

THE DETROIT teacher

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December 2010

DFT Sues Over 3% Shortage

Since July Michigan teachers have been shorted 3 percent in their paychecks. Thanks to state lawmakers, current public school employees are being assessed to pay for retiree health care costs.

Public school employees are guaranteed a pension but, because of a Michigan Supreme Court decision, are not guaranteed health care when they retire. Nevertheless, the Legislature has required current employees to fund health care for retirees even though current teachers may never receive health care themselves when they retire.

“This is like charging Ohio drivers an extra gas tax because some day they might drive in Michigan,” said Mark Cousens, general counsel for AFT Michigan.

“You can’t assess one group of people for something that benefits a different group of people – the people who are already retired,” said Mark O’Keefe, DFT executive vice president. “It’s like saying we’re charging you for something you may not get.”

In August, the DFT together with 80 other affiliates of AFT Michigan, pursued legal action. The DFT is a plaintiff on the lawsuit filed by AFT Michigan to stop the Health Care Trust withholding.

Because of the lawsuit, the state retirement system has put the money in escrow in case it loses and has to pay back the funds.

“We were on top of this and we have a good case,” O’Keefe said.

There is a caveat, however. The state will fight this aggressively, O’Keefe says. “And even if we win, they will appeal.”



Nutrition Night at the DFT

Unions Reach Out on Food Front

Detroit parents tasted a bit of fall harvest Oct. 27 with ratatouille, vegetarian spaghetti and spring mix salad, thanks to the leadership of Detroit school unions in helping parents eat healthier food.

The Coalition of Unions sponsored another in a series of Parent Academies called Nutrition Night.

Nutrition Night – a tasty and generous event – invited parents to learn how to buy and cook healthy meals, do the hustle for exercise, and take home a bag of free fresh produce.

“Our parents are the first teachers,” said DFT President Keith Johnson. “The one reform that remains constant is parental involvement and support. It’s making sure your children are receiving the proper rest, making sure your children are receiving the proper nutrition.”

“One of the great tragedies in our community is that the children are not physically fit,” Johnson said.

“They are not receiving the correct nutrition. They also are not receiving

the correct medical care.”

The unions – the DFT, the Detroit Federation of Paraprofessionals, the Detroit Association of Educational Office Employees, and the AFT – are reaching out to parents as partners in the educational process, inviting them to learn how to prepare their children for optimum educational opportunities.

That means more than eating healthily. It also means expending calories.

“It’s not just what you eat but what you do to wear off the calories you put in,” said keynote speaker Ron Rice, president of the NFLPA Detroit chapter. A Gleaners Food chef taught cooking basics like spicing up food and cooking lean but delicious dishes.

“It’s just tremendous what these three locals are doing,” David Hecker, AFT Michigan president, said to the parents. “You are the first educators of your children and you’re the lifetime educators of your children.”

The parents were thrilled with the



door prizes, ranging from a set of pots to a digital slow-cooker, bought by the locals. They also enjoyed a vegetarian meatless spaghetti and a spring mix salad prepared by Rosemarie Kirtz, secretary of the Detroit Federation of Paraprofessionals, Local 2350, from ingredients in her garden.

Loretta Johnson, AFT vice president, came to Detroit to attend Nutrition Night. On a tour of Carstens Elementary School earlier that day, Johnson learned that the staff reaches out in every direction to make AYP each year. If it’s lack of food that is a problem, children who stay after school get dinner.

“If a student is hungry but not in the after-school program, we say let them eat!” said psychologist Patricia Kane.

All of this attention on proper health and school readiness is the focus of the unions’ Parent Academies.

“What we’re doing here tonight,” Loretta Johnson said, “makes a difference.”

BATTLE STATIONS:

As Assaults on Teachers Continue, We Must Defend Ourselves

Tenure gives us too much protection. Our salaries are too high. Our pensions are too good. And certification is overrated. These are just a few of the latest attacks on our profession that legislators, think tanks, corporate executives and other critics have heaped upon us as they attempt to dissect what is wrong with public education.

President's Report



Keith Johnson

It isn't enough for us to embrace educational reforms. It isn't enough that we have acknowledged we must improve student outcomes. It isn't enough that we are reaching out to colleges and universities to improve the way they prepare teachers.

Now many state governments, including Michigan, want to pay for their budget deficits on the backs of teachers. It is the height of hypocrisy that the same people who continually hold up the teaching profession as the key to restoring America to global greatness, also vilify us as the prob-

lem, not the solution.

In recent weeks legislation has been introduced in Michigan to all but eliminate the tenure rights of teachers, eliminate seniority, reduce pay and pensions, and make it easier to fire teachers without just cause.

As educators, we have followed the script for pursuing the American dream. We have gone to college, earned our degrees, selected a profession that establishes a productive quality of life while at the same time providing an invaluable service: teaching the youth of America.

Now we are rewarded with the threat of being penalized for choosing a profession that affords us few amenities. No one ever gets rich by being a teacher. Many teachers feel the need to earn additional income by working after-school programs, teaching summer school, or even taking second jobs to supplement their income.

Since 1994 Michigan teachers are required to take additional coursework to maintain their teaching certificates, an additional expense that is seldom covered by their employer.

The twisted irony is that Michigan, like many other states, has embraced Teach for America as the salvation for education, believing that college graduates (many who cannot find jobs in their chosen field) can miraculously come into education and provide quality instruction as good as, or better



NUTRITION NIGHT – The DFT hosted the parent academy “Nutrition Night” Oct. 27. It was a huge success, teaching parents about healthy eating, cooking and exercise. DFT President Keith Johnson welcomed the guests along with pro football player Ronald Rice, AFT Vice President Loretta Johnson, Ruby Newbold, president of the Detroit Association of Educational Office Employees, and Donna Jackson, president of the Detroit Federation of Paraprofessionals.

than, those who go the traditional certification route.

We must send a clear message to our lawmakers that their assaults upon our profession are unwise. With so many of our teachers now approaching retirement, it will soon become necessary to recruit young men and women into a profession that is currently not attracting the best and the brightest in part because of the persistent attacks on the profession.

These men and women are turned off by the lack of competitive salaries, lack of parental support, lack of

resources, particularly in poor urban areas, and students that quite frankly are more troubled than ever before.

Making teaching less attractive as a career will further impede our ability to implement educational reforms because we will have to settle for whomever comes into teaching as a last resort instead of those of us who chose this as a lifelong career.

I encourage all of you to contact your state representatives and state senators to advocate for yourselves and your profession. Remind them that teachers prepare everyone else to pursue their dreams, and often, to make more than those who taught them.

Hundreds of Detroit Kids Clothed

Eight-year-old Myanna was thrilled to get a brand-new duffel bag and enter the mall to fill it with a winter coat, hat and gloves, jeans and a top, and lots of other necessities. The only difference was that the mall loaded with clothes was Breithaupt Career and Technical Center. And the clothes were all free to Myanna and 400 other



Joanne Brown helps a student with her shopping spree.

Detroit students.

The Assistance League, a non-profit charity based in Rochester, Mich., returned for the fifteenth year on Nov. 4 to give away clothes

to Detroit children who are homeless or in need. Coordinating with the school social workers from the DPS Homeless Unit, the Assistance League helped 440 children receive new clothing.

Myanna said she is used to hand-me-downs and couldn't wait to show her mom what she would bring home. And since everything was new, she wouldn't have to wash it first.

Some 66 volunteers spent a long day unpacking new coats, hats, gloves, jeans, tops, underwear, socks and even a Payless Shoes voucher for each child. The Assistance League helped 1,700 children in the tri-county area with new clothing this year.



Assistance League member Betty Zych and school social worker Angela Johnson.

Marjorie DiLiddo says the long day is exhausting and exhilarating.

“Look at their faces,” DiLiddo said of the children's happiness. “The adults in these schools give a lot of positive feedback. It's one of the most positive things I've ever done.”

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teacher

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Updates...

Library Makeover

The Mark Twain Elementary School library got a magnificent makeover, thanks to the Target foundation. DFT members A. Chika Ngozi, media spe-



cialist, and International Baccalaureate coordinator Madeleine Karcz, above, applied for the grant to renovate the library with warm hues of steely blue and lime, and stock it with new furniture. "There's a lot of hope going on in Detroit and this is just a little thing our business can do to help," a Target spokesman said.

Retirements Announced

The following DFT members have announced their retirements:
Gwendolyn Ashford, France Bowers,

Michael Carter, Lori Crandall, Ricardo Delgado, Anna Dickerson, Sandra Dunstone, Patricia Dysard, Barbara Graham, Timothy Graham, Diana Horvath, Cherrie Glenn-McClellan, Vivian McGhee, Yvonne Murray, Maryanne O'Connor, Sandra Ross, Diane Scott, Darryl Settles, Bettye Stepherson, Janice Thomas, Deborah B. Williams, Bruce Wilson, Linda Young. If you have retired in the last six months and would like it announced, please call the editor at 313-875-6776.

Registering Retirees



The registration committee (from left) — Michael Poterala, Dorothy Mitchell and Robert Mitchell — is busy at the registration desk each month for the DFT Retiree Chapter Meetings.

Thanksgiving Float Design Winner

Za'Cyrus Gaiter meticulously drew his dream neighborhood replete with a beautiful library and roller coaster. While it didn't come to life, it materialized on a much bigger scale — as the winning float in the Skillman Foundation Float Design Contest for America's Thanksgiving Parade in Detroit. The eighth-grade student at Duke Ellington Conservatory had a fantastic vision that included "a random kid" in the sketch. Za'Cyrus got to see the float in full scale at the Parade Company Nov. 18 and shyly accepted his honors. "He's difficult to understand sometimes — his brain is so colorful," said his mother Elonia Gaiter. She said Za' Cyrus

loves electronics and is currently trying to ride a unicycle. "He's a creative genius," says his art teacher, Patrice Wilson, pictured with him below.



TURKEY TROT — Mason Elementary School held its own Turkey Trot Nov. 24. The third- through fifth-grade students, along with some teachers and parents, ran twice around the block, a one-mile run. The girl and boy of each grade finishing first won a turkey for Thanksgiving. Fifth-grader Elijah Kargler crossed the finish line first. Mason physical education teacher Carol Poenisch, pictured above, conceived of the run to teach cardiovascular fitness.

BUMPED AROUND BUT NOT GIVING UP

Pershing Teacher Named Finalist

You can call Michael Craig an idealist. And he'll agree. He wants to help students succeed. He wants to beautify their neighborhood. As a teacher in Hamtramck for seven years, he and his students spruced up their domain.

"We were on Caniff next to St. Laz's and some of the kids made a statement that it didn't look so hot," Craig said. He asked the kids, what do you want to do? Soon enough Craig was applying for grants.

"Yes they're in school but they're old enough to be part of the community they live in," says Craig, who taught a combined 16 years in three districts. "There should always be a sense of community. Fifth-graders understand. They're just waiting for a way to get involved."

But Craig's "can do" spirit can't overcome the dysfunction he faces in Detroit.

He was happy and fulfilled teaching five years at Bennett Elementary School, only to be laid off and bumped to a Brenda Scott classroom of 38 kids. The move from Bennett devastated him.

"I was so miserable," he said. "Not only did it take me by surprise — I know the district is big and huge and understaffed — but there should be a way the district looks into someone and how they do. My kids performed academically higher than a lot of fifth-grade classrooms."

That misery led Craig to take advan-

tage of a joint State of Michigan-DPS program to teach special ed while earning certification in special education. Now at Pershing High School, it enabled him to gain job security.

"I keep going because the kids need it," he says. "My principal appreciates what I do and that's a big deal."

Because Craig always says yes, doing community events, helping students apply to colleges, sorting out their schedules, he was anonymously nominated for Michigan Teacher of the Year. He was a top 10 finalist. The winner, however, was a Dexter teacher.

While a lot of teachers could cop an attitude, Craig resists.

"Why do I take my kids to the Pistons game at the Palace?" he says. "I think it's more important that the kids know they have a teacher who cares for them. And it's flattering when I have parents of fourth-graders saying I want my kids to go to Mr. Craig's class."

Craig is now pursuing an administrative post.

"As an elementary teacher I did great things for 30 kids," he said. "So what could I do for 400 or 500? With my personality and the way I approach things, I think I'd be a good principal."



Michael Craig



Spain Teacher Wins \$38,000 to Give Kids Fresh Fruit Daily

By Charlene Uresy

Knowing the benefits of nutritional food, and her love for children, Spain School teacher Patricia Tyler applied for and won the Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Grant. From her efforts, Spain was awarded \$38,000 to implement the program.

The Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Program is a nutritional course that introduces fresh fruits and vegetables to the children weekly. With so many children eating fast food, parents not cooking, and families not sitting together for meals, Tyler could see how this program would benefit Spain students.

"A large number of our students only eat fresh fruits and vegetables at school, and many of them do not know common fruits and vegetables," said Tyler, an elementary resource room teacher. "When I came across this program, I knew this would be excellent for our students, and increase the nutritional value of their diets."

Two days a week, every student and staff member will be given a two-ounce package of fruit or vegetable to enjoy. This program is exclusive of the breakfast and lunch offered in DPS, and enhances the quality of food presented to the students.

Tyler also manages the forms, records and files of applications for free and reduced lunch; working as a liaison between school administration and the Food Service Department. Since 2008, Tyler has been diligent in this task that entitled Spain to \$538,000 of Title 1 money and allowed the school to keep all of its staff last year.

The Fresh Fruit & Vegetable program fits with the Physical Education courses, where being active and good nutrition are taught regularly. In Michigan, 30 percent of children are either overweight or obese. Thanks to Tyler, Spain students have another defense to arrest this problem.

Marathon Man at Spain School

By Charlene Uresy

Eighth-grade math teacher Benjamin Harris has been running for 10 years. The highlight of his running career came when he completed his third Detroit Free Press International Marathon in October. Harris, 46, bettered his time by 20 minutes!

With this jubilation came the pain he suffered: aches, chills, nausea, and a loss of appetite. These symptoms lasted only an hour and were worth it because this marathon was his personal best. He came to school the next day thrilled, proud of his accomplishment and wearing the medal he was awarded.

Harris started running for health reasons. His cholesterol was high and he weighed 240 pounds. Realizing this was unacceptable for his personal happiness, he started to run. He didn't make the mistake of trying to run a couple of miles without stopping. Instead, he put no pressure on himself; taking his time jogging, and when he got tired, he walked.

Running four times a week, averaging 20 miles a week, Harris is a new man. He weighs 180 pounds and has an athletic physique that wears a pair of jeans well. His dependable companion, the iPod, is filled with gospel music. As he runs he thinks about his wife and family, work, what he will eat, and he prays. Running has given Benjamin Harris a quality life. He is a fine example to colleagues and students at Spain of how a man conducts himself to get the best out of life.

THE DETROIT NEWSM

Students "See da Point" in Math at City High



City High students and their teacher from left are Jaland Phillips, Th

By Michael Walters

Detroit City High School teacher Amanda Belanger is shown in these photos with her geometry class. As a prelude to upcoming lessons on polygons and angles, Belanger bought hundreds of dollars worth of K-Nex kits to help bring the usually flat world of geometry to life.

Belanger is in her third year as a specialized student services teacher with DPS. "I love my students, and I love to see them get excited about math," Belanger said. "It was well worth the extra time and money to put together."



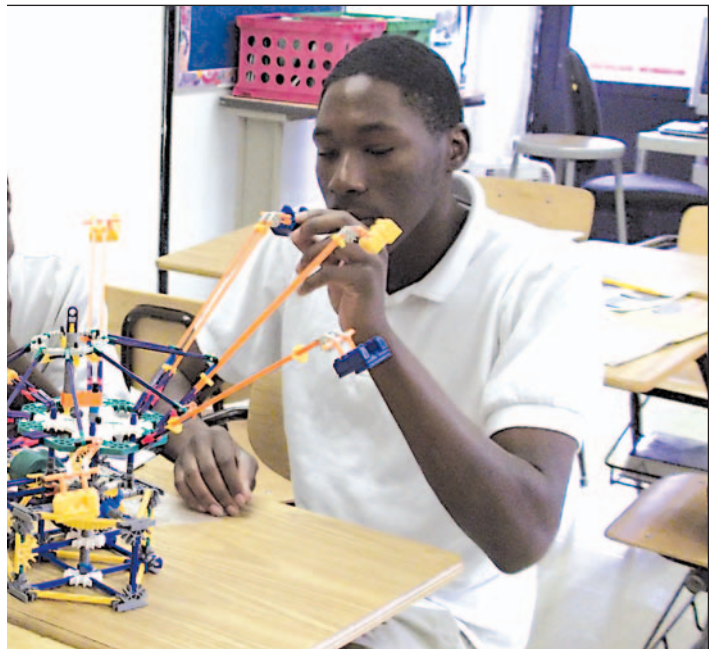
The Officers and Executives would like to wish the n

HAPPY HOLL

ROIT teacher MAKERS



teacher created works of art and learned math with K-Nex kits. Pictured, Th'ron Brown, Amanda Belanger, Johnathan Fisher, Robert Yeeman.



At left are students Deontae Sylvester and Joseph Dunn

cutive Board of the IDFT membership & retirees a
IDA Y SEASON

Veterans Day at Mason School

Mason Elementary School teacher Lake Liverman, a Vietnam veteran, seized Veterans Day to teach students about the goals and costs of war. "Veterans Day didn't start until after World War I," Liverman said. "That particular war was supposed to end all wars. That didn't happen."

Liverman, a 17-year Detroit teacher, explained that Armistice Day turned into Veterans Day.

"The principles that have to do with Veterans Day are the principles of sacrifice," he said. Liverman invited U.S. Marine Maj. John Milburn as the keynote speaker.

Milburn taught about the Montford Point Marines, the first black soldiers trained as marines in 1942-1949. Milburn's uncle was a Montford Point Marine. Like the Montford Point Marines, Milburn told the students, "If you put your mind to it, you can do anything."



Mason teacher Lake Liverman and Maj. John Milburn

Deaths of Soldiers in War

- War of 1812 – 20,000
- Spanish-American War – 232
- World War II – 407,300
 - Vietnam – 58,000
 - Iraq War – 4,404
- American Civil War – 110,000
- World War I – 53,402
- Korean War – 54,246
- Persian Gulf War – 378
- Afghanistan – 1,098

*From Liverman's research

CLEANING UP CARSTENS

Early Childhood teacher Sandra Pack, her assistant Glenda Carr, and their students have initiated a school beautification project at Carstens Elementary School. Every day if the weather permits, the class goes outside after lunch and picks up trash around the school. They have invited other classes to join them. It's a win-win for all - the students get fresh air and exercise. They learn about being good citizens. And they beautify the school.

On the front steps of the school are Carstens students with (from left) teacher Sandra Pack, principal Janice Richardson, and teacher's assistant Glenda Carr.



MORE NEWSMAKERS

Detroit Lion Derrick Williams Visits Bunche

Fourth-grade teachers Pat Roper and Kimberly Cole hustled to enter an essay contest for their Bunche



Fourth-grader Devin White enjoys goodies the NFL player brought to Bunche school.

Elementary students. After tediously assigning and correcting essays on sportsmanship and meeting contest deadlines, they enjoyed a party and a local celebrity.

The Bunche students won a contest sponsored by Detroit Lions wide receiver Derrick Williams to encourage children to write about sportsmanship, respecting their peers and eating well.

Williams, 24, visited Bunche Nov. 9 and signed autographs, took photos and generously brought lunch from Subway and take home treat bags of



Bunche teacher Pat Roper with Detroit Lion Derrick Williams.

healthy snacks for each student. Williams and his program, Mealz on DWheelz, visits Detroit classrooms throughout the NFL season. The mission is to combine writing on

sportsmanship and promote healthy eating.

Williams says he loves visiting kids though, "It's a little nerve-wrecking because I wasn't good in school."

Stewart Girls Overcome Obstacle

Stewart School has had its challenges. It closed and moved into the old MacCulloch Elementary School. Then one middle and two elementary schools merged into it – all over the last four years.

The girls basketball team also had its challenges. Hard workers on the court, they went undefeated in the season. But when they got to the championship game, they always lost.

"The girls were practicing very hard trying to get to that second stage," said coach Alvin Rolle, a 42-year physical education teacher. "It was a struggle from the beginning."

Rolle had four objectives this season: Win the game. Give everyone a chance to play. Get everyone to score a basket. Win the championship game.

Rolle met three of the goals in the



The champs with coach Alvin Rolle and statistician Gwendolyn Woods.

championship game.

Every one of the nine girls played. They won the game. They won the cherished championship. But one girl couldn't make a basket.

The Stewart girls are such team players that for several minutes they gave the ball to the one girl who hadn't scored.

"This is a selfless team," Rolle said. The girls play as he instructs them.

"I've never seen kids who hustled like this," said Frank Moran, a retired Stewart phys ed teacher. "There was no pride in this team. They were humble. They did what he told them. They love him."

Of the six teams who played at the Jamboree Nov. 6 at Cody High School, Durfee, Bates and Stewart went home with championship trophies.

"I felt happy because this was my first championship," Stewart student DaJane Jones, 13, said. "And I was crying."



Stewart assistant coach Celwyn Mitchell, retired teacher Frank Moran, and coach Alvin Rolle.



Why Do I Stay Here?

Four brain surgeries. A serious car accident. Lupus. Double vision. A husband who left her with four small children.

But perhaps the biggest obstacle for Jaye Powell was the gap between her front teeth. The smiling teacher wasn't always that way.

"I was actually depressed as a child growing up," says Powell, a 16-year teacher. "As I realized I'm OK the way I am, then I started to realize my gap is OK. Then I started smiling."

Powell has spent many hours in the hospital and was always pragmatic with doctors, asking: "What do I have to do to get out of here?"

Before her husband left, Powell realized she had to get an education and a career. She started studying at Marygrove College. Eventually she became a teacher.

These days Powell, 56, smiles all day at Dossin Elementary School. She certainly doesn't sweat the small stuff.

"I love these children," she says. "Too many people are leaving them and failing them."

Love is what keeps Powell motored.

"Love has been easy for me to give," says Powell, who has 10 grandchildren.

"However small or big, these kids come up with something."

BEST PRACTICES

Predictability is Key to Classroom Management

By Kimberley Cole-Murray
PAR Consultant

Procedures and routines. Really...it is what kids want!

Predictability is making sure the children know the rules, procedures and routines from the first day of school and every day thereafter. Routines need to be taught and reinforced throughout the school year. At the beginning of the school year, they should be included in daily lesson plans.



Kimberley Cole-Murray

This can be as simple as how students enter the room. A teacher may have a clipboard for attendance to tell which students are in school, students may move a magnet from “out” to “in” first thing in the morning. This is a routine that is a time saving tip, assists in taking attendance, and provides orderly student entrance to the room.

A quality teacher should have procedures and routines established for how students get materials, go to the lavatory, get a drink from the water fountain, and hand in homework. Teachers should have a procedure for what students should do when independent work is

completed early.

You are establishing classroom norms. Effective classroom procedures foster highly engaged students, which leads to student growth and achievement. It is

as if the students rise to the occasion because they know what the teacher expects. It also cuts down on behavior issues because the rules and expectations are clear.

According to Cothran, Kulinna and Garrahy (2003 Teaching and Teacher Education), a caring, respectful relationship at the beginning of the year is key in gaining students’ cooperation and engagement in academic activities. When the kids are comfortable because everything is so predictable, they know what to expect. They are able to tell you the daily learning routine. They can explain: “First we do reading and write in our journals, go to centers, then we go to lunch and then do math...”

I always enjoyed when I returned from an absence. My first-graders would tell me about the substitute and how s/he “didn’t know how to do anything.” The substitute would always leave a note stating how great my class was, how the kids knew the routine of our classroom.

I would not have too many rules for students. Too many rules will cause confusion and overwhelm the students. However, you want your students to know what to do. Remember you are establishing norms.

Classroom management and structure is something I did not learn in college. You discover the need for routines very quickly because things can fall apart. Without them, life in the classroom would be very chaotic.

Once you have established your procedures and routines, the next year you know to go directly to what works. But you have to be flexible, you get new students each year and you have to make adjustments. Each class will have different needs.

It’s trial and error, sometimes. As they say: you live and you learn.

Best Practices is a new feature brought to you by highly qualified Detroit teachers.

What Is PAR Up To?

The DFT’s new Peer Assistance and Review consultants, known as PAR, have been busy working on a successful mentoring and evaluation program for new and veteran teachers.

The 20 PAR consultants have developed a mission statement, are undergoing professional development, and are working with the district on an evaluation rubric.

Here are some PAR accomplishments to date:

- Attended Educational Research and Dissemination (ER&D) professional development facilitated by the AFT, the district, and Wayne RESA workshops and training.
- Established home base offices, a professional library and a teacher resource conference center.
- Created PAR program: Consultant Handbook, PAR Program Manual, and other program materials.
- Met with DFT and district officials regarding PAR operations, duties and responsibilities.



PAR consultants meet with Emergency Financial Manager Robert Bobb.

- Provided teacher input on district teacher documents: Teacher Evaluation Tool, Teacher Self Assessment Evaluation, Evaluation Domains and Detroit Public Schools Teacher Evaluation and Professional Development Tool.

- Met with DFT and district legal services to review PAR documents, procedures and evaluation documents.

The DFT was ahead of the curve when it formed PAR in the last teacher contract. A January 2010 Michigan law made teacher evaluation mandatory in all Michigan schools.

PAR will start mentoring and assisting teachers in the second semester of this year. The full program will be rolled out in August 2011.

The mission of Detroit’s Peer Assistance and Review Program (PAR) is to provide support through observation, modeling, and sharing of information for both new and veteran teachers. Detroit PAR will strive to provide teachers with high quality training, superior educational resources and practical consultation. Our aim is to offer a professional development plan for effective classroom performance; improve teacher quality, strengthen teacher professionalism, and ultimately enhance student learning. We will help foster a climate that is professional, collaborative, and supportive among all educators within the Detroit Public Schools System.

Disturbed, Do Not Test

By Mark O'Keefe
DFT Executive Vice President

While students are taking standardized tests, anyone attempting to enter a classroom is likely to find a sign that reads "Testing – Do Not Disturb." In response to the ever increasing number of standardized tests, one teacher hung a sign on his door: "Disturbed, Do Not Test."



Mark O'Keefe

Farmers will tell you that weighing a pig won't make it grow, and teachers know that testing a child won't make him learn. Teachers throughout the district are asking "When do we have time to teach?"

In addition to the regular curriculum, students are assessed using the Star Math and Star Reading programs. They work on individualized lessons and assessments through Accelerated Math and Accelerated Reading. Three times per year students take a battery of benchmark assessments including up to five Dibels assessments, Burst, and TRC. Throw in quarterly Q tests that take two class periods four days each quarter, and two to three weeks of MEAP testing, and it's no wonder teachers want more time to teach.

In between benchmarks, teachers are asked to print up to 80 pages of Burst

lessons every two weeks. These lessons are to be taught to the lowest achieving four to five students in each class for a half hour per day. Some schools don't have enough toner to print these lessons, others don't have enough copiers, and nobody seems to have enough time. One teacher estimates that a quarter of her instructional time is devoted to these assessments and progress monitoring.

On a weekly basis, teachers also are asked to do time-consuming progress monitoring for Dibels and TRC. Much if this work is done with one student at a time. While our teachers are doing their best to keep the rest of the class doing meaningful work, it is not possible to properly monitor and coach the others while you are testing individuals.

Two common themes emerge from discussions with teachers throughout the district. First, these assessments all have some merit individually, but together, they are too much. Second, we as teachers can handle all this, but our students are suffering.

One teacher told me that for one day, she ignored Burst, Dibels, TRC, Accelerated Math and Reading, and all she did was teach. It was the best day the class had all year! The saddest thing is, this didn't happen until the third week of October, and she had to ignore directives to make it happen at all.

To bring more balance to the classroom, we suggest that the district strongly consider the following changes:

Eliminate the Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 benchmark tests. These tests are not aligned with the district's scope and sequence charts. Students are taking tests in November on material that won't be covered until March. As a result, there is no validity to these tests. Our teachers have seen tests designed by and for DPS every few years. From Exit Skills, to ESAT, to MIP, to Q tests. The tests come and go and you would be hard pressed to find a teacher who will claim instruction has improved as a result of any one of these.

Allow teachers to use their professional judgment to determine the amount of progress monitoring to do. Progress monitoring in TRC is particularly difficult, since the text in the Palm devices frequently does not match the text in the books students are reading.

Discontinue Burst groups. The lower achieving students can be helped in the regular classroom setting.

Provide additional personnel to help with assessments. Whether the district allows literacy coaches to do some of

the assessments or provides classroom aides to assist with class management, more help is needed to keep all children learning.

Standardized testing is here to stay. To improve our scores, we need more instructional time, not more tests.

Calendar

All meetings will be held at 2875 W. Grand Blvd., Detroit, unless otherwise noted. Dates and times are subject to change.

DECEMBER

- 7 Attendance Agents Chapter Meeting, 4:00 p.m.
- 7 School Social Workers Chapter Meeting, 4:00 p.m.
- 9 General Membership Meeting, 4:30 p.m.
- 13 Special Education Chapter Meeting, 4:30 p.m.
- 14 Retirees Chapter Meeting,
(Golightly Vocational Center) 11:30 a.m.
- 16 Early Childhood Chapter Meeting, 4:15 p.m.
- 17 Last day for teachers and students

JANUARY

- 3 Schools Reopen
- 6 Executive Board Meeting, 4:30 p.m.
- 11 School Social Workers Chapter, 4:00 p.m.
- 18 Retirees Chapter Meeting, 11:30 a.m.
- 18 Attendance Agents Chapter Meeting, 4:00 p.m.
- 20 General Membership Meeting, 4:30 p.m.
- 20 Early Childhood Chapter Meeting, 4:15 p.m.
- 24 Special Education Chapter Meeting, 4:30 p.m.
- 27 Educational Technicians Chapter Meeting, 3:30 p.m.



WHO WANTS TO BE A CEO? — Tina Giles is teaching Pasteur Elementary School's top students leadership skills. The first-grade teacher and principal Sharon Lawson pulled high-performing students from each class and invited local businesswomen to visit the school Oct. 21 to discuss leadership, business, marketing and entrepreneurship. Pictured from left are Lawson, teacher Nicole Akra, Giles, Natalie Conyers, director of sales and marketing at First Independence Bank in Detroit and Rhonda Pugh, branch administrator. They discussed a range of topics from opening accounts to buying supplies to having a board of directors and being an honest employee — all coming from the real world of their neighborhood.