

ADVOMTACATE



ONTARIO-MONTCLAIR TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

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SEPTEMBER 2009



PREVENTING THAT ACHY FEELING!

by Melody Kelly

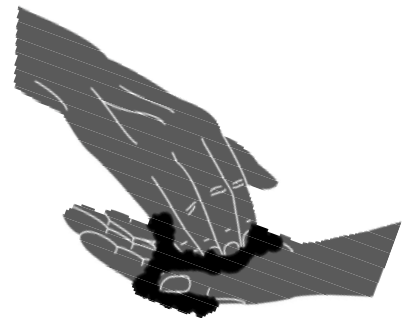
School Nurse and OMTA Rep Denise Mick encourages all to make plans to receive the regular yearly flu shot as well as the H1N1 flu shot. The district has polled employees by phone to collect data for interest in obtaining shots through OMSD. When made available the H1N1 (Swine Flu) vaccination is likely to be a two shot series to be given about 2-4 weeks apart, according to District Health Services Project Administrator Cindy Tenney, RN, PHN, MSN, as stated in her bulletin that went out to principals.

The County of San Bernardino Department of Public Health Immunization Program's seasonal flu clinics will provide the regular flu shot for ten dollars but will not have the H1N1 at these locations. For county immunizations call 1-800-722-4794.

If we develop symptoms we are encouraged to make an appointment with our medical provider instead of waiting in the hospital emergency rooms where we can be chatting with people who may be contagious. NEA tells us to find out more about H1N1 so we can watch for symptoms in our students. Resources are available at www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/ or www.pandemicflu.gov/.

At a recent Kaiser visit I was given the "opportunity" for a pneumonia shot since I was of a certain "age." I had not heard of the recommendation for this shot until this visit so please ask your provider if you are in this category. (Yes, I happily received the shot and asked for a sticker.)

The district website carries information on this subject and you can also check out CTA's website at www.cta.org. As we continue to teach good hygiene and prevention, having emergency lesson plans handy wouldn't be a bad idea.



FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

Rick McClure



With the election of Barack Obama as President, many of us in the education community thought we finally had an education ally in the White House. It appears we may have been too optimistic. The good news is that the Obama administration is talking to education leaders. NEA President Dennis Van Roekel talks to Education Secretary Arne Duncan at least once per week. More importantly, the people in the Education Department responsible for actually doing most of the work meet and consult regularly with their counterparts in NEA. Secretary Duncan has also met twice with the CTA officers David Sanchez, Dean Vogel, and Gail Mendes. This never happened during the Bush administration, where a Secretary of Education called NEA a terrorist group.

The bad news is that the Obama administration is pursuing some policies that will actually make NCLB worse, rather than better. In its Race To The Top (RTTT) initiative, funded by the economic stimulus package thus bypassing congressional oversight, the Education Department is pursuing some policies that are alarming. One is insisting that evaluations be tied in some manner to standardized test scores. In another part of this newsletter you can read my response to that policy, as published in the Inland Valley Daily Bulletin. While they have not yet proposed a merit pay initiative tied to test scores it would seem to be not far behind. Rest assured that NEA and CTA are vigorously opposing these initiatives on your behalf.

Another part of RTTT is a change in sanctions to “low performing” schools (i.e Program Improvement or PI). Current law says that when schools fail to meet established goals (read AYP), they are subject to one of seven different sanctions. Since six of the sanctions are ones no one really wants, all districts in this situation choose the 7th, which is alternative governance. That’s why OMSD has an Alternative Governance Board. In the RTTT though, the Obama administration is proposing to limit the sanctions to three: closing the school, turning the school into a charter, or reconstituting the school (i.e. transferring all the current staff and restaffing it). With as many schools in PI as we have in OMSD, this is a proposal that will have chilling effect on all of us. Even if you teach at a school that is not in PI, under the reconstitution provision you could find yourself involuntarily transferred to a school because all of the teachers there are being transferred out. Or, if the school is turned into a charter, you could find yourself at a new school that is not protected by the contract, meaning your working conditions, like how many hours you work, could be dictated to you with no recourse.

It is too early yet to tell where all of this is going, but be assured that NEA, CTA and OMTA will be vigorously opposing these and similar proposals. You can be sure that CTA and OMTA will keep you informed on what you can do to fight this.*

In previous issues of the Advocate, I’ve argued that it’s time for schools to start making the time for teachers to meet and collaborate. I have a very simple philosophy about this. First, no one cares more about students than teachers. Second, no one knows more what the students need than their teachers. We have been doing data analysis in OMSD for at least the last six years, yet we still have principals who believe that their teachers need additional training in how to use data. Just as bad, we have principals who believe that planning time needs to be “structured.” We don’t need more training, we don’t need to have our time “structured.” What we need is time to meet in our grade levels or departments to analyze all of the data (including our own observations about our students) and then decide how to best meet the needs identified. The most powerful reform we can institute in our schools is to allow teachers to make these decisions and giving them the time to do it.

If you work at a school where you are not given this time, go talk to your principal about it. Demand to know why you’re not trusted enough to do this on your own. Demand to know why your planning time needs to be “structured” instead of allowing you, and your colleagues to make those decisions and talk about what you think you need to talk about. Most of our schools have moved beyond this and it’s time for the others to follow suit. Our district test scores last year speak for themselves about the value of letting teachers take control. Again, if your principal has not yet given your school this control it’s time to have that conversation with him or her about why not.

* After writing this I attended a meeting chaired by CTA Vice President Dean Vogel who reported that Secretary Duncan was very receptive to CTA concerns about all of this and assured him that he would personally look into all of this. It appears that being able to actually speak to the Administration about our concerns may very well pay off. I’ll keep you posted.

USING TEST SCORES TO RATE TEACHERS HURTS STUDENTS

The following is an article written by Rick McClure at the request of the Inland Valley Daily Bulletin and appeared on Sunday, August 30 under the title above.

The Department of Education has announced a competition for \$4.35 billion in grants for a program called "Race to the Top." The goals are for states to use the funds to drive reform in four main areas: teacher effectiveness/distribution, standards and assessments, data systems, and struggling schools. One specific tenet of the plan says states must have no "legal, statutory or regulatory barriers to linking data about student achievement or student growth to teachers for the purpose of teacher and principal evaluation." This last part is creating controversy in California because the Department of Education is alleging that California does not comply with this requirement.

The fact is, though, that nothing in California law prohibits linking student test results with specific teachers. California law already requires teacher evaluations. Further, the law specifically allows for what the federal government is demanding. It reads, "each school district shall evaluate and assess teacher performance as it relates to the progress of pupils towards the state standards, and, if applicable, the state adopted academic content standards as *measured by state adopted criterion referenced assessments*." Based on current California law, it's hard to understand what the Department of Education is concerned about.

Allow me to more specific, though, about how data is actually used on a day-to-day basis to improve student achievement. In the Ontario Montclair School District, where I'm President of the Teachers' Association, data is used every day to guide teacher decisions about what to teach and how to teach it. Far more important than using this data to evaluate teachers is using the data to evaluate student performance and to guide instruction. For example, at Del Norte School in Ontario, teachers meet once per week in grade level teams to collaborate with each other on a number of instructional issues, including examining data from school, district, and state tests. They use the data that is provided for them in order to improve the instruction they are delivering to their students. With the improved instruction, guided by the data, student achievement improves. Isn't this what it should be all about,

improving student outcomes?

The Department of Education seems to be focusing on one narrow part of the problem, evaluating teachers based on the results of one test. Teachers oppose that because they know that their students are more than just a test score. Even President Obama believes this, and said so in a speech on July 24. In order to truly judge what a student has learned, and can do, it is necessary to use multiple measures such as classroom assessments, district assessments, state assessments, and, yes, teacher judgment. Not all students fall into neat little boxes allowing us to evaluate how they are doing.

There are few things, in my experience, that teachers are more united on than being evaluated, or paid, on the basis of a standardized test. The reason for this is very simple. Teachers know from their own experience that there are many factors beyond their control that affect how students do in school. They also know that classes have varying numbers of students who do well in school and students who don't.

A very likely consequence of requiring that evaluations, or pay, be based on test scores is that teachers will do everything they can to avoid the most challenging students. Take little "Billy" for example. Billy comes from a family that has lived in 7 different homes by the time he's in second grade. Even though it's only his third year in school he's now at his fourth different school. Billy is also absent a lot. Needless to say, Billy struggles in school with reading and math. Billy is an example of student who most needs our best teachers, but under a system where teachers are evaluated, or paid, based on how Billy does on his state test at the end of year, what teacher will want him? Even worse, how can teachers be expected to collaborate with each other, a proven reform that will increase student achievement, when they are in competition with each other for the best students?

What the Department of Education is demanding of California, is unnecessary. Even worse, depending on where they want to go with this, it has the potential of being very damaging. Instead of allowing, and encouraging, teachers to work together, using data, to improve student achievement, it will pit teachers against each other in an ugly competition over who gets what students in their classes. Teachers understand this, which is why they oppose it. If only the policy makers understood this.

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Lincoln: Susan Hardisty, Jessica Woerz/
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Vina Danks: Teresa Collins, Henry Dutra,
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Vista Grande: Helen Cieslik
Wiltsey: Ken Aven, Linda Boren
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Speech: Susan Yee
Health/Nurse: Denise Mick
Early Ed Center: Leticia Martinez
Hardy Center: Linda Meyer
HFB: Vacant



KNOW YOUR CONTRACT – GRIEVANCES

“A grievance is a claim by a grievant that there has been a violation, misinterpretation, or misapplication of a provision in this Agreement.” In other words grievances are about the contract. Your administrator being mean or unreasonable is not a grievance. That doesn’t mean there isn’t something the association can do to help, but grieving isn’t one of them.

Furthermore, a grievance can only be filed against the district, never against another teacher. We sometimes hear of one unit member threatening to file a grievance against another unit member. This would be impossible to do, since unit members can’t violate the contract against other unit members.

If your administrator asks you to do something you think is a violation of the contract, don’t simply refuse to do it, since that can be considered insubordination. Instead ask, “Are you directing me to do that?” If the answer is yes, do it, then grieve it.

If you think you have a grievance, contact that OMTA office for help and guidance.

OMTA Executive Board Meeting
October 5th at 3:45pm

OMTA Rep Council Meeting
October 26th at 3:45pm

OMSD School Board Meeting
October 1st & 14th
7:00pm at Central School

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