

The Slate



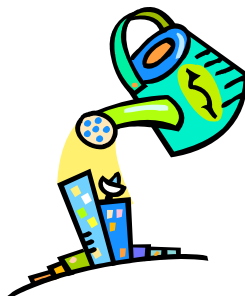
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MNPS budget shrinks

Most long-term observers of Metro Schools will readily acknowledge the current fiscal crisis facing our nation and our schools is unprecedented. The virtual collapse of the stock market has caused panic, which in turn has intensified the fiscal crisis. MNPS is not immune to panic. The Board took action in December to authorize \$3 million of budget cuts.



On December 15, Interim Director of Schools, Chris Henson, unveiled his plan to reduce the MNPS budget by \$3 million as directed by the Board of Education. The announcement was made at the Board's Budget and Finance Committee Meeting. While the Budget Committee is a committee of the whole, only a few members were present. Most changes involved the reduction of vacant support positions in the Central Office and the trimming of overtime. Only two positions were certificated. Other changes to the budget included accounting for reductions to certain budget accounts based on partial-year vacancies.

Budget Committee Chair, Steve Glover, announced at the meeting that he would like the administration to come up with an additional \$4 million in reductions in January. The Board has yet to take action on the Glover plan as presented on December 15 even though he characterized the additional \$4 million as a Board decision when interviewing Jesse Register. To date, only the initial \$3 million in reductions have been authorized.

The Glover plan is designed to reduce the budget by \$12 million: (1) \$3 million in budget reductions as presented this week, (2) \$4 million in reductions to be identified in January, and (3) a \$5 million appropriation from the district's fund balance.

MNEA does not intend to enter into discussions about salary reductions because a reduction in teacher salaries would violate the law, TCA 49-3-306(b)(4)(B). To date, few members of the Board have indicated salary reductions are a viable option. MNEA maintains fund balance exists for the purpose of filling shortfalls of revenue.

Teacher medical plan unchanged

The Metropolitan Professional Employee Insurance trust issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) earlier this year with the intent of entering into a new contract to administer the Metropolitan Teacher Medical Plan. After months of analysis by the evaluation team and protests from three of the four top bidders, the Director of Metro Purchasing decided to award an emergency one-year contract extension to Blue Cross Blue Shield of Tennessee. Cigna will not become the third party administrator of the Metro Teacher Medical Plan until January 1, 2010.

Here are some important points to remember:

- The Insurance Trust determines the benefits provided under the Teacher Medical Plan.
- Blue Cross Blue Shield of Tennessee does not determine the plan design nor will Cigna after the conversion.
- MNEA works hard with other members of the Insurance Trust to provide a high level of medical coverage at a low cost.
- The Metro Teacher Plan is funded by participating employees (25%) and the Board (75%).
- The Local Education Plan (the state teacher medical plan) costs a great deal more than the Metro Teacher Plan and provides a lower benefit package.
- The Metro Teacher Plan is the best insurance package provided to public school teachers in Tennessee and still has the lowest premiums.
- MNEA believes Nashville's teachers deserve excellent medical coverage and will continue to maintain benefits.
- Cigna will not provide an HMO to our teachers.
- Cigna will not provide a high-deductible plan like the one support employees have to our teachers.
- The teacher medical plan is self-funded. Thus, premium savings will be realized by employees and the Board or be used to offset future premium increases.
- MNEA cannot demand favoring Blue Cross or any vendor in the competitive sealed bidding process.

Know your contract

Who grades student progress?

Every year, teachers in Metro are faced with challenges related to assigning grades to students.



Article II, Section E "Grading Procedures" states:

Teachers shall have the right and responsibility to determine grades and student promotions. An administrative change in a teacher's decision on grade or promotion shall not be made without prior consultation with the teacher. A teacher may request that the decision of the principal or the results of the consultation be reviewed by the appropriate assistant superintendent or designee.

Generally, teachers would be on solid legal ground to assign the grade he or she believes best reflects the student's work in the class so long as the grade can be justified. If principals insist a grade should be higher, they may follow the procedure outlined above to change the grade. Thus, no teachers should have to change grades if they can justify the averages, scores, or ratings they have assigned. There is no requirement in the contract for principals to approve grade changes made by the teacher of record. **No administrator or other individual has the authority to change a teachers grade "without prior consultation with the teacher."**

Negotiations starts with input

The MNEA Negotiations Team has begun to discuss possible items for consideration in this year's contract. Currently, the team is developing items for a membership survey that will be conducted in the spring of 2009. If you have any ideas for what should be included on the survey, please email stephen37216@yahoo.com with your suggestions be January 14.

MNEA is anticipating discussions about the MNPS Budget to become part of negotiations. The new zoning plan, which passed in the summer by a 5 to 4 vote of the Board, called for several "additional resources" for schools in the Pearl-Cohn cluster. One of those items was a 5% supplement to teachers in the cluster presumably to attract and retain highly qualified teachers in those schools.

MNEA has been struggling with the issue because of the salary increment for several reasons. (1) All teachers deserve better pay—not just those in one cluster. (2) Some schools in other areas of the city face similar challenges as those in the Pearl-Cohn cluster. (3) The money to provide the supplement and reduced class size in the Pearl-Cohn cluster may cause class sizes to increase elsewhere. MNEA does not believe the plan can be adequately funded in the current economic environment.

UPCOMING EVENTS



January

- 8** MNEA Executive Board Meeting
5:00 PM at MNEA Headquarters
- 13** MNEA Nominations and Elections Committee
5:00 PM at MNEA Headquarters
- 15** MNEA Representative Assembly
4:30 PM at MNEA Headquarters
- 17** ***I Can Do It!* Classroom Management Workshop**
8:00 AM at MNEA Headquarters
- 26** Professional Council
4:00 PM at the Central Office

February

- 12** MNEA Executive Board Meeting
5:00 PM at MNEA Headquarters
- 13** MNEA Candidate Petitions Due
5:00 PM at MNEA Headquarters
- 19** MNEA Representative Assembly
4:30 PM at MNEA Headquarters
- 19** TEA/NEA Delegate Nomination forms Due
5:00 PM at MNEA Headquarters
- 21** MNEA Black History Forum
8:00 AM at TEA Headquarters
- 23** Professional Council
4:00 PM at MNEA Headquarters

March

- 6** TEA/NEA Delegate Ballots Due
5:00 PM at MNEA Headquarters
- 12** MNEA Executive Board Meeting
5:00 PM at MNEA Headquarters
- 26** MNEA Representative Assembly
4:00 PM at the Central Office
- 27** MNEA Officer Election Period Begins

April

- 9** MNEA Executive Board Meeting
5:00 PM at MNEA Headquarters
- 13** MNEA Officer Ballots Due
5:00 PM at MNEA Headquarters
- 16** MNEA Representative Assembly
4:30 PM at MNEA Headquarters
- 27** Professional Council
4:30 PM at MNEA Headquarters

The Slate is published during the school year by the Metropolitan Nashville Education Association, an affiliate of the Tennessee Education Association and the National Education Association.

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Let's hear from Erick...

After an eleven-month process riddled with starts, stops, twists, and turns, the Metropolitan Nashville Board of Public Education finally decided on a permanent director of schools in a special session on December 20, 2008. Dr. Jesse Register, who retired as Director of the Hamilton County Department of Education in 2005, was selected in a 7-2 vote.



Ed Kindall and Gracie Porter were the only two Board members who failed to cast favorable votes for Register in a very long, convoluted process designed to achieve unanimity in the vote for a director of schools. Porter and Kindall held out for Dr. Doris McEwen who served briefly as the superintendent of Clover Park School District #400 in Lakewood, Washington near Takoma.

Supporters of McEwen claimed she did an excellent job of answering questions in her second interview. However, she was not held to the same standard as Register. Board members asked Dr. Register harder questions and many more than they asked of either Dr. McEwen or Dr. Santiago Wood, the obvious underdog in the three-way race. Register appeared to be the best qualified of the three—not merely because of his stamina but, also, because of the depth of his answers and his superior experience.

During his second interview, Dr. Register indicated:

1. Selecting the right principal for a school is the most important factor in school success,
2. Collaboration is more effective than fear,
3. Teachers are vital to the success of the district,
4. Administrators must be trained to do their jobs, and
5. Focused professional development designed by teachers is essential.

Dr. Register comes to Nashville facing a great number of challenges—not the least of which is the district's status under No Child Left Behind. Register will have to find a way to get everyone in the District working together for a common goal.

The first order of business will be to address the cultural barriers to student success and the negative climate, which continues to exist in many of our schools. The Garcia legacy of fear, distrust, hatred, and intimidation still permeates MNPS. Ferreting out the torch bearers of the legacy will prove to be quite a challenge. Nonetheless, the depth of his understanding education in Tennessee, his collaborative style, and his positive working relationship with the Tennessee Department of Education should prove to be assets to MNPS. I say, "Dr. Register, welcome aboard and good luck!"



I Can Do It!

Effective Classroom Management Workshop

When? 8:00 AM to 3:30 PM on January 17, 2009

Where? MNEA Headquarters

Who? This program is recommended for teachers in their first three years of teaching. It is not open to STEA members. Participation is limited so spots will be filled on a first-come, first-served basis.

How? Complete the University of MNEA registration form at www.mnea.com/uofmnea

Cost? Free to MNEA members

I Can Do It! is designed to look at the day-to-day role of the classroom teacher as a manager. As a classroom manager, teachers have been given discretionary power to allocate tasks to students, direct their behavior, and evaluate their performance. It is a program that affirms the fact that teachers are in charge of everything and everyone in the classroom.

I Can Do It! is TEA's unforgettable workshop covering classroom management, especially beneficial for new teachers. Originally created by the San Bernardino Teachers Association (CA) and school administrators, *I Can Do It!* is heralded by teachers across the country.



Tennessee's teachers acclaim it as – "Awesome and extremely beneficial" – "Great training – I have specific ideas to take home." – "Great mix of research and practical applications" – "I feel reinforced in what I have done and have tools to expand & modify my classroom."

Register for

I Can Do It!

at

www.mnea.com/uofmnea

In the long history of humankind... Those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed.—Charles Darwin.

More details and up-to-date information at www.mnea.com