

TAAAC ACTION REPORT

Your Professional Organization

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Teachers Association of Anne Arundel County, An MST/NEA Affiliate

January 2005

COMPENSATION IMPROVEMENTS

The TAAAC Bargaining team is hard at work attempting to negotiate a successor agreement with the Board of Education's team. Things are a little testy right now and our team is working hard to secure real and recurring improvements in the compensation of our members. The teams are quite far apart on several issues, including the determination of how best to spend money available for instructional salaries. The Superintendent's proposed budget appears to ignore the fact that TAAAC negotiates for all Unit I educators and not for just a few chosen groups.

Here at the TAAAC office, we are hearing from our members who wonder why the money is being proposed for use on gimmicks instead of real salary improvements. The greatest need is to use those funds directly toward the salary scales which currently are well behind the average of surrounding districts on virtually every step in every column. In a perfect and prosperous world, it might be nice to provide a well-defined bonus and incentive program, but Anne Arundel County isn't rolling in available dough. Let's do what we can to strengthen the scale and increase the lifetime earnings of struggling local educa-

tors before we spend scarce resources on gimmicks like one-time bonuses.

Why are gimmicks bad? Well, let's take an example of a one-time bonus of \$1,000 given to each teacher in schools which make AYP. While it provides a small short term increase is disposable income for some, it comes at a great expense to all. The projected cost of that one-time bonus is about \$4.6 million dollars. Those same dollars would fund an additional across the Board increase of 1.6%, and would provide a permanent structural improvement in salary, improve the average final compensation for pension computation, beef up life long earnings for everyone, and maybe begin to close the salary gap. Gimmicks like one-time bonuses do none of those things.

Let your voice be heard at Board of Education Budget meetings and County Council budget meetings. The most important contributors to the future are now sitting in our classrooms, and the greatest resource those children have are the folks who teach them. Those educators should be made to feel appreciated and

respected, and need to be financially rewarded for the important work they do. Let's ensure that available revenue will be used wisely to benefit all of them.

Board Approves Additional Workday in 2005-06 Calendar

At the December mid-month meeting, the Board approved the Calendar for 2005-06. Two significant changes were made in the new calendar year. Yom Kippur was added in October as a day when all schools and Central Offices are closed. A staff development day, which currently exists in March, will be moved to the end of the year and will serve as a second workday, to give teachers an additional day to close out.

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Sheila M. Finlayson

Happy New Year!

I hope that you each had a very happy holiday and that you found some time to sit back and enjoy your family and friends.

As we begin the new year, we must look ahead and prepare for the challenges. We return to work in the mist of the budget process. The Superintendent submitted his budget proposal to the Board at the December 15th meeting. The Board will have two months to consider the recommendations from the Superintendent and prepare its own budget. Two Budget Hearings will be held in January, on the 11th and the 13th, to allow for input from teachers, parents and the community. The Board will then adopt its budget on February 16th. The budget will then go to the County Executive who will present her budget on or around May 30. After receiving the funding from the County, the Board will approve its final budget on June 15, 2005. That's the process!

Now that the process is underway, we must look closely at the priori-

COMMENTARY

ties that are being set forth in the budget. Reading an article about the police chief's refusal to fund officers in our middle schools forced me to look closely at exactly how the school system is spending its money. (6131)

At a time when we making a requesting for officers in our middle schools, we are using our funding to expand program offerings. I

"We'll have wonderful programs that we really can't afford but the high quality teaching staff will be long gone."

know it is blasphemy to say we can't afford middle school IB or to expand other programs, but it is a reality. The parents who attend the meetings to learn about new programs would surely prefer to have a "safe and orderly school" before considering new programs.

When will we stop and say enough? We seem to continue to spend money as if it is in great abundance. When moneys are tight, I believe we should prioritize our spending. As I have said many times, programs don't teach the students, teachers do. To not invest in the work force is a terrible mistake that will surely come back to haunt us.

Forty percent of the professional staff who terminate their employment with AACPS have five years or less in the system. Is it the money? One might say, they took the job knowing that our salary is 14th in the state. While the pay is always an issue, there are two big issues, which must be addressed: workload and the lack of support. Overwhelmingly, these are the concerns we hear about continuously. So, what is being done about them?

All of the research indicates that if a new teacher has a mentor for the first three years, they will stay in the profession. But what have we done? At a time when we were expecting to increase the number of mentors, our mentors were cut, and the few that remain have been re-assigned. Of the 19 mentors currently in the program, twelve of them are assigned to the 12 high schools and the other seven are assigned to cover the 76 elementary schools, the 19 middle schools and the ten or so special schools. Seven mentors are supporting all of the new teachers in 105 schools. Is there any wonder teachers feel as though they have no support? Not only are the teachers frustrated but the mentors are equally frustrated since they cannot reach the folks who need their assistance.

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TAAAC Action Report

Teachers Association of Anne Arundel County	Officers	Board of Directors	Editors	
2521 Riva Road, Suite L 7 Annapolis, Maryland 21401 (410) 224-3330 (301) 261-8309	Sheila M. Finlayson, President Timothy Mennuti, Vice President Kathy Naeseth, Secretary-Treasurer	Donzella Parker Bert Alice Liptak Yolie Marshall Carol Petrosky	Enid Collison-Lee Susie C. Jablinske Richard Benfer Edith M. McDougald Ron Russell Ken Baughman Darlene Murphy	Bill Jones, Executive Director and Managing Editor Roxanne L. Vietmeier, Editor

From Contentia this month . . . *Are We Breathing Clean Air?*

Addressing Air Quality Concerns

Many TAAAC members have questioned what their rights are when dealing with an environmental or manmade air quality concern. The answer is partially provided for in Article 18 of the Negotiated Agreement, which requires:

E. Health and safety hazards Conditions on school premises which are considered by the Faculty Advisory Council to endanger the health and safety of pupils or Unit I members shall be reported to the principal, who shall immediately request an inspection by persons qualified to determine the existence or the extent of the alleged hazard. Upon receipt of recommendations from the qualified persons appropriate remedial action shall be taken at once... The Board will ensure that each school principal, after consultation with the Faculty Advisory Council, develops a plan to enable teachers to notify the main office staff of emergency health or safety problems in their classrooms.

Obviously, the principal has a responsibility to his or her staff when air quality causes concerns for the FAC. But what if the FAC doesn't have time to meet and determine endangerment to staff and students? That's where the plan developed by the principal and FAC for notification of health concerns comes into play. It is imperative that your school has such a plan in existence to expedite communication within the building. Check with your FAC and principal to see if a plan exists, and if not, articulate the importance to have one developed and implemented as soon as possible.

Okay, you have a plan, but you suddenly feel overcome by fumes, vapors or airborne contaminants. Or, you become sick due to the unsafe air quality the next day, or the next, then what? All Unit I employees have sick leave available to them for use on any workday. Use your sick leave to cover the day. Then, see your physician, explaining your symptoms and the probable cause for your illness. If it is necessary for you to miss work as a result of the unsafe air quality and the symptoms you are suffering, get a certificate from the physician, including a release from work. Next, contact the TAAAC office. Work-related illnesses, when attributed to specific work-related conditions, may be eligible for workers' compensation claims.

Some common investment advice applies to this situation. People are unprepared for the future, not because they plan to fail, but because they fail to plan. Have a plan in your building to *prevent* illnesses and *protect* all staff and students.

To Negotiate *OR* Not to Negotiate?

That is the question! Too often the Superintendent and Board members ask us why we need to negotiate items into our contract. Why? One need only look at the repeated grievances to answer that question.

How many times have we had to file a grievance because a negotiated item was not adhered to? Take planning time as a perfect example. How many times have we filed grievances because teachers were deprived of their guaranteed individual planning time? Can you imagine if we had simply come to an "understanding" on planning time? There would be no guarantee that it would ever occur. **(8582)**

When superintendents and board members come and go, can we and should we expect them to live up to a "promise" made by a predecessor? I don't think so. Placing items in the negotiated agreement is the only guarantee that it will happen!

(Commentary continued from page 2)

This speaks to the true commitment to teacher retention. It sounds good for the system to say they are trying to recruit the best and brightest teachers to AACPS, but what are they doing to keep them. Talk is cheap. A proven method is at hand but if it is not a priority, teachers will continue to leave. We'll have wonderful programs that we really can't afford but the high quality teaching staff will be long gone. And, who loses most in this scenario? Of course, it's the students.

(By the way, two months ago, TAAAC offered to supplement the mentoring program and we have yet to get a response.)

And yet, if we listen to the rhetoric, there is a concern about the retention of teachers. They're just not willing to do anything about it.

When the funding is adequate, then new programs are a luxury we can afford. In the meantime, it should be a priority to fund what is absolutely necessary for our school system.

Is Speech Really Unimportant?

For several years, we have lamented the loss of the Speech requirement for all students. While we have always recognized the tremendous value of speech, it is wonderful to see that others recur. Below is an article outlining the true value of speech.

THE EDUCATIONAL IMPORTANCE OF DEBATE

Since the middle of the last century, interscholastic debate programs have been common throughout the nation's more affluent public and private schools. These programs have provided generations of more privileged students the substantial academic benefits that result from training in rhetoric, persuasion, organized communication, and argument.

In debate, the preparation and delivery of argumentation provides students with the opportunity to think critically, develop their academic research skills, improve their communication abilities, solve problems creatively, and increase their self-confidence. Because students involved in debate regularly engage in writing, information analysis, and in-depth library and Internet research, they often receive higher grades than non-debaters in high school, and are more likely to continue on to post-secondary education. **(8560)**

Debate enables students to express their views effectively and to respond cogently to arguments with which they disagree. In addition, debate students are often the most well read and well informed in their grade level. The scope of their studies — from the mental health care crisis to curbing the spread of weapons of mass destruction — means that debate students take part in a truly worldwide examination of the issues facing all people. Urban Debate Leagues, now flourishing in low-income schools, are designed to teach advocacy skills so that students are empowered to be the architects of their own futures.

The National Association of Urban Debate Leagues

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Lauren P. Almeida
Jessica M. Hameza
Nathan L. Martin
Linde Mohr
Karen M. Pfarr
Justin T. Sherlock
Martin A. Urban
Melissa M. Wallace

Did You Know?

If you fall on the ice on school property, any injury incurred will be compensable under Maryland workers' compensation laws. Your employer is liable.

If you're a member, call TAAAC.

Congratulations to Ron Russell, Anne Russell, and Brooklyn Park Elementary School

Ron Russell, former TAAAC Vice President and current member of the TAAAC Board of Directors, recently accomplished something that has not been done since the 2000-01 school year. Through his recruiting efforts at Brooklyn Park Elementary School, the school has just attained 100% TAAAC membership. Every one of the thirty-two Unit I employees assigned to BPES are now dues-paying members who contribute their share toward the costs of the benefits, protections, and services provided by TAAAC. The fruits of Ron's effort, and the support of his school staff, will benefit us all. **(6362)**

BPES has had strong and capable TAAAC representation for a long time. That is much due to the school's good fortune in having Ron and his wife, Anne, assigned there. While Ron holds elected office on the TAAAC Board, Anne serves perennially as the elected Association Representative at BPES, and she chairs the TAAAC Government Relations Committee, a cadre of volunteer lobbyists who represent the interests of local educators during the annual sessions of the Maryland General Assembly. The membership percentage has consistently been well into the 90's. Issues that rise at BPES have been addressed efficiently by Ron and/or Anne, the Russell team.

While on the topic of membership strength at BPES, let it be stated now that TAAAC is growing stronger across the county. As of the first payroll run in December, we stand 187 members stronger than last year, and enrollment forms continue to trickle in from late hires. It is quite likely that by the close of the spring drive, which will be kicked off in April, TAAAC will surpass the 4,200 member mark for the first time. It is an encouraging trend that we believe is the result of the hard work being done by the TAAAC staff and by elected leaders like the Russells. Although, frankness requires us to acknowledge that such membership gains are sometimes the natural result of employee dissatisfaction with the employer.

As stated repeatedly in prior TAR issues, the strength of TAAAC or any other organization, lies in the size of its membership and in the willingness of its membership to act. Recruiting members contributes a great deal to that strength. Free-riders are a drain on staff time and other resources paid for by contributing members. In a very literal way, they take money away from members. For now, the staff at BPES can rest easy. Thanks to Ron, and with the help of Anne, there are no free-riders in the building reaching into the wallets at BPES.

Two AACPS Classes Win Reading Contest

Once again, two Anne Arundel County elementary schools took first place in the Maryland State Teachers Association Reading Contest. Jean Piper's second grade class from Davidsonville Elementary won first place in the K-3 category, reading a total of 2559 books. One student in that class read 840 books. The contest ran for one month, from November 1st through the 30th.

TAAAC member Cheryl Sahin's 4th grade class from Crofton Woods won first place in the Grades 4 & 5 category. Ms. Sahin's class read a total of 1491 books.

The first place winner in the middle school category was from Montgomery County.

All three classes will be honored in February with a pizza party at MSTA Headquarters and presented with \$1,000 worth of books. Each teacher will receive a \$100 gift certificate from Staples.

Congratulations to all of the students and teachers. Job well done!

Teachers Honored by Chamber

Each year the West Anne Arundel County Chamber of Commerce honors citizens who serve their community. This year, at their annual gala, four teachers were recognized as outstanding educators. They were: Marcus D’Arcangelis from Odenton Elementary, Nina Gaither from Southgate Elementary, Jacqueline Nedab from MacArthur Middle School and Peter Akerboom from the Center of Applied Technology-North.

We add our congratulations to the very worthy recipients.

Have you spotted the last four digits of your phone number? You may be a winner! Contact the TAAAC office.

Employment Opportunity

Spend Summer in the Sun

DRD Pool Management, Inc. is accepting resumes for summer job openings as swimming pool field supervisors and swimming pool managers. No Experience Necessary. For more information, call Noelle Navarro at 410-923-7665, 1-888-785-7665 or email: n_navarro@drdpools.com

NOMINATIONS OPEN

The TAAAC Nominating Committee is accepting nominations for **Secretary-Treasurer, Board of Directors, NEA Delegates, and MSTA “Fund for Children and Public Education” Representative.**

Nomination forms will be accepted until the January 5, 2005 Association Representative Council Meeting.

NOMINATION FORM

Name _____
Home Address _____
School _____
Phone (H) _____ (W) _____
Ethnic group _____

I would like to place my name in nomination for the following position(s):

- Secretary-Treasurer
- Board of Director
- NEA Delegate
- “Fund for Children and Public Education” Rep.

High School Concerns Committee

Looking for your input!

The TAAAC High School Concerns Committee is seeking members! If you are a Unit I member, working at the high school level, please join the committee to voice the concerns and issues affecting you and your colleagues. Speak your mind with like-minded secondary school professionals. Call the TAAAC office to reserve your seat on this important committee today!

TAX PREPARATION

R. J. Pellicoro & Associates is accepting appointments for tax preparation on the following dates at the TAAAC office:

Thursday, February 17	2 PM – 7 PM
Monday, February 21	9 AM – 5 PM
Wednesday, February 23	2 PM – 7 PM
Tuesday, March 1	2 PM – 7 PM
Friday, March 18	2 PM – 7 PM

To schedule an appointment, please call the TAAAC office.