
Open Enrollment Now!

You may apply for the MTEA's disability insurance plans at any time during the school year. However, to apply on the open enrollment basis below, your application must be signed and dated by **November 13**.

If you are an active employee and apply by the deadline, you can obtain coverage within the benefit maximums noted below, **even if you have a pre-existing medical condition**. (However, you will not be able to collect benefits on a pre-existing condition within the first 12 months of coverage.)

For Plan 1 - Up to a monthly maximum of \$1,200

For Plan 2 - Schedule A only

For Plan 3 - Up to a monthly maximum of \$600

A Healthy Note

If you are in good health, you may enroll for maximum coverage under all three plans - as long as your monthly cash benefits do not exceed two-thirds of your monthly salary rate.

More Information

A detailed explanation of the MTEA's group disability plans is on page two. Some helpful tips on which plans best fit your age, sick leave accumulation, and income are in the left column.

Drop-In November 9

If you have questions about this insurance, stop by the MTEA Office on: **Monday, November 9**, from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. An MTEA staff member and a Union Security representative will be available to provide individual counseling on your plan options.

Educators Oppose Mayoral Takeover

The MTEA position opposing mayoral takeover of MPS, adopted at the October 14 MTEA Representative Assembly (RA), is printed on **page four**. Prior to adoption, your union's school leaders considered the background information, detailed on **page three**.

MTEA/WEAC Leaders Present a Research-Based Alternative Plan

At a news conference held at the branch headquarters of the NAACP in Milwaukee, leaders of the MTEA and WEAC presented a bold plan to improve student achievement in MPS. Parents, community leaders, and educators participated in the conference, which was covered by all local television stations (but not the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel).

The "**Milwaukee Opportunity Plan**" offers specific, research-proven strategies such as smaller class sizes; art, music, and physical education classes; school safety measures; and other initiatives that can help close the achievement gaps - and attract and retain highly qualified educators. Several plan components reflect your union's teacher contract proposals.

Two-Fold Plan: Systemwide and SIFI Schools

The plan, developed jointly by leaders of the MTEA and WEAC as a alternative to the well-publicized mayoral takeover, has two major components. First, low-cost, systemwide changes for the district. Second, measures that would be piloted in some SIFI schools.

The two-pronged approach is designed to maximize the chances of the state Legislature approving the educators' alternative plan which:

- ◆ Supports Wisconsin's bid for federal Race to the Top funding, to start up the plan - without eliminating elected school board governance.
- ◆ Recognizes the economic reality: state and federal funds are not available to implement changes, such as class size reduction, systemwide.
- ◆ Provides some SIFI schools with the resources to significantly improve student success - building support for sustaining the plan long-term and expanding it to other schools.

"Opportunity Centers" for Bold Initiatives

The plan calls for piloting changes in some SIFI schools that teacher unions across the state and country have strongly resisted in the past. A number of schools would become "Opportunity Centers" to demonstrate the efficacy of a comprehensive set of reforms.

For example, Opportunity Centers would have a longer school day and year - **along with reduced class sizes**. MTEA and WEAC leaders know that a longer day can help - **depending on how the extra time is used**. (Teachers would be paid for the added time and school days.)

Continue on page four...

Tips on Coverage to Fit Your Needs

Whether you are already enrolled in one or more of the MTEA salary protection plans or are applying for the first time, the following tips will help you select coverage based on your income, age, and sick leave accumulation.

With Little Sick Leave...

If you have just a few days of sick leave accumulated, you should (at a minimum) enroll in Plan 2, the sick leave coordinated plan. For example, if you are a new teacher, you have earned very little sick leave. With only a few sick days, you would quickly become eligible to collect benefits from the sick leave coordinated plan.

In addition, the premium cost is low. The sick leave coordinated plan (Schedule B) costs only \$5.60 per paycheck for a monthly benefit of about \$600.

Advantage of Plan 1

If you want more coverage or if you have a great deal of sick leave accumulated, you should enroll in Plan 1. This plan pays benefits whether you are receiving sick leave pay from MPS or not.

Plan 1 is a very good option for veteran teachers. As the risk of a disabling illness increases with age, many teachers want the option of not using their sick leave so that they can qualify for Board-paid health insurance during retirement. With Plan 1, you can receive a monthly benefit when you are unable to work, and you opt to not use your MPS sick leave.

Should You Drop Plan 2?

Unless you use up your sick leave, you will **not** receive sick leave coordinated (Plan 2) benefits. Depending on your age and sick leave accumulation, you may wish to drop sick leave coordinated coverage and increase your benefits under Plan 1 (and Plan 3).

What's Disability Insurance?

The AFLAC duck commercials give a humorous explanation of a serious insurance need. **Disability insurance is protection against the loss of salary income in the event of a disabling illness or injury.**

MTEA Group Disability Insurance

The MTEA's group disability insurance plans offer options for salary protection that you can tailor to your individual and family needs - at excellent group rates. (You don't pay for expensive TV ads.) The plans also provide the convenience of paying premiums through biweekly payroll deductions.

Over 1,600 teachers participate in the MTEA group plans. Our program began in 1969, and in the past, the plans were underwritten by the Washington National Insurance Company. The Union Security Insurance Company now underwrites our plans.

Three Types of Salary Protection Plans Offered

Three types of MTEA group disability insurance plans are available.

- ◆ **Plan 1** pays benefits whether you are on sick leave pay or not.
- ◆ **Plan 2** pays benefits only after your accumulated sick leave is exhausted. (It's "Sick Leave Coordinated.")
- ◆ **Plan 3** provides extended benefits in the event of long-term/permanent disability. (It's "Long-Term Disability.")

All plans pay cash benefits when you are medically unable to work due to illness or injury, as certified by your doctor, whether hospitalized or not. You may select Plan 1 and/or Plan 2. However, you may enroll in Plan 3 **only** if you also enroll in Plan 1.

See Booklet for Details and Enrollment Form

The plans are described in detail in the booklet sent with today's Sharpener. **A tear-out enrollment form is on the back inside cover.**

Because so many members are in the MTEA group plan, we did not send a booklet for every teacher. Instead, BR's have received an ample supply which they will make available to interested teachers.

If you received this Sharpener at home, please see the BR in any school for a booklet. Copies are also available to pick up at the MTEA Building, or call us at 259-1990 to mail a copy to your home.

Wanted: A Few Curious Members

Would you like to learn more about our union? How to advocate for public schools? Do you believe in social justice and that being an educator goes beyond the classroom? Thinking about getting involved in our union at some level, but don't know where to start?

Unique Opportunity for You

If you responded "yes" to the questions above, our Emerging Voices program may be right for you. We are looking for a diverse group of members to participate. Emerging Voices is not just for "new" or "young" members. You may have worked in MPS for years but have only recently started exploring what it means to be an active union member.

Apply Online

If you're interested, please fill out the application at mtea.org by **Wednesday, November 4, 2009**. For more information, please contact Stephanie Walters at walterss@weac.org or 259-1990.



Background Information on Mayoral Takeover

Initial Reactions of Members

Over the past two months, we've learned that:

1. Some members, especially those in union leadership positions, are quite knowledgeable and vehemently oppose mayoral control
2. Many members have been consumed by their day-to-day responsibilities, especially at the start of the school year. They have had little time to consider to how mayoral control might affect them and their schools.
3. Some members are asking how mayoral control might impact their contractual rights and benefits – now and in the future – including retirement benefits.
4. Some members have little or no confidence in certain school board members – past and present. (For several years, a number of staunch voucher supporters have been on the board - often in the majority.) Some feel that mayoral control could be an improvement, certainly no worse than what some dysfunctional board members have done in the past.

Things Can Get Worse

Judging from the experience of cities where mayoral control has been enacted, conditions in MPS would get substantially worse.

- ◆ One outcome is consistent: Power is concentrated in the hands of one politician, and schools are not the sole priority.
- ◆ Mixed academic results have been reported – depending on which “data” is used, how it is interpreted, and which politician is quoted.
- ◆ Bargaining rights of educators are typically restricted and weakened immediately.

Ominous Preview

We have a preview of what would happen to our contract if Mayor Barrett was in charge. Subcommittees of the advisory group on MPS headed by the mayor have been working since last spring. Health insurance benefits of active and retired educators are their primary target for “reforming” the finances of MPS.

Lots of Talk Since August

Since Governor Doyle and Mayor Barrett publicly announced their support for mayoral

control of MPS, there has been a blizzard of activity, starting with School Board President Michael Bonds.

The Milwaukee media, especially the Journal Sentinel, has focused on this issue. There have been numerous public statements (pro and con), political posturing, community meetings (generally opposing mayoral takeover), conversations with and among legislators (usually private), and more.

To date, no legislative bill has been introduced in the Wisconsin Legislature. In fact, the mayor and the governor have not publicly offered any concrete specifics.

History Repeating Itself?

This will not be the first time the Legislature will consider “a solution” to the “MPS problem” premised on eliminating the city’s school board. In 1998, Governor Tommy Thompson called a special session to pass a bill that would have replaced the school board with an appointed three-member commission. That legislation was defeated.

The MTEA worked extensively with the community, including religious leaders, to oppose what Leon Todd, a school board member at the time, labeled “plantation politics.”

WEAC a Key Force for Public Schools in the State Legislature

A decade ago, the deciding factor was the coordinated work of MTEA and WEAC staff lobbyists, elected leaders, and members.

Today, WEAC remains the pivotal player in influencing the outcome of bills affecting the educators of the state.

MTEA/WEAC Leaders At Work

MTEA leaders have been working with WEAC leaders to coordinate opposition to mayoral takeover legislation since the governor’s position became public on August 13.

Alternative Plan Needed

It’s clear from MTEA and WEAC legislative contacts that merely opposing mayoral control will not be enough to persuade key legislators to defeat a takeover bill. MTEA and WEAC lobbyists need to present an alternative that will provide substantial changes in MPS to achieve meaningful reform.

Continued from front page...

The plan envisions a longer day that includes art, music, and physical education classes - taught by teachers licensed in these areas. This allows classroom teachers time to plan within a longer day.

Bold Initiatives for Teacher Compensation

The Milwaukee Opportunity Plan calls for:

- ◆ An alternative compensation system based on educator skills and knowledge, along with more responsibilities such as mentoring initial educators.
- ◆ Requiring all new teachers to serve a one-year residency.
- ◆ Market incentives for hard-to-serve and hard-to-fill positions.
- ◆ Incentives to employ and develop master educators and National Board-certified teachers.

Other Key Components

The Milwaukee Opportunity Plan includes several other key elements for parent/community engagement, effective administration and school board leadership, and accountability and improvement for MPS administrators - not just educators.

The Entire Plan and More at mtea.org

MTEA and WEAC staff members have collaborated to make the comprehensive information, outlined below, available to you:

- ◆ The 9-page plan document.
- ◆ A fact sheet with links to research supporting key elements of the plan.
- ◆ Frequently asked questions.
- ◆ The news release distributed to media in Milwaukee and around the state.

MTEA Opposes Mayoral Takeover

Mayoral takeover of MPS is not a solution to the challenges of our district and city. The MTEA is categorically opposed to mayoral takeover. MTEA leaders and members will actively engage the community in:

- ◆ **Opposing mayoral takeover.**
- ◆ **Supporting steps that will strengthen the city's public schools.**

Three Main Reasons for Opposition

1. Mayoral takeover will not change the fundamental reform issue: the state's method of funding public schools.

The state law, which largely determines the MPS budget, does not provide the resources essential for a quality education of the district's students. Year after year, the structural budget deficit has resulted in more and deeper cuts depriving MPS students of the educational opportunities that wealthy districts provide.

MPS schools desperately need more resources to provide the essential elements of quality education, such as:

- ◆ Class size maximums to enable age-appropriate instruction and individual attention.
- ◆ Modern technologies and curriculum.
- ◆ Preparation time for all teachers.
- ◆ Conditions that attract and retain highly qualified, teachers and support staff.
- ◆ Safe environments for students and staff.
- ◆ Art, music, physical education, guidance, library, and other services and support students need.

2. More parent, community, and educator engagement is needed - not less.

Mayoral takeover would mean that the leadership and direction for the city's public schools would be taken from accessible school board members, elected from the eight geographic districts of MPS. Instead, the power would reside in the hands of one individual - the mayor. The office of mayor is responsible for several areas critical to Milwaukee. Education would be an add-on that would compete with other priorities. No mayor could be as accessible on education issues as nine elected representatives whose sole responsibility is policy-making for the city's public schools.

Meaningful reform requires a transformative partnership among parents, the broader community, and educators. The district's educators are the experts who understand what is needed to improve student achievement; educators want to implement reforms that can make a difference in the classroom.

Mayoral takeover is not reform. It's a false promise, similar to the voucher solution, which will again take MPS in the wrong direction.

3. The right of residents to elect school board members should be maintained and strengthened, especially in Milwaukee.

Throughout the state and most of our nation, the right to vote for school board members is the most meaningful and direct opportunity to participate in our democracy. No citizen should lose this basic right. To single out an urban district with a majority minority population would be a devastating and discriminatory step backward - especially for a state with a strong progressive tradition.