

Newsflash

Insider News for OEA Leaders  www.oregoned.org

September 12, 2003 Please print and post Newsflash on the Association bulletin board at your work site.

Attention Association Representatives:

Make sure members at your work site are getting the information they need to be effective advocates for public education. Print and post *Newsflash* on the Association bulletin board at your work site each week. (A portable document format (PDF) document is attached to this e-mail for that purpose. You will need Adobe Acrobat reader to open this document. If you don't have Adobe Acrobat, go to www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep.html to download a free copy.

Crisis Organizing Continues in Blue Mountain; Eagle Point Settles

Last week's *Newsflash* reported that two local affiliates of OEA have been involved in contentious contract negotiations. This week, negotiations and organizing continue for the Blue Mountain Community College Faculty Association in Pendleton, while Eagle Point Education Association celebrates the ratification of its new contract just days ago.

In Pendleton, a mediation session held this week yielded no agreement and the parties are scheduled for another mediation session on September 25. The 130 full- and part-time members of the Blue Mountain Community College Faculty Association are strongly resisting the demands of the administration to cut programs, slash benefits, reduce full-time faculty to part-time status, and more.

The Association reports that members are motivated and community support is high. About 100 faculty members attended the last board meeting and they also plan to be at the next board meeting, scheduled for September 24. During a recent faculty lunch, members marched through the administration building, all the while chanting, "settle now!" Should the district move to implement all or part of their offer, the Association has the option to exercise its right to strike.

Meanwhile, Eagle Point Education Association/OEA, a wall-to-wall unit representing licensed staff and education support professionals, settled earlier this week and ratified the contract on Tuesday evening. The 330-some member Association had been engaged in lengthy contract negotiations that Local President Jody Streetman says were made much

more difficult by the involvement of the Oregon School Boards Association (OSBA) in the district's bargaining agenda. "Our members are thrilled because we were able to keep OEA Choice Trust insurance—our top choice because we prefer the quality of the coverage. It was obvious to me that an OSBA agenda was the cause of our difficult negotiations because they have a financial stake in the districts using Blue Cross-Blue Shield." Streetman believes that negotiations could have carried on longer, but it was clear to the district that the members were very well organized. "Our members really came together and we had tons of support from outside the Association as well. We got a great contract for these times."

OEA Member Appointed to PERS Board

Governor Ted Kulongoski has appointed OEA member **Tom Grimsley, Eugene Education Association (EEA)**, to represent labor on the brand-new Public Employee Retirement System (PERS) Board.

Included in the PERS reforms enacted during the recent legislative session, was a revamping of the Board, which makes decisions affecting the retirement of public employees. The new legislation reduces the PERS Board from 12 members to five. The new configuration includes one board member representing labor union members of the system (Tom Grimsley); one board member that is either a management employee of the state or who holds an elective office for a public employer other than the state; and three members of the public who are not PERS members, but that have experience in business or pension management or investing.

The new PERS Board will be responsible for implementing the 2003 legislative PERS reforms, including the creation of a new retirement plan—the Oregon Public Service Retirement Plan—for new employees. It will also make decisions on the direction of the PERS Board's response to litigation, in addition to many other decisions that have great impact on public employees.

Grimsley comes to the Board with experience on the Bethel School District bargaining team for the last four labor contracts. He has also served as a member of Bethel's Joint Benefits and Insurance committee for the past fifteen years. As vice-president of the Eugene

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Education Association for the past six years, Tom has had a wide-range of experiences with the PERS system as well as the many other issues that labor organizations face.

OEA Members Represent You on Important State Boards

The recent appointment of an OEA member to the PERS Board (see above story) is just one example of OEA member participation on key state boards that have great impact on public education and education employees. Here are some others:

OEA President **Kris Kain**, an elementary teacher from Coos Bay, serves as a Board member over the Quality Education Model (QEM). The QEM was developed by education professionals and community college leaders and puts a price tag on educating Oregon's students to the quality goals established in state law.

Five OEA members serve on the Fair Dismissal Appeals Board (Fair DAB), a group of 20 individuals. When a teacher on permanent contract is dismissed and an appeal to the local school board fails, the next level of appeal is Fair DAB. OEA members who serve on Fair DAB include:

- **Paul Duchin**, middle school teacher, Eugene Education Association.
- **Kevin Murphy**, high school teacher, Salem Education Association.
- **Carolyn Ramey**, high school counselor, Seaside Education Association.
- **Linda Streetman**, high school teacher, Eagle Point Education Association.
- **Karen Watters**, elementary teacher, Sutherlin Education Association.

Eight OEA members serve as commissioners on the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission (TSPC), the group that oversees teacher licensure. They are:

- **Aurora Cedillo**, secondary bilingual/bicultural educator, Salem Education Association.
- **Cathy Gwinn**, elementary teacher, Beaverton Education Association.
- **Anne Jones**, retired Canby elementary teacher, NEA-R-Oregon.
- **Katrina Myers**, high school English teacher, Klamath County Education Association

- **Marit Pierce**, elementary teacher, Coos Bay Education Association
- **Debra Robinson**, sixth grade teacher, Parkrose Education Association.
- **Sharon Shannon**, high school math teacher, LaGrande Education Association
- **Leslie Walborn**, elementary teacher, Arlington Education Association.

In addition, **Karen Weiseth**, special education teacher, District 6 (Central Point) Education Association, serves as a Board liaison to TSPC.

And finally, serving as a Board Liaison to the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) Board is OEA member **Jorie Weinberg**, middle school teacher, Gresham/Barlow Education Association.

OEA Urges You To DECLINE TO SIGN Petitions

Petitions are circulating around the state in an effort to repeal the \$1.2 billion revenue plan enacted by Oregon's legislature last month. The revenue-raising plan, which includes a temporary (three-year) income tax surcharge, is the backbone to the \$5.2 billion in cash budget appropriated for K-12 education and the funding for other essential state programs for the next two years.

OEA urges you to ask your colleagues, friends and family members to decline to sign one of these petitions. If the measure makes the ballot, it opens the door for deep, immediate cuts to public education and other state services. Oregon's public schools stand to lose more than \$400 million if the revenue-raising plan is repealed. Oregon has lost more than 1,500 public school employees in the last year and is ranked near the top of the nation in class sizes. Without this new revenue plan, Oregon's schools will likely retain their distinction as having the shortest school year in the nation.

Oregon's students and educators deserve better. Decline to sign...for our schools, our future and our Oregon.

More>>

NEA Supports Proposals to Improve 'No Child Left Behind'

This week, U.S. Rep. Ted Strickland (D-Ohio) introduced the Student Testing Fairness Act. The proposed legislation, supported by the National Education Association (NEA), would make much-needed changes to the latest revision of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, also known as the 'No Child Left Behind' law.

The Strickland bill recognizes that there is no one-size-fits-all prescription for student achievement. The bill would end reliance on a single test as a measure of a student's achievement, give schools credit for improving student academic growth over time, and create reasonable ways to measure the skills and progress of students with disabilities and limited English language proficiency.

Also, the proposal (H.R. 3049) provides for supplemental services, such as tutoring, and the option of attending another public school to students in those groups who do not make sufficient progress.

"The Strickland bill still insists on holding schools accountable, but it does so in a realistic manner," said Reg Weaver, NEA President.

The NEA and its affiliates are urging Congress and the Administration to support reform efforts that educators know will work, rather than impose unfunded mandates that hinder the progress and lower the standards that schools have already set for themselves.

In The News This Week:

On Monday, the *Register-Guard* in Eugene published a lengthy story about area teachers digging into their own pockets to purchase books and school supplies to meet the needs of their students. Reporter Susan Palmer told readers, "Teacher spending falls into two categories – educational materials that directly relate to studies and items that enhance classroom ambiance or student attitude." She noted a survey released last month by the National Education Association (NEA), which showed that during 2001-2002, teachers spent annually an average of \$443 of their own money to help meet student needs. To read the complete story, go to:

www.registerguard.com/news/2003/09/08/e1.cr.edextra.0908.html

Educators Reminded to Save Receipts for Educators' Deduction

As the new school year begins, the Internal Revenue Service is reminding teachers and other educators to save their receipts for purchases of books and classroom supplies. These out-of-pocket expenses may lower your 2003 taxes.

Taxpayers may subtract up to \$250 of qualified expenses when figuring their adjusted gross income (AGI) for 2003. This deduction is available whether or not the taxpayer itemizes deductions on Schedule A and is available to eligible educators in public or private elementary or secondary schools. To be eligible, a person must work at least 900 hours during a school year as a teacher, instructor, counselor, principal or aide.

The IRS suggests that educators keep records of qualifying expenses in a folder or envelope with a label such as "Educator Expenses Deduction," noting the date, amount and purpose of each purchase. This will help prevent a missed deduction at tax time. More information about the Educator Expense Deduction is available online at:

www.irs.gov/taxtopics/page/0,,id%3D105560,00.html

Health Benefits Survey Documents Skyrocketing Premiums

The 2003 Annual Employer Health Benefits Survey was released this week by the Kaiser Family Foundation and Health Research and Educational Trust (HRET).

The survey shows that health insurance premiums increased 13.9% in 2003, a larger increase than last year and the third consecutive year of double-digit increases. This was the largest increase since 1990. While employers are not dropping coverage, most are passing on higher costs to employees. Over the past three years, the amount of the premium employees pay for family coverage has increased almost 50%, from \$1,619 to \$2,412. The typical family health insurance policy now costs \$9,068, with employers on average paying 73% and employees paying 27%.

The report can be found at:

www.kff.org/content/2003/20030909a. In addition to the survey, the HRET web site is a valuable resource for many health care and insurance related issue