

YOUⁿion News

Cleveland Heights Teachers Union Local 795



Special points of interest:

- Local 795 member wins Teacher of the Year award pg. 1
- Race to the Top: Promise and Perils pg. 1 and 3
- Health Benefits pop quiz on pg. 4
- Union Banquet will be here soon pg. 2
- A report on ER&D classes pg. 4
- Union Surveys—why bother? pg. 2

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Gearity Teacher Named Educator of the Year

By Darrell Lausche

Recently the state-wide spotlight has hit our district and focused specifically on one special person, Third Grade teacher Natalie Wester. She has been named Ohio Teacher of the Year. Her belief that every child is a genius is deeply rooted in the core beliefs of Gearity Professional Development School and experiences with her own son.

Natalie doesn't regard this recognition as something attributed to her alone. She continues to express how connected her success is to the staff, students, and families of the school community. When asked about her career, Natalie professes that she could not be the teacher she is today without the support of the entire staff. "There is a culture of collaboration at Gearity," she explains. "No one teaches alone. Everyone at Gearity has helped me develop teaching strategies, locate materials and plan for my students' needs." It is this

level of professional respect that had helped her transition to this second career.

The staff at Gearity values the collaboration that occurs at all levels. Teaching staff, support staff, and administration keep the students at the center of the building's work. It is this cooperative culture that factored into Gearity Professional Development School being named one of eight Elementary Model Schools in 2008 by the International Center for Leadership in Education, founded by Bill Daggett. The continuing work with Professional Learning Communities and integrated learning units helps to strengthen the collegiality formulated over the last four years since partnering with John Carroll University.

Natalie embodies the work done at Gearity. As a Data Liaison, she facilitated conversations using formative assessment to drive instruction. Step into her classroom and one will see students working in part-

nerships, using trade books to focus on a central theme while incorporating practice with comprehension and research skills. One will also witness the incorporation of flexible grouping to target the skills students need for mastery or extension.

Upon entering the school the core beliefs hang high:

1. Every student belongs to every adult in the building.
2. We are committed to forming a partnership between families and school to help all children academically and socially.
3. We strive to make education rigorous and relevant while inspiring the joy of learning.

Natalie is quick to point out that the entire staff works towards this common goal, not just her. It is one of the many reasons Gearity is another special place within the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District.

Race to the Top: A Test of Collaboration

By Tom Schmida

As you know, Ohio is among the 16 finalists for the Race to the Top (RTTT) competitive grant funds soon to be allocated by the U.S. Department of Education. The states that emerge as the winners will be announced early in April. Over the past few weeks during our Union Comes to You lunch meetings, members have posed many questions and expressed a number of concerns over the Race To The Top initiative in terms of both substance and process.

Our members are not worried

so much about the standards and assessment, or data systems elements of RTTT since the Ohio Department of Education and our CH-UH district have been deeply immersed in both areas for some time in our school improvement process. It is the requirements within the RTTT initiative to link student performance to teacher evaluation, as well as skepticism about meaningful collaboration in the RTTT effort that are of greater concern. The skepticism and concern are warranted.

The first concern regards teacher evaluation. We have

entered a new era of accountability where attempts to simply quantify teacher effectiveness are becoming commonplace. This is flawed and destructive thinking that holds only teachers and schools accountable. We know that the excellent test results in excellent school districts are not due to effective teaching alone. If we reconstituted a low-achieving school by exchanging its entire teaching staff with that of an excellent school, what impact on student achievement do you think such a move would have?

Tying student perform- (continued on pg. 3)



CHTU: By the Numbers

Who in the heck are we?

- 14—Art Teachers
- 7—Speech Pathologists
- 20—First Grade Teachers
- 98—Intervention Specialists
- 16—High School English Teachers
- 25—Security Monitors

Why Take a Union Survey

By Ari Klein

How does a grass-roots organization like the Cleveland Heights Teachers Union stay true to those roots? How can an organization with over 600 members ensure that its leadership represents the diversity of views held by our teachers and security monitors? One of the simplest ways merely requires a few mouse clicks and the occasional use of a keyboard.

Those ubiquitous electronic surveys I send to your inbox may not seem all that impressive. However, they allow for quick transmission of information from a large portion of the membership to our union leaders, which is incredibly powerful.

Survey results have been profoundly influential in changing policies, informing bargaining positions, and awakening Board Members to the needs and concerns of those responsible for educating Heights' children. Just this year, the results of a survey on the extended elementary school day helped dissuade the Board from implementing a major schedule change. When the Board voted to adopt the proposal for an eight period schedule for the high school, board members echoed

concerns originally expressed by our members. After hearing from nearly 300 members who fill prescriptions with Walgreens, we were able to represent those concerns in a meeting when we were changing from Caremark. The same was true when we attended a Calendar Committee meeting where we distributed your preferences around when school should start and when spring break will occur. The large bargaining poll helps drive the decision making process when it is time for a new contract—and for long after.

So the next time a link to a Union survey arrives in your inbox, please continue responding with honesty and insight. If you have ignored those messages in the past, consider answering. We understand how valuable your time is and promise to cut to the heart of the matter on our surveys. Your response might be what influences a Board member to make a good decision regarding our schools. Power lies in the knowledge and wisdom of our membership. Share that knowledge. To speak with one, strong voice we need your voice.

CHTU Banquet is Around the Corner

By Ari Klein

Treat yourself and significant other to a beautiful night out Saturday, May 1, 2010. The Teachers Union annual banquet will be held at DiBorallies on Chardon Road in Richmond Heights. For a \$20 ticket, treat yourself to a phenomenal buffet, as well as the music of Tony

Quarles and the Discovery Band. Come enjoy the evening with colleagues from around the district. In 2009 we started a Chinese raffle to raise money for the Glenn Altschuld Scholarship awarded each year to a Heights High senior who will be going into education. Last year we raffled off incredible baskets made by each of our schools in the district. Don't miss this year's banquet!



Race to the Top

(continued from pg. 1)

ance to teacher and principal performance is replete with problems. Clearly, we can not permit a single assessment or series of assessments to be used to assess teacher quality in formal evaluations. The value-added approach that measures student growth over time may appear to be a more acceptable model, but nonetheless it is a measure of student performance, not teacher efficacy.

If we examine our history of recent district initiatives, and we consider how the administration started off in its plans to move to an eight-period day at the high school; to extend the elementary instructional day; and the proposed changes to the middle school bell schedules, our members are rightfully concerned that these changes will happen “to us” rather than “with us”. To be fair, we have now seen an effort on the part of administration to collaborate on these instructional time initiatives. However, collaboration must be meaningful and empowering to be effective.

There are two models or styles of collaboration. The first is the “input” model. Teachers are invited to participate in the discussions on the issue at hand, and offer input. However, when it comes time for a decision, it is a directed top-down one.

Although the teachers had input, they had no role in decision-making. This is a poor model that merely pays lip service to teacher involvement. It is understood that there are certain decisions that by law rest solely with the Board of Education and/or administration. One such example is the district calendar committee. Representatives from all district unions, parent groups, and administration bring their suggestions to the meeting, but ultimately, it is the Board of Education that sets the calendar.

The second model of collaboration is one that gives teachers a true voice in matters that impact instruction and teaching responsibilities. In this model, teachers are partners with administration in decision-making, and it is understood that all parties share accountability for the decisions enacted. Our building based TAP committees are, in theory, a good example of how this model should work. As a union, we have held to the belief that meaningful changes will not be successful without teacher buy-in. Such partnerships require a sharing of power as much as a sharing of accountability.

Clearly, the climate in which we live and work today places teachers and principals in the crosshairs when it comes to

student achievement. The debacle in Central Falls Rhode Island is a case in point as is the Cleveland reorganization plan. While we should not reject being held accountable for the work we do, it is up to us to ensure that whatever systems are developed under RTTT to determine the effectiveness of teachers, principals, and schools are valid, sensible, and not focused merely on standardized assessments, or the punitive measures of NCLB.

Race to the Top requires a true partnership model. The team that develops the scope of the work must be comprised of equal numbers of teachers and administrators. This process that unfolds and the resulting product will be a test of collaboration that reflects this model.

We have signed off on the initial application for the Race to the Top Initiative. Before a final scope of work for the project is submitted, we will conduct a membership vote. We will collectively and democratically set our course. Together we will determine whether or not the partnership model to which we have committed is working to best serve our students and to elevate our profession.



Meaningful changes will not be successful without teacher buy-in. Such partnerships require a sharing of power as much as a sharing of accountability.

Catching You in Our Web

By Ari Klein

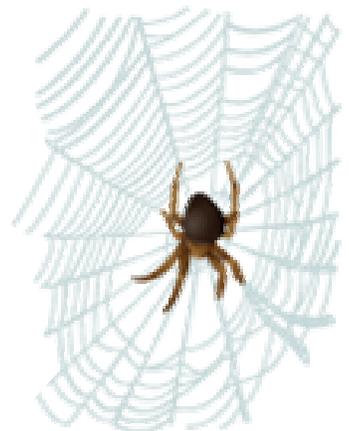
One of the goals of the CHTU website is to put resources that teachers need in one place. On our homepage, www.chtu.org, we have links to district resources, such as school email, AESOP, web vpn and Infinite Campus. We also have other useful links to medical forms that members need sometimes, and Frequently Asked Question categories like; rates of pay, deadlines (like for licensure

renewal, evaluation, and retirement incentive), salary schedules, and medical. All this and we haven't gotten off the first article.

Our updates are posted online under “CHTU Updates.” “Our Issues” has articles around Race to the Top, the Elementary Day, the high school 8 period day, and the results to all of our surveys. Have you ever looked at our “Grievance Update?” This monthly article lets you

know what the executive board learns more about in depth each month. We have ER&D information and much more.

We try to add things that are useful to our members. What else will it take to get you to use this as your homepage? Please take a moment to browse the site and send me an email with your suggestions. A_Klein@chuh.org



ER & D: Teacher Led Professional Development

By David Egbert

We [ER&D instructors] constantly reflected on how these methods would work in a real classroom and how best to share those ideas in our ER & D classes,” ~Rick Gulick, Thinking Math III facilitator

“I learn awesome ideas that impact my classroom instruction,” explains Jackie Kerzner, Title I specialist at Noble, when asked why she takes ER&D courses. The Educational Research and Dissemination (ER&D) program provides CHTU members access to the latest pedagogical techniques and theory. This past summer, sixty-six teachers took courses entitled Instructional Strategies that Work, Managing Anti-social Behavior, Thinking Math III, and Reading Comprehension. “The courses improve competence in the content areas,” noted Tif-

fany Mixon, a Monticello intervention specialist.

Instructors of ER&D courses are experienced educators who travel to an intensive, week-long training organized by the AFT. “We [ER&D instructors] constantly reflected on how these methods would work in a real classroom and how best to share those ideas in our ER & D classes,” remarked Rick Gulick, Thinking Math III facilitator. A follow-up training provided Rick and fellow ER&D instructors the chance to teach in front of AFT’s national trainers and receive feedback.

In addition to learning cutting-edge strategies, participants who have a Master’s degree earn 2 hours towards the next step on the salary schedule. The registration fee for an ER&D course is only \$125.

ER&D coordinators Beth Rae and Jennifer Bennett will offer the next round of ER&D courses this summer. Registration is ongoing and more information is available at www.chtu.org

Know Your Benefits Quiz



Maintaining our health benefits typically tops members’ priorities when we conduct our bargaining survey. But how much do you know about those benefits? Find out with the quick quiz below and check your answers at our website www.chtu.org.

- ___1. Colonoscopies are automatically covered as routine at age 50
- ___2. The shingles vaccine is covered
- ___3. There is a \$100 co-pay for emergency room visits
- ___4. For dental work that will cost over \$200 there needs to be pre-approval
- ___5. Your out of pocket expenses are the same if you go to a non-dentemax dentist.

___6. Hearing tests are covered

___7. Vision exams and lenses have a straight dollar benefit, regardless of your cost.

___8. Some UH doctors or labs are in network

___9. If your kid needs a second set of braces your \$2700 benefit starts over.

___10. In one calendar year women need to choose to have a physical exam by their doctor or a gynecological exam by their OBGYN.

___11. If you go out of network you pay the first \$100 then 10% of everything else.

___12. Doctors can never re-

submit bills to Medical Mutual.

___13. Any prescription you get from your doctor will be covered by Medco.

___14. Mental health services are not covered.

___15. If you waive medical insurance to get \$1000 then you still have access to Vision, Dental, Prescription, and skilled nursing without an employee contribution.

___16. The Union has a negotiated benefit that members can access when they are experiencing non-medical issues; like dealing with aging parent, financial problems, workplace stress, etc.

Remember to check your answers at www.chtu.org



Lee Road

Tutoring is held every week on Wednesdays from 4-6pm at the Lee Road library.

Teachers Needed for Tutoring Sessions

By David Egbert

Our Union is holding tutoring sessions for students of all levels each Wednesday at the Lee Rd. library. Teachers are volunteering their time to help

our students achieve. However, we need more teachers to make the program successful. Please visit www.chtu.org and click on the library tutoring link. Use the online scheduler to sign up for a time slot.

