

TAAAC ACTION REPORT



Your Professional Organization

Volume 42, Number 1



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

September 2009

California on the Bay

Much of what has been said back and forth regarding the financial mistreatment of our teaching force this past year had been a futile exercise between the County Executive and the Superintendent trying to find the other at greater fault. By setting aside the rhetoric and looking at the facts, you could easily see that both parties made their contributions to our plight.

Mr. Leopold did not lie when he stated that he was able to cut the county government budget by 8% without furloughing employees by “prioritizing.” But he left unsaid that \$45 million of his cuts were in discretionary funds that did not obstruct operations. If you disregarded the \$15 million cut in pre-funding retiree healthcare and the \$30 million cut in PayGo (pay-as-you funding of capital projects), the county’s operating budget actually increased. Also left unsaid was that he cut all new money requested to offset increases in school employees’ healthcare claims expenses, forcing the Superintendent to cover projected increases out of his own budget.

Yes, the Superintendent got far less than what he requested. But then he forged ahead with the expansion of the STEM Program at two high schools, the Performing Visual Arts Program, a new middle school structure, the 181st student day, and sent 90 or so educators to Las Vegas; and all while sitting on a \$1.5 million budgeted surplus. Paid for by employee furloughs? You be the judge.

So, that sums up how the expense side of the county budget and competing priorities of an elected County Executive and an appointed Superintendent left us a little out of the loop this year. Let’s not lose sight of the revenue side. Anne Arundel County has been dancing around an insidious chokehold on revenue clamped on us by a 17 year-old charter amendment. I’m referring to the *property tax revenue cap*. Without it, maybe the County Executive and the Superintendent would not be pointing at each other, and we wouldn’t have reason to point at both of them.

In 1992, nearly 75% of the voters adopted a property tax revenue cap that set an arbitrary limit on total collections. The county must limit any increase in total property tax collections to the *lesser* of 4.5% over the prior year or an amount equal to the rate of inflation as defined by the consumer price index. With only one exceptional year attributable to each of the county executives in office during the life of the cap, (not coincidentally, they were election years) every annual budget bumped up against the ceiling it imposed. This year, the cap caused Mr. Leopold to reduce the tax rate despite the revenue shortfall to accommodate an inflation rate of 2.9%, which became this year’s cap on collections.

Since the cap, which first impacted the county budget in FY94, Anne Arundel County schools have been falling below its neighbors in nearly all components of education funding. Although, teachers have made a temporary comeback over the past decade by moving from 19th to 6th out of the 24 Maryland districts in starting salary. That ground gained may be quickly lost as a slow economy allows the cap to further choke total revenue.

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COMMENTARY



Timothy M. Mennuti

Welcome Back! We hope that each and every one of you had a healthy and restful summer and that you are fully recharged and ready to meet the challenges of a new year.

For the TAAAC officers and staff, this has been the year that never ends. Here is a sampling of how your Association President, staff and other leaders spent the summer.

As you know, we held a special ARC on August 19th to introduce the new contract and then briefed our members so that we could vote September 2, 2009. As with most things in life, the devil is in the details. Once we had a tentative agreement with the Board of Education, our Executive Director, Bill Jones, sat down to draft the language which implements the contract and holds some of the devils at bay. In our Negotiated Agreement, a document of 60 pages, that was a lot of writing.

The significant shifts in personnel this year caused a larger than usual number of TAAAC members needing help over the summer with assignments. The TAAAC professional staff, Mike, Mark, Sarah, and returning retiree Ralph Straley were busy providing assistance on placement and related issues.

In a continuing effort to support our teaching staff, I accompanied the faculties of Annapolis MS and Annapolis HS in an outreach effort by visiting selected communities.

Still in the change mode, on September 1st, after 143 years, our state association changed its name from the Maryland State Teachers Association to the Maryland State Education Association.

“The economy remains the number one challenge for all we do.”

We will also look prospectively into the 2009-10 school year. Because our TAAAC Incident Report program has been very successful, we will continue it this year. We will provide you copies of the Incident Report and additional materials soon.

This year a major focus of your TAAAC leadership team (which includes the officers, the board of directors and the school based representatives) will be to make certain that all schools have a fully functioning TAAAC organization and Faculty Advisory Council in place. We will be concentrating initially on schools which need the most help. We encourage all schools and worksites to recruit and involve as many TAAAC members as possible. A number of schools

divide the effort among several staff. This includes who attends the monthly ARC meetings, who distributes TAAAC materials and who handles the TAAAC bulletin board.

On the professional front, new teacher hires have been significantly greater than originally anticipated. We will be closely watching the evolution of the new encore courses in the Middle Schools and we will remain focused on teacher retention.

The economy remains the number one challenge for all we do. Bill Jones and I receive economic data almost on a daily basis which includes local, state and national information which impacts education.

Because the 2009-2010 school year leads into a major election cycle, we will be informing you on a regular basis as political events which impact education occur. We will also be looking for volunteers to help us work with the General Assembly during the 90-day session from January to April. As 2010 moves into spring, we will need more volunteers to prepare for a major fall effort to elect candidates who are supportive of public education, along with a possible campaign to modify the county’s revenue cap.

With that in mind, TAAAC will also launch several initiatives to increase attendance at the National Education Association’s Summer 2010 Convention in New Orleans. We will provide more information later in the year.

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From Contentia this month . . . *It's your planning time.* *Make sure you get to use it.*

Many teachers complain that they do not have enough time to complete all their work, yet when we check their schedules, we find that they do not receive their contractually allotted planning time.

Your Negotiated Agreement states, "each classroom teacher shall have at least 410 minutes of individual and group planning time within the required work week when not responsible for the supervision of students." Your principal cannot direct your individual planning time.

Elementary Teachers

A minimum of 210 minutes of planning time must be scheduled during the student day and set aside for individual planning time for delivery of instruction.

Individual planning time must be scheduled in blocks of no less than 30 consecutive minutes.

The additional 200 minutes of planning time can be assigned for group planning and must be contained within the 37 ½-hour work week, exclusive of the duty-free lunch.

It is permissible for an elementary school teacher to have no individual planning time scheduled on a given day as long as the 210 weekly minimum is adhered to.

Secondary Teachers

A minimum of 210 minutes of planning time must be scheduled during the student day and set aside for individual planning time for delivery of instruction.

Individual planning time must be scheduled in blocks of no less than 40 consecutive minutes.

The additional 200 minutes of planning time can be assigned for group planning and must be contained within the 37 ½-hour work week, exclusive of the duty-free lunch.

Special Education Centers

In addition to the non-student time referenced above, teachers assigned to the special education centers must receive 60 additional minutes per week of non-student time for case management, billing and other paperwork demands.

Your planning time is your contractual right. You can grieve if you are not receiving your required weekly minimums. Check your schedule very carefully to ensure that both individual and group planning times are scheduled correctly. Call your TAAAC Uniserv Director if you believe you are being shortchanged.

TAAAC Class Size Contest

Bring your biggest!

TAAAC is holding a class size contest. A total of nine \$25 gift certificates will be awarded to those members who have the largest class sizes revealed to us in each of the major grade levels — elementary, middle and high school.

To enter mail, fax, e-mail or deliver a copy of the roster of your largest class. Be sure to blackout, delete, or otherwise obfuscate the last names. You need only to identify your entry by your name, school, and subject area or grade level as appropriate.

Count co-taught classes as one group and be cautious not do not distinguish one group of students from the other.

Deadline for entries will be the October 7, 2009 Association Representative Council.

Let's start the year with an interesting little lottery.

**Welcome
Back!
Have a great
year!**

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As I stated earlier, we hope that you are well rested and raring to go because this is going to be an eventful year.

All in all this is an exciting time to be in education.

Again, welcome back — Have a great year!

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Why is all this discussed here and now, you ask? The answer is this:

It is time to change the county charter again, but this time for the better. Effective budgets are based upon realistic revenue projections and prioritized needs. Artificial caps may sound good, after all who among us wants to give government unfettered access to our pockets and purses. But despite their initial appeal, these caps disregard needs and eventually choke even reasonable and necessary revenue. Citizens lose critical services like police and fire protection, public education, and some quality of life. Public employees are forced to work harder for less and become harder to recruit and retain. And public officials, elected and appointed, must... Well, enough said.

If you want to see where the revenue cap will be leading us, you need only to look to the plight of our counterparts in California.

09.01.09 CHANGE IS COMING!

Delegates to the MSTA Representative Assembly voted last October to change the name of the Maryland State Teachers Association to the Maryland State Education Association, demonstrating the Association's long-standing tradition of inclusion and advocacy for all members. The Kick-Off Celebration for the historic name change which occurred September 1, 2009, at the soon to be newly-named MSEA Headquarters building, was a resounding success! Those members planning to attend the MSEA Convention this year will see lots of information regarding the change and additional celebration of the new name.

REMINDER

All MSTA and local affiliate employees e-mail addresses will be changed to reflect the new name. For example (Bill Jones); bjones@mstanea.org will now become bjones@mseanea.org. Please take a moment to modify your e-mail contact information to reflect this change. Thanks!

