

## Save the Dates

The events below take place after spring break, but you may want to mark your calendar now.

◆ **Smart Move: A Workshop**; 4:30-6:00 pm on Wednesday, **April 14**, at the MTEA Building. Learn how taking advantage of a low-cost WEA Member Benefits Trust 403(b) savings program may help you reach your retirement goals. Register at [mtea.org](http://mtea.org) (Events).

◆ **New Teacher Seminar on Culturally Responsive Teaching**; 4:30-6:30 pm on Thursday, **April 15**, at the John Marshall Campus. All first year, intern, and permit teachers are paid at the part-time certificated rate. For details and registration, go to [mtea.org](http://mtea.org) (Events).

◆ **Southeastern Wisconsin Consortium Action Research Conference**; all-day, Saturday, **April 24**, at the UWM Student Union. Details and registration at [mtea.org](http://mtea.org) (Events).

◆ **MMABSE's Annual Education Summit**; all-day, Tuesday, **April 27**, at the Wyndham Hotel Airport. For details, contact Dr. Patricia Ellis at [pellis@stritch.edu](mailto:pellis@stritch.edu) or 410-4359. Register by April 1.

◆ **MTEA Legislative Breakfast**; Saturday morning, **May 1**. Dialog with area legislators and teachers in nearby districts on school finance reform and other education issues. Details after spring break. Contact Andy Reid of the MTEA staff at [reida@mtea.weac.org](mailto:reida@mtea.weac.org).

◆ **14th Annual MTEA Brewers Tailgate Party**; 4:00 p.m. start on Friday, **May 15**; Brewers vs. Phillies at Miller Park. Details in **Sharpener** after spring break.

## Contract Talks Continue at Slow Pace

Our teacher bargaining team has met with the district's team four times this semester, and progress has been very slow. The last session was held on March 9, and the next date has not been set.

The Wisconsin Employment Relations Commission (WERC) has assigned Bill Houlihan as the mediator, and it is anticipated he will join the talks soon. Mr. Houlihan has assisted the parties in reaching voluntary agreements several times during the past two decades.

### Teacher Team Focus: Attract and Retain

Our teacher team continues to press for contract improvements that will attract and retain highly qualified educators. This means changes in working conditions such as class size, preparation time, professional development, safety and discipline.

Keeping career teachers in MPS, now and in the future, also means offering a salary and benefits competitive with districts in our region, and eliminating the residency requirement.

### School Board Team Focus: Health Insurance Concessions

District negotiators are seeking major concessions in health care benefits - essentially shifting costs to employees through premium contributions and increased out-of-pocket payments for medical services.

The district's approach is the same as in the past: Steer employees away from the open choice PPO plan, administered by Aetna, and into the managed care HMO plan, administered by UnitedHealthcare. The endgame: Everyone is in an HMO; the PPO choice is eliminated.

### Health Care Questions and Answers

We are putting together information aimed at breaking down health care cost complexities into a reader-friendly Q & A format. If you have a question you'd like addressed, please send it to Pat O'Mahar of the MTEA staff at [omaharp@mtea.weac.org](mailto:omaharp@mtea.weac.org) or call him at 259-1990.

## Calendar Talks: Spring Break Question

As negotiators for our union began discussions with the district over next year's school calendars, there were concerns about a very late spring break next April. (It is especially problematic for IB high schools.)

### Because Easter Is Very Late...

Traditionally, spring break has started on Good Friday, and school has resumed on a Monday, a full week after Easter Sunday. Easter is very late next spring - April 24. If tradition is followed, next year's spring break would start on Friday, April 22; we'd be off the last week in April; and school would resume May 2.

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## Grievance Wins:

### \$11,500 in Back Pay

Our union filed grievances on behalf of three teachers who were not hired for local summer school positions. Each received back pay because the district violated their contract rights; the amounts - \$3,164, \$4,083, and \$4,271.

In each case, the teacher was denied a position because she had not taught the same grade during the past three years. For example, one teacher had taught kindergarten at the K-4 level, but the summer position was a K-5.

### Correct Interpretation

For decades, the term "taught the same grade" has meant:

◆ A teacher who has taught kindergarten at any level (K-3, K-4, or K-5) during the past three years is qualified for any level kindergarten summer position.

◆ Likewise, primary teachers can teach grades 1, 2, or 3.

◆ Intermediate teachers can teach grades 4, 5, or 6.

◆ In K-8 schools, teachers with experience at grades 6, 7, or 8 can teach any of these three grades in summer school.

### Same Eligibility for Local School Hiring

All three grievances involved hiring for local school summer positions. It appears that some administrators were unaware that same definition of "grade taught in the past three years" applies to local, as well as citywide, summer hiring.

For questions about summer school hiring, contact Don Ernest of the MTEA staff at 259-1990 or [ernestd@mtea.weac.org](mailto:ernestd@mtea.weac.org).

### Citywide Summer School Applications Due March 24

To apply for a citywide MPS summer school position, go to the MPS Portal and type in 10-11 (no spaces) in the search box. Then click on "Online Application Instructions for Internal Teaching Jobs."

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## Supplemental Poll on Spring Break

In March of 2009, members were surveyed on their calendar preferences for both this school year, 2009-10, and next, 2010-11. To supplement our spring break data, our bargaining team is conducting a sample poll via e-mail to members who signed up for negotiations updates online. The target date is Friday, March 26.

If you haven't already signed up for e-mail updates, go to [mtea.org](http://mtea.org) and click on the "Negotiations Updates" quick link to participate in this poll.

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## The MPS "Benefit Rate" Fixation

Today's contract talks article highlights the sharp contrast between our team's theme, "Attract and Retain," and the district's, "Blame the Benefits."

MPS sends its blame message to employees and the public whenever it can in bargaining and in budgeting. Case in point: The administration has focused on benefit costs from the start of its budget process.

◆ Principals received no information about the many reasons behind the cuts in their school budgets - except the "77% fringe benefit rate."

◆ For the school board's March 2 budget meeting, the administration sent an overview document with 137 lines, plus a full-page attachment on the MPS benefit rate. Just six lines were on "other issues that affect the FY11 budget."

### How MPS Creates Its Benefit Rate

The district creates its benefit rate by dividing the total cost of all its fringe benefit costs (roughly \$390 million) by its salary costs (about \$524 million). But what does that rate mean?

The devil is in the details, and the MPS March 2 document includes these:

◆ MPS fringe benefits include: Social Security, city and state pensions, supplemental pensions (one for administrators and another for teachers), life insurance, dental insurance, vision insurance, and health insurance. There is a lot more included in addition to medical costs.

◆ MPS includes the cost of retiree health insurance in its fringe benefit calculations. (This means school budgets are charged for retiree costs.)

◆ MPS projected a **6.2% increase** in benefit costs - about \$23 million. But the district also projected a **5.7% decrease** in salary costs - roughly \$32 million.

Here's the math fact: If benefit costs go up and salary goes down, the benefit *rate* goes up even higher.

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## Delegate Openings for the WEAC RA

The Wisconsin Education Association Council's Annual Representative Assembly will be held the weekend of **April 23-25** in Green Bay. WEAC RA delegates act on reports, adopt the statewide legislative program, elect NEA Directors and other leaders, consider resolutions, and establish the WEAC budget and dues.

We need additional members to join our delegation for this key policy-setting meeting. If you'd like to serve as a delegate, please call Linda Scherlie of the MTEA support staff at 256-6760 or e-mail her at [lscherli@mtea.weac.org](mailto:lscherli@mtea.weac.org).



