

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I recently read an article written by Angela Leitzer, Bulletin Editor for the Teachers Association of Baltimore County, comparing the current law regulating collective bargaining in Maryland, to being in the "Twilight Zone." She describes a scenario whereby 2 sides of a business partnership share responsibility for the business endeavor. However, at meetings when both sides work out the details of the vision and goals for the company, one partner consistently says "no" to all of your suggestions; and when you try to settle the differences, your partner decides to have the CEO of his side of the business make the determination; and the process can take up to a year, with your business "partner" finally saying "no" to all the suggestions made by the negotiator.

Sound like the "Twilight Zone" to you? This is the scenario in many counties across our state. Unfortunately, Maryland is the only state (of 34) that has collective bargaining laws that does not have a neutral board to hear arbitrations between boards of education and local teacher associations.

In 2010, MSEA has made it a priority to get the Fairness in Negotiations Bill through both houses of the legislature. Last year, after passing the State Senate 31 – 13, time ran out and the bill did not make it through the House. Some would say that the bill "vanished into another dimension."

Working to get this law passed may be the most important thing you do for yourself and your colleagues. You can contact your legislator by going to acta@mstanea.org. Click on the Lobby/Politics link on the home page. At the bottom of the next page is the question, "What can I do in Allegany County?" Click on **Find Your Delegate or Senator**. From there you will type in your address; the name of your elected official will appear for you to click on and automatically email. Ask them for their support of the 2010 Labor Negotiations Bill and tell them what it means to you to be able to have a neutral negotiator, **not** the appointed Maryland State Board of Education, arbitrate teachers' grievances and education employee group contracts. And don't let "the other guy" do it for you. He/she is probably counting on you to take care of the issue. The more our elected officials hear from us, the more seriously they will consider our concerns. You may want to include issues such as pension cost shifting (see separate article) and the state providing funds to private schools, when funds to public schools are being adversely affected by the current economic climate.

I would like to mark the passing of my friend and colleague, **Dr. Fred Sloan**. Education has lost a great ally. Fred and I taught together at the Barton Elementary School. It would be hard to find an educator more compassionate or more loved by his students. We deeply appreciate his almost 40 years of dedication to the Allegany County Public Schools and send our thoughts and prayers to his family.

Despite the pending political issues, I am counting my blessings, both professionally and personally, as we come to the close of 2009, and I hope you are able to do this as well. I am grateful for the quality education we provide to students in Allegany County and for the professionalism and dedication of my colleagues.

I wish all of you a joyful holiday season and a wonderful year in 2010.

Debbie Pappas
Debbie Pappas
President, ACTA

December 2009

TOYS FOR HAPPINESS CAMPAIGN

All employees of the Allegany County Public Schools were invited to participate in a Dress Down Day in support of the local Toys for Happiness program on Friday, December 4, 2009. We thank those who were able to donate to this charitable cause. We appreciate the help of our building reps in collecting the money and toys. An update of the total collection will appear in next month's newsletter.

ARE SCHOOL EMPLOYEE PENSIONS EXCESSIVE??

Here's the issue: A recent article in the *Baltimore Sun* (10/21/09) described a 54-year-old, five-term (20 year) Baltimore City Councilman who qualifies for a \$54,000 annual pension benefit. The WBAL radio station then used the article as a "rallying point" against all public sector pensions.

Here's the question: What would a school employee need to do to earn such a pension benefit?

Here's the answer: (The math for this answer was supplied by David Helfman, MSEA Executive Director.)

The current pension system credits each year since 1998 at 1.8% (the multiplier) times average three-year salary. Years of service prior to 1998 use a 1.2% multiplier.

Let's say a teacher is on step 30 of the 2008-2009 year and earns \$72,758 (a bit high for Allegany County teachers, but hey, this is just an example.) This number would approximate a 3-year average salary for someone retiring at the end of the 2009-10 school year. This member would get 21.6% (12 years times 1.8%) of \$72,758 or a \$15,716 benefit for the years since 1998. That leaves them \$38,284 short of the \$54,000 total the councilman receives. \$38,284 is 52.6% of \$72,758. Since the pre-1998 multiplier is only 1.2%, 52.6 divided by 1.2 is about 44 years. If a teacher taught 44 years before 1998 and 12 after 1998, this would combine to generate a \$54,000 pension.

Here's the conclusion: With **56** years of school employment, this teacher could match the \$54,000 pension. Of course, a teacher who worked 56 years would begin collecting a pension at about age **77**, not age 54.

Know the facts! The Maryland Teacher Pension benefits are not excessive. Anyone who claims they are, hasn't done the math. If you are around family and friends this holiday season and the conversation turns to politics, be sure to spread the word (the correct word) about teacher pensions.

MSEA GIFT CARD WINNER

Congratulations to Valeria Arch, teacher at Washington Middle School, who won a \$250 VISA gift card from MSEA in a random drawing. Contestants were eligible for the drawing if they had recruited a new member and had assisted in updating their building roster of members.

We're on the web!
acta@mstanea.org

Next page →

PRESCRIPTION ISSUES

We are happy to report that our continuing effort to resolve the prescription drug issues regarding brand name drugs has been successful. Those individuals suffering financial loss should be reimbursed. Please contact Mr. Steve Wilson of the ACPS Human Resources Office at 301-759-2033 regarding reimbursement.

Anyone continuing to have unresolved problems with brand name prescriptions should contact the ACTA office.

NEA MEMBER BENEFITS DECEMBER SWEEPSTAKES PRIZES

NEA members can register on NEA Member Benefits Website for a chance to win sweepstakes prizes during the month of December, 2009. The entry period is December 1 – 31, for 8 prizes which include \$250 VISA gift cards. See neamb.com for complete rules.

LEGISLATIVE RECEPTION 2009

ACTA hosted a Legislative Reception for those attending the pre-session open forum on the evening of November 17, 2009 at the Allegany College of Maryland Auditorium. The ACTA thanks those members who helped to serve refreshments: Valeria Arch (WA), John Reuschlein (NE), Evan West (AL), and Misty Tiwgg (CW). Special appreciation goes to Evan West and Valeria Arch for speaking about education issues to the three local delegates, Kelly, Myers and Beitzel, and Senator Edwards, and to those members who attended the forum to show their support of Allegany County education.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Allegany County Teachers Federal Credit Union provides a check overdraft protection option for its members. That program allows funds to be taken from your savings to cover checks written against your account. A \$2.00 fee is charged for each time the option is used.

Contact the Credit Union to make sure you have signed up for this service with your accounts.

YOUR PENSION IS SAFE

There is a great deal of concern about the state shifting the cost of education employees' pension back to the counties. If local boards of education are forced to assume any or all of the costs, it would have a major impact on our ability to negotiate fair salary and benefit packages in the future. However, it would not affect the current or future retirement benefits that you would receive. The calculation of your benefits and the amount of your benefit would remain the same. The multiplier would still be 1.8% (or 1.2% before 1998) of your final average salary times years of service. Unfortunately, your final average salary could be less because monies the county would have to pay in retirement costs would not be available for salary or benefit increases.

The ACTA and MSEA are adamantly opposed to the shifting of any pension costs back to local boards of education. As stated in remarks made at the legislative forum on November 17, ACTA believes shifting pension costs will have an adverse effect on local school boards' budgets. It will make it more difficult for the board to fund adequate salaries and maintain needed benefits to attract and retain the high quality teaching force Allegany County now enjoys. Such an economic burden on the county budgets will transfer to the local board of education; and as they attempt to absorb the cuts, the ability to provide materials, resources, technology and education personnel vital in meeting the needs of students will be severely diminished. In tough economic times, it is tempting to look for quick fixes. However, shifting pension costs back to the local boards of education would be at best a short-term solution that would cause long-term problems.

FREE ATTORNEY SERVICE

Members of ACTA have access to two local attorneys who provide an annual one-half hour of free legal consultation. Those attorneys are Mr. Ray Weston (301-759-4343) and Mr. James Speis (301-759-9090).

SICK LEAVE BANK UPDATE

Currently the Allegany County Education's Sick Leave Bank has a balance of 539 days available. The total number of days donated is 1297 and 758 days have been used. There are 649 members signed up for the Sick Leave Bank.

This is the 10th year of operation for the Sick Leave Bank and members have been asked to donate the minimum number of 2 sick days only once.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

The ACTA's annual membership meeting will be held on Monday, January 11, 2010 at 4:00 p.m. at the Center for Career and Technical Education's large auditorium.

READ ACROSS AMERICA LITERACY FUNDING

MSEA will provide funding for local associations and their members to establish literacy programs for high-risk students. The awards range from \$1,000 to \$5,000 and will be distributed based on available funds, scope of project and how well the project meets the criteria.

Deadline for proposals is January 31, 2010. Learn more at:
<http://www.mstanea.org/mtemp/ReadAcrossAmerica.php>

INFORMAL LEGISLATIVE MEETINGS

Members met with Senator George Edwards at the ACTA office on December 2, 2009. The meeting provided a more personal opportunity for members to ask questions and relate their own education concerns. We appreciate the participation of Barbara Kennedy (BR), ACTA Government Relations Chair, Steve A. Yeash (CCTE), John Reuschlein (NE), Valeria Arch (WA), Amy Duncan (WM), Evan West (AL), Josh Cook (JH), Debbie Pappas and Steve Benson.

Two more meetings have been scheduled. On Wednesday, December 9, all members are invited to speak with Delegate Leroy Myers and on Thursday, December 10, Delegate Wendell Beitzel will be at the ACTA office. Both meetings will begin at 4:00 p.m. and last about 30-45 minutes.

Please contact dpappas@mseane.org if you plan to attend.

BENEFITS OF SICK DAYS

In January, the ACPS plans to post a section on its website which explains the benefits of appropriate use of sick leave days. The ACTA has collaborated with the Human Resources office to update members about the financial aspects of judicious use of these days. Access to this information should be helpful to all education employees.



*MERRY
CHRISTMAS
&
HAPPY
NEW YEAR*