

The Voice

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Professional learning communities

At the Partnership for Leadership Summit this past August, Dr. Harris introduced the district's Action Plan which focused on four areas: Partnership, Feeder/ Cluster Development, Curriculum Reform and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). All of these efforts are needed for great schools with supported teachers and students learning at the highest levels. When considering PLCs, the research of Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker best summarizes their importance and power: *The most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is developing the ability of school personnel to function as professional learning communities* (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Armed with this knowledge, the implementation of PLCs into the school day of every educator is an important goal for all of us.



When PLCs are most effective, there is a consistent team of educators meeting on a regular basis throughout the school year to discuss and implement new or proven practices, design common assessments, share successes and challenges and engage in whatever it takes to improve teaching practices and student learning in their classrooms. The work of the group is shaped by the teaching assignments of its members. For example, a common assessment created by a PLC of 8th-grade math teachers could very well be the exact same assessment used by all members in their classrooms. Whereas a common assessment created by a PLC of 8th-grade teachers of diverse content areas could share a common format (such as an exit slip or a quick write), but would focus on different content. Regardless of the content, PLCs focus their work on four essential questions that drive the work of a PLC:

- ✦ What is it we want our students to learn?
- ✦ How will we know if each student has learned it?
- ✦ How will we respond when some students have not learned it?
- ✦ How can we extend and enrich the learning for students who have demonstrated proficiency?

To support the development of high performing PLCs, the district will be offering a four-day PLC Coaching Academy with Solution Tree™ this spring. School Leadership Teams will identify one teacher to attend with their principal and develop a shared understanding of PLC principles and tools. This learning activity is a start to the continued support needed to fully implement PLCs in all schools.

Many CCS educators have worked successfully in PLCs for years. Learning from their experiences helps us bring the PLC vision district wide. Several of these PLCs have been highlighted in *The Learner*, a joint publication of CEA, CCS and OAPSE. If you are currently involved in a PLC, please consider sharing your story. Send your ideas to *The Learner* at Northgate Center, Route 3.

Committee to study CCS levy

Levy time is coming again in the Columbus City School District. The school board just formed a committee to recommend the millage amount for the ballot. Board President Carol Perkins was quoted as saying, "This is an all-hands-on-deck. We can't move something this huge without a lot of the community involved."

The committee of community leaders will review the district's finances and operational plans and then recommend the timing, type and amount of the request. The board anticipates depletion of the cash reserve by the end of the 2014–15 school year, resulting in a \$155 million deficit by the end of fiscal 2016.

Supt. Gene Harris said the committee will have to consider voters' economic circumstances, which are worse than in 2008, when they approved a combined 7.85-mill operating levy and 1.13-mill bond issue for capital improvements. Even with a levy, Harris and Perkins have said that the district will have to reduce spending growth and make cuts.

Committee members meeting for the first time on Feb. 21 will include: Robert "Bo" Chilton, President and CEO of Impact Community Action; Stephanie Hightower, President and CEO of the Columbus Urban League; Bob Leighty, President of the Merion Village Association; Kenneth Ramos, President of the Hispanic Chamber of Columbus; Greta Russell, Controller at Ohio State University; Sonnetta Sturkey, COO at the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services; Lolita Augenstein, President of the district's Columbus Council of PTAs; Tanny Crane, President and CEO of Crane Group; Michael Dalby, President and CEO of the Columbus Chamber; John Davis, a retired partner with the accounting agency PricewaterhouseCoopers; Alex Fischer, President and CEO of the Columbus Partnership; Chad Jester, President of the Nationwide Foundation; Tim Robinson, CFO of Nationwide Children's Hospital and Renea Williams, Vice President of Development for St. Stephen's Community House.

The school board ultimately will decide whether to place a levy on the November ballot and the amount of the millage to request.

Cleveland teachers under attack

The latest Cleveland Schools' reform plan looks like a blatant attack on collective bargaining. It's all part of Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson's new plan to reform the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. The plan includes creation and assimilation of additional charter schools, closing or reconstitution of failing schools and flexible business practices that would give administrators the authority to override policies mutually negotiated over many years. The whole collective bargaining agreement would have to be negotiated from scratch.

The mayor's stated motivation is to improve school quality and increase opportunity for thousands of students, starting in preschool and continuing through high school, until students are ready for college and the workforce. Jackson is insisting that charter schools be held accountable for achievement and closed when their students are not meeting standards. We applaud those aims. As Cleveland Teachers Union (CTU) President David Quolke stated, "The path to true education reform must be built on respect and a willingness to work together."

But the plan lacks complete respect for the union. It focuses on tenure and seniority rather than efforts to improve teaching and learning. It ignores poverty as the fundamental problem in urban school districts today, instead blaming working conditions which teachers have fought to improve for decades.

Most of the changes will require Ohio legislative approval. Gov. Kasich has pledged to support the plan. We must join with our fellow educators and insist that CTU have a prominent seat at the legislative table.

Last year we ran a smart and effective campaign to defeat Issue 2 and repeal SB 5. We know our voices can be heard.

Retirement system update

We will finally find out this summer about proposed changes to our state retirement benefits. We have been hoping that, after nearly 10 years of analysis and deliberation, the lawmakers finally would have before them a proposal that will increase pension-fund solvency.

The process was delayed when Gov. John Kasich asked a consulting firm to review the findings of the Ohio Retirement Study Council. The firm, Pension Trustee Advisors, is working on its report. With new Study Council President Bethany Rhodes in place, the council expects a report on SERS first, followed by the other systems, including STRS, by July 11.

Over the past two years, 40 state legislatures enacted significant revisions to state retirement plans, ranging from increasing employee contribution requirements and age and service requirements for retirement, to revising cost-of-living adjustments. Nearly two years ago, Ohio's public pension boards submitted new funding plans to our General Assembly that call for employees working longer for less-generous pension benefits.

TURN gets a boost

A \$2 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation will support some of the groundbreaking national work that CEA has been involved in for many years.



With this funding, the five Teacher Union Reform Network (TURN) regional satellites will expand efforts to help educators and unions to lead the education reform movement on policies, programs and practices that impact schools, teaching and learning.

Leaders of the TURN locals assemble three times per year to discuss and explore issues related to education reform and the role of teacher unions in advancing the cause of public education. CEA is a founding member of TURN and the Great Lakes TURN Satellite.

Founded in 1986, TURN's members include locals from both the American Federation of Teachers and the National

Education Association. TURN's goals are to:

- ◆ Expand work on improvements in the teaching profession and increase student achievement
- ◆ Build labor/management partnerships to enhance policies and programs
- ◆ Facilitate deeper discussions on teacher evaluation and meaningful measures of student growth
- ◆ Encourage and support teacher unions and their leaders to become more effective partners

CCS Superintendent Gene Harris and CEA President Rhonda Johnson were recently invited to the Southwest TURN satellite meeting to talk about labor-management collaboration, teacher effectiveness and higher education partnerships.

TURN's efforts are being managed by the Consortium for Educational Change (CEC), a reform model established by the Illinois Education Association to work with school districts, including boards of education, administration and union locals, on collaborative projects.

Ask for your ballot

Voting in the CEA Elections runs Feb. 21–Mar. 5. Most members will receive their ballots from their faculty representative. Itinerant members will receive their ballots through school or U.S. mail. This year's ballots will be on Scantron forms.



The elections committee will tabulate votes on Mar. 6. In the event of a run-off election, the formal campaigning period will be from Mar. 12–Apr. 2. Voting will be Mar. 20–Apr. 2. The committee will tally votes on Apr. 3.

Contact your FR to find out when voting will occur in your building/unit. If you have questions, contact Michele Mays at CEA (253-4731).

Special notes

- ❑ **Early voting** for the **Mar. 6 primary election** has begun. Request an absentee ballot or vote in person at your local county board of elections now. Check the Ohio Secretary of State's Website at www.sos.state.oh.us for locations.
- ❑ **Article 211 training** will be held at **Northgate Center** (Room G) on **Wednesday, Feb. 22**, from 8–10 a.m. for all high schools, 7–12 schools and career centers; and from 1–3 p.m. for elementary and middle schools in Regions III, IV and V. On **Thursday, Feb. 23**, training for all district programs and offices will be from 8–10 a.m. and for elementary and middle schools in Regions I and II from 1–3 p.m.
- ❑ **2011 dues deductions** for CEA members: **Full Dues, Plan A** (21 Pays) **\$752.41**, **Plan B** (26 Pays) **\$747.07**. **If you switched from: Plan A to B: \$692.41** or went from **Plan B to A: \$807.07**. **Half Dues** are **\$474.32** and **Quarter Dues** are **\$243.37**.
- ❑ **Mar. 2 is the deadline to apply for continuing contracts.** Eligibility requirements can be found in Section 401.16 of the *CEA Master Agreement*.
- ❑ The **deadline** for applications for **CEA scholarships for graduating high school seniors** is **Wednesday, May 2, at 5 p.m.** Two scholarships are available: the **\$1,500 Christa McAuliffe Scholarship**, awarded to an education student, and the **\$1,000 CEA General Scholarship**. Both are renewable for up to four years but at a reduced level from the first-year award. Go to <http://bit.ly/eSj3rJ> to download the application form.