

Monday, December 14, 2009

Good Morning, Everyone.

I don't know about you, but I feel a bit as if I just weathered a crazy storm, and am peeking outside, into the yard, to see if my trees are still standing. I think they are. Now that the storm has abated, let me share with you some ideas of how we, the members of the Maine Teacher Association, can move forward.

Over the weekend, I received emails and phone calls from a variety of our members, with ideas and outlined plans of how our membership could pledge voluntary donations to District 207, in order to save teaching positions. This is a concept touched on in early October, but was put on the back burner in order to address the complexities of the question of opening the Collective Bargaining Agreement.

Greg Serrano, Jean Miller and I met at 6:30AM this morning with Ken Wallace, Greg Dietz and Mary Kalou in order to present this idea, and to discuss the mechanics of such a voluntary pledge program. Interestingly, some of our members had also discussed such ideas with Dr. Wallace after the referendum vote last week. This is encouraging to me, as I interpret these contacts as interest by our membership to actively address the potential loss of so many of our colleagues.

Understand that we have lots of research to do in a short time: IRS regulations, tax implications, use of the existing Education Foundation, timeline and dollar target for maximum impact, etc. The Administration Team is contacting their legal department, Mary is researching IRS rules, and Greg is putting together salary information. It's important that people know the exact dollar amount of their pledge, and how that pledge would impact their earnings in the next two years. I am contacting IEA legal, and Jean and Greg are working on the format for a pledge card. We feel an urgency in bringing this program to fruition this week. Jean says Wednesday, but I would be happy with Thursday!!

This kind of *'FTE position- dedicated pledge program'* may be the first of its kind, so we need to do our homework. We do know that when Mary Kalou was part of the Lake Zurich school district, she helped to implement a donation program to save the extracurricular offerings. We hope that experience can inform us as we proceed to craft our pledge program.

A few random thoughts...the more we pledge, the more positions we can save for the next two years. The pledges will be irrevocable, as the District will be taking action on a predetermined dollar amount. Teaching Assistant positions are not part of this equation, as those positions have a great deal of flexibility to them. The District will continue to meet legal SPED requirements for children who have IEPs indicating one-to-one instruction, and retain/hire Teaching Assistants accordingly.

I will update you as soon as details are available for this Voluntary Give Back Program. And, with her permission, let me share a thought from Kathy Tomassi, our nurse at South, *"In these economic times, it's clearly the right thing to do. Ultimately, a drastic reduction in force will impact each and every one of us and our students."*

Em

