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Oteach

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Let's Go Back to Happy Schools

Diane RAVITCH on ending the testing regime and where NCLB went wrong, p. 4

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teach

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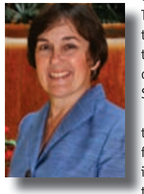
SEE

Speaking Out for You

Gera Summerford, President | **Al Mance, Executive Director**

Benefits of Membersip—Now More Than Ever

The 2011- 2012 school year has officially begun and I want to thank each of you for your continued support and dedication to the Tennessee Education Association (TEA). I know you are aware that we are entering a time of great change in Tennessee and our nation. We as education professionals face new standards for our students, state and local budget challenges, the creation of a new teacher evaluation framework and a general environment of education reform. Already in the first month of my term, I have had opportunities to be the voice of Tennessee's teachers on the teacher advisory council to the State Board of Education, in discussions with the Tennessee commissioner of education and the deputy governor, and on the steering committee of State Collaborative on Reform in Education (SCORE).



As your newly elected president, I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce you to those who work for you at TEA, because I believe that our TEA staff is the primary benefit of membership. In addition to our excellent field staff, or UniServ Coordinators, there are many unique individuals who work for you each day to handle the pressing issues in education. While you plan your lessons, enlighten young minds, drive a busload of children to school, prepare student lunches or maintain our school buildings, you can be assured that TEA staff members are working behind the scenes to support your profession.

The Government Relations Division works to influence legislators at the state and national level, conducts trainings, spearheads political action, develops coalitions with other groups to advocate legislation issues and publishes the TEA Legislative Report when legislature is in session. Many of the department's staff members are known on a first-name basis with legislators.

The Research Division provides accurate local school budget analysis, salary and benefits analysis, training in school finance for local association leaders and conducts regular surveys of members to assist the TEA Board of Directors in decision making. We are the only organization in the state of Tennessee that collects salary and benefits data from all school systems and provides this information to our members—which helps us advocate for better working conditions in schools and beyond.

The Instruction and Professional Development Division provides professional development to educators across the state and mentors Student TEA. The department also deals with issues involving teacher evaluation, certification, ESEA, IDEA, classroom management, teaching strategies, conflict resolution and diversity. At present, the IPD staff closely monitors the development of the new teacher/principal evaluation model.

The Legal Services Division assists members in resolving employment-related disputes and advises TEA Governance, staff and local associations on legal issues affecting education and the organization. This division also administers the liability insurance and TEA/NEA Educators Employment Liability Insurance programs.

The Communications Division is responsible for representing the organization to the members and general public. It publishes ***tea*ch** and other print and online publications, edits all materials for www.teateachers.org, creates news releases and media advisories, produces television and radio spots, designs and prints artwork and materials, and is responsible for special events.

The Membership and Affiliate Relations Division processes membership materials, collects dues, coordinates meetings for membership development and member benefits programs.

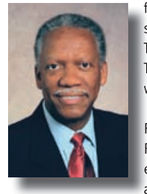
While you can't always see it, there are up to 100 dedicated staff members working hard for you and more than 52,000 other members of TEA—every day. If you need to reach any of our staff members, contact information can be found on pages two and 12 of this publication each month.

Make our voice stronger—ask your colleagues to join us today!

TEA Aided Victims of the Worst Flood in Tennessee History

No one could have predicted on the morning of May 1, 2010, that Tennessee was on the verge of the worst flood disaster in the state's history. By Sunday morning, May 2, the possibility began to dawn on some of us and by Tuesday most of the damage had been done.

By the time the rain stopped and rivers and streams had overflowed their banks, 45 Tennessee counties were declared federal disaster areas. While the majority of the state did not suffer flood-related damage, many TEA members and citizens of Middle and West Tennessee were not so fortunate. Their losses were heart-wrenching. TEA wanted to help.



TEA had to establish a special 501(c)(3) Fund. As a nonprofit organization under Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(5), organizations established under this section of the IRC are not authorized to collect tax-deductible donations for charitable relief.

After some research, we learned that special provisions of the IRC allow organizations such as ours, with a 501(c)(3) component, to collect tax-deductible donations specifically to provide disaster relief on a one-time basis. Since TEA has a trust fund with the appropriate designation to collect tax-deductible donations specifically to provide scholarships, we qualified under the special provisions to collect tax-deductible donations to provide relief for victims in federally declared disaster areas. As a result, we were able to establish the TEA Flood Disaster Relief Fund more quickly than anyone thought possible.

Between May 25, 2010, and July 25, 2010, TEA collected $88,790 in tax-deductible donations to provide assistance to victims of the May 2010 flood. The Internal Revenue Code allows disaster relief assistance to be used for emergency housing costs, food, clothing, health care for the uninsured or other basic necessities.

By August 17 of this year, TEA had distributed more than $75,000 in assistance to 67 families and individuals. Recipients were given between $300 and $2,000 each, based on requests and the need expressed in applications for assistance.

More than 87 percent of the total amount was contributed by TEA, NEA Health Information Network, Kentucky Education Association, Missouri NEA Charitable Fund, Pennsylvania State Education Association, New York State United Teachers, Colorado Education Association, Louisiana Association of Educators and the New Jersey Education Association. Individual TEA members, NEA members, and TEA and other state affiliate staff contributed from $5 to $500 each.

We have 18 additional applications for assistance that were received after the last meeting of the selection committee. The final amount of approximately $13,000 will be distributed among them on or before September 15, and the Fund will close.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to Jill Poss, my associate, who kept track of all applications and related records, and made the important telephone calls; the Selection Committee (Margaret Thompson, Dr. Alzenia Walls, Linda Holmes, Galen Riggs and Ronny Clemmons) who read every application and made the difficult assistance decisions. I thank Earl Wiman, Gera Summerford, Stephanie Faulkner and Bryan McCarty who served with me as the Oversight/Audit Committee.

TEA and recipients of assistance from the Flood Disaster Relief Fund are grateful to the TEA Board of Directors, members, staff, NEA state affiliates, and the one anonymous contributor who have been so freehearted with your giving. All of our lives were made better because of your generosity.

Many hands make light work. You count.

District 4 Leadership Summit Participants Meet to Set Strategies

Harrogate, TN

LMU Professor Dr. Okie Wolfe talks to summit participants at a Cumberland Gap restaurant.

Left to right: Donna Long (Claiborne Co. EA), Melinda Derrick (Sevier Co. EA) and Lisa Rogers (Claiborne Co. EA).

Michele Bowman and Judy Bailey-Ogle of Sevier Co. EA.

Summit participants discuss issues.

Sharon Maheu (Sevier Co. EA) and Johnny Henry (Jefferson Co. EA).

In a joint effort between TEA and the Center of Professional Collaboration at Lincoln Memorial University (LMU) School of Education, local leaders from TEA District 4 met July 12 -13 at the LMU campus in Harrogate, Tenn., to review their accomplishments, share their goals and expectations and develop action plans for the 2010-2011 membership year.

District 4 participants from Claiborne, Grainger, Jefferson and Sevier County EAs also got to spend time in fellowship, building relationships and gaining a better understanding of the similarities and differences that they face as educators in an ever-changing environment.

During the summit, each local was able to customize individual action plans to meet their specific needs. In developing these plans, they considered who would carry out the assigned duties, how, when and where the plans would be enacted, what data would be required, as well as what training, staff and member support services would be needed. An evaluation system was established to determine the plans' effectiveness.

LMU Professor Dr. Okie Wolfe, nationally and internationally known for her unique and energetic workshops and professional development activities, offered her learning environment strategies to help educators prepare for the upcoming school year.

Lauren McCarty (Sevier Co. EA).

Left to right: Lauren McCarty, Melinda Derrick and Ginger Dixon (Sevier Co. EA).

ESP Insurance Bill Finally Becomes Law

While the Basic Education Program (BEP) generates funding for health insurance premiums for education support personnel, it took a 2010 act of Tennessee legislature to require school boards to use at least a portion of the state-provided funds to help pay for education support professional employees' health insurance.

The BEP provides for approximately 30% of the cost of the premium for ESP employees. Tennessee's teachers and education support professionals fought hard for this measure because while some LEAs were passing on this state funding, others were spending the health insurance funds in other areas.

This year, SB 3125/HB 3193 was passed and signed into law by Governor Bredesen. While the proposal does not go as far as TEA would like, it does require LEAs to begin a phase-in of insurance funding beginning in 2012. Many ESP employees—most of whom are already grossly underpaid—should feel some effects of this change over the next few years.

TEA has tried for several years to pass this important legislation on behalf of our ESP members. TEA lobbyists would especially like to thank bill sponsors Sen. Charlotte Burks (D-Monterey), Sen. Jim Tracy (R-Shelbyville), Rep. Johnny Shaw (D-Bolivar), and Rep. Les Winningham (D-Huntsville) for their strong advocacy on behalf of the state's education support personnel.

LET'S FIX IT ALREADY

Education's foremost historian on where NCLB went wrong, ending the testing regime and why we need neighborhood schools.

Dr. Diane Ravitch is a polarizing figure in the education world. Between 1991 and 1993, Ravitch served as Assistant Secretary of Education in President George H.W. Bush's administration. Originally a strong proponent of school choice, vouchers and high-stakes testing, she has changed her views considerably. Earlier this year, Dr. Ravitch received NEA's 2010 Friend of Education Award. The article below is adapted from ***The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education****, by Diane Ravitch (Basic Books, 2010).*

On 'No Child Left Behind'

I was initially supportive of NCLB. Who could object to ensuring that children mastered the basic skills of reading and mathematics? Who could object to an annual test of those skills? Certainly not I.

My support for NCLB remained strong until November 30, 2006. That was the day I went to a conference at the American Enterprise Institute, a well-respected conservative think tank in Washington, D.C. The conference examined whether the major remedies prescribed by NCLB—especially choice and after-school tutoring—were effective. Was the "NCLB toolkit" working? The various presentations that day demonstrated that state education departments were drowning in new bureaucratic requirements, procedures and routines, and that none of the prescribed remedies was making a difference.

I started to doubt the entire approach to school reform that NCLB represented. I started to see the danger of the culture of testing that was spreading through every school in every community, town, city and state.

The most toxic flaw in NCLB was its legislative command that all students in every school must be proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014, including students with special needs, students whose native language is not English, students who are homeless and lacking in any societal advantage, and students who have every societal advantage but are not interested in their schoolwork. All will be proficient by 2014. And if they are not, then their schools and teachers will suffer the consequences.

The 2014 goal is a timetable for the demolition of public education in the United States. The goal of 100 percent proficiency has placed thousands of public schools at risk of being privatized, turned into charters or closed. And indeed, scores of schools in New York City, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and other districts were closed because they were unable to meet the unreasonable demands of NCLB. Superintendents in those districts boasted of how many schools they had closed, as if it were a badge of honor rather than an admission of defeat.

As the clock ticks toward 2014, ever larger numbers of public schools will be forced to close or become charter schools, relinquish control to state authorities, become privately managed, or undergo some other major restructuring. Yet, to date, there is no substantial body of evidence that demonstrates that low-performing schools can be turned around by any of the remedies prescribed in the law. Furthermore, [NCLB's] simpleminded and singular focus on test scores distorts and degrades the meaning and practice of education.

One of the unintended consequences of NCLB was the shrinkage of time available to teach anything other than reading and math. Other subjects, including history, science, the arts, geography, even recess, were curtailed in many schools. Reading and mathematics were the only subjects that counted in calculating a school's adequate yearly progress, and even in these subjects, instruction gave way to intensive test preparation. Test scores became an obsession. Many school districts invested heavily in test-preparation materials and activities. Test-taking skills and strategies took precedence over knowledge. Teachers used the tests from previous years to prepare their students, and many of the questions appeared in precisely the same format every year; sometimes the exact same questions reappeared on the state tests. In urban schools, where there are many low-performing students, drill and practice became a significant part of the daily routine.

NCLB assumed that shaming schools that were unable to lift test scores every year—and the people who work in them—would lead to higher scores. It assumed that low scores are caused by lazy teachers and lazy principals. Perhaps most naively, it assumed that higher test scores on standardized tests of basic skills are synonymous with good education. Its assumptions were wrong.

On Her Favorite Teacher

My favorite teacher was Mrs. Ruby Ratliff. More than fifty years ago, she was my homeroom teacher at San Jacinto High School in Houston, and I was lucky enough to get into her English class as a senior.

Mrs. Ratliff was gruff and demanding. She did not tolerate foolishness or disruptions. She had a great reputation among students. When it came time each semester to sign up for classes, there was always a long line outside her door. What I remember most about her was what she taught us. We studied the greatest writers of the English language, not their long writings like novels (no time for that), but their poems and essays. I still recall a class discussion of Shelley's "Ozymandias," and the close attention that thirty usually rowdy adolescents paid to a poem about a time and place we could barely imagine. Now, many years later, in times of stress or sadness, I still turn to poems that I first read in Mrs. Ratliff's class.

She had a red pen and she used it freely. Still, she was always sure to make a comment that encouraged us to do a better job. Clearly she had multiple goals for her students, beyond teaching literature and grammar. She was also teaching about character and personal responsibility. These are not the sorts of things that appear on any standardized test.

At our graduation, she made a gift of a line or two of poetry to each of the students in her homeroom. I got these two: "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield," the last line of Tennyson's "Ulysses," which we had read in class, and "among them, but not of them," from Byron's "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," which we had not read in class. As she did in class, Mrs. Ratliff used the moment to show us how literature connected to our own lives, without condescending into shallow "relevance." I think these were the best graduation presents I got, because they are the only ones I remember a half century later.

I think of Mrs. Ratliff when I hear the latest proposals to improve the teaching force. I believe Mrs. Ratliff was a great teacher, but I don't think she would have been considered "great" if she had been judged by the kind of hard data that is used now. How would the experts have measured what we learned? We never took a multiple-choice test. We wrote essays and took written tests in which we had to explain our answers, not check a box or fill in a bubble. If she had been evaluated by the grades she gave, she would have been in deep trouble, because she did not award many A grades. An observer might have concluded that she was a very ineffective teacher.

Would any school today recognize her ability to inspire her students to love literature? Would she get a bonus for expecting her students to use good grammar, accurate spelling and good syntax? Would she win extra dollars for insisting that her students write long essays and for grading them promptly? I don't think so. And let's face it: She would be stifled not only by the data mania of her supervisors, but by the jargon, the indifference to classical literature and the hostility to her manner of teaching that now prevail in our schools.

On Teacher Unions

Data-driven education leaders say that academic performance lags because we don't have enough "effective" teachers. The major obstacle to getting enough effective teachers and getting rid of ineffective teachers, they say, is the teachers' unions.

Critics of teacher unions seem to be more plentiful now than ever before. Supporters of choice and vouchers see the unions as the major obstacle to their reforms. One would think, by reading the critics, that the nation's schools are overrun by incompetent teachers who hold their jobs only because of union protections, that unions are directly responsible for poor student performance, and that academic achievement would soar if the unions were to disappear.

This is unfair. No one, to my knowledge, has demonstrated a clear, indisputable correlation between teacher unionism and academic achievement, either negative or positive. The Southern states, where teachers' unions have historically been either weak or nonexistent, have always had the poorest student performance on national examinations. Massachusetts, the state with the highest academic performance, has long had strong teacher unions. The difference in performance is probably due to economics, not to unionization. Where there are affluent communities, student performance tends to be higher, whether or not their teachers belong to unions.

Critics say the union contract makes it impossible for administrators to get rid of bad teachers. The union says it protects teachers against arbitrary dismissals. To be sure, it is not easy to fire a tenured teacher, but it can be done so long as there is due process in hearing the teacher's side of the story. But the issue should not take years to resolve. When it comes to decisions about terminating a teacher, unions want to be part of the decision-making process. It is not in the interest of their members to have incompetent teachers in their midst, passing along poorly educated students to the next teacher. Since unions are not going to disappear, district officials should collaborate with them to develop a fair and expeditious process for removing incompetent teachers, rather than using the union as a scapegoat for low performance or for conditions in the school and society that are beyond the teachers' control.

On "The Billionaire Boys' Club"

In 2002, the top two [education] philanthropies were the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation; these two foundations alone were responsible for 25 percent of all funds contributed by the top 50 donors in that year.

The new titans of the foundation world were billionaire entrepreneurs and corporate leaders. They were soon joined in education philanthropy by another billionaire, Eli Broad, who made his fortune in home building and the insurance industry; he launched the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation in 1999. Unlike the older established foundations, such as Ford, Rockefeller and Carnegie, which reviewed proposals submitted to them, the new foundations decided what they wanted to accomplish, how they wanted to accomplish it and which organizations were appropriate recipients of their largesse.

Gates, Walton and Broad came to be called venture philanthropies, organizations that made targeted investments in education reform.

[They] began with different emphases, but over time they converged in support of reform strategies that mirrored their own experience in acquiring huge fortunes, such as competition, choice, deregulation, incentives and other market-based approaches. These were not familiar concepts in the world of education, where high value is placed on collaboration. The venture philanthropies used their funds assertively to promote their goals. Not many school districts could resist their offers. School districts seldom have much discretionary money. The money expended by a foundation—even one that spends $100 million annually—may seem small in

***"The Southern states, where teachers' unions have historically been either weak or nonexistent, have always had the poorest student performance on national examinations."*—RAVITCH**

comparison to the hundreds of millions or billions spent by public school districts. But the offer of a multimillion-dollar grant by a foundation is enough to cause most superintendents and school boards to drop everything and reorder their priorities.

And so it happened that the Gates, Walton and Broad foundations came to exercise vast influence over American education. These foundations set the policy agenda not only for school districts, but also for states and even the U.S. Department of Education.

There is something fundamentally antidemocratic about relinquishing control of the public education policy agenda to private foundations run by society's wealthiest people. These foundations, no matter how worthy and high-minded, are not subject to public oversight or review, as a public agency would be. They have taken it upon themselves to reform public education, perhaps in ways that would never survive the scrutiny of voters in any district or state. If voters don't like the foundations' reform agenda, they can't vote them out of office. The foundations demand that public schools and teachers be held accountable for performance, but they themselves are accountable to no one. If their plans fail, no sanctions are levied against them.

The foundations justify their assertive agenda by pointing to the persistently low performance of public schools in urban districts. Having seen so little progress over recent years, they now seem determined to privatize public education to the greatest extent possible. They are allocating millions of dollars to increase the number of charter schools. They assume that if children are attending privately managed schools, and if teachers and principals are recruited from nontraditional backgrounds, then student achievement will improve dramatically. They base this conclusion on the success of a handful of high-visibility charter schools (including KIPP, Achievement First, and Uncommon Schools) that in 2009 accounted for about 300 of the nation's approximately 4,600 charter schools.

If we continue on the present course, with big foundations and the federal government investing heavily in opening more charter schools, the result is predictable. Charter schools in urban centers will enroll the motivated children of the poor, while the regular public schools will become schools of last resort for those who never applied or were rejected. The regular public schools will enroll a disproportionate share of students with learning disabilities and students who are classified as English-language learners; they will enroll the kids from the most troubled home circumstances, the ones with the worst attendance records and the lowest grades and test scores.

Do we need neighborhood public schools? I believe we do. The neighborhood school is the place where parents meet to share concerns about their children and the place where they learn the practice of democracy. They create a sense of community among strangers. As we lose neighborhood public schools, we lose the one local institution where people congregate and mobilize to solve local problems, where individuals learn to speak up and debate and engage in democratic give-and-take with their neighbors.

The market is not the best way to deliver public services. Just as every neighborhood should have a reliable fire station, every neighborhood should have a good public school. Privatizing our public schools makes as much sense as privatizing the fire department or the police department.

American education has a long history of infatuation with fads and ill-considered ideas. The current obsession with making our schools work like a business may be the worst of them, for it threatens to destroy public education. Who will stand up to the tycoons and politicians and tell them so?

On How to Improve Our Schools

What can we do to improve schools and education? Plenty.

We must first of all have a vision of what good education is. We should have goals that are worth striving for. Everyone involved in educating children should ask themselves why we educate. What is a well-educated person? What knowledge is of most worth? What do we hope for when we send our children to school? What do we want them to learn and accomplish by the time they graduate from school?

Certainly we want them to be able to read and write and be numerate. But that is not enough. We want to prepare them for a useful life. We want them to be able to think for themselves when they are out in the world on their own. We want them to have good character and to make sound decisions about their life, their work and their health. We want them to face life's joys and travails with courage and humor. We hope that they will be kind and compassionate in their dealings with others. We want them to have a sense of justice and fairness. We want them to understand our nation and our world and the challenges we face. We want them to be active, responsible citizens, prepared to think issues through carefully, to listen to differing views and to reach decisions rationally. We want them to learn science and mathematics so they understand the problems of modern life and participate in finding solutions. We want them to enjoy the rich artistic and cultural heritage of our society and other societies.

If these are our goals, the current narrow, utilitarian focus of our national testing regime is not sufficient to reach any of them. Indeed, to the extent that we make the testing regime our master, we may see our true goals recede farther and farther into the distance. By our current methods, we may be training (not educating) a generation of children who are repelled by learning, thinking that it means only drudgery, worksheets, test preparation and test-taking.

Our nation's commitment to provide universal, free public education has been a crucial element in the successful assimilation of millions of immigrants and in the ability of generations of Americans to improve their lives. As we seek to reform our schools, we must take care to do no harm. In fact, we must take care to make our public schools once again the pride of our nation. To the extent that we strengthen them, we strengthen our democracy.

Staffer Celebrates 50 Years at TEA

TEA will celebrate a special anniversary in September. Sandra (Lewis) Stinson, associate to the government relations division, has devoted 50 years to TEA and the education profession in Tennessee.

When she came to work for TEA on September 1, 1960, Stinson was completing her senior year at Hume-Fogg Technical High School in downtown Nashville. It was a different era and a different office. The TEA building was located on 7th Avenue North, across from the War Memorial Building and not far from Hume-Fogg, so Stinson could walk from school to work.

Sandra Stinson

At TEA, Stinson is known as an expert shorthand note taker, a skill she perfected in the early years on the job when she used a manual typewriter and took lots of shorthand notes. There were no copiers, fax machines or printing equipment back then.

Stinson began her work as secretary for Sara Nolan, editor of the *Tennessee Teacher* magazine (now ***tea***ch), and Fred Crosson in the research division. She has worked as administrative assistant in government relations for more than 25 years, serving as an invaluable brain trust for Jerry Winters and Antoinette Lee as they fight for teachers' rights at the Capitol.

Stinson and her high-school sweetheart, Jerry Stinson, were married for almost 44 years when he passed away in 2008. Their son Greg lives in Nashville. Sandra has lived in Hendersonville, Sumner County, for more than 45 years.

TEA thanks Sandra Stinson for her excellent work for the education profession in Tennessee and for making a difference in our lives!

Jefferson Co. EA Vice President Lisa Henry (right) with Association Representatives Karla Mills (left) and Melanie Simpson (middle) were busy signing up new members at the JCEA table on the county-wide in-service day Monday, August 9.

Teacher Tenure Alive and Well in Tennessee

"The reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated."
-Mark Twain (1897)

It seems Mark Twain could have been talking about teacher tenure in Tennessee in 2010 as some teachers returning to school this year report being told that Tennessee teachers no longer have tenure protections.

Let us set the record straight.

Tennessee teachers continue to enjoy the benefits of a strong teacher tenure law—a law strengthened in 2010 as a result of TEA's efforts to ensure that every teacher facing dismissal charges has the right to a hearing before an impartial hearing officer.

In fact, TEA legal services has already represented 11 tenured teachers in such hearings in the seven months since the Tennessee First to the Top Act passed in January, and three more hearings are scheduled within the next month.

Know the truth:

* Tennessee teachers continue to earn tenure after three years of teaching in a district.
* Tenure guarantees teachers due process protections if threatened with dismissal or suspension.
* TEA will vigorously defend these rights for members.

While the Tennessee First to the Top Act authorized many changes in Tennessee school districts, it did not change these basic facts.

Don't be taken in by rumors, half-truths or outright lies being told by those who seek to exploit this dramatic period of change occurring in schools across the state.

If you have any questions about your rights as a Tennessee teacher, consult your TEA UniServ Coordinator or local association president, who can put you in touch with your UniServ Coordinator.

TEA: Now More Than Ever!

Orris and Teresa Densford, longtime Carter County Education Association members, attended the Carter Association Representative training in early August.

The husband and wife team works hard for CCEA. Orris serves as the chief negotiator and Teresa is the local treasurer.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS
TENNESSEE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
October 2010

October 1	Deadline for sending UEP Membership Dues Payment Agreement
October 1-2	NEA Board of Directors, Washington, DC
October 2	TEA Committee-Commission Weekend, Nashville
October 15-16	TEA Board of Directors, TEA Building
October 15-17	NEA Southeast Regional Minority Leadership Conference, Tampa, FL
October 28-29	East Tennessee Education Association Conference, Knoxville
October 30	New Teacher Conference, Nashville

NEA Foundation Awards 50 Grants

October 15 is Next Deadline

In late June, the NEA Foundation awarded 50 grants totaling $217,000 to support public school educators' efforts to improve student achievement and strengthen their own practice. The grants, of $2,000 or $5,000, were awarded to educators in 28 states.

The NEA Foundation awards two primary categories of grants to public education professionals: Student Achievement Grants for initiatives to improve academic achievement and Learning & Leadership Grants for high-quality professional development activities.

Twenty-seven of these grants have been awarded in collaboration and with support from NEA Foundation partners including: the National Association for Music Education Teaching Improvisation Grants for teaching musical improvisation; and Nickelodeon Big Green Help Public Education Grants and Staples Foundation Green Grants to Public School Educators for projects that integrate green-related topics and experiences into the classroom.

"Through these grants, educators are improving their practice so their students can master academics and develop critical thinking and problem solving skills," said Harriet Sanford, president and CEO of the NEA Foundation. "These funds will enable educators to carry out a wide range of initiatives: from creating school gardens; to studying ecosystems in the Chesapeake Bay; to attending workshops and conferences at institutions such as Columbia University."

The NEA Foundation has awarded more than $6.6 million in grants over the past decade to educators in every state in the country. Each year, the Foundation awards approximately 150 Student Achievement and Learning & Leadership grants. The Foundation awards its grants to educators three times a year. The deadline for the next review period is Oct. 15, 2010. Descriptions of current and past recipients, online application forms and an instructional video can be found at ***neafoundation.org***.

The NEA Foundation is an independent public charity created in 1969 and sustained by contributions from educators, corporate sponsors, and other supporters of public education. The Foundation offers grants and programs that support educators' efforts to close the achievement gaps, increase classroom innovations, provide professional development and salute excellence in education. For more information, visit ***neafoundation.org***.

OPINION & COMMENTARY

Capitol Experiences

After a Week in Washington, No More Simplistic Views of Politics

By Betsi Foster

Most people have to get elected to Congress or work in the U.S. Capitol to experience Washington, D.C., the way I did this July. I spent an unforgettable week in what turned out to be a crash course on the legislature and its processes. Along with 14 other secondary history and government teachers from across the nation, I was granted staff access to the U.S. Capitol, interviews and meetings with legislators, and private tours of the National Archives, the Library of Congress and the U.S. Capitol—including the Dome!

This experience was made possible through the House Fellows Program, the purpose of which is to develop curriculum on the history and practice of the House for use in secondary schools. We were chosen through a competitive application process in April of this year. We were told at the time that we would be provided "an opportunity for an insider's perspective on representative government," a statement I later called the world's biggest undersell.

Sen. Lamar Alexander, Betsi Foster, Cindy Tatum and Sen. Bob Corker

The application process included a lesson plan component where I designed a rough draft of a lesson plan for teaching a history of Congress. I and the other participants were under the impression that the bulk of our week would be spent honing that lesson and developing more to contribute to the database of the House Historian's office. We quickly learned that our real job was to play the part of congressional staff, learning hands-on the inner workings of the legislative process. By the end of the week, we were all ready to redo, replace, and resubmit many of our lessons in favor of our new, more realistic view of Congress. The Schoolhouse Rock version of how a bill becomes a law just doesn't hold up to reality; politics, we learned, is often more important than policy or process.

Some of my unforgettable experiences from the week include the following: an insider's tour of the U.S. Capitol; meeting and talking education with Reps. John Boehner, David Dreier, James Clyburn, John Tanner, and Sens. Corker and Alexander; a private tour of the National Archives led by an archivist (it included a viewing of the Charters of Freedom—Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution, Bill of Rights); a private tour of the U.S. Capitol Dome and the Library of Congress; dinner in the President's Dining Room at Union Station; as well as visits with various legislative staff (including a visit to the Eisenhower Office Building in the White House complex). The whole program was free and without waiting in lines!

And here are a few things I learned from my experience:

1. Never take anything in your textbooks at face value. The simplistic version of Congress presented to students barely hints at the complex reality.

2. Contact your legislators. They need our input on the issues, and we as constituents are always welcome to call, write or visit. This is especially true of southern legislators, whose offices have a reputation on Capitol Hill for being the most cordial, polite and hospitable.

3. If you want something, just ask. Our legislators and/or their staff are more than willing to provide classroom materials, meet with groups of students, or even visit to help educate our youth. And if the office says they can send a staff member instead, I urge you to accept. Quite often, the staff knows more about the issues than the legislator!

4. Apply for anything and everything that even sounds remotely interesting. You just might get picked! I think Rep. James Clyburn said it best in one of our meetings: "You will achieve as much or as little as your experiences allow." So go for it!

Betsi Foster is president-elect and membership chair of Weakley Co. Education Association. She is also a member of the TEA-FCPE Executive Committee, representing District 12.

Teaching Laboratory

Giving Students a Chance to Succeed: Let's Focus on Life Lessons, Not Just Formulas

By Michelle McMillian

The first day of school brings about many emotions for a high school student. A typical teenager is usually perplexed about too many things at once: "Do I know where my classes are located? Did I bring my schedule? Are any of my friends in my classes or at lunch? Am I wearing the right clothes?" With all of these questions, there may not be much energy left to devote to actual learning.

A teacher's most challenging job is to first get his or her students past the social barriers, to get them interested in learning and expanding their intellectual horizons. Simply presenting the material for a given course is not the key to producing successful students. For a student, it's not enough to memorize the material in order to successfully pass the test, without truly internalizing what is being taught. Research and experience prove that memorizing formulas without understanding why and how they are applied would not land anyone a decent job. Teachers must show students how to relate to others, the proper way to conduct themselves in a professional setting and how to work with a team in solving problems.

As high schools work to equip students with the necessary tools for success in the working world, they must teach students the skills they need to successfully work with others. As only a few occupations allow for a person to work solo, relations in the workplace are crucial to productivity.

Inevitably, situations will arise on the job which will require thinking creatively, outside of the proverbial box. In order to tackle such tasks successfully, students need as much encouragement as teachers can possibly give them. Making a student believe that he or she can do anything they desire regardless of the obstacles gives them the confidence to shoot for the stars and hopefully will land them someplace fun along the way—perhaps even on the moon.

Michelle McMillian is a member of Sullivan Co. EA and teaches at Sullivan South High School.

Lessons Learned

Students and Plagiarism: Fostering Critical Thinking in the Age of Internet

By Dr. Mary Ransdell

A teacher stands before the class saying, "Please open your science books to the chapter comprehension questions on page 95. I want you to answer these questions for homework. If you have trouble, find the sentence with the answer in the book and copy the sentence." Sound familiar, at least in principal if not in actual words? When teachers communicate this to students, they are actually teaching kids to plagiarize. Children learn this lesson very well.

Plagiarism, whether it is stealing another's words or thoughts or a lack of citations, is a monumental problem facing high school and college level instructors. These days, students can create a report on nearly any topic without first going to a brick-and-mortar library, finding relevant books and articles, making copious notes, before finally converting the notes into a logically written paper. The easy access to the Internet means that students with even rudimentary word processing skills can hand in a reasonably presentable paper with little scholarly effort. In effect, the student can find the answer to a problem or question on the Internet, copy and paste the sentences with the answer and hand it in. Teachers know that students do again, what they were rewarded for doing in the past.

High-stakes testing and local accountability means that teachers and students are concerned with getting the right answer. Finding the requisite sentence in the book may assure students that they have indeed found the correct answer that their teacher was likely looking for. Never mind the fact that textbooks sometimes contain incorrect material.

Tennessee, as well as many other states, is currently in the process of adapting the state level-initiated Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts. Current TN state standards for these states indicate that students will correctly use quotation marks but do not specifically mention "when citing". The author acknowledges that if the questions are at the back of the book or chapter, one assumes that the answers are somewhere in the text just read. A limited need to cite, but it could be as simple as putting a page number after the answer and the text citation at the end of the paper. The author suggests that a citation might be part of the "heading" students place on their papers. Simple citations for K-4 students might include the author (last, first initial), year, and title of book or Web site. Grades 5 and higher could be introduced to standardized styles such as APA, MLA or Chicago Style as part of the general classroom procedures. This would get students into the habit of citing sources. Thus, citing sources when in middle and high school might become second nature.

The common Core State Standards Web site (***www.corestandards.org***) for the second grade notes: "With guidance and support from adults, [students] use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers." "Participate in shared research and writing projects (e.g., read a number of books on a single topic to produce a report; record science observations)." And, "Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question." However, citations are not recommended until high school, a time when the habit of disregarding the need for citations is already formed.

The National Educational Technology Standards states in Standard 3 (*Research and Information Fluency*) that students are to "…ethically use information…." This asserts the need to teach students to consistently cite direct quotes and paraphrased information, even if it is right in the textbook where they were reading. TN curriculum standards note that students are to create stories and/or reports using technological resources, but there is no mention of attribution or plagiarism until the ninth-grade level. The plagiarism issue is treated like a "hot potato" in hopes, perhaps, that children would not think to copy or perhaps that the issue will go away. We need to teach responsibility even if not specifically mentioned in the state standards. The Common Core State Standards have the potential to dictate what is taught and no more. Alternatively, perhaps adjustment is needed before adopting the common standards.

Because of the wide range and number of state standards teachers and students must meet, lessons on plagiarism and paraphrasing need to be married to existing standards. Students must learn to correctly use quotation marks and footnotes. A guidance counselor could introduce the ethical issues of plagiarism through regularly scheduled sessions. Young children need assistance in differentiating between what is heard or learned and an original thought. Children could be introduced to the word "plagiarism" or "ethical behavior" as we introduce other vocabulary words. There are places within the current curriculum in which these issues might be discussed and practiced.

Learning to paraphrase or retell in one's own words is helpful as is the use of questions that require higher order thinking skills. The author suggests the inclusion of a short statement (suitable for the grade level) with each assignment that is signed by the student and indicates the work is original and true. This adds a bit of credibility and drives home the point to students, no matter how young, that honesty and accountability are expected.

Recognizing the author's and illustrator's names is seamlessly accomplished in pre-kindergarten, when teachers begin to read a story. The terms "author" and "illustrator" might be part of the vocabulary words. It is a simple step to find the copyright date and the publisher.

Students might practice citing others' work when in the computer lab for regularly scheduled instruction, during WebQuests or when researching particular topics for their content classes. Students studying external text structures might note the author/editor and publication information for textbooks as part of the lesson. A lesson taught by the guidance counselor might cover the legal aspects of plagiarism. Depending on the grade level, assorted lessons about paraphrasing, main ideas, supporting details or comprehension could relate to plagiarism.

By asking kids to create original sentences, we teach critical thinking and paraphrasing. By teaching young children to properly cite sources, it teaches responsibility, honesty and integrity. It also asserts the need for teachers to model the use of proper citations regarding the materials they give to students. This might be similar to that found in the header, footer or margins of commercial handouts given to students. There are plenty of materials and activity ideas on the Internet and the author suspects many teachers do not cite their sources when using these materials, even though copyright laws exist that limit the use of such materials. Teachers should model ethical behavior.

Plagiarism will not go away anytime soon, but we can make students of all ages more aware and conscientious of the ethical use of others' words and ideas.

Dr. Mary Ransdell is clinical assistant professor of education at the University of Memphis Millington Center.

Gear Up for Tennessee Space Week
Grant Application Deadline: September 24

If you are interested in Tennessee Space Week (TSW) project's 2010-11 learning grants, don't forget that the application deadline is September 24. TEA will award TSW learning grants to teachers for instructional projects and materials in grades K-12. This is a great opportunity to demonstrate your local Association's commitment to academic excellence through local publicity for the program and sponsorship of supporting activities. Our Tennessee Space Week celebration will be held on January 23-29, 2011.

What on earth is TSW?

TSW is a statewide project designed to increase student interest and performance in science and mathematics through a focus on aerospace programs and accomplishments. Activities are co-sponsored by TEA, the Tennessee Space Grant Consortium and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

Originated in 1986 by TEA, the TSW project includes many learning opportunities for both students and teachers. TEA generally offers workshops that deal directly with teaching math and science at the annual TEA Spring Symposium in March. Information concerning other available training opportunities is disseminated to members through TEA publications and the *Special Events* section at ***www.teateachers.org***. Every teacher who applies for a grant automatically receives notification of training opportunities sponsored by the Tennessee Space Grant Consortium and NASA.

TEA awards TSW Learning Grants to members each year, prior to Tennessee Space Week. Since 1999, TEA has awarded over $170,286 to association members and various school systems across the state. These grants fund special TSW materials and activities. Grant awards vary in amount to a maximum of $1,000, with special consideration given to proposals from first-time applicants. Proposals that include matching funds from other sources are also given special consideration. Applications are available annually in May at *www.teateachers.org* with a deadline in late September. Awards are mailed directly to winners in late November or early December. This year's application deadline is Friday, September 24.

The goal of TSW activities is to increase student interest and performance in math and science. Keeping this goal in mind, TEA strongly encourages interdisciplinary project development as well as traditional proposals within math and science departments across the state.

When does TSW take place?

Following the Challenger tragedy on January 28, 1986, TEA acted to honor the life and teaching of fellow NEA member, Christa McAuliffe, who was aboard the Challenger as America's first teacher in space. In her honor, Tennessee Space Week is held each January, the last school week preceding, or the school week including, January 28.

If you would like to be the TSW contact for your local Association, E-mail A.L. Hayes at (*alhayes@tea.nea.org*). Provide your name, address, e-mail address (home preferred), and name of your local Association.

1. Application must be typed and submitted as directed on the application form.

2. Individual K-12 teacher members, groups of members or local associations are eligible to apply. Applications for collaborative projects should be made in a single application. Only current members holding professional certification are eligible. Special consideration is given to those proposals from first-time applicants or proposals that include matching funds from other school and/or community sources.

3. Grant amounts up to $1,000 will be awarded to purchase aerospace teaching and learning materials to be used in instructional projects for classrooms, departments or schools. Reusable materials are preferred, but not required. TEA encourages incorporation of matching funds from other sources wherever possible. Learning grant funding can change annually, and matching funds increase the impact of your proposal.

4. Field trips, salary supplements and professional development courses are not eligible for funding; however, they can be part of a total project.

5. **Applications are due at TEA by 5 p.m. (CDT), Friday, September 24, 2010.** A joint committee of TEA and the Tennessee Space Consortium will select and notify winners. Grant winners will receive checks in November and are responsible for making all purchases for their projects.

6. Any unspent funds must be returned to TEA by Friday, May 6, 2011, as part of the final report for each grant project.

Tennessee Space Week – January 23-29, 2010
Please mail the completed application to:

Tennessee Space Week Learning Grant
Attn: A.L. Hayes
Tennessee Education Association
801 Second Avenue North
Nashville, TN 37201-1099

Need information, services?

Mitchell Johnson
Assistant Executive Director for Affiliate Services

Ronny Clemmons & Donna Cotner
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