

ADVOCATE



Ontario-Montclair Teachers Association

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ESEA REAUTHORIZATION

Senator Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) has released a draft of his reauthorization proposal for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, otherwise known as No Child Left Behind). The proposal would change the current accountability system by eliminating the requirement that all children be proficient by 2014, but keeps in place the requirement that students in grades 3 – 8 and one grade in high school be tested annually. The proposal allows for one comprehensive test at the end of the year or interim assessments to measure progress. States would also still be required to report scores by student sub groups.

Schools at the bottom 5 percent would be subject to intensive interventions similar to the 4 options spelled out now in Race to the Top and the School Improvement Grant program (close the school, turn it into a charter, replace half the teachers and other staff, or restructuring the school). The legislation would also require states to develop teacher and principal evaluation systems based on multiple factors, including student achievement (e.g. using standardized test scores).

The House of Representatives has so far taken an approach of reauthorizing in small chunks, rather than as a whole bill. Whether or not it will be possible to break through the partisan gridlock that has characterized Congress over the last few years remains to be seen.

Neither NEA or CTA has yet had the time to fully examine the proposal. They will no doubt support some aspects of it, while opposing others. It is safe to say that the teacher evaluation proposal will be opposed by both organizations. OMTA will report to you more on this as the proposal moves through Congress.



FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

Rick McClure



I am of the firm belief that one of the most powerful reforms in education today is teachers collaborating together to develop lessons, review student data, open their classrooms to each other for feedback, and take collective responsibility for all the students, not just those in their classes. For this to happen, though, teachers need to be given the time to meet. I devoted a lot of newsletter space to this several years ago, arguing that no one knows the students better than their teachers, therefore teachers should be deciding what to talk about when they get together.

Based on the feedback I got at the last rep council meeting, it seems the problem is here with us again.

What I'm hearing is that teachers are being micro managed in their meetings with agendas, specific work to do that is decided by someone else, and that little or no time is left to meet about things teachers think are important. It also seems that teachers are being "staff developed" to death again, which again leaves little, or no time for teachers to meet, except on their own time.

My proposal has always been a simple one. Devote one of the two site level Tuesdays to teacher collaboration (call them PLCs or whatever else you want). It's important that teachers have this time. It will do more to improve student learning than anything else we can do. Should principals be monitoring what teachers do during this time? Of course. But the primary purpose of that monitoring should be to determine what support teachers need to do the best they can with students. It should not be to tell teachers what to do.

The response to my last column about testing has been interesting, to say the least. The issue of testing became a subject of conversation at Rep Council where a question was posed about released test questions from the STAR and the proper use of them in classrooms. That led to a bit of back and forth between Scott Turnbull and me which resulted in a joint memo going out from the two of us on the subject. In the end, though, what I said to the reps was accurate, namely that using the released questions in classrooms is not allowed unless they are an embedded part of a lesson. That is not how most of you have been directed to use them.

Frankly, what I find most disturbing about the whole issue, though, and the reason any of this is even being discussed is because of how obsessed we have become with test scores. It isn't just Ontario Montclair where this is a problem. It's virtually every school district in the country. Testing has become the end all and be all of what we do. This has happened because of the last reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), otherwise known as No Child Left Behind.

ESEA is now up for reauthorization again in Congress (it's only 4 years overdue). The Senate has released their proposal for comment. As of this writing I have not seen any analysis by either CTA or NEA on it. I have looked at some of it myself. The good news is that it proposes to completely eliminate AYP. That, I hope, will end some of the testing mania that we've all been subjected to over the last 10 years. The bad news is that it proposes requiring any district receiving Title II funds (OMSD gets a lot) to develop a teacher evaluation system that includes student performance (i.e. test scores). So on the one hand they take away the need for high-stakes testing, but they replace it with something that makes the tests even more "high stakes." Under the proposal, tests will be high stakes for teachers, not for the students, the schools, or the district. You can trust I'll keep all of you informed as to what's happening with this, and what you can do to make your voices heard about it.



SOCIAL NETWORKS AND TEACHERS

Most of us by now are on Facebook and are using other social networking sites and tools. As teachers and educators, though, caution is highly advised on how you use sites like this. Did you know, for example, that it's common for HR departments to check your Facebook presence as part of pre-employment screening? Did you know that parents sometimes complain to districts about what a teacher has on his/her Facebook page? Did you know that those complaints have sometimes resulted in teachers losing their jobs?

A cardinal rule to remember when posting anything on the internet is that it is potentially there forever. There is no such thing as delete. You may be able to remove something from your Facebook page, but it's still there to those who know how to look. For that reason alone, it is good policy for teachers to maintain privacy settings on any internet presence so that only those who you want to see it, can.

Does this mean that teachers should never use the internet to communicate with students? No, but it does mean there are some rules to follow to keep both you and the kids safe. Rule number one is never, never friend a student on a social networking site where you friend others. Remember that by friending them, students can not only see what you post, but they can also see what everyone else posts on your page



Therefore, create two profiles, a personal profile and a teacher profile. You may wish to consider a third profile as well, a professional profile, since such sites are often searched by prospective employers and professional organizations. You should also never say anything on it you wouldn't say in class, in front of your principal, or in front of parents. Finally, never post student work or pictures without permission from your principal and parents.

Probably the best way to use the internet with students, though, is to use sites established by the district and are accessed through the district's web page. From there you can post homework, links to websites for students and parents, as well as your district email address. These are safe ways to communicate with students and parents and they have the added benefit of the district's filter to prevent students from visiting sites they shouldn't. Nothing can be more embarrassing or potentially harmful to your career than allowing students access to harmful websites through something you've done. Using a district site protects you from that.

It is particularly important for teachers who don't have permanent status to be very careful about this. If you have temporary or probationary status, it is easy for the district to terminate your employment without giving you due process. There are examples from other states where teachers have been fired because they posted pictures of themselves with an alcoholic beverage in their hand.



Teachers have been fired because someone got a hold of their account information and made public what they thought was private. If you want to have a personal presence on the internet you might want to do it under a different name. At the very least be aware that your employer can, and will under the right circumstances, check. And again, never, never give students access to anything other than a site set up exclusively for them.

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Wiltsey: Ken Aven, Linda Boren
Music/PE/APE: David Moody
Speech: Kimberly Cieslik
Health/Nurse: Marissa Sitz
Early Ed Center: Leticia Martinez
HFB: Vacant

SCHOOL BOARD ELECTION RECOMMENDATIONS

The following school districts are having elections for school board. If you live in any of these districts, or know someone who does, please vote for the candidates endorsed by teachers:

Alvord Unified – Carolyn Wilson
Azusa Unified – Burke Hamilton and Paul Naccachian
Baldwin Park Unified – Jack White, Mary Ferrer, and Natalie Ybarra
Chaffey College – Lee McDougal, Paul Gomez, and Gary George
Charter Oak Unified – Brian Akers, Bob Cruz, and Joe Probst
Claremont Unified – Hilary LaConte
El Monte Elementary – Michael Kingsbury and Kien Lam
El Monte Union High School – Tonson Man and Juanita Gonzales
Hacienda-La Puente Unified – Jay Chen and Gino Kwok
Mountain View Elementary (LA County) – Mary Espinosa
Pomona Unified – Jason Rothman and Hank Mollet
San Bernardino Unified – Margaret Hill, Juan Lopez, Lynda Savage, and Sharon “Bobbie” Perong
Rosemead Unified – Qui Nguyen
Temple City Unified – Kien Teit, Kenneth Knollenber, and Robert Ridley

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OMTA
Executive Board Meeting
November 7th
Rep Council Meeting
November 28th

OMSD
School Board Meetings
November 3rd & 17th
7 pm at Central Language
Academy