

# GREEN SHEET

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER • DEARBORN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS • AFT LOCAL 681, AFL-CIO  
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Dearborn, MI

## General Membership

### Future meeting dates

April 24 McCullough-Unis

May 22 O.L. Smith

Meetings begin at 4 PM.

June 6 is the annual end of the year party at Park Place beginning at 3 pm.

## Payless Pay Days???

The Budget Director for the State of Michigan has notified all the Superintendents of Michigan's public school districts that the May 18<sup>th</sup> State Aid payment will be late. What does that mean?

For many districts, including Dearborn, that means that school employees could go without their May paychecks. Very few districts, and Dearborn is not one of them, have enough of a fund balance, savings account, to allow them to pay employees without harm. For some districts, such as the financially strapped Detroit Public Schools, having their May state aid payment delayed could end up causing a financial crisis. Many districts are on the brink of bankruptcy, and this could push them over the edge.

Coupled with late State Aid payments, the state is asking Michigan's public schools to return funding at the end of the school year.

At this point, the State could take between \$100 and \$150 per student, or

for Dearborn, between \$1.8 and \$2.7 million dollars. Districts across the state, including Dearborn, have made spending and budget decisions based upon the premise that this year's funding is set. This is both barbaric and unfair. Had the state had this pro-ration in January it would have been difficult, but manageable.

So, how does Dearborn fair? Or more precisely, how does this affect us? Let's start with some facts. Like it or not, the School Aid Fund is in a financial mess. Dearborn's finances are no better than any of our neighbors. But, the bottom line is that we do not have the "money in the bank" to cover payroll.

Currently, the Union is working with the District to seek a solution to this situation. We are confident that a viable and workable solution can be reached. What members need to know is that this will be an ongoing problem until the Michigan legislature gets off their collective butts to reach a meaningful and workable solution to Michigan's economic problems.

What can you do? Begin by becoming informed. Contact your respective legislative members and ask them what they are doing to solve Michigan's budgetary problems. Prod them for specifics. Don't let them off the hook. If they're vague, press for specifics. Remember, this is not only our livelihood, but the future of education in Michigan and Michigan's future.

## Reporting Child Abuse

Michigan law requires that a teacher file a report when you have reasonable cause to suspect abuse or neglect of a student. This is a low legal standard. Teachers are not required to determine whether abuse or neglect has actually occurred. The Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) is responsible for investigating reports of abuse and neglect and for determining how each case progresses. A teacher must make a report whenever abuse or neglect is suspect.

A teacher who fails to file a report of suspected abuse or neglect, will be subject to both civil and criminal liability. In a civil action, a teacher may be held liable for all damages that any person suffers due to the failure to file a report. In a criminal action, a teacher may be found guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by imprisonment for up to 93 days and a fine of \$500.

Notifying your supervisor or other agency administrator **DOES NOT** satisfy your legal obligation to file a report with DHS.

Teachers, along with doctors, dentists, social workers.... Are mandated reports of child abuse. The link to the Department of Human Services has information on reporting such abuse.

[http://www.michigan.gov/documents/dhs/Pub-112\\_179456\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/dhs/Pub-112_179456_7.pdf)

## Teacher Tube

According to Teacher Magazine, TeacherTube, launched in March 2007, is video-sharing site designed exclusively for educators. Created by a 14-year veteran educator the site aims to “fill a need

for a more educationally focused, safe venue for teachers, schools, and home learners.”

TeacherTube provides many of the same tools featured on the popular YouTube site, which is blocked by many schools. The Dearborn Public Schools have blocked YouTube with Websense. Teachers can use the TeacherTube to upload and share instructional videos, comment on and rank videos, and create video groups to bring together users with similar interests. Videos can also be easily embedded on Web pages.

In keeping with its educational focus, the site’s producers aim to feature mainly instructional and professional development videos. Users are encouraged to “flag” videos that might be inappropriate.

Videos currently on the site include specific lessons, class projects, demonstrations of unique instructional approaches, and expressions of educational philosophy.

## Negotiations

As many of you know, we are in the middle of negotiations. The DFT will have a brief negotiation on-line survey for members to complete that will help guide us during these talks.

The Union's goal is to preserve what we have and make improvements where we can. During these tough financial times, solidarity makes us stronger.

# Why Teacher Unions are Good for Teachers and the Public

We live in an era when leaders in business and the media demand that schools function like businesses in a free market economy, competing for students and staff. Many such voices say that such corporate-style school reform is stymied by the teacher unions, which stand in the way of leaders who want unchecked power to assign, reward, punish, or remove their employees. Some academics blame the unions when student achievement remains stagnant. If scores are low, the critics say it must be because of teachers' contract, not because the district has a weak curriculum or lacks resources or has mediocre leadership. If some teachers are incompetent, it must be because of the contract, not because the district has a flawed, bureaucratic hiring process or has failed to evaluate new teachers before awarding them tenure. These critics want to scrap the contract, throw away teachers' legal protections, and bring teacher unions to their collective knees.

It is worth recalling why teachers joined unions and why unions remain important today. Take tenure, for example. The teacher unions didn't invent tenure, despite widespread beliefs to the contrary. Tenure evolved in the 19th century as one of the few perks available to people who were paid low wages, had assets of 70 or 80 or more, and endured terrible living conditions. In late 19th century New York City, for example, there were no teacher unions, but there was already ironclad, de facto teacher tenure. Local school boards controlled the hiring of teachers, and the only way to get a job was to know someone on the local school board, preferably a relative. Once a teacher was hired, she had lifetime tenure in that school, but only in that school. In fact, she could teach in the same school until she retired—without a pension or health benefits—or died.

One problem with this kind of tenure was that it was not portable. If a teacher changed schools, even in the same district, she would lose her tenure in the school

where she was first hired, and she would have to go to the end of the line at her new school.

The union is necessary as a protection for teachers against the arbitrary exercise of power by heavy-handed administrators. In our school systems, at the local, state, and federal levels, we need checks and balances. Just as the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government all act as checks on each other, we need checks and balances in our school systems. We need independent lay school boards to hire the superintendent and to hold open public discussions of administrative decisions, and we need independent teacher unions to assure that teachers' rights are protected, to sound the alarm against unwise policies, and to advocate on behalf of sound education policies, especially when administrators are non-educators.

In the current climate, when it is in vogue to select non-educators to administer school systems, it is vital that teachers have a voice. School reform cannot possibly succeed when teachers—who are on the frontlines of implementation—are left out of the decision-making process. If there is no "buy-in," if teachers do not willingly concur with the orders handed down from on high, then reform cannot succeed. If administrators operate by stealth and confrontation, then their plans for reform will founder. They cannot improve what happens in the classroom by humiliating and bossing around the teachers who are in daily contact with the children. Only in an atmosphere of mutual respect can administrators and teachers produce the kind of partnership that will benefit students. And administrators cannot achieve this collaborative atmosphere unless they are willing to talk with and listen to the leaders chosen by teachers to represent them.

The essentials of good education are the same everywhere: a rigorous curriculum, effective instruction, adequate resources, willing students, and a social and cultural climate in which education is en-

couraged and respected. Teacher unions today, as in the past, must work to make these essentials available in every district for every school and every student. They cannot do it alone. They must work with administrators and elected officials to advance these goals. The unions will continue to be important, vital, and needed so long as they speak on behalf of the rights and dignity of teachers and the essentials of good education.

Diane Ravitch—AFT

## Lay Offs

This year, as in the past, spring-time unfortunately coincides with lay offs. Because of the state of school financing and the number of new positions added this year because of increased enrollment, this year is going to be different than those past.

The Administration is going to approach lay offs as if this were a normal year, dealing with a potential deficit and no increase in either enrollment or state aid. Given that, the number of teachers receiving lay off notices should be somewhere between 75 and 100. The short explanation is that the Teacher Tenure Act requires the District to notify teachers 60 days prior to the end of the current school year if their position will be eliminated. The school year officially ends on June 30, 2007. That means that teachers must be notified by May 1, 2007. This is further complicated by the May 1, 2007 deadline for the state to come up with a solution to its budget crisis. Currently, we have the potential of losing about \$2 million from this year's budget, which then complicates next year's budget projected shortfall.

The School Board meeting at

which lay offs will be voted on is scheduled for April 23rd at ASC beginning at 7:30. The lay offs will be announced at this meeting. This means that teachers will begin to receive lay off notices as early as April 24<sup>th</sup>.

The Union is committed to working with the Administration to bring back those who are laid off.

## Attendance Incentive Update

The Union and the District signed a Letter of Agreement, which is included in the 2006—2007 contract, that rewards bargaining unit members for meeting certain attendance goals.

The attendance reduction goals are:

1. 1% salary bonus for a 50% reduction in absences,
2. .75% salary bonus for a 37.5% reduction in absences,
3. .50% salary bonus for a 25% reduction in absences.

Current attendance data shows that we are below where we were this time last year; however, if trends continue and sick time usage remains constant, we will fall short of receiving the incentive.

In order for members to be eligible for the Attendance Incentive bonus, sick time usage will need to be less than 1/2 day per member for the remainder of the school year. If we are able to achieve this, all bargaining unit members will receive a 1/2% salary bonus.