aren't fortunate enough to even think about this "leg", if you will. For too many women the journey ends too soon. While fighting the beast, choices are taken away from them. I feel for them, for some of you who may be in the audience today. I have been fortunate to have another leg in my journey, and for that I am extremely grateful.

Since my journey began, there have been a lot of milestones. I finished chemo and radiation. I made it to my one-year canceriversary. I made it to my two-year canceriversary. Then my third. I make it to my 40th birthday. My son started Kindergarten. I made it to my fourth canceriversary. My husband and I received the chance to be foster parents to a beautiful baby boy. Some amazing milestones have happened.

Yet this part of the journey has come with its own set of travel pitfalls. Like having to deal with hot flashes, mood swings, and weight gain from the menopausal state that the chemo and hormone therapy had thrown me into. Things I wasn't supposed to deal with until I was much, much older. Things like osteoporosis, caused by the chemo and other treatments, and having to be on calcium supplements, and bonding with Sally Field over our Boniva.

Things like joint pain and lymph edema. Again, side effects from the treatments. Things like struggling to walk or sleep for a few days after the monthly shot in the butt to protect or shut down my ovaries so that I just may, perhaps, be able to make my son the big brother he's been wanting to be, hoping cancer didn't rob me of that as well. Only to find out that in fact, it did. And not only did it rob me of having another biological child, it also automatically made me ineligible to adopt from China and many other programs. Single households could adopt, but we were left out. But one of the things that I truly was not prepared for was fear. Fear that resurfaces with every new pain, or doctor's checkup. Fear that shakes your inner core when you find out that your older sister, who was diagnosed two weeks before you, and with whom you went through treatment together, now has to battle the beast again. Again. Wondering if I was next. Wondering why I wasn't next. Like I said in the beginning, the journey for each person is different, and sometimes it just doesn't make sense at all.

And so I am ambivalent about being here. Because I feel that I should only be saying how many positive things have come out of our fundraising efforts. And they have. But they just aren't enough. No woman should every have to worry about getting a mammogram. Period. Not about paying for one, or worrying about what the results will be. Or living in fear that she or someone she loves will get breast cancer. Do you know what the statistics are for the nation? One in eight women will be diagnosed. In northeast Ohio? One in 5.5 women will be diagnosed in her lifetime. Those numbers are unacceptable to me. My journey continues because of all the research that has been done. But that is not enough. We need to do more. That is why I'm here today. For my sister, this "pitfall" has meant more chemo, more radiation, and the need to wear a body brace full time. I can't walk a mile in her shoes, but I can walk with her along the way. I can walk for her.

See you Friday at the Chapel Hill Johnny Malloy's and Saturday at Lock 3!