

The United

Voice



United Teachers

OF WICHITA

Creating Tomorrow Together



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Going Digital

This is the final regular issue of The United Voice to be printed on paper. We have decided to continue publishing The United Voice in a digital format only. That means every month each UTW member will receive an email with a PDF attachment of the Voice. It will also be posted on our web site.

UTW would like to thank all of the great folks at Wooten Printing for their assistance in getting The United Voice out each month. Gil, Mike, and the rest have been extremely helpful over the years. Thank you!!

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- In this issue is a welcome back Speak Out from Larry. You will want to read this article - "Four years is enough!"*
 - Vice President Randy Mousley has written an article about teacher accountability. Since we are still writing the new evaluation system language for the contract, this is a timely piece.*
 - What is the NEA RA and what is it like to be a delegate? Check out pages 4-5.*
 - The AFT-TEACH Conference also was attended by UTW delegates. Don't know what this is? You should because it is an excellent conference. Page 6.*
 - Lesson plans seem to be an issue every year in some buildings. Check out the UTW explanation of what the contract language means for you. Page 7.*

Speak Out!

Just like the summer weather, I offer a warm (OK, HOT) 'Welcome Back' to those of you returning and a special 'Welcome Aboard' to those joining the Wichita Public School System. Hopefully the weather will get back and stay normal as you prepare and begin work with your new group/s of students.

You begin this year with good news that your hard work and dedication to the students of USD 259 has again produced outstanding results in student achievement as presented by the Superintendent in his email during report week. The results show that Wichita Public Schools has superb teachers and support staff that know how to perform their jobs and bring about great outcomes. I repeat a quote from the district's assessment analyst, Bob Winkler, "These numbers don't happen by accident, you don't just get lucky. These results happened because of a lot of hard work and focus by an *extraordinary* group of teachers and other staff."

You, ALL, are to be commended for the work you do and have done for the students of Wichita. You must also be commended for the professionalism you have shown during these tough times. You and your families have given and sacrificed much to help the district through the difficult economic times they have faced. You continue to provide high quality instruction and guidance in your buildings while your salaries and benefits remain frozen for the fourth year. Costs of fuel, electricity, food and everything else continue to rise along with the repayment of loans for initial or master's degrees and family emergencies still occur, but you continue to demonstrate your dedication to your chosen profession. You are living examples of the old saying, "you don't go into education to become rich", but at least one should expect to be able to pay your bills and enjoy some extras. While words of appreciation for a job well done are "appreciated" (and not received often enough), they don't help get the bills paid.

NOW is the time for the BOE, administration, teachers and other groups to work together to find solutions, not tradeoffs, that will provide some type of relief for teachers and all employees in order to facilitate and enhance the next round of negotiations in the spring. Four years is enough!

As the year begins I have three wishes for each of you. My first wish is that you do not hear the phrase 'what's best for kids' used more than once. I say this because I feel the phrase is overused. I don't know anyone who enters this profession that wants to do 'what's worst for kids'. They enter this profession for the love of teaching, to make a difference or transform a life, and a desire to help students prepare for their future. If that is not their mind set, they need to be weeded out immediately. Plus, the continuing growth of student achievement throughout the district would indicate that we are doing what's best for kids. (Although this brings up other topics that are debatable and worthy of a different Speak Out).

My second wish is that you don't hear another overused phrase, 'that's an adult issue'. There are around 7,000 adults in this district, and I would bet that every one of us has had an adult issue while employed here. The district needs to seriously listen to these issues and work with UTW and others to find workable solutions, especially in these high pressure and stressful times.

My final wish is that this year is the best and most rewarding year for you and your students no matter if it is your first, twentieth or last! Have a great year full of successes.



Larry Landwehr, UTW President

Realistic Teacher Accountability

Randy Mousley, UTW Vice President

This summer at the NEA Representative Assembly many issues were brought forward, debated, and voted on by the delegates. One of many issues you may have heard about in the media is the NEA's new policy on Teacher Evaluation and Accountability. This is a rather lengthy document that comprehensively addresses the position of the organization on this issue. You can access the entire document at: <http://www.nea.org/grants/46326.htm>

The adoption of this new policy statement on Teacher Evaluation and Accountability represents somewhat of a paradigm shift for the NEA. The AFT (American Federation of Teachers), our other national affiliate, has for several years collaborated with states and local school districts to include workable teacher accountability into their evaluation systems. For the NEA, this is new territory. The part of this policy statement that has caused some consternation for many educators is the section entitled "*Indicators of Contribution to Student Learning and Growth*". This section states that there are multiple factors that impact student learning, many of which are outside the control of teachers but must still be acknowledged. The document goes on to list indicators of student learning that could be used to determine the impact a teacher has on student learning. Within this section it is also mentioned that "standardized tests" scores could be utilized as one of many factors regarding student learning. The policy statement also requires the tests being utilized for this purpose must be "high quality (and) developmentally appropriate". It continues on with the statement that "Unless such tests are shown to be developmentally appropriate, scientifically valid, and reliable for the purpose of measuring both student learning and a teacher's performance, such tests may not be used to support any employment action against a teacher and may be used only to provide non-evaluative formative feedback".

A teacher should be responsible for student learning and growth during the time we have charge

of them. It is difficult to defend an argument contrary to that premise. Education is a complicated process that is extremely difficult to accurately quantify. Unfortunately, much of the common public perceives that a single test score actually defines teacher effectiveness. The big question here is how does this profession hold educators accountable and do it in truly scientifically supported manner? The NEA's adopted Policy Statement attempts to do just that.

There is much work to be done in the area of development of standardized tests that will measure both student growth and the impact of an individual teacher on the learning of a particular student. I do not claim to be a psychometrician but it seems to me that it would be extremely difficult to measure two completely different factors with the same metric. If it can be accomplished then maybe we can move forward with the idea of identifying teacher effectiveness to student test scores more seriously. Until that occurs, we need to look no further than at the test cheating scandal that occurred in the Atlanta, Georgia Public Schools that came to light in the media this past summer to understand what can happen when there is an over emphasis on standardized test scores as the sole measure of student learning. Our nation deserves better, our teachers deserve better and without a doubt our students deserve better.

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The NEA Representative Assembly (RA)

What is it? Why do we spend money to send delegates? Is it basically a vacation?

LIFE AS AN NEA RA DELEGATE

by Larry Smith, East High School, UTW Delegate to the NEA RA

Beep-beep-beep! I turn over to reach for my cell phone alarm, fumbling in the dark as I turn it off. It's 5:45 am. It is NOT a school day. I sit up in the dark room and realize (again) that I'm not in my own bedroom; I'm in a Chicago hotel, and a few feet away is my room-mate trying to grab a few more minutes of sleep. Welcome to the NEA Representative Assembly 2011!

By 7:00 am, I will be in a two hour meeting with fellow Kansans, followed by eight hours on the RA floor with almost 9,000 other delegates. We will be listening to speeches, caucusing with delegates from other states, reading resolutions, texting messages to delegates, writing real-time reports on Facebook and Twitter, and voting on the resolutions and policies that will drive the agenda and activities of the National Education Association for years to come.

Somewhere along the way I'll grab lunch in the convention center, take a few bathroom breaks, charge up my cell phone, and figure out if I'll have enough energy to find a place to eat dinner after we adjourn at 6:00 pm. Later, I'll read up on what will likely be the next day's work. I'll finally get to bed around midnight.

I'll repeat all this for four days, plus some of us will have another one or two (or four or five) days of extra meetings. In a nutshell, this is what a delegate's life is like at an NEA RA.

Don't get me wrong; there are opportunities to enjoy the cultural life of the city we're in. And we try to socialize with old friends and make new friends. But the work is hard and the pace is fast. By the last day, we're all exhausted. Sometimes it's frustrating, especially when the majority of delegates have voted something contrary to what you believe in. But it's also exhilarating, because we're seeing people just like us – classroom teachers, para-educators, administrators, nurses, bus drivers – making the decisions of the largest professional association in the world. This is grass-roots democracy, and it's sweaty, earthy, inspiring, exciting work.

This year, the NEA RA considered six standing rule amendments, passing two; three by-law amendments, passing one; 21 legislative amendments, passing 10; 100 new business items, passing 41. Others items were referred to the National Executive Committee or some other group. We re-elected Dennis Van Roekel and Lily Eskelsen as national president and vice-president, and elected several Executive Committee and Board of Directors members. We also passed



Kansas Delegates were part of the 9,000 delegates at the NEA R.A.

a major policy statement on teacher evaluation and accountability, endorsed the re-election of Barack Obama, listened to Vice-President Joe Biden address the RA, and recognized several individuals and groups for their efforts on behalf of education.

I sometimes hear from UTW members who are unhappy with an action of the RA, and they say, “Why did they do that? Why don’t they listen to the members?” I try very hard to stay calm, and then I say, “They ARE the members. People like you and I elected these delegates, and they are just like us. If you want to have a say, you have to get involved.” I also try to help those members see that for every action they don’t like, the NEA RA makes 100 decisions that they do agree with.

I also have listened to members complain that they don’t like their dues being used for delegates to go to some big city and have a vacation. It is true that KNEA does pay for the transportation and hotel fees of every Kansas delegate, and that our members’ dues are used for that, but KNEA doesn’t pay for any social



Delegates standing in solidarity.

activities, and only \$15 a day for food (try doing that in Chicago). And one of the unspoken, but very real, expectations of a delegate is to contribute to the NEA Fund, to the tune of nearly \$200 per delegate. Most of us never even bother asking fellow members to help with that contribution. We just dig it out.

Most delegates don’t mind these things. We love the hard work and rewards of being a delegate. Most first-time delegates end up running again in the annual delegate election. If you like being part of something really important, and believe in the concept of educators being involved in educational issues, then you might want to consider running for the privilege of being a delegate to the NEA RA 2012 in Washington, D.C., or to the 2012 AFT National Convention that will be held in Detroit next summer. Besides teaching our students, can there be anything more important than representing your fellow UTW members where real democracy still means something?

UTW sent fourteen delegates to the NEA R.A. There were also some UTW members elected as either Regional or State delegates.



Delegates wait to get thru Secret Service security to hear Vice President Biden.



AFT-TEACH Conference Report

by David E. Clark, Jr., (6th Grade Science, Wilbur)

I participated in the AFT-TEACH Conference in Washington, D.C., from July 9-13. This conference focused on professional learning aspects of teaching and the importance of professional advocacy. In addition to small group learning opportunities, many plenary sessions were scattered throughout which allowed us to listen to people on the front lines of current trends in Education.

Fourteen UTW members attended this conference. One member, Allen Galloway (5th Grade, Clark Elementary) said, "I got information that can help me in my classroom. The Homework Session was excellent because we got into groups and had some good discussions."

Personally, I enjoyed a session led by teachers from the Toledo Public Schools that discussed Project-Based Learning (PBL). Their district had written a grant to integrate PBL in after-school activities to keep kids using critical thinking skills after the regular school day.

Further, I found remarks by New York Times columnist Paul Krugman to be inspiring as he was critical of state legislatures balancing their budgets on the backs of teachers. Although he is also employed as a professor at Princeton University, he was openly complimentary of public school teachers.

During the last night of the AFT-TEACH Conference, our group was treated to an advanced showing of the documentary, "American Teacher". It chronicled the tribulations of five American teachers at various stages in their professional life. A male teacher from Texas stood out to me: he and his wife had two young daughters, so he was forced to work 40 hours per week at Circuit City. I have always continued to moonlight in home repair or yard maintenance just to make ends meet, so I had empathy for the Texas teacher, and I know many of my colleagues have to work extra jobs, too.

Finally, one statistic shared in "American Teacher" resonated with me: 28% of American educators were male in 2002. By 2011, that number had dipped to 16%. Male teachers are becoming an endangered species in Education mainly due to the fact that it is nearly impossible to be a breadwinner in our profession. American Teacher did a great job of demonstrating that the lack of adequate teacher compensation is hurting our profession in ways that may never be remedied. As we have found out in Wichita, the Great Recession has forced many families to rely solely on one's teacher pay because the spouse may have lost his/her primary job.

The AFT-TEACH Conference is held every other year in Washington, D.C.

* * * *

Changes to Teacher Licensure

Two very important changes that impact all Kansas educators:

License Lapse:

Beginning August 1, 2011, if a license holder allows any license to lapse, a fingerprint card and KBI/FBI background check will be required before the license is issued. That procedure costs \$50 and is in addition to the cost of renewing the license. "A license renewal application is considered timely by KSDE staff as long as it is postmarked prior to the license's expiration date," said Peg Dunlap, director of KNEA Instructional Advocacy.

Fees Increase:

Beginning September 1, 2011, the fee for all licenses will increase. The new fee structure is based

on the length of time the license covers. All licenses start with the current \$39 fee. An additional \$3 per year of license life will now be added. For example, an initial license, which lasts two years, will now cost \$45 [39+3+3]. A professional license, which lasts 5 years, will cost \$54 [39+(3x5)].

Specific information is available on the KSDE web site, at the Educator Licensure page.

Remember: licenses can be renewed up to six months before their expiration date. KNEA urges every member to renew in a timely manner. "We suggest teachers submit their renewal application no less than two months prior to their expiration date," said Dunlap.

Lesson Plans:

What is required? Can I be required to submit them ahead of time?

This is UTW's interpretation of the lesson plan language in Article 4 of the contract. If you have questions about the topic, please contact UTW at 262-5171 or by email - utw@utw-ks.org.

Article 4: Professional Day: Section B: Classroom Teachers

Paragraph 2: The teacher shall make his/her lesson plans and any other material which the teacher is using available to the principal upon request. Lesson plans shall be based upon standards but are required only in sufficient detail to provide guidance to the teacher.

Point #1a: *'available to the principal upon request.'* This does not mean a teacher must copy the plans and submit them. To make available has a very different meaning than submit. A teacher may leave their plans on their desk, or inform the principal where they may be found, and be in compliance with the contract.

Point #1b: *'available to the principal upon request.'* This is a unique request made to an individual. It is not a blanket demand made of every teacher every Monday. Teachers use their plans every day and many write them every weekend. To always leave them on their desk on a certain day is an imposition on the teacher that doesn't need to occur. If a principal has a concern about what was being taught, ask to see the plans.

Point #2: *When must the plans be made available?* Because plans often must be changed on a daily basis, they may not be required any earlier than the period for which they are written. The contract does not specify that plans must be completed a certain number of hours or days prior to teaching a class.

Point #3: How much detail is required in the plans? *'Lesson plans shall be based upon standards but are required only in sufficient detail to provide guidance to the teacher.'* Teachers may not be required to put lesson plans into a specific format, nor can they be required to provide a specified amount of detail.





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