

Voice

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The United Teachers of Wichita Representative Assembly



What is it? What does it do?

← Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources, Mary Whiteside, talks with the UTW Rep Assembly about the new evaluation system.

- The UTW Representative Assembly is the top decision making body in UTW.
- It is comprised of all UTW Pro Reps, Executive Board members, and elected leaders.
- The UTW Rep Assembly, also referred to as the Pro Rep meeting, meets monthly.
- One of the things they did this month was approve the UTW Negotiations Team. (page 6)
- Superintendent John Allison talked with the Pro Reps this month. (page 3)

The United Voice: Paper or Digital?

Many organizations have moved away from paper newsletters, choosing to put them online and/or email them. We have had the same discussions. There are merits to keeping the paper newsletter such as the United Voice. Some studies indicate that many people still like to hold the newsletter in their hands.

There are good points about too much paper and going green that make us wonder whether we should make the Voice purely digital.

So, we have decided to try the digital only format during the months of October and November. Then we will assess the feedback we receive and decide whether we continue printing the Voice, or go digital.

Remember, the Voice is already available on our web site, and that will continue no matter what decision is made.

~

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The United Voice

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Superintendent Allison Dialogues with UTW Pro Reps at September Meeting

At the September meeting of UTW Pro Reps, Superintendent John Allison spoke and answered questions from the Pro Reps. It was evident early in the questioning that Pro Reps were expressing a fair amount of frustration on behalf of their colleagues. While the questions were polite and professional, the stress of teachers in the district came through loud and clear.

He told the Pro Reps about a meeting he had with Senator Brownback, at the Senator's request. The Superintendent came away from the meeting concerned with the stances of the candidate on education issues. Senator Brownback is convinced that we spend too much money on schools. He wants to completely rewrite the school finance formula and give local school boards the ability to raise taxes to fund schools at a level of their choosing. Kansas used to have that system and it was a failure. It caused huge discrepancies in the funding levels of schools across the state.

The questions asked of Mr. Allison covered the gamut from Pre-K to high school A.P. classes. One of the frustrations voiced to the Superintendent was the feeling that, "my voice is not listened to and not wanted." The point the Pro Rep made involved whether expressing alternative views about curriculum matters and teaching methods was being ignored. The rep felt very strongly that alternative views were not listened to and that the district didn't care if that was how he felt.

Pupil misbehavior was a subject of questions and comments, also. One rep stated that she didn't want to publicly support Walt Chappel, but that teachers were concerned about the issue. Another rep said that it seemed like principals were of the opinion that they had to keep the suspension and expulsion rates down, or downtown would be upset. The Superintendent responded he has never made that statement, nor has he heard any of his management team make that statement.

When asked about staffing the future high schools the district is preparing to

build, he talked about the need to look at boundary changes. He also noted that they will be looking at options on how to staff those schools.

The topic of recess was raised by some elementary teachers. They educated the Superintendent on the subject, telling him that some of their principals strongly discourage the practice of recess.

The conversation with the Superintendent lasted quite some time and the Pro Reps were appreciative of his willingness to listen and dialogue with them.

* * * *

John Allison at the Sept. UTW R.A.



Study Confirms Flaws in Performance Pay for Teachers

The Project on Incentives in Teaching (POINT) was a three-year study conducted in the Metropolitan Nashville School System from 2006-07 through 2008-09, in which middle school mathematics teachers voluntarily participated in a controlled experiment to assess the effect of financial rewards for teachers whose students showed unusually large gains on standardized tests. The experiment was intended to test the notion that rewarding teachers for improved scores would cause scores to rise. It was up to participating teachers to decide what, if anything, they needed to do to raise student performance: participate in more professional development, seek coaching, collaborate with other teachers, or simply reflect on their practices. Thus, POINT was focused on the notion that a significant problem in American education is the absence of appropriate incentives, and that correcting the incentive structure would, in and of itself, constitute an effective intervention that improved student outcomes.

By and large, results did not confirm this hypothesis. While the general trend in middle school mathematics performance was upward over the period of the project, students of teachers randomly assigned to the treatment group (eligible for bonuses) did not outperform students whose teachers were assigned to the control group (not eligible for bonuses). The brightest spot was a positive effect of incentives detected in fifth grade during the second and third years of the experiment. This finding, which is robust to a variety of alternative estimation methods, is nonetheless of limited policy significance, for as yet this effect does not appear to persist after students leave fifth grade. Students whose fifth grade teacher was in the treatment group performed no better by the end of sixth grade than did sixth graders whose teacher the year before was in the control group. However, we will continue to investigate this finding as further data become available, and it may be that evidence of persistence will appear among later cohorts.

The report is divided into six sections. After a brief introduction, Section II describes the design and implementation of POINT. In POINT the maximum bonus an eligible teacher might earn was \$15,000—a considerable increase over base pay in this system. To receive this bonus, a teacher’s students had to perform at a level that historically had been reached by only the top five percent of middle school math teachers in a given year. Lesser amounts of \$5,000 and \$10,000 were awarded for performance at lower thresholds, corresponding to the 80th and 90th percentiles

of the same historical distribution. Teachers were therefore striving to reach a fixed target rather than competing against one another—in principle, all participating teachers could have attained these thresholds.

It is unlikely that the bonus amounts were too small to motivate teachers assigned to the treatment group. Indeed, a guiding consideration in the design of POINT was our desire to avoid offering incentives so modest that at most a modest response would result. Instead, we sought to learn what would happen if incentives facing teachers were significantly altered. Was the bar set too high, discouraging teachers who felt the targets were out of reach? We devote considerable attention to this question in Appendix A, examining performance among teachers who were not eligible for bonuses (POINT participants prior to the implementation of the project, and control teachers during the project). We find that about half of these teachers could reach the lowest of the bonus thresholds if their students answered 2 to 3 more questions correctly on an exam of some 55 items. We conclude that the bonus thresholds should have appeared within reach of most teachers and that an attempt to raise performance at the margin ought not to have been seen as wasted effort by all but a few teachers “on the bubble.”

In Section III we consider other threats to the validity of our findings. We investigate whether randomization achieved balance between treatment and control groups with respect to factors affecting achievement other than the incentives that POINT introduced. While balance was achieved overall, there were differences between treatment and control groups within subsamples of interest (for example, among teachers within a single grade). Statistical adjustments through multiple regression analysis are required to estimate the effect of incentives in such subsamples. As always, this raises the possibility that different models will yield different findings. Thus, we place greatest confidence in estimates based on the overall sample, in which data are pooled across years and grades.

POINT randomized participating teachers into treatment and control groups. It did not randomize students. Because the assignment of students to teachers was controlled by the district, it is possible that principals and teachers manipulated the assignment process in order to produce classes for treatment teachers that enhanced their prospect of earning a bonus. In addition, attrition of teachers from POINT was high. By the end of the project, half of the initial participants

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had left the experiment. Such high rates of attrition raise the possibility that our findings could reflect differential selection (for example, more effective teachers might remain in the treatment group than in the control group).

We conducted a variety of analyses to ascertain whether differential attrition or the manipulation of student assignments biased our results. We conclude that neither produced significant differences between treatment and control groups and that experimental estimates of the incentive effect are free of substantial bias. In addition, to remove the impact of differences between the teachers and students assigned to treatment and control that arose by chance, we estimate treatment effects using models in which we control for student and teacher characteristics. Our conclusions about the overall effect of incentives are robust to the omission of such controls: a straightforward comparison of mean outcomes in the treatment and control groups and estimates from the more complicated model both show no overall treatment effect. This is not true of estimates based on subsets of the full sample—for example, outcomes by grade level. At the grade level there were substantial imbalances between treatment and control groups whose influence on achievement must be controlled for.

It is also possible that test score gains were illusory rather than proof of genuine achievement. This would obviously be the case if treatment teachers engaged in flagrant forms of cheating to promote their chances of earning a bonus. But it might also result from the adoption of instructional strategies intended to produce short-term gains on specific test instruments. Our investigation (including a statistical analysis of item-level responses) does not reveal this to have been a problem, though we have not had access to test forms in order to look for suspicious patterns of erasures.

In Section IV we present our findings. As already noted, we find no effect of incentives on test scores overall (pooling across all years and grades). We do find a positive effect among fifth graders whose teachers were eligible for bonuses. We have explored a variety of hypotheses that might account for a positive effect in grade 5 but not the other grades. Only one seems to have played an appreciable role: fifth grade teachers are more likely to instruct the same set of students in multiple subjects. This appears to confer an advantage, though it is unclear precisely what the advantage consists of—whether it is the opportunity to increase time on mathematics at the expense of other subjects, or the fact that these teachers know their students better, or something else. And even this is at best a partial explanation of the fifth grade response.

POINT participants (both treatment and control teachers)

completed surveys each spring over the course of the project. In Section V we summarize some of the findings, focusing on two issues: (1) how teachers' attitudes toward performance pay were affected by POINT; and (2) why we found no overall response to incentives.

Participating teachers generally favored extra pay for better teachers, in principle. They did not come away from their experience in POINT thinking the project had harmed their schools. But by and large, they did not endorse the notion that bonus recipients in POINT were better teachers or that failing to earn a bonus meant a teacher needed to improve. Most participants did not appear to buy in to the criteria used by POINT to determine who was teaching effectively. Perhaps it should not be surprising, then, that treatment teachers differed little from control teachers on a wide range of measures of effort and instructional practices. Where there were differences, they were not associated with higher achievement. By and large, POINT had little effect on what these teachers did in the classroom.

In the concluding section, we summarize our main findings and explore their implications for education policy. The introduction of performance incentives in MNPS middle schools did not set off significant negative reactions of the kind that have attended the introduction of merit pay elsewhere. But neither did it yield consistent and lasting gains in test scores. It simply did not do much of anything.

While it might be tempting to conclude that the middle school math teachers in MNPS lacked the capacity to raise test scores, this is belied by the upward trend in scores over the period of the project, a trend that is probably due to some combination of increasing familiarity with a criterion-referenced test introduced in 2004 and to an intense, high-profile effort to improve test scores to avoid NCLB sanctions.

It should be kept in mind that POINT tested a particular model of incentive pay. Our negative findings do not mean that another approach would not be successful. It might be more productive to reward teachers in teams, or to combine incentives with coaching or professional development. However, our experience with POINT underscores the importance of putting such alternatives to the test.

The UTW web site (www.utw-ks.org) has a link to the actual report. This article is the Executive Summary.

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Kansas Teacher of the Year Finalist, Kim Morrissey, is UTW Member

Kim Morrissey, PE teacher at Dodge Literacy Magnet School, was named a finalist for the Kansas Teacher of the Year. She was selected as the Elementary Region IV representative over teachers from school districts in Kansas' Fourth Congressional District. Her road to this honor began last school year when she was named the Distinguished Classroom Teacher in the Support Teacher Category for the district and the elementary nominee for Region IV.

Seven other finalists from across Kansas and Kim will compete for the award of being named Kansas Teacher of the Year. After more interviews and videos, one will be selected to represent Kansas for the National Teacher of the Year Award. The Kansas winner will be named at a banquet this November in Wichita.

We congratulate Kim for her achievement and wish her all the best as she continues in the process. She is a great representative of the many distinguished teachers and UTW members in Wichita.



Dale Dennis, Assistant Commissioner of Education; Kim Morrissey; and Dr. Diane M. DeBacker, Commissioner of Education

UTW would like to thank the Credit Union of America for their continued support of Wichita Teachers and The United Voice!



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Speak Out!

Last month during our scheduled meeting, the Superintendent brought up an interesting topic- teacher dress. I quickly responded that teachers are the deciding factor in determining their work attire. Mr. Allison did agree that the contract did make that statement, but was more concerned about the word ‘professional’ in the wording. I later checked the negotiated agreement for the exact wording and found in Article XII; Section B; Paragraph 4; “Teachers will project a positive professional manner as determined by the teacher. However, his/her appearance shall not adversely affect his/her professional performance.”

When questioned about what he meant, Mr. Allison gave us examples of what he witnessed in teacher attire during the first week of school. Examples of bicycle shorts with a long t-shirt, jeans with rips, sweats (non- PE teacher), and some shorts fairly short were given. He went on to ask if there was anything UTW could do. I asked to give it some thought.

Here are my thoughts.

This topic has appeared at negotiations in the past, brought to our attention by members, and discussed at a recent KNEA meeting. In visiting with leaders from other large locals, it was discovered that their agreements do not contain dress codes for teachers either, but do suggest professional attire similar to ours.

I believe a dress code for teachers is not

needed. I believe that a teacher’s professional decision is enough. With AYP, MTSS, new literacy and behavior goals, and other more important issues, I don’t believe teacher dress is all that important in the grand scheme. Plus, is this how we want administration to spend their time, making judgments on teacher appearance?

What we possibly need is better personal judgment on what is considered professional. If the chosen dress is something you might wear to kick around on weekends, it might be a wrong choice. If the jeans are torn or ragged, it might be a wrong choice. I know, you probably paid more for the torn jeans, but would you question a doctor or lawyer who dressed in them when you came for your office visit?

My intent in this Speak Out is simply to ask teachers to give more thought to their professional appearance. It is and will remain your professional judgment to determine appropriate dress for you and the situations in your classroom.

* * * *

The contract between UTW and the Board of Education is available on our web site. Go to utw-ks.org and click on the link under the picture for a PDF of the Teacher’s Employment Agreement.

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Larry Landwehr, UTW President

UTW Negotiations Team Announced

UTW President Landwehr announced the 2010-2011 UTW Negotiations Team to the Pro Reps at their Monday, September 20, meeting. The team was recommended by the Executive Board and approved by the Pro Reps. The members of the team are:

- Sara Harrison**- 1st grade- Mueller Elementary
- Susan Phillips**- 5th grade- Cloud Elementary
- Shirley Rose**- Science- Curtis Middle
- Nicole Herrera**- English- Mayberry Middle
- Dwight Goodman**- SPED- East High
- Sara Harjo**- English- South High
- Greg Jones**- UTW Staff
- Keith Welty**- UTW Staff
- Randy Mousley**- UTW Vice President
- Larry Landwehr**- UTW President

The team will begin preparations for the spring negotiations with a survey of members on issues. The survey will be electronically delivered in mid to late October. We encourage all members to participate

in order to have strong data for the proposals to be presented to the Board on February 1, the date both sides exchange proposals for negotiations.

Also, several school sites will be selected to hold meetings to gather input from members regarding contract negotiations issues. Look for these meetings in EVoice messages, and plan to attend one close to you.

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