

TAAAC ACTION REPORT



Your Professional Organization

Volume 44, Number 3



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

November 2011

“Workload this year is just ridiculous!” announced an Association Representative at the October 5 Representative Council.

In the spring of 2008, Unit I employees sent a message to their Association Representatives by voting against a valuable salary package because of the extra work time it required. Having surrendered additional salary to avoid additional work time, why do we now continue to work that additional time for free? While doing whatever is asked and causing no distress to your employer, your students, or the parents of your students might appear to be the path of least resistance and the safest choice of direction, doing so over the long term has costs and consequences that have injured and will continue to injure the profession of educating our young people.

School districts have become not only dependent upon teacher “volunteerism” to maintain operations, but they have also grown too accustomed to the willingness of teachers to absorb any burden placed. For years now, that willingness is taken for granted by superintendents and local governments who hold the purse strings. Local governments now can cut teachers’ salaries and state governments can cut teachers’ pension benefits with virtual impunity. Superintendents can pile on programs, meetings, projects, and clerical responsibilities with arrogant confidence. The results:

- Fifty-percent or more of resignations come from teachers in the first five years of service as they experience the difficulty in maintaining a personal and family life in the face of employer demands.
- Chronic turnover among the younger teaching population.
- Frustration and burnout impacts the performance and behavior of those remaining.
- Difficulty in negotiating extra pay for work that teachers volunteer to do for free.
- Continuing license for the employer to shovel more on.

TAAAC, like other negotiating agents for educators, has a role in this mess. It negotiates terms and conditions of employment for local certificated educators (except administrators), and has negotiated relevant provisions. In accordance with the pertinent parts of the Negotiated Agreement, all Unit 1 employees are entitled to a duty-free lunch. That duty-free lunch is unpaid time and the employer has no standing to apply requirements to time for which it does not compensate you. All Unit 1 employees work a 37 ½-hour workweek. There is some limited flexibility in those hours for non-classroom educators and some specialists, but only for explicit circumstances. There is less flexibility for teachers, who can only be required to do two things outside of the 37 ½ hour workweek. Those things are *attendance to one back-to-school night or other such evening activity and individual planning for the delivery of instruction.*

Demands that extend the workweek beyond those restrictions should be generating calls to the TAAAC office along with subsequent follow-up to take corrective action. That corrective action is typically the initiation of the appropriate grievance with the assistance of your advocates at TAAAC. Too few are initiated, too many continue to suffer under unreasonable demands, and too little changes for the better.

Advocates here at TAAAC have had members indicate significant concern for retaliation, including fear of job loss if they dared to enforce employee rights that have been negotiated for them. While such response to the

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Timothy Mennuti

Workload, Workload, Workload

Several years ago Julia Pruchniewski, a high school English teacher, brought a large pile of papers, reports and other documents to a Board of Education meeting and made an impassioned plea for workload reduction. The Board listened politely but nothing changed.

This fall we have received more work related “concern” calls than at any time in recent history. Elementary teachers are deeply concerned about the workload issues accompanying the new reading program, and teachers at all levels are concerned about the workload issues related to Writing Across the Curriculum. Teachers at all levels are also deeply concerned about the additional work that they need to do to bring students up to level while at the same time helping students at the top continue to grow at their own speed.

At this point it is important to acknowledge that TAAAC does not have a position on the “Heterogeneous Grouping” issue which has caused concern at some middle and high schools. Having said that, we realize full well that this is not a neutral

COMMENTARY

work issue. A student who doesn’t have the background to do the work in a particular class requires additional support to get up to level. This is especially apparent in classes which have a reading requirement that will require students to stretch. The idea that we must challenge students is one that we understand. Implicit in that challenge, however, is the reality that “someone” must step up to provide the additional help and support that underperforming students need to meet the new norm. Students who

“We want to be successful. No student has a right to fail. We are teachers and we are doing our part.”

refuse to do homework aren’t doing their part. The idea that teachers should be able to provide “extra help” in the classroom for students who refuse to do homework is a pipe dream, especially as class sizes continue to increase.

Our ability to plan for the delivery of instruction is being further impacted by the increasing number of meetings and professional development requirements above and beyond the time already allotted to the 3-hour early dismissal days. The addition of more and more meetings and requirements does not appear to be part of any master

plan. Unfortunately it appears to be designed to meet “school unique” needs. Because there is no apparent master plan there isn’t anyone evaluating what is being added. Notice I haven’t said anything about an elimination of duplicative and/or non-professional duties. Nothing is being eliminated or deleted – it is add, Add, ADD!

The transition of more and more Special Education students into co-taught classes significantly increases workload because teachers are expected to not only know the special needs of each of their students, but are expected to provide unique education plans for the teaching of content to each of these students.

While we are being told that all students need to be challenged, one area remains conspicuously absent from the challenge in many of our schools. That area is discipline. Unfortunately in some of our schools we are told not to challenge our most serious discipline issues. The word of the day continues to be something like this, “...teachers with good lesson plans don’t have discipline issues.” That statement earned a loud round of “Boo’s” at our last ARC.

The discipline issue is coming front and center as we discover more and more ways that discipline reporting is being eroded or avoided. One school refuses to process “ANY” referral unless the teacher has

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TAAAC Action Report

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From Contentia this month . . . *An Observations/Ratings/Plans of Action Checklist for Procedural Errors*

Observations and ratings are a stressful part of your job. If you feel that you have been unfairly targeted during an observation/rating, please use the following checklist to see if procedural errors were made by your administrator. If the answer to any of the following questions is a “no,” please contact TAAAC so we may attempt to have the illegal observation/rating removed from your records:

- Was the observation (scheduled or unscheduled) conducted with the full knowledge of the individual?
- Were the observations at different times of the day?
- Were varied types of activities seen?

Formal/Scheduled Observation

- Was a conference held within two (2) school days when both parties were on site?
- Was a written evaluation provided within five school days?
- Did the written evaluation provide in simple, precise language specific recommendations for improvement where deficiencies existed?
- Was a Plan of Action provided when a need was indicated?

Plan of Action

- Was the Plan of Action developed at the post-observation conference?
- Were the suggestions constructive and include consideration of preparation needed for the assignment?
- Were the conditions under which you work (physical facilities/pupil load/ number of pupils with special needs/adjustment problems) considered?
- Did you have input into the development of the plan (during the post-observation meeting)?

Rating

- Was the rating form provided during the rating conference?
- If the rating was unsatisfactory, was it based upon the conclusions/assessments of more than one administrator?
- Were the conditions under which you worked (physical facilities, workload, and other factors) considered?
- Was the rating received prior to the last day for students?
- Were there at least two classroom observations at least 30 days apart during the rating year?
- Was at least one of the two observations scheduled/formal?
- Were the two observations each at least 30 consecutive minutes?

Non-tenured Ratings

- Were you rated at least twice during the school year?
- If the second rating was unsatisfactory, was there a third rating given?
- Was the first rating completed by December 15th?

Person Responsible for Rating

- Were you rated by your building principal?
- If you are an itinerant Unit I member, were you rated by your base school principal?
- Did your base school principal receive input from the principals of the other schools you serve?

Student Achievement Tests

- Were they used as the primary basis for the rating? (They CAN'T be)

Remember, Observations and Ratings are only grievable for failure to follow the above procedures. The *content* of the Observations and Ratings are subject to a 4-205 appeal, a much tougher standard of proof for the Unit I member.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Beth Acton
 Victoria Barstow
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 Matnilde Coyle
 Amanda Duke
 Erin Foxmann
 Michael Foxmann
 Cheryl Gamble
 Katherine Gardner
 Darryl Gonzalez
 Bedrye Gunduz
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 Rachel Kennelly
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 Meghan Lovett
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 Roy Rackley
 Kim Rader-Lackey
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NEW MEMBERS CONTINUED

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Kimberly Zis
Lieslie Zuknick
Allison Zweig

“The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires.”

-William Arthur Ward

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initiation of a grievance is not beyond the realm of possibility, it is a rarity. Feathers may be ruffled a bit at first but our environment is comprised mostly of professional adults who understand that reasonable people sometimes reasonably disagree. For those of us on either side who administer grievances regularly, they are relatively mundane events.

A group of TAAAC members a decade ago at Meade High School prevailed in a worktime grievance and won salary for additional time they were required to service whether after school or during duty-free lunch. Two kindergarten teachers won salary payments for time beyond the workweek demanded of them for the preparation of MMSR reports. Eight or so teachers at North County High School won money and forced a change in the school schedule due to non-professional duties being assigned during duty-free lunches and planning time. Quite recently, in separate instances two specialists were rewarded a remedy that included money when paper-work demands and short time limits required work beyond the negotiated workweek. These groups and individuals are only a sampling of those who stepped up to help enforce rights negotiated on their behalf. They were not administratively transferred. They did not receive unsatisfactory evaluations. They did not lose their jobs. None of them were caned. While it does take some level of personal and/or group courage to step forward, the level of trepidation that is becoming apparent is unfounded.

Well intended though they are and fearful though they may be, when by their actions teachers persistently allow encroachments into their own personal and family time they give license for more to be demanded. They also render useless the protections already in place and to some extent hogtie their own advocates that are anxious to help.

In the end, inaction serves to our own detriment, diminishes the effectiveness of our own advocates, and contributes to the long-term injury of our profession. *More of the same will lead to more of the same.*

How can that be good for the young people we serve?

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called home. Multiple schools are using Minor Incident reports and some are using special substitute referral forms. Simply put – if a sub writes a referral it goes on a special form. No one seems to know what happens then. The PBIS Process is a world onto itself.

The end result of this non-reporting is that I am hearing from teachers that they have no faith in the discipline system because it is being subverted at every turn.

The worst part of our current discipline situation is that it negatively impacts our ability to close the achievement gap. With legitimate data we can identify challenging students and create support which will help them be successful. When we avoid an honest accounting we

allow students to remain discipline problems thereby robbing other students of their right to a safe and orderly classroom and precluding the challenging students from receiving the support that he/she needs to be successful.

Teachers have repeatedly complained that some students who are unready or unwilling to meet the challenges of rigor react by becoming discipline challenges. Unfortunately this deprives other students of their right to a “safe and orderly” classroom situation. Guess who gets hammered when AP grades go down or when AYP isn’t achieved? I’ll give you a hint – it isn’t the students who deprived their classmates of a “safe and orderly” learning environment.

If we as a system are to be success-

ful and meet our goals, teachers need help in dealing with students who refuse to participate in the program. That implies an accurate record of discipline issues.

We want to be successful. No student has a right to fail. We are teachers and we are doing our part.

At our recent ARC several teachers made the point that it is once again time to tell the Board of Education how we feel about workload issues. Please let your representatives know what you want to do, and please communicate directly with your TAAAC leadership as well.

Please also continue to tell us when you discover a new form or a new way to avoid reporting discipline issues.