

Special Edition, Again

Today's Sharpener is for members in all four MTEA units - as was the December 3 edition.

We wanted all members to see our report of the December 8 meeting, when our school leaders discussed discipline issues with Superintendent Thornton. You'll find the details on this page.

More Information

You can view an outline of Dr. Thornton's presentation at mtea.org. It includes a national context for our district's academic and safety/discipline challenges.

Three key MPS administrators also attended the meeting to listen to the concerns of educators:

- Naomi Gubernick, Dr. Thornton's Chief of Staff
- Anita Pietrykowski, Director of the Office of School Administration
- Graciela Pequeno, one of the MPS Regional Executive Specialists

Solid First Step

Nearly 200 MTEA leaders and Dr. Thornton showed respect for one another and affirmed our common cause: safe and orderly schools where all students succeed academically. There were no illusions of instant solutions, but there was a strong sense of urgency for improvements.

Our union will work with the district administration to ensure that the necessary steps are implemented.

Discipline: Definitions and Direction - School Leaders Meet With Dr. Thornton

Our union's school leaders - BRs and EA Chairpersons - voiced their staff's discipline/safety concerns on December 8. Superintendent Gregory Thornton explained his commitment to ensuring a safe, positive, learning environment in our schools. Overall, the lively dialog led to a shared understanding of steps needed to effectively address disruptive behaviors.

Districtwide Direction: No Unnecessary Suspensions!

At several points during the discussion, Dr. Thornton stated he did not give a "no suspensions" directive to principals. He made it clear his directive is: "No Unnecessary Suspensions!" and gave two examples: not bringing materials to class and being late to class or school.

The superintendent also cited serious offenses which warrant suspension at a **minimum**. (See left column on back for precise definitions.)

Our leaders expressed the need for firm and consistent disciplinary action, especially when an educator or a student is threatened or battered. The superintendent unequivocally agreed.

Expect Strong, Effective Leadership in Schools

Dr. Thornton stressed that disrespect for educators - all adults - will not be tolerated. He expressed two fundamentals:

- ◆ *All students have a right to be educated.*
- ◆ *No student has a right to disrupt.*

Specific measures the superintendent is pursuing include:

- ◆ Additional resources - now and during the second semester - for schools with the most severe and immediate disruption issues.
- ◆ Reinstating alternative education schools in the district in 2011-12 - where disruptive students receive the support and guidance they need to successfully return to their school.
- ◆ Reviewing the district's student assignment process so that the most challenging students are not disproportionately placed at certain schools.
- ◆ Developing effective interventions to avoid suspensions, such as temporary alternatives to accommodate disruptive students within the schools.

All of Us Have a Role

Along with strong administrative leadership, the superintendent pointed out that all educators have responsibilities for maintaining safe and orderly schools. He stressed that punitive measures, such as suspensions, are necessary, but not the solution. Dr. Thornton noted that positive steps - especially at the classroom level with the PBIS approach - are also key to improving school climate.



Behaviors Warranting Suspension (Minimum)

The 2010-11 MPS Parent/Student Handbook on Rights, Responsibilities and Discipline defines safety offenses which mandate suspension as the minimum administrative action. For serious or repeated offenses, expulsion is the maximum penalty recommendation.

Assault - "Aggressive behavior exhibited in an attempt to do immediate bodily harm, or to threaten to do immediate bodily harm to others, or to put others in fear of immediate bodily injury."

Battery - "Unprovoked/unanswered intentional physical contact without consent causing bodily harm."

Gun - "Possessing, having under one's control, using, or threatening with a gun (pistol, BB, pellet, rifle, starter, replica, or toy gun).

Weapon Other Than a Gun - "Possessing, having under one's control, using, or threatening with a knife, razor, karate stick, metal knuckle, box cutter, laser pointer used to do bodily harm, pepper spray, or any other object that by the way it is used or intended to be used is capable of inflicting bodily harm."

We wish you and your family a joyous holiday season and a happy new year!

Teacher Lump Sum Payment

Teacher December 23 paychecks will include the first of two lump sum payments for 2010-11.

Details will be posted at mtea.org by December 17.

BR Leadership/Communication Key

If schoolwide discipline and security issues arise, members should inform their school's MTEA Building Representative (BR). In most schools, the BR will involve the Building Committee, which includes the school's EA Chairperson, to address the problems.

BRs have a leadership role in working with the principal and assistant principals to develop and follow through with agreed-upon solutions.

BR Released for Crisis Periods

The teacher contract requires the principal to release the BR from classes/ assignments during school crisis periods. The BR's role is to make certain that accurate, factual information is communicated. If there is a serious disturbance, the BR will notify our union's staff.

(All staff members should know their specific roles if the school's crisis plan becomes necessary. All teachers should have a copy.)

Notify BR of Battery Incidents

If you are the victim of an assault and/or battery, you should promptly initiate a series of steps - such as notifying your school's BR. The BR will assist you as needed and accompany you to any related conferences if you wish.

The BR will notify our union's staff of all serious battery incidents.

Continuous Discipline Problems?

The BR is also the point person when discipline conditions call for action making use of the following Milwaukee School Board policy:

"When a school has continuous discipline problems, every effort will be made to provide released or compensated time for teachers. The principal and the teachers shall use such time to develop appropriate programs to reduce the causes of the problems."

EA Chairperson - Similar Responsibilities

If you are an educational assistant, the EA Chairperson will assist you in much the same way as the BR helps teachers. Please notify your school's Chairperson of any battery incident.

Next Paycheck Notes

The next paycheck will be dated and negotiable on **December 23** - instead of December 24.

The district plans to mail the paychecks on December 22.

If you have direct deposit, you won't have to worry about seasonal postal delays. You'll be able to review your paycheck on December 22, and your take-home pay will be negotiable on December 23.

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Winter Break for Our Union Office

During the winter break, the MTEA Building will be open from 8:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. on three days - December 22, 23 and 29. The office will be closed on December 24, 27, 28, 30, and 31.