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The WTA NEWS

Information Updates

by: Dave Najduch, WTA President

Teacher/parent in the Same Building with their Children

The issue of teachers who are also parents working in the same building that their children attend as students has generated a fair bit of concern over the last year. Under the previous Chief Superintendent, it was made clear this was not to occur. She had also indicated that if it was taking place, either the teacher/parent or the child would have to move to a different school.

The WTA brought this issue to the new Chief Superintendent in December 2008 and again in January 2009. At both meetings there was a healthy discussion around the topic.

On January 21, 2009, the Chief Superintendent indicated in a memo to all school administrators that the previous "Protocol-Children in Same School" had been "withdrawn" and that teachers/parents and their children could now be in the same building. It is our understanding that a number of conditions apply. The children can be shown no preferential treatment and upon registering their child in the school a discussion must take place between the school administration and the teacher/parent regarding any real or perceived conflict of interest which may occur.

WSD Finance/Personnel Meeting

On January 19, 2009, the WTA was invited to speak with The Winnipeg School Division Finance/Personnel Committee. In attendance were the five Superintendents, the Secretary-Treasurer, five trustees and the WSD's Communication Officer. The issue discussed was the WSD's use of the Tax Incentive Grant to fund the ongoing educational cost of the Division in the 2009/2010 school year.

The WTA's position continues to be clear; the WSD should not be accessing the grant because it has significant negative implications for the funding of education and the deliver of programming across the system. After a short presentation by the WTA there were a number of questions and some discussion. As a final note, this is the first occasion in a very long time that the WSD Board of Trustees has invited the WTA to a meeting to discuss any topic.

MTS & the Disability Benefits Plan Increase in Premiums

At the Presidents' Council meeting held on January 17, 2009 a report was presented from the Disability Benefits (DBP) Committee indicating their investments had been seriously impacted by the downturn in the economy. The current premium paid by MTS members is 1.88% of salary. The proposal from the DBP Committee (to be considered at the MTS Annual General meeting in May) is provided below:

Premium for 2009/2010 = 2.64% (total increase of \$465 on a \$60,000 salary)

CHECK THE LAST PAGES OF THIS NEWSLETTER FOR A FOLLOW-UP ARTICLE ON THE RETIREMENT OF THE MTS GENERAL SECRETARY.

INFORMATION UPDATES cont'd.***Substitute Teachers/Reminders to Classroom Teachers***

The WTA hosted a Substitute Teachers General Meeting on January 26, 2009 at which 74 individuals were in attendance. The following reminders are based on the feedback from that meeting:

1. Please ensure that your job profile on the substitute call-in system is correct. It needs to include the grades and subject areas you are teaching.
2. When calling for a substitute, please forward a copy of your day plan to the substitute and the school secretary so that copies are available for the sub.

Negotiations Committee Update

by: Joan Fransen, WTA Vice-President

Negotiations Package

Our current collective agreement will expire at the end of June, 2009. This represents an extension of an agreement negotiated at the table. As such, it has been a few years since we've sat across the table to negotiate. After a busy fall of creating its negotiation package, the committee is well on its way through the "vetting" process leading up to the opening round of negotiations. The WTA Executive has had the chance to review the package and at its meeting on January 15, 2009 gave its approval. The Special Negotiations Meeting is scheduled for February 17, 2009 prior to Council. At this meeting the committee will introduce the proposals and answer questions. Opportunity will be provided for attendees to provide the committee with feedback. Having said that, by the time you receive your newsletter, this meeting will have taken place. Your council representative will be able to share negotiations information with you. The final Council participation will take place at the March Council meeting, where council representatives will vote whether to send the package forward.

New Teacher Focus Groups

Last year the committee hosted round-table discussions as a venue for gathering feedback from members representing a wide variety of demographic groups. One of the most successful groups—both from the committee's and the attendees' perspective—was the group held for New Teachers. As a result, the committee made a decision to run focus groups exclusively for new teachers this year—and perhaps on an ongoing basis. Teachers on permanent contract, who attended the WSD New Employee Workshop last fall (2008), have received invitations to participate.

The goals of this focus group are two-fold. First, this is an opportunity for new teachers to meet with their colleagues to share successes. Last year, it was interesting to watch the reactions of new teachers who attended the focus group as they realized that others had experienced many of the same successes and concerns. Secondly, this is a chance for the WTA to provide its own orientation—involving topics such as Benefits, the collective agreement, and the workings of the WTA.

We look forward to meeting with our new members in March and April.

“ATTENTION ALL WTA MEMBERS ACCESSING PARENTAL LEAVE”

If during the 2008/2009 school year you have applied for the ten week top-up for parental leave and have been informed by The Winnipeg School Division that the top-up would not occur during any break in the school year, please call Henry Shyka, WTA Business Agent at 888-7961 as soon as possible.

WTA Dental Plan

- As of January 1st, 2009 the following changes have been made to the WTA Dental Plan:
 - ◊ As of January 1st, 2009, the 2009 Dental Fee Guide is in effect.
 - ◊ There is a deductible holiday for the 2009 calendar year.
 - ◊ The Routine/Major combined maximum has increased to \$2500 per person/per year.
 - ◊ The Orthodontic maximum has increased to \$1250 per person/per year.
 - ◊ The total annual benefit amount has increased to \$3750 per person/per year.

Quote of the Month

A good laugh is sunshine in a house.

*- William Makepeace Thackeray
(1811-1863)*



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DEADLINE FOR ARTICLES TO THE MARCH NEWSLETTER IS:

March 4, 2009

Electoral Units not represented at the January Council meeting:

Champlain, COTE, Elmwood, George V, Glenelm, Grant Park, Isaac Brock, J.B. Mitchell, Kelvin, Lab Assistants, Machray, Montrose, Mulvey, Niji Mahkwa, Norquay, Principal Sparling, Ralph Brown, Sacre Coeur, Sisler, Strathcona, Support Services, William Whyte, WAEC—700 Elgin Ave.

Sometimes it is a Heavy Load

By: Tracy Fyfe, WTA Secretary, Member of The Manitoba Teachers' Society Collective
Bargaining Standing Committee

It's that time again when MTS sends out a workload survey to all its 15,000 members. This is a time when teachers can reflect on their workload and share the information with MTS.

This survey is done once every two years. "What is the data used for?" you ask...the is collected and the Society uses the information in many different areas to help Manitoba teachers. This information helps many bargainers in the province direct their focus on important issues that are relevant to teachers. It is important to see the common issues and concerns teacher have.

By now all schools should have received the surveys. If you have not, please contact MTS (888-7961). One common question asked when teachers receive the package addressed to them from MTS is "Why am I the Rep?" The answer is simple, MTS uses the WTA Council Rep as their contact.

Completing and distributing the surveys will vary from school to school. Some schools will complete them at a staff meeting, while others have distributed them into the mail boxes of staff members with a collection date decided. If your school is short surveys please contact **MTS** to get more sent to you. Do not photocopy the surveys as they are scanned for compiling. **Once your surveys are complete, please return them to the WTA Council meeting in February or March and they will then be submitted to MTS.**

Two years ago, when the survey was completed only **12% of Metro** handed in the surveys, with The Winnipeg School Division as one of the lowest. We have real issues and concerns. As well, we are the largest Metro school division, if we want our issues dealt with, we have to provide the information to those who can help.

Remember...

1. Please send your **original receipts** to Manulife and make a photocopy of the documents for your records.
2. When filling out your ManuLife claim forms please **include your home address** on the form. Failure to do so will result in Manulife forwarding your claim/cheque to the Payroll Department of The Winnipeg School.

Disability Benefits Plan (Long Term Disability)

Please be aware that your dental plan **ends** with the exhaustion of your sick leave.

*The views expressed in articles in the
Newsletter are not necessarily those of
the Association*

Retiring...resigning?

Please Note: Requests to rescind intentions to resign or retire have been refused in the past.

“An Off-the-Record Public Spanking!”

By: Dave Najduch, WTA President

Sharing the information about The Manitoba Teachers' Society (MTS) General Secretary and the information I had around her retirement was going to generate a response from MTS. The venue for one of these responses was Presidents' Council on Saturday, January 17th, 2009.

Presidents' Council meets every three to four months in the MTS auditorium. It brings together the Provincial Executive, the MTS President, the local Association Presidents from across the province and MTS staff. The day is usually filled with reports, updates, questions and information about the current topics important to the locals and the Society. Pat Isaak, the MTS President started the meeting by indicating she had a number of comments to make off-the-record before the formal agenda was approved.

Ms Isaak talked about a web site and an article that had been published without ever naming the WTA or me as its author. The off-the-record public spanking began. In what seemed to me an aggressive, and sometimes angry fashion, she indicated that the article was distressing, disappointing, disrespectful, based on gossip, discourteous and brought into disrepute the work of the MTS and the Provincial Executive. The President also stated that the General Secretary deserved nothing less than our respect and celebration of her service. Ms Isaak talked about the hiring of Meyers Norris Penny early in the school year to work on succession planning within MTS and that they had been working for months. The Presidents' meeting was then called to order and the agenda was approved.

The comments and actions of the MTS President bother me less than what did not happen at Presidents' Council. If the former General Secretary had been present, thanked publically for her over 30 years of service to the teachers of Manitoba and been given a chance to speak, my article and I would have looked foolish and disrespectful.

Had the Provincial Executive bothered to include a heartfelt thanks to the General Secretary in the notes from their December or January Executive meetings, again I would have felt the article was ill advised. In fact the notes of the Provincial Executive meetings included the following announcements, but nothing about the General Secretary.

“Accepted, with regret, the resignation of Tim Duprey.”
(Provincial Executive Notes December 12, 2008)

“Accepted, with thanks and appreciation for his years of service to the teachers of Manitoba,
the notice of retirement from Saul Leibl effective April 25, 2009.”
(Provincial Executive Notes January 15 & 16, 2009)

In my opinion, the tone and the delivery of the MTS President in responding to the WTA article was more about silencing serious questions and discussion at the meeting. A number of people I spoke with referred to the President's actions as “damage control.” The other disturbing thing about the process is that her comments are not reflected in the official record of the meeting.

“An Off-the-Record Public Spanking!” cont’d.

On a related issue, I wrote to the President of the Society on January 7th, 2009 seeking information based on the following MTS Bylaw provision.

“V. DUTIES OF THE PROVINCIAL EXECUTIVE

- (p) ensure that any member will have access to the duties, remuneration and the terms of employment of all paid officers and employees of the Society: and...”

(Constitution, Bylaws and Policies Governing the MTS pg. 16)

Based on the Bylaw, I should be able to have access to “the duties, remuneration and the terms of employment” of the General Secretary. In fact, the President of MTS has shared information from these documents with presidents from various locals in the recent past, including specifics about the salary amounts of senior staff. Presidents and AGM delegates were also allowed to read an MTS internal audit that included very specific information about individuals and their expenditures. The response to my request was received in the WTA office on January 27th, 2009 and stated the following:

“Your letter of January 7th, 2009 has been forwarded to legal counsel at the request of the Provincial Executive.”

(Pat Isaak, President)

It is not clear why information that was once freely available through the President of the Society must now be referred to legal counsel prior to it being shared with a member. It is interesting how a simple retirement notice has generated this type of response from the MTS.

I would hope the information provided through the application of the MTS Bylaw V. would address the following questions:

1. Did the General Secretary leave her position before her contract had expired? If so, how long did she have left in her contract?
2. Did the General Secretary leaving the employment of MTS cost the Society additional salary or some other financial consideration? If so, how much did it cost the Society?
3. Did the General Secretary have a notice provision in her contract? If so, what was it? MTS Staff Officers are required to provide three months notice to the Society when they leave. It appears the General Secretary provided nine days.

As a WTA/MTS member you have got to be asking yourself right now why all of this matters? We as a local work very hard to hold our employer responsible for its actions and try to make them accountable in how they deal with people. The Society is our parent organization and should be held to the same or a higher standard than our employer. MTS needs to be transparent, accountable and open to how they operate. The actions and inactions of the President and Provincial Executive over the last while have generated more questions than answers about what is really going on. We will continue to seek answers to these and other questions on your behalf.