

## **President's Message-Executive Board Mtg. –3/27/2012**

### **A. Grievance Updates**

HTEA President Fred Schwartz, NJEA Region 8 Field Representative Tim Ryan, NJEA Attorneys Arnold Mellk and Ed Cridge met with Interim Superintendent James Sheerin, Interim Human Resource Director Dr. Dan Swirsky, and board attorney Bill Burns to discuss unresolved HTEA grievances.

The meeting seemed productive and tentative agreements were discussed regarding the 8 period day grievance, the 8 period day ULP, the Custodian RIF grievance, and the Warehouse/Field Maintenance ULP.

- ✓ We have a tentative agreement for a salary increase for the Field Maintenance/Warehouse workers, but have not signed off on that agreement.
- ✓ The offer to end the 8 period day issue has not been brought to closure. The board is already moving forward with part of an 8 period day tentative agreement in good faith. They are preparing to go back to a 9 period day and a 6 period/240 minute work load for September. However, we have not come to an agreement on compensation for the workload members endured for the 2011-12 school year. If we cannot come to an agreement for the compensation, the process will have to return to PERC.
- ✓ For the custodian RIF grievance, we have submitted an offer to return to work 5 of the custodians who were laid off in 2010, but the board has not responded. The offer is for 5 custodians because 15 custodians who were laid off no longer desire to return to Hamilton.

On Friday, March 9<sup>th</sup>, HTEA filed another grievance regarding a custodian working on a Saturday without receiving overtime. I have discussed this issue with Mr. Corelli and seemed to come to an agreement. However, a written settlement has not been achieved. This grievance has been moved to the Superintendent's Level on 3/26/12.

We are going to have another meeting with board representatives this week to try to bring these issues to closure.

### **B. 2012-13 School Calendar**

I met with the district's School Calendar Committee on March 5<sup>th</sup> and March 12. Concerns sent to HTEA and to the principals were discussed with the committee. The committee was made up of building principals from all levels, PTA members, the president of the HTEA, the president of the secretaries' union and the president of the administrators' union. Planning a calendar of 180 student days and 185 staff days between the dates of September 4<sup>th</sup> and June 21<sup>st</sup> was challenging. We were able to increase snow days before using spring break, but not as much as I would like. Enclosed is an draft of the calendar that was adopted at the end of the meeting on March 12<sup>th</sup>. The calendar must be approved by the board before it can become official. They will look at the calendar at their March meeting.

### **C. Negotiations 2012**

HTEA's negotiations team has completed our proposal and analyzed the salary scattergrams to come up with increment costs. We are ready to negotiate.

The board has hired a legal firm, Capehart Scatchard to negotiate with the HTEA. Joe Betley will represent Capehart Scatchard. Acting Superintendent/Interim Human Resources Director Dr. Dan Swirsky will represent administration, and Richard Kanka and Board VP William Harvey will represent the Board.

We met with the Board's team on March 22. We created a set of negotiations ground rules, discussed the HTEA scattergram, and set three meeting dates. Those dates will be April 26, May 10<sup>th</sup> and May 15<sup>th</sup>. We will exchange proposals on April 26<sup>th</sup>. We will leave every meeting with a minimum of 2 future meeting dates. It is our goal to complete negotiations by June 30<sup>th</sup> and we will continue to push the Board in that direction.

For the most up to date negotiation information, go to the HTEA website at [hte.org](http://hte.org) and register your email address on our mailing list today. The HTEA internal communications committee will do the rest. Due to the negotiations confidentiality clause, updates cannot be posted on the HTEA website from this date forward. Registering your email will be the best way to stay informed.

## **D. Teacher Evaluation Committee**

HTEA has been invited to participate in the Hamilton Township School District Teacher Evaluation Committee. The committee met on Thursday March 22<sup>nd</sup> to discuss the pilot plan for the Hamilton Township School District for the 2012-2013 school year. Pat Apoldite, Eileen Porada, Connie Somers, Dan Ashton, and Fred Schwartz attended that meeting on behalf of HTEA. If you have any information that you would like to share with the committee, please contact the HTEA members listed above.

The state of New Jersey mandates that a new teacher evaluation program be in place in September of 2013. Districts have been invited to run pilot programs during the 2012-13 school year to facilitate the transition in 2013. A plan must be selected by the district by January 2013. We will keep you informed of the progress of this committee.

## **E. NEA/RA 2012 Washington D.C.**

This year's NEA/RA will be held in Washington D.C. from June 30 through July 5<sup>th</sup>. HTEA is entitled to send 10 delegates to the convention. The HTEA president and 9 delegates will attend. Delegates must be elected each year.

HTEA will be holding a NEA/RA delegate election from March 28 through March 30<sup>th</sup> at each worksite. We have 9 members running for 9 positions, but sometimes elected delegates have to cancel and we will need alternates. If you are interested in being a delegate to the 2012 NEA/RA in Washington DC in July, someone must write-in your name on at least one ballot for you to be considered as an alternate. You can vote for yourself and become an alternate. You must receive at least 1 vote to be a delegate. Available positions will be filled in order, based on who receives the most write-in votes. Election packets with instructions are being distributed at this meeting. **The completed election packet must be returned to the HTEA office in person by 5 PM on Friday March 30<sup>th</sup>. HTEA office will be open from 9:30 AM until 5:00 PM on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. DO NOT USE INTERSCHOOL MAIL TO RETURN BALLOTS TO HTEA OFFICE SEND A MESSENGER FROM YOUR BUILDING**

## **F. Health Benefits**

At the March 28<sup>th</sup> Board of Education Meeting at 6 PM at Crockett Middle School, there will be a presentation by a group of Hamilton citizens from “The Citizens Campaign”. They plan to put pressure on the Board of Education to put their contract with Allen Associates out to bid and possibly move our school district employees into the “School Employees Health Benefits Plan”. Their goal is to save tax dollars at our expense. The “level of benefits” in the state plan are significantly lower than our current plan. The HTEA contract requires the Board to match the level of benefits negotiated July 1, 1996.

If the Board made this change, we would not have Allen Associates to fight our payment battles with the carrier. Some of us have experienced difficulties since we have switched to Ameri-Health from Horizon last July. These plans are considered equal to, or better than, and we still had problems. Imagine what you will experience with a plan that pays lower amounts for your health care procedures and has lower annual and lifetime limits.

With the SEHBP the state simply announces annual premium increases each January. The increase in the SEHBP is not negotiable. The Board currently has the ability to negotiate with Allen Associates who in turn negotiate with carriers to achieve the lowest premium increase each year. The SEHBP has had an average increase of 11% over the last ten years. Our current health benefits with Allen Associates has only had an average increase of 9% over the last ten years. Benefit cost is now a concern for HTEA members since new state legislation requires us to pay a percentage of our health benefit premium.

Salary and benefits are negotiated. Legally the Board has to negotiate a change in the level of benefits despite what this community group is telling them. An involuntary change would cause hundreds of grievances like the ones that were caused when our dental plan was switched from Delta Dental to Direct Dental. 900 grievances were filed at that time and eventually the Board returned to Delta Dental.

The salary and benefits we have are a result of decades of negotiations where the need for salary and health benefits were negotiated side by side. We accepted smaller salary increases to maintain our current high level of health benefit coverage. The level of benefits can only be changed through negotiations. If the level of benefits were reduced, salary would have to be increased to compensate for the loss. The net savings to the Board would not be as great as “the Citizens Campaign” have projected. This is not a smart move when the whole country has a budget problem. We will fight to keep the health benefits our union has fought to defend for decades. Members need to attend the March 28<sup>th</sup> board meeting at 6PM at Crockett Middle School.

## **G. School Board sets 2012-13 School Budget**

The school board, after moving the school board election to November for 2012, has set the 2012-13 Budget at the 2% cap so the public will not have to approve this budget. The \$182,313,518 budget will spend \$12,310 per child compared to the \$18,354-\$10,412 expenditures of the 9 school districts in Mercer County. The tax rate in Hamilton will increase from 1.86 to 1.89 and increase school taxes from \$2418 to \$2496 for a home assessed at \$130,000. That's only an increase of \$76 to improve our schools and to ultimately increase the values of taxpayers' homes.

The budget includes many improvements, but the improvements that please HTEA the most are the addition of 9 high school teachers, 8 middle school teachers, 7 elementary teachers, 4 elementary guidance counselors, 1 school nurse, and 4 educational assistants. That amounts to 33 staff members who will have direct contact with children every day. That's what we call improving education. The board also made a commitment to increase the funding of the theater program.

The initial budget proposal included increased staffing in the areas of administration, data coaches, and computer technicians. HTEA asked the board to reconsider these positions and hire more classroom teachers. That is when the number of elementary teachers was increased from two to seven. Thanks to the Board and administration for considering the suggestions of the HTEA.

We thank the Board for this educationally friendly budget.