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## Supporting Public Schools - Two Key Messages

Our union recently ran radio and community newspaper ads to celebrate our city's public schools. At a time when MPS is criticized relentlessly by its many outsider critics, it is essential that we, the educators, stand up for our students, parents, and ourselves. Along with MPS administrators, our parents and students, we are the most authentic and most respected voices for public schools in Milwaukee.

### Great Public Schools

All of us can do much more to communicate the excellent work we and our peers do. Each of us has a sphere of influence - family, friends, neighbors, and peers. Instead of doing what comes way too easily - griping about difficult students or unreachable parents - we could talk about high-achieving students and supportive parents.

### Fix the Funding Laws

As we tout the good things being accomplished by our schools, we also need to explain the negative impact of the state's broken funding laws. For example, if a district does not raise local property taxes to the legal limit, it is penalized with decreased state aid the next school year. Another example, affecting MPS only, the state's voucher funding law results in less state aid for students in MPS and higher city property taxes for students in voucher schools.

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## What's a Teacher Vacancy?

Under the teacher contract, a vacancy is created when a teacher:

- ◆Retires or resigns.
- ◆Receives a **formal** leave of absence.
- ◆Requests an incompatibility transfer from a school.
- ◆Is absent more than 60 days during a semester.

Vacancies also occur when a new position is added to a school or when a position vacant at the end of a semester remains vacant the next semester.

### Some Apparent Vacancies, Are Not

While a retirement or resignation clearly creates a teacher vacancy, other situations are complicated. For example, a teacher medically unable to work due to pregnancy/childbirth may be absent up to 12 consecutive weeks without losing her assignment.

There are several ways for teachers to keep their assignments through the teacher contract and the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA). A long-term absence does not necessarily create a teacher vacancy.

## Assigned to a Teacher Vacancy?

While there may be a question as to whether you are in a teacher vacancy or not, the following is important information and advice.

The substitute teacher contract provides teacher pay and benefits (except pension) to those assigned to a teacher vacancy. **If you are assigned to a vacancy and do not already have MPS group health and dental insurance coverage, you should apply ASAP.** You will **not** receive these benefits unless you apply for them.

To obtain the enrollment form, call MPS Benefits and Insurance at 475-8158. You may also go to Room 124 at the MPS central office to pick up the form.

When you request the insurance application from, you **may** be told that you are not in a teacher vacancy. That may be accurate because of the complicated situations such as the example noted above.

However, MPS is apparently **not** notifying eligible substitutes in teacher vacancies of their right to these negotiated, Board-paid insurance benefits, in a timely manner (if at all). We recommend you call to request an insurance application as soon as you believe you are in a vacancy.

If you experience any problems or delays, please contact Sandra Wilant of the MTEA staff at wilants@mtea.weac.org or 259-1990.

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**School Funding Reform**  
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Our schools, programs, and our students' educational opportunities are dying a death of a thousand cuts. **We must speak out now!**

**Send Us Your Stories!**

Tell your story about how the current state funding laws are hurting your school or classroom. What could you do or provide for your students if you had the resources you need?

We also need good news - the successes of students, parents, and educators - at your school!

**Please send us both kinds of stories at [mtea.org](http://mtea.org).**

To publicize the real MPS stories, our union is working with:

- ◆ WEAC - which has won an NEA grant targeted for our area.
- ◆ MPS, ASC, and the GMC (Greater Milwaukee Committee) - partners in communications on the MPS Strategic Plan.

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**High School Students Released Early?**

Custer and a few other senior high schools release students about an hour early each Wednesday. The MPS central administration expects substitute teachers to remain at work until the end of the normal teacher day (3:45 p.m.) to earn a full day's pay. The school principal is responsible for making appropriate assignments for the time without students.

## **Teacher Vacancy Pay and Benefits**

By contract, you should receive teacher pay and benefits (except for pension) when you complete 15 days in a teacher vacancy occurring from **October 1 through November 15**. The pay and benefits are then retroactive to your first day in the vacancy. The contract also provides teacher pay and benefits if you are assigned to a teacher vacancy **after** November 15 during the first semester.

### **Enroll for Insurances As Soon As You Qualify**

It is very important to enroll in the health, dental, and life insurances as soon as you qualify for teacher benefits. (If you are currently enrolled in these insurances, you do **not** need to re-enroll.)

If you have any questions about the benefits or when/how to enroll, please call Sandra Wilant of the MTEA staff at 259-1990 or e-mail her at [wilants@mtea.weac.org](mailto:wilants@mtea.weac.org).

### **File Your College Transcripts and Notify MPS of Outside Teaching Experience**

The college courses you have taken and your prior teaching experience outside of MPS may place you at a higher rate on the teacher salary schedule.

If you have not already done so, you should take steps **now** so that MPS receives your original college transcripts and verification of teaching experience outside of MPS. Both items are needed to place you at the teacher salary schedule level commensurate with your education and experience.

We recommend you bring the documents to the Compensation Department in Room 124 at the MPS central office. The mailing address is P.O. Box 2181, Milwaukee WI 53201-2181.

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## **Shorted Pay? Don't Delay!**

If you find your paycheck does not reflect the number of days/hours you worked during a pay period, you should immediately investigate the error. Waiting makes it difficult to get a correction.

### **Whom to Call First? It Depends.**

If you were assigned to only one school for the pay period, notify the secretary who handles the payroll at that school.

If you worked at two or more schools during the pay period, call the MPS payroll department at 475-8300 to find out which school did not properly process your payment.

There are only a few situations when calling your dispatcher about a paycheck problem is the right step. One good example - not being paid for a holiday.

### **When Pay Problems Are Not Resolved**

If you encounter a pay problem that is not being addressed, please call Sandra Wilant at the MTEA Building at 259-1990 or e-mail her at [wilants@mtea.weac.org](mailto:wilants@mtea.weac.org).

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