

SHTA *news*

No. 2 • 19 October 2009

Message From the President

For me, the past month has been filled with meetings. One meeting was with our new teachers and their mentors. Most of our new colleagues have joined our Association—my thanks to all of them and to all of the other members of the S.H.T.A. for continuing to support the Association with your membership. Other meetings focused on evaluations, the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), and negotiations (read more in the Salary-Tenure Report). I also attended the Board of Education meeting on October 13.

I continue to receive questions about district initiatives and would like to deal with three of them here:

1) Why participate in Imagine Shaker?

Let me begin my response with a question for you: When was the last time you were asked for your input regarding the future of our district? In my 30+ years in Shaker, those opportunities have been very rare—even in my leadership position. I am looking forward to being a part of this process. Using Appreciative Inquiry, interviewers will focus on our strengths; it is a natural extension of the work we have been doing on best practices. You are not required to participate; however, I encourage you to add your voice to this process. Most of you have many years of teaching ahead of you. Imagine Shaker is an opportunity for you to shape the future of the Shaker Schools.

2) Why offer Chinese as a foreign language...and why start at the elementary level?

When I hear this question I am puzzled. We know that language learning is more effective when begun at an early age. Chinese is a challenging language, so providing an early foundation could help with later learning. Another reason for teaching Chinese depends on your vision for the future and the kinds of jobs that our students will have. Historically, many Shaker graduates follow career paths in business or government. They are diplomats and delegates; economists

and financiers. China and other Asian countries are and will continue to be important financial and political entities. It makes sense for our students to learn a language that could make them better prepared for the future marketplace.

And finally,

3) Why IB?

IB is an internationally recognized program with rigorous standards and expectations. For me, the professional development that has been offered for the IB program has been especially rewarding. I appreciate the preK-12 focus along with the shared terminology, themes, and attention to inquiry. Much of the funding for the professional development portion of IB has come from grants.

Other expenses for IB will come from the general fund and this is the area that some teachers are questioning, voicing a desire to see more money directed toward teacher salaries. While I certainly support improving teacher salaries (and maintaining the quality of teachers that we are able to attract with competitive salaries), I also support the administration's effort to continue to focus on opportunities for educational excellence. We have many programs that add to our district's reputation as one of the best in the country. And each of us could debate the merits of different programs relative to their costs—for example, do we really need well-funded libraries with certified library/media specialists and knowledgeable library assistants? And we could ask about physics, or theater, or speech, or the range of Advanced Placement offerings. We could debate clubs, sports, and other extracurricular options.

Ultimately, the administration is responsible for making these choices. They do this with a focus on excellence—program excellence and staff excellence. Many of us have jobs here because of this focus. The IB program is one more option for Shaker students that will prepare them for the many challenges and opportunities that they will face in the future.

As I reviewed my responses to these three questions, some common themes are evident: opportunities, innovation, and a vision for the future. Your philosophy of education and your vision for the future shape your opinions about each of these questions. Personally, I consider myself fortunate to have spent my entire teaching career in the Shaker Heights schools.

One quick note, at Representative Council, several elementary Representatives expressed concerns about the implementation of Progress Book at the K-4 level. I shared these concerns in a letter to the administration and received assurances that our issues would be attended to in a timely manner. On Friday, October 16, all K-4 staff received a letter from Dr. Stokes postponing the use of Progress Book this year. I appreciate being able to represent your interests and serve as your President.

*Respectfully submitted,
Rebecca Thomas, president*

Reports from the Executive Board

VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Happy fall! I hope that your October is off to an outstanding start. It is time again to apply for SHTA Fellowships. I hope that each of you has received an application. These awards are designed to promote professional development and can be use to attend workshops, for payment of dues to professional affiliations (except the SHTA), journals or professional materials. The winners are selected via random drawing and the deadline for submission is *noon Friday October 30, 2009 to Dollye Finney, Boulevard School*. Multiple entries will be disqualified and only members of the Association are eligible for participation. Forty recipients will be chosen and awarded \$100 each. Winners will be notified by school mail and their names published in the November newsletter. If you need an application contact your building representatives or contact me at 4916.

The 18th Annual Night for the Red and White is scheduled for Saturday March 13, 2010 at the Landerhaven of Mayfield Heights. Over the past seventeen years contributions to this event have raised over \$1,700,000. This year the proceeds will be used for educational enrichment focusing on technology, arts, health, and fitness. A discounted ticket is being offered to staff members for \$90 dollars per ticket. Ticket purchase information will be mailed in January. However, we are asking that you consider making a contribution to the Silent Auction. In the past popular silent auction items have included lunch, outings to museums sporting event, pizza parties, tutoring or lessons, and gift certificates. The possibilities are endless so please as you always are, "be creative". The contribution envelopes are available through your school office and should be mailed by January 20, 2010. Please send your forms through inner office mail to the Shaker Schools Foundation. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at 4916 or via email. I am asking each member to begin thinking about making a contribution to the Silent Auction for The Night for the Red and White.

Thank you for your continued support of the Association and feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

*Respectfully submitted,
Dollye Finney, vice president*

PROFESSIONAL RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

As you know all SHTA members are entitled to a 50 minute uninterrupted lunch. If this is not the case, please contact your building representative. Building reps, please contact me so we can resolve this issue for our members.

Every year during the month of November, the school district allows an OPEN ENROLLMENT period for any member to switch insurance carriers for your health coverage. If you decide to change your coverage, the effective change will start in January. You should be receiving information from our benefits coordinator, Sue Garber, in the next few weeks.

As I have stated before if you have a LIFE CYCLE EVENT, such as, a divorce, name change, birth, adoption, spouse loses his/her insurance coverage you need to contact Sue Garber and notify her of these changes. In some cases, these situations may

cause you to change your insurance coverage from single to family or from family to single coverage. It is everyone's responsibility to try to keep our health costs down.

*Respectfully submitted,
Gary Raymont, chairperson*

TREASURER'S REPORT

The investment committee will be meeting with Brady Krebs, our Edward Jones advisor, on October 20th to discuss our financial portfolio. I will be meeting with John Hawkins of Edward C. Hawkins & Co., Ltd. (our accountant) next month to prepare for the audit of our 2008-09 fiscal year. I have also been working with Key Bank and people in the administration building to set up direct deposit for our monthly dues deductions.

*Respectfully submitted,
Bill Scanlon, Treasurer*

SALARY-TENURE COMMITTEE

On Wednesday, October 7, our negotiating team met with the representatives from the Board of Education and exchanged proposals. Representing the S.H.T.A. were Dave Klapholz, John Morris, Mike Sears, Linda Roth, Darlene Garrison, Gary Raymont, and me. Representing the Board were Mark Freeman, Chris Auginas, and Lisa Howell. Discerning readers will note that we are negotiating directly with our Superintendent and that we are meeting without our respective attorneys. Early in October, Dr. Freeman met with me and suggested this format for negotiations. I presented it to the negotiating team and we discussed it with our attorney, Susannah Muskovitz. We decided to begin the process in this new format, acknowledging that we could return to the traditional bargaining mode if necessary. Also, no tentative agreement will be entered into without consulting with our attorney before presenting it to the membership for a vote.

Our first meeting was very productive, focusing on economic issues, including the consideration of a short term contract (one year). We also discussed the probability of a school levy in 2010. Dr. Freeman mentioned a 2010 levy at the Board on Education meeting on October 13. Our next meeting for negotiations is scheduled for Friday, October 30.

*Respectfully submitted,
Rebecca Thomas, Chairperson*

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

The Ohio Education Association's (OEA) web site has been overhauled and its new format is easy to navigate and includes a wealth of information relevant to teachers regarding current legislation and reform proposals. They compiled a nice summary of House Bill (HB1) and offer an assessment of the current licensure and professional development proposals related to Governor Strickland's efforts to fund and improve public education. While OEA supports the mission of high quality teachers in every classroom, they are concerned that lowering termination standards while increasing the cost and length of licensure and tenure requirements will discourage quality candidates

from entering the teaching profession, especially in the face of budget cuts and resistance to levies. You can access information on these and other issues of concern to educators at <http://www.ohea.org>.

The Ohio Federation of Teachers (OFT) also includes a compilation and bill summary that links to important documents to clarify issues related to current education reform plans. For example, OFT supports Gov. Strickland's plan to postpone reductions in tax rates to avoid a budget crisis that would impact Ohio schools. You can sign up to receive their newsletter or find more of their positions related to the current legislative agenda at <http://oh.aft.org/>.

Both websites address STRS and health care reform proposals and controversies. If you have not visited these web sites recently and are not eagerly anticipating the opportunity to research current issues in education legislation, you may be impressed by their updated formats if not the plethora of special effects and streaming headlines. These new "bells and whistles" are clearly more impressive than the so-called "reform proposals" currently on the table.

*Respectfully submitted,
Andi Glickman, chairperson*

PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMITTEE

I am currently working on placing ads on behalf of the Association with various publications such as the Shakerite, the Gristmill and the Shaker Life Magazine. Our ads typically consist of our Association's name, the logo underneath and the phrase "Professionals Dedicated to Educating Shaker's Youth" underneath that.

*Respectfully submitted,
Debbie Ashbaugh, chairperson*

SOCIAL COMMITTEE

The fall SHTA social event has been scheduled for Friday, November 20, 2009 after 4:00PM at *Jillian's* 12359 Cedar Road. Munchies and pool tables will be available. Fabulous door prizes will be given away (see flyer at end of the newsletter). Join us for the fun!

*Respectfully submitted,
Darlene Garrison, chairperson*

SECRETARY'S REPORT**MINUTES FOR THE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL MEETING**

October 12, 2009

Fernway Elementary School

The President, Becky Thomas, called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m.

Chris Hayward, principal of Fernway Elementary School, greeted the SHTA Representative Council.

The minutes of the September meeting were unanimously approved.

ADMINISTRATION REPORT: No Report

PTO REPORT: Eileen McKeon, PTO Council Co-president, thanked SHTA members for their donations to support the PTO Council. She discussed the Outreach program for families new to the district and the upcoming K-12 Directory.

OFFICERS' REPORTS:**PRESIDENT**

Becky Thomas stated that she has been meeting with Gary Raymont to discuss the changes to FMLA. She stated that if anyone has any question about the FMLA requirement to call either her or Gary Raymont. She also met with the new teachers. She has also been working on computer issues with Special Education reports.

VICE-PRESIDENT

Dollye Finney distributed the SHTA fellowship applications. This opportunity is provided for SHTA members only. Forty teachers will receive \$100 each to pay for professional development. She asked that members please donate to the PTO's annual drive. Ms. Finney stated that the *Night for the Red and White* committee is beginning its preliminary work.

SECRETARY

Matt Zucca recorded attendance.

TREASURER

Bill Scanlon reported he has scheduled a meeting with our financial planner and the SHTA's Investment Committee. He will be meeting with our accountant to begin the auditing process of the Associations accounts.

EXECUTIVE BOARD REPORTS**PUBLICITY**

Debbie Ashbaugh reported that she is submitting an ad for the *Gristmill* and *The Shakerite*

PUBLICATIONS

John Morris asked that articles for the SHTA Newsletter be submitted to him by email at morris_j@shaker.org. The deadline for submissions to the newsletter is the Wednesday after each representative council meeting.

SOCIAL

Darlene Garrison is working on a social gathering at *Jillian's* on Friday, November 20th.

TEACHER EDUCATION

Steve Smith stated that he attended the new teacher meeting in September and provided information on the evaluation process.

SALARY/TENURE

Becky Thomas stated that the negotiation team has met with the administration, and the next meeting will be Friday, October 30th.

LEGAL AID

Mike Sears had no report.

MEMBERSHIP AND ELECTIONS

Stacy Elgart distributed membership rosters to building representatives. Payroll deduction begins with the October 16 paycheck and continues for 10 pays.

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

Andi Glickman was unable to attend.

POLICY

Dave Klapholz had no report.

PROFESSIONAL RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Gary Raymont was unable to attend the meeting, Becky Thomas submitted his report. Dr. Thomas reminded the membership to notify the Benefits Department about Life Cycle changes. She stated that open enrolment will occur in November. She stated that the contract Lunch Break is 50 minutes, and if members are not being given this amount of time she should be notified.

BUILDING REPORTS

The following reps asked questions, expressed concerns, or made statements on behalf of the membership in their buildings:

At the Middle School there is a concern about a possible study that would require additional time and input from the staff.

Onaway asked for clarification about how concerns brought up during the meetings are followed up.

At Fernway, Lomond, and Mercer there is a concern about the new report card format on Progress Book.

At 5:00 p.m. the SHTA representative council went into executive session.

The regular meeting resumed at 5:25 p.m.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER

Dr. Thomas thanked the Fernway members for hosting our meeting.

The membership received a thank you from Lesley Homans for the SHTA Fellowship Grant she received last year.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

THE NEXT MEETING WILL BE HELD ON MONDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2009 AT BOULEVARD SCHOOL.

Respectfully submitted,
Matt Zucca, secretary

Editorial: The Importance of Being Open and Honest (and Listening Too)

This newsletter is a publication of the Shaker Heights Teachers' Association, an independent organization of professional educators in the Shaker Heights City School District. Signed editorials represent the opinion of the author(s) and may or may not reflect the thinking of other officers or members of the Shaker Heights Teachers' Association. Members and friends of the Association are invited and encouraged to express their opinions or share information via this newsletter.

One of the most serious challenges that any organization faces is the challenge of being open and honest with its members. To express your opinion on serious issues and say what you feel can be difficult if not downright impossible. What we say and feel might offend others, alienate them or hurt their feelings. I am no less challenged by this reality than anyone else. But for an organization to thrive, its members must be able to communicate with one another at all levels of the organization. If that can't happen, its

members will become alienated and divided without a word being said. This is as true for the SHTA as it is anywhere else.

Equally significant to our organization is listening. So many of the issues that we discuss informally are part of ongoing discussions dealt with in-depth by the representatives and leadership of the Association. However, in our busy teachers' lives, it is easy to miss these communications and feel as if issues have not been addressed. Staying in tune with representatives' communications and the Association's newsletter is essential to this effort.

The reason I bring the topic up is that during times of transition, open communication becomes even more important. Rumors can be detrimental and divisive when an organization is facing change. We are in such a time. As we head into a new approach to contract negotiations and leadership in our organization begins to change, it will be more important than ever for us to communicate honestly and openly with one another, and make sure we listen too.

I propose that while we can communicate face to face and via email, the best place to express viewpoints and pose questions to the SHTA as a whole is on the pages you are reading right now. Of course individual building issues are best addressed at the building level through our representatives. However, the newsletter continues to be the best vehicle for inter-organizational communication. This communication doesn't have to be in the form of a full blown editorial. It doesn't have to be in direct response to something that has been previously written. It can be a few well-written sentences expressing concern, congratulations or posing a question to the membership *especially if you feel as if these issues have not been dealt with adequately or to the depth you would like to see*. Granted, talking informally or via email can be more convenient and less risky. But if you want to truly effect change and have your concern openly expressed and discussed organizationally, the newsletter is the place to do it. This communication is essential to the success of the SHTA. I look forward to your responses. Please send them to morris_j@shaker.org. JM

Important Dates

Mon. Nov. 2

- Executive board at Woodbury

Tues. Nov. 3

- Election Day/Professional Day (No classes for students)

Mon. Nov. 9

- **SHTA Representative Council at Boulevard**

Fri. Nov. 13

- Conference Day, K-12

Mon. Nov. 16

- Conference Day, K-8

Mon. Nov. 17

- Board of Education Meeting at Woodbury

Nov. 25-29

- Thanksgiving Recess

Mon. Nov. 30

- Classes Resume

Mon. Dec. 7

- SHTA Executive Board Meeting at Woodbury (IF NEEDED)

Tues. Dec. 8

- Board of Education Meeting at Woodbury

Mon. Dec. 14

- **SHTA Representative Council (IF NEEDED) – place TBA**

Why Limit HAPPY To Just An Hour???

Please Come Out for the

SHTA

Fall 2009 Happy Hour

On

Friday, November 20, 2009

JILLIAN'S

12459 Cedar Road

4:00 P.M. until ???

Happy Hour Prices

Appetizers

Pool

Wait, something new...

Door prizes!!!!

Try your luck winning one of the following prizes: GPS system, a teacher fellowship or a SHTA flash drive

Bring a friend or two ☺