

The CEA Voice

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Layoff debacle

Just before spring break, 20 teachers received a gift wrapped in pink: layoff notices.

The notices came early. Usually, layoffs aren't announced until closer to late April, so as not to ruin a person's spring break. Maybe this was central office's attempt to help those laid off professionals prepare.

Trouble is, 16 people who got the notices were not, in fact, losing their positions. *Happy holiday!*

An adjusted list was distributed, and the teachers who are actually being laid off now know. The administration created a mess that didn't have to happen.

How did this mistake happen? Under the gun to get the layoff notices hand delivered to teachers before spring break, administrators made the reductions according to strict seniority. This is not how the system works. Instead, layoffs are made according to the types of contracts issued (limited contracts being first and continuing contracts next). Seniority and certification areas count, but only within these defined categories and stipulated order of consideration.

For years, CEA and the district's human resources department have worked together to review lists and mutually agree on them. Then notices were issued before Apr. 30 each year, with ample time allotted for everyone to prepare.

This year, Dr. Harris decided to push ahead without consulting CEA. Not only has she created an embarrassing mess for the central office, but she has undermined the union's duty and our responsibility to represent association members.

There is a reason we have a contract. There is a reason we have worked hard to develop a system to address employment issues.

We hope administration will do better next time.

Reading specialists are out: Worse science and math scores coming

What would your life be like if you stopped paying attention to your health after age 5?

It's a drastic analogy, but one that many of CPS' students may learn, albeit from an academic perspective.

Starting in the fall, elementary students won't get the same level of intensive help many need to advance in reading, a core skill that affects success in all other subjects.

Administrators are about to make a curriculum change that will rob students of the time spent with reading specialists. They are doing it because math and science test scores aren't rising at the same rate as reading scores.

This "rob Peter to pay Paul" plan should be re-examined—and perhaps halted—before students are damaged.

Here's the upshot: Central office is changing the role

of its Title I (Safety Net) specialists. Instead of helping students with reading, these 183 specialists, on whom the district has spent time and money, will now focus on math and science for fourth and fifth grade students.

It will be the responsibility of regular classroom teachers to provide reading instruction and intervention.

Here's the plan: Small groups of students will visit in turn with math and science specialists for 90 minutes each, several times each week. While that instruction is happening, the remaining students will receive reading, writing and social studies instruction with the regular classroom teacher.

The district plans to train all regular classroom teachers in using the new reading materials ordered as part of the (already ill-conceived and disorganized) LACES approach. Teachers will be sent for additional training at a significant cost to the district.

Administrators contend that this way is better. Reading, they tell us, is best taught by regular classroom teachers, since the ability to read affects all other subject areas, and primary-level teachers are by nature generalists.

They are right about one part of that statement: Reading is central to learning other subjects, particularly math and science. "If you don't have a strong foundation in reading, reading at proficient levels in other areas becomes impossible," says CEA President Rhonda Johnson.

Students need reading intervention

Administrators are wrong—tragically wrong—about changing priorities and switching responsibilities of the Title I (Safety Net) specialists. What they are failing to realize is the reason reading scores in the district have improved (85.4 percent of sophomores were proficient in reading this last go-round) was that they have been receiving more help—from specialists over time.

It's true, other scores are not as high: 72.3 percent of sophomores were proficient in math and 48.6 percent in science. But taking the intense instruction away from reading and giving it to these other subjects is not the answer.

"What's needed is more time," said Johnson. "Everyone knows that the math and science tests are essentially reading tests. Continue to provide intensive reading instruction, introduce complex vocabulary, provide intervention. The math and science scores will rise, too."

National consensus (including from the federal government) has formed a chorus with this exact refrain, and our teachers and administrators have heard it.

Last month, Catherine E. Snow of the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Cynthia B. Schmeiser, president and chief operating officer of ACT's education division, presented at the Ohio Summit on Literacy in Secondary Schools.

Among the alarming facts they shared:

➤ Fewer than half of high school seniors performed

at or above the level expected by the federal government on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP).

- The picture is worse for particular groups, including African-American and Latino students—more of whom drop out of school than white students.
- Students who make it to college often are not prepared for the level of reading required. Rates of postsecondary remediation have skyrocketed.
- Nearly 40 percent of high school graduates do not have the sophisticated reading skills employers expect.

Here's what Snow and Schmeiser see as necessary steps to ensuring that students advance:

- Exposing middle and high school kids to increasingly complex material
- Intervening early and often to help students with literacy skills
- Recognizing that students have a variety of needs including intensive re-teaching

Continually introducing students at all levels to new vocabulary, academic language, reading skills specific to other subjects and new purposes for reading is essential.

We ask: Who is more suited to perform these tasks than reading specialists?

"The administration is setting the district back with this new plan," said Johnson. "My suggestion is they go back and read the research. What expert would recommend removing reading specialists at any grade level?"

We say: You were headed in the right direction. If you change course, you will see that our students will suffer.

Testing contracts cost a bundle

The cost of outside contracts to administer the state testing system continues to grow.

The Ohio Department of Education has reported that in 2008, Ohio will spend nearly \$89 million for assistance from testing companies for K–8 OAT and OGT testing.

Yet other states seem to be keeping these costs down considerably through innovative approaches. For instance, Nebraska relies on teacher-developed and administered tests. The cost? \$9,000 dollars on outside contracts.

The comparison? Ohio spends 50 cents per-student on contracts. Nebraska spends 3 cents per-student. Moving to a system like Nebraska's would save our state 47 cents per-child or more than \$85 million dollars annually. That is enough to employ an additional 1,700 teachers.

An idea worth considering? For more on this discussion consult the Forum for Education and Democracy at www.coras.org.

Teachers from abroad visit Columbus

CEA recently welcomed 19 educators from China, the Middle East and Latin America visiting Columbus to learn about state government and to see how teacher unions work. They were here on a Fulbright Program administered through the Ohio Department of Education.

While in our city, the visiting teachers met with CEA, OEA and OFT officials. They were particularly interested in CEA's work on diversity and women's issues. They were fascinated by recent court cases we have supported. They also were interested in how salaries and benefits are constructed. For example, most of these visitors have never heard of paternity or adoption leave.

After the session, two teachers from Egypt told us that 15-year veterans in their country earn the U.S. equivalent of \$80 per week.

The visit was a productive exchange in which we also learned many interesting things about education in their countries. We applaud this initiative, managed through Kent State University, to promote exchange and dialogue.

United Way examines priorities

CEA members always generously support the community's United Way campaign. Next year's campaign promises to be even more focused, as the agency is redefining its work to address the root causes of social problems.

Here are the areas CEO Janet Jackson recently defined:

- Providing basic short-term needs (food, clothing, shelter and health care)
- Ensuring youth success (creating a network of caring adults)
- Strengthening and supporting individuals and families (educating residents about health, education and other matters)
- Building vibrant neighborhoods (so everyone can live in healthy, safe and affordable surroundings)

It takes everyone to create a successful community. Let's all focus on these goals to help United Way *do what matters*.

Reward effective leadership

The CPS Development Office is receiving nominations for the Ingram Award for Outstanding Principals. This award, including a \$1,500 professional development grant, will go to five CPS principals. Employees, parents, students and friends of CPS may make nominations.

The award was established by the Edward W. Ingram Foundation to recognize outstanding leadership and a commitment to quality. Nominees are judged on academic achievement, leadership, staff development, parent and staff involvement, resource management and interpersonal communications.

All principals in the district are eligible. A seven-member committee, with representation from CEA and the administration, will review the nominations. Forms are available in school libraries, offices and other locations. The deadline is May 11.

Special notes

- ❑ **NEA MB April 2007 Website Giveaway:** NEA members can register anytime in the *Free Giveaways* area of the **NEA Member Benefits website** at www.neamb.com for a chance to win one of three **\$100 Target gift cards**. The giveaway entry ends at 11:59:59 p.m., EDT, on Apr. 30, 2007. No purchase is necessary to enter.
- ❑ There will be a **Retirement Open House for Brigid Moriarty** at Gables ES on Sunday, May 20, 2–5pm. Plan to attend and wish Brigid well.
- ❑ **MidState Educators Credit Union** announces Spring Specials: **Spring Helper Loan**—Members can borrow \$1,200 for 12 months at 10% APR (April and May only); **Free Home Buyers' Seminar**—Tuesday, May 22, from 6:30–8 p.m. at 4635 Trueman Blvd, Suite 100, Hilliard (Christopher Land Title office). Call MidState at 221-9376 for more information.
- ❑ **OEA-R** will host a **spring conference** at the Doubletree Suites in **Miamisburg** from 10 a.m.–3 p.m. on **Wednesday, May 16**. Topics include STRS, Health Care Advocates, Long Term Health Care and GPO/WEP. The **\$15 registration** cost includes lunch. The **deadline for registration is May 11**. If you're interested in attending the conference and/or carpooling, please contact Marilyn Allen at 299-4841. It would be nice to have a CEA-R delegation attending the conference.