

PEA Newsletter

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Portage Education Association

Did you know...

MEA President
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MEA Vice-President
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MEA Secretary Treasurer
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Inside this issue:

President's Message	1
Student Loan Forgiveness Workshop	2
PAC Donations	3
Whitmer Talks	4
Pension Seminar Series	5
Evaluation Bill Vote	6
Know Your Contract	7

A Message from PEA President Chris Furlong

Members,

It's hard to believe that we are five weeks into the school year already. I cannot believe that in a couple of short weeks, fall will be in full swing. I want to take this time to thank all of you for what you do.

I'm thankful for the time and effort you continue to put in outside of the school year to be great teachers and professionals. I'm pleased to let you know that our membership is growing and we are having new faces join us frequently. We've gotten several former members to come back to the PEA over the last year, too.

This has been an amazing year for the PEA. We settled a three-year contract and have brought several issues to light that have strengthened our presence in the district. I hope you know that together we have continued to make a union that runs on its members' ideas. Your building representatives and I will continue to make sure that we are treated as professionals and as an essential part of the Portage community. Thanks for what you have done and continue to do for our students, each other, and community. We are better because we work together.

Please continue to ask questions and reach out to me or your building reps if you need anything. Our rep council meetings are the third Monday of each month and all members are invited. You can also let your reps know of any concerns and they can bring them to the group on your behalf. Thank you for being an active member of the PEA!

Chris Furlong
mea.peapresident@gmail.com

Personal E-mail Distribution List

Kat Frink is our PEA Communications Chair. If you need to update your email address, please contact her at peacommunications2016@gmail.com.



Student Loan Forgiveness Workshops

The Kalamazoo MEA Office is offering several opportunities to attend a Student Loan Forgiveness Training to help our members familiarize themselves with a variety of options to reduce and/or eliminate their student debt. You are welcome to attend the workshop that is most convenient for your schedule/location. There will be an additional workshop in March, if you cannot attend one the sessions below.

Student Loan Forgiveness:

This training has been designed to familiarize members with a variety of options to reduce and/or eliminate their student debt. Members will be provided information and parameters regarding student loan forgiveness as well as financing and refinancing options available to members in good standing.

Any member in good standing* is eligible to attend. To reserve your seat, please send your reservation request in an email message to kazoomea@mea.org with your name, your local [Portage Education Association], and the name, date and location of the session for which you are registering. Seating is limited – so don't delay in sending your email request.

Tuesday, October 23, 2018

5:00 to 6:30 pm

St. Joseph County ISD – Rocky River Room

(located at 62445 Shimmel Road, Centreville MI 49032)

OR

Thursday, October 25, 2018

5:00 to 6:30 pm

Kalamazoo MEA Office

(located at 4341 S. Westnedge Ave., Suite 1210, Kalamazoo MI 49008)

Should you have any questions, please feel free to get in touch with our office at 269/344-7428 or via email at kazoomea@mea.org.

2018–2019 Academic Calendar

Did you know the PEA has its own Google calendar with important events and dates preloaded? Do you need to know if the upcoming half days are professional records or professional development?

You can add this calendar to your Google Calendar by going to: <https://tinyurl.com/y6wd7bpd>

Political Action Committee Donations

We're making progress towards our monthly recurring PAC donor goal, but we still have a big hill to climb. Going up against DeVos money like this means we need as many of you to support the PAC as possible.

We may not have the same access to unlimited funds like the other side does, but what we do have is incredible grassroots energy.

Energy that inspires each of us to wake up every morning and fight for our students' futures.

Energy that inspires us to go the extra mile, every single day.

Energy that inspires us to spend our own time, money, and resources without question and without fail when a student needs us.

Energy that can't be imitated or stolen from us.

We're joined together to fight for public education, for educators, and for our students -- that's the kind of energy they'll never have.

If you're on the fence about becoming a PAC donor, just start with whatever your monthly budget will allow. That's all it takes to bring about positive change in Lansing. **It's our goal to gain 500 new PAC donors this month, and if 85 more of you become donors right now, we'll be on track to hit our monthly and yearly goals.**

[Will you chip in a few dollars each month to support the PAC?](#)

Weingarten Rights

Weingarten Rights were established by the United States Supreme Court in 1975. They state that an employee who reasonably believes that an investigatory interview could lead to discipline is entitled to ask for union representation. An investigatory interview is a meeting with administration at which the employee will be questioned or asked to explain his or her conduct, and which could lead to disciplinary action against the employee.

If you think a meeting is investigatory SAY:

“If this discussion could in any way result in my being disciplined, I respectfully request that my union representative be present at the meeting. Prior to an investigatory interview, I wish to be informed of the subject matter of the interview. Following such disclosure, I am requesting a pre-interview conference with my union representative”

Whitmer Talks Education in Pontiac Forum

<https://mea.org/whitmer-talks-education-in-pontiac-forum/>

During a recent community forum on education and urban issues, gubernatorial candidate Gretchen Whitmer had no shortage of examples to show what she would seek to change if elected.

Diversion of hundreds of millions of School Aid Fund dollars each year to fill gaps elsewhere in the state budget. Draining resources away from the state's neediest communities. Retention of third graders who do not meet a standardized test benchmark. Tax cuts for corporations and new taxes on retiree pensions.

All bad policies; all enacted under total Republican rule, said Whitmer.

"Right now in our state we have seen the failure of the last 25 years, where we had a family on the west side of the state pretty much dictating the law and dictating funding when it comes to education," Whitmer said, referring to the influence of the DeVos family over GOP politics.

"Probably the most demoralized group of people in our state right now are educators, because they've been attacked and blamed and stripped of the resources they need to be successful," she added.

Whitmer held the discussion on Thursday in a community close to her heart – Pontiac, where her grandfather was once superintendent. Next door in Waterford, her grandmother was a teacher. Growing up with grandparents she called true public servants, Whitmer said she learned that "every child has potential; it's our job to ensure every child has opportunity."

Whitmer was joined by panelists Aimee McKeever, president of the Pontiac Education Association; school board member and state House candidate Brenda Carter; and state Rep. Tim Greimel (D-Auburn Hills).

McKeever told the crowd of community members and activists that 75 percent employee turnover in the city's schools over the past several years can be attributed to destructive state policies that fail to value students, respect educators, and adequately fund public education.

"Because of emergency managers, because of consent agreements, urban and rural school districts are failing their education communities," McKeever said. "We need to stop this. We need to make it a priority that we value all of our students, who are our future."

Hit hard economically by the loss of its manufacturing base, the city of Pontiac struggled for years under a succession of state emergency managers, and the school district has been slashing budgets for five years under a consent agreement with the state.

Pontiac School Board member Brenda Carter, who is running for the State House, said the state removed local control and "literally tied our hands." Urban areas have been disproportionately affected by state takeovers, which she called "an all-out attack on districts in poverty."

"We were told either follow these mandates or there will be repercussions," Carter said.

From his very first state budget, Gov. Rick Snyder's approach to education has been "upside-down," Whitmer noted – giving a \$1 billion tax cut to businesses while cutting school spending, taxing retiree pensions, and shrinking the earned income tax credit that allowed working families to keep more of their earnings.

"A budget is a statement of values, and this governor's first budget told the real story," she said. "Who paid for that huge corporate tax cut? Kids, the working poor, and retirees."

Education spending still has not returned to pre-Recession levels. Numerous studies and reports have found that Michigan is underfunding education, especially for poorer, at-risk, and special education students. Meanwhile, school employees have seen their take-home pay shrinking as new laws forced them to absorb increasing health care premiums and deductibles.

"Our leaders in Lansing have balanced budgets on the back of education and made choices to give for-profit companies the opportunity to make money off of education," Whitmer said. "We've taken a system that was once the envy of the world and now as a state we're in the bottom 10 in our country."

She is often reminded of the human toll of the DeVos agenda, Whitmer said. On her birthday in late August, she was approached by a Lansing-area paraeducator while taking a rare night off from campaigning. She had stopped in a store with her family between dinner and a movie.

The woman said, "'You're my last hope,' and she started crying," Whitmer recalled. "She explained to me that she was working in this store because her job as a parapro didn't pay her well enough to take care of her three kids at home."

That is what this election is all about, Whitmer said. "We need a governor who cares more about our kids and our parents and our educators – the people who work in our schools – than about Betsy DeVos."



Pension Seminar Series

Investing in your future!



Seminar Topics include:

Pension 101: Targeted to newer school employees (0 – 5 years of service) who need to understand their plan, including each one and what the one you select will mean. It will focus on creating the habits necessary to accumulate a retirement savings plan.

Pension 201: Targeted to those mid-career employees (5 – 25 years of service) who have not determined when they will retire but who need to stay informed of the details of their retirement plan, with a focus on the many life changes everyone goes through which impact their retirement security.

Pension 301: Targeted to those employees who are recognizing they are in the last few years of their career and want to know the specific details of what lies ahead as a public school retiree, including healthcare, pension benefits and managing lifetime income.

Pension 101

October 25th

5:00pm

Pension 201

October 25

6:00pm

Pension 301

November 8

4:30 and 6:00

KRESA Wile Auditorium

1819 East Milham

Cost: FREE

To be sure there are adequate handouts, please **RSVP** no later than one week prior by going to the MARSP website: marsp.org. Click on the events tab and register. You will receive a confirmation of your registration. Hosted by the Kalamazoo Chapter of MARSP.



Michigan Association of
Retired School Personnel
Protecting your future

Educator Evaluation Bill Awaits a Vote

<https://mea.org/educator-evaluation-bill-awaits-a-vote/>

A bill with bipartisan support that would keep standardized test scores from taking on even greater importance in the lives of teachers and students in Michigan passed out of the House Education Reform Committee on Thursday.

It's important to keep up the pressure on your state representative and senator—Use our Action Network page to add your letter today!

Hundreds of educators and parents have contacted legislators in support of House Bill 5707, a measure that would keep the percentage of an educator's evaluation that is tied to student growth measures at 25 percent instead of jumping to 40 percent this school year.

Livonia social studies teacher Craig Barker is one of those people who contacted his legislator about the bill following an MEA Call to Action over the summer.

"HB 5707 is critical because while test scores are an important component of looking at teacher effectiveness, we know that they are a piece of the puzzle and not the whole story," Barker wrote in a letter to Rep. Adam Zemke (D-Ann Arbor), who is minority vice-chairman of the House Education Reform committee.

Barker said he taught a U.S. History class with 33 students enrolled last fall in which students averaged 8.9 days absent for the semester. "The simple reality is that I can't teach students that are not there, but my evaluation score is still tied to their achievement," he said.

It's not a system designed to spur great teaching, he said: "Tying teacher evaluation so heavily to a test score incentivizes all the worst practices in teaching and does not help students, parents, or teachers get the best learning experience."

Zemke said lawmakers who support the bill continue to push for its passage, given the "significant amount of angst" many are hearing about the scheduled increase of student growth measures to 40 percent of educator evaluations.

"These are not willy-nilly concerns that people are sharing," Zemke said. "They make a lot of sense."

Changes to the state's educator evaluation system in 2014 were intended to be constructive and not punitive, aimed at improving teaching and learning, Zemke added. Research shows observation and feedback from a well-trained evaluator is best at helping educators improve their practice, he said.

"We shouldn't be basing half of a growth score on a state assessment which has – in the eyes of the student – very little value," Zemke said. "This is what we hear. Students don't have any incentive to do the right thing on the test."

Ann Arbor science teacher Amie Snapke also contacted her legislator this summer to say that not only teachers are stressed in the current environment.

"Today's students are more stressed and anxious than they were when I started teaching," the 15-year veteran said. "We need more mental health supports for students, not more testing and focus on testing."

Time that could be spent working with students is used for testing, preparing for tests, and filling out dozens of pages of evaluation forms – all in pursuit of "a single data point," Snapke said. "Our students need us to spend time with them, work with them on areas where they are struggling, and listen to them."

Kelly Hilgendorf, an elementary teacher in Davison, said many students are facing difficulties at home that affect their performance in school.

She had a student last year who was homeless, and another who lost his father. Classroom teachers do not control many outside factors that influence a child's performance on a standardized test, she said.

In her district, students take a reading assessment several times per year, but only the first and last are used to calculate teacher evaluations. Last spring, she said, "I had three students who completed the last test of 34 reading questions in about 15 minutes and had terrible scores."

Basing evaluations in part on student test scores is "frustrating" and "disheartening," she said.

"PLEASE do something to help Michigan teachers!" she wrote in an Action Network letter to her representative over the summer.

[Reach out to your state senator and representative using our simple Action Network tools, and share your story about why it's important to keep student growth at 25 percent of educator evaluations.](#)

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Putting Kids First
www.portageea.org

October 15
November 19
December 17
January 21
February 18
March 18
April 15
May 20

Know Your Contract!

ARTICLE 21 - PROFESSIONAL COMPENSATION

Section 5: An amount of 0.2% of the base of the Bachelor's Degree Schedule as shown on Schedule A, per semester hour shall be added to the appropriate step of Schedule A of a Teacher with a B.A. or B.S. degree for each hour of graduate credit earned. Such reimbursement shall be made provided:

- a) The credit was earned from an accredited institution of higher education designated as a four-year college or university
- b) That all courses were approved on the appropriate form by the Superintendent of Schools or his/her designee prior to the Teacher's registration for the course.
- c) Such reimbursement shall be made following submission of proof of satisfactory completion of the course.
- d) The maximum number of hours reimbursed shall be thirty (30) hours minus those hours required for permanent or continuing certification.
- e) Excluding members who have already received reimbursement of the predecessor of this benefit.

In order to receive salary adjustments based on this Section for the fall semester, passing grades must be submitted by the next February 1 following the completion of the course except that the adjustment made at the beginning of the second semester shall be based on 0.1% of the base of the Bachelor's Degree Schedule per semester hour.

In order to receive salary adjustments based on this Section for the winter, spring and summer semesters, passing grades must be submitted by the next October 1 following the completion of the course. If a Teacher fails to meet this deadline, they may submit passing grades at any time. They will receive salary adjustments for current and future years when grades are submitted.

**Has there been a violation of your contract?
Contact your building rep immediately!**