

The Local Voice

President's Message

Dear Dr. Hunderfund:

On September 22, 2010, I sent you a letter requesting that we meet to negotiate the terms and conditions of employment as a result of your directive to teachers to create curriculum maps. It is my understanding that curriculum maps are being developed despite the concerns expressed in our discussions.

Since that time, a number of other issues have surfaced that cause the LVSEA to seriously question the way curriculum and personnel decisions are being made in this district.

As you know, the LVSEA has filed a grievance regarding the goals process as part of our Supervision and Evaluation plan. Certainly, we can determine whose position is correct by going through the grievance procedure. What is disturbing is that your administration would seek to change the way goals are determined without any discussion or input from the Association. As we both know, change that lacks the support of those who are to implement the change is less likely to be efficacious or successful.

Additionally, your administration, again without input or discussion with the LVSEA, is attempting to change the way exams are given to our students. This directive has many implications, both from a management-labor standpoint and from the perspective of providing a sound education for our students.

There are serious problems regarding how the district will provide time so that teachers can meet to discuss and write standardized exams. Furthermore, the issue is complicated by how the results will be collated and evaluated. We request that we meet to negotiate the changes in our terms and conditions of employment which may result from this directive.

With regard to the educational impact of this change on our students, there are many unanswered questions. For example, would the administration expect the students in first period and ninth period to take the same test? How is the security of that test ensured? Certainly, teachers, parents, and students will have concerns about this. From a pedagogical point of view, what impact will this directive

have on the ability of an individual teacher to make professional decisions regarding instruction, so that s/he can veer from the day's lesson plan when student inquiries or current events, in the teacher's judgment, require it? Top-down decisions such as this are antithetical to good educational policy.

Moreover, a decision was made to combine two I.B. classes into one period for two of our instructors of art (one teacher has an overload, so she is teaching eight different courses in six periods). Again, without consulting the Association or garnering student and parent input, a decision was made that raises grave curriculum and instructional questions. Are the parents even aware that this has been done? What impact will this have on the results for these students when, in essence, each course will receive 50% less instruction? Furthermore, were the instructors given advance notice of this change as required by the collective bargaining agreement (Article 3-B 2)?

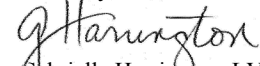
These three directives have created what the LVSEA believes is a disturbing pattern. Deci-

sions are being made without input which threatens the ability of the staff to provide the excellent educational program that this community has grown accustomed to expect.

These directives are disturbing because they are creating an adversarial relationship between the LVSEA and the administration in a district where there have historically been cooperative and respectful relations.

As always, the LVSEA will take any legal action to protect the rights of its members. As usual, we stand ready to discuss any issues with you and would respectfully suggest that the administration be proactive in seeking LVSEA input rather than force us to react to decisions which create an environment of anger and distrust.

Sincerely,


Gabrielle Harrington, LVSEA
President

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Individual Needs

For years, parents have moved to our district because of the high quality individualized attention of our Special Education program. This was developed through carefully planned accommodations, knowledgeable staff and support from our active SEPTA organization.

Now things are changing, and the LVSEA does not think that the change is helpful to our students.

For example, in our elementary schools, several teaching assistant positions were eliminated. Teaching assistants who worked in the co-taught inclusion class or in the resource rooms for several years and who were an integral part of the children’s support team are now gone. Additionally, teaching assistants that could have been mandated by the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) were not assigned. According to many reports, parents were told that their child would not need a “one on one” to help because these teaching

assistants would be in the co-taught inclusion class. If these services are to be put into place now, a new CSE has to be called. Parents and staff have to justify the need for the support that was a part of the model in the past.

What was the reason for this? “Budget constraints”. Surely, we could have cut back elsewhere without such a costly effect upon the students.

When staff has questioned the sagacity of this decision, they have received the caution from administration that it would look terrible if the community thought a class could not be controlled by two teachers.

How ridiculous!! Control of the class is not the issue; additional support for the learning needs of the class is the issue. It is shameful that the administration would say this when, in fact, the teachers were trying to make sure that the students were getting the support that they may need to succeed.

However, safety and control may be relevant for other reasons. There are no assistants to support needy students in these classes when they attend their specials.

This change at the elementary level was announced right at the end of the school year to the teachers and their assistants. Why didn’t the administration discuss this with the staff before drastically changing the services to the children? The answer is that we would DISAGREE with their last minute decisions. The administrators knew that front line staff, teachers and teacher assistants, would find the elimination of support staff detrimental to our children.

Let’s face it, “individual needs” of the students are being neglected without the informed consent of the people most directly involved with the education of the students: their parents and their teachers.

Local Voice

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Tests

Assessments are very important to teachers. They take a long time to develop and are carefully edited. The forms that they take are adjusted to fit the information and skills acquirement that we want to assess. It is a thoughtful process.

State exams may take an equally long time to be written, but they are to be given to the masses. There is no accounting for what's going on in the classroom or home and no real concern for the individual.

Many times, you have read the reasons why state tests are not important in these pages. To give just a few examples: they are developed so that some people fail; they do not allow for language immersion and, MOST importantly, the test developers make a giant profit from these tests. It is a business. A business which makes some children feel badly about themselves and a business which grows on the fears of parents and administra-

tors that students may not be learning and that, therefore, teachers may not be teaching.

Guess what? Tests don't measure teacher productivity. Unfortunately, test scores only measure what a student can do on the day that the test was taken. So, we don't pat ourselves on the back if the students do well nor should we beat ourselves up if they don't. Nor should the students. Heaven forbid if my child's score is to be taken as a measure of his worth or ability!

However, now we have reached a new fear level. We are at the mercy of the new commissioner of education who thinks that raising the bar means raising the passing grade for the state tests. Also, the state has decided to evaluate our teaching based upon these grades. How will our administration deal with the possibility of impending doom?

PANIC!!

Instead of understanding and accepting that different students progress at different speeds, we are force feeding them. Some students are not ready to take the exams at their grade level. This can be for many reasons. The student may have reading problems or other skill development needs. For most students, there will be no problem. So, how do we address this concern for a few students?

Well, according to some administrators, we need to adjust the curriculum for all! Yes, we now have "one curriculum". One size fits all. No more individual needs. All teachers should give the same tests at the same time. For what reason? To insure that the teachers are teaching the skills necessary for the state tests.

Again, guess what? The teachers are and have been teaching the skills necessary for the state

tests. The state tests determine student deficiencies; not what they learned beyond the state curriculum.

We need to address the "individual needs" of the students who may be struggling with the state exams. A focus on reading support could help an immersion focused solely on improving reading skills, if necessary. Teaching test taking strategies to this small group of students would help, too. If the goal is to improve the students scores on the state exams, then focus on that. Continuing forward with the normal curriculum does not make sense for this small group who are "at risk". Additionally, changing the curriculum for all may not help anyone.

Teachers are interested in students attaining the skill sets that they will need to move on educationally. They want to construct a meaningful plan to help them.

Disability Retirement - Did you know?

The Question:

If you are critically ill, have a life expectancy of less than one year and meet the disability retirement eligibility requirements, should you stay on payroll and be covered by an in-service death benefit, or retire and select an option providing a payment to your beneficiary?

The Answer:

With few exceptions, you should file for retirement immediately. (This means anyone facing major surgery- you can always rescind your application, but it cannot be filed posthumously on your behalf. Please, protect your beneficiaries!!)

By retiring and selecting the

appropriate option for your tier, you will provide a greater payment to your beneficiary than by staying on payroll.

Under Tier 1, the appropriate option to select is the Declining Reserve Option (4%). Under Tiers 2-5, in most cases you should select the Largest Non-Declining Lump Sum Option. Contact NYSTRS before mak-

ing your final decisions.

Ellen Patak and Gaby Harrington are your NYSTRS reps. We are happy to help you find the answers you need.

Please set up an account on the NYSTRS website today!

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