

# The Slate



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## Swapping days next year

The designated days for swap days in 2011-2012 are scheduled for October 17, 2011 (the first day of fall break) and April 2, 2012 (the first day of spring break). In many cases teachers should not notice much of a difference from this year if they complete two professional development days in the summer. The main difference is that an unpaid day in spring break was switched with a professional development day in the fall in order to allow more time for new hires and others who could not meet the obligation during the summer to complete the second swap day before the deadline by which it must be accounted. The district will be able to provide more Saturday activities and teachers will have more opportunities to use professional conferences attended on Saturdays to meet the obligation.

To get the whole week off in both semesters, teachers need only complete two days of professional development in the summer or beyond the workday like they did this year. The only difference will be where one of the PD days falls for those not completing the obligation. While the agreement on swapping does not force all employees to participate in summer professional development or require every staff member to complete the same activities, school faculties and principals are encouraged to incorporate swap activities into their school improvement plans. Personal needs and professional growth plans can also provide topics for teachers when selecting activities for swap days. Generally, the agreement for next year is much less prescriptive than last year's approach to swap days.



### Article III, Section U states in part:

*Two (2) of the professional development days shall be designated for flexed professional development opportunities. Starting in the 2010-2011 school year, teachers and faculties will be able to select appropriate professional development opportunities for the two flexed days based on personal needs, professional growth plans, and the school improvement plan (SIP).*

## Submit retirement by Jan. 15!

Starting last year, the rate of compensation for unused sick leave at retirement increased for certain individuals. There are a few stipulations that **must be met** in order to receive the higher rates. (1) The increased amounts are only applicable to time earned in Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, subject to the first-in-first-out rule. (2) The employee **must** notify Human Resources of one's intent to retire by **January 15**. (3) The employee **must** work until the end of the school year. (4) The established reductions for years of service and age will apply.

**There are absolutely no exceptions to the January 15 deadline.**

The increased rates are:

- \$75 for the 51st through 100th days of accrued sick leave
- \$100 for all accrued sick leave above 100

If you miss the deadline, no excuse, justification, or rationale will work to reinstate the higher rates if you do not notify Human Resources of your intent to retire at the end of the year no later than January 15.

## MNEA elections conclude

Delegates to the November Representative Assembly elected members to fill interim vacancies on the MNEA Executive Board and the Administrative Retirement Committee of the Metropolitan Teacher Retirement Plan. Those individuals are:



### MNEA EXECUTIVE BOARD

District 1 Director (Hunters Lane Cluster)  
**Shelia Smith** (Bellshire Elementary)

District 2 Director (Hillwood Cluster)  
**Dianne Jarrell** (H.G. Hill Middle)

### ADMINISTRATIVE RETIREMENT COMMITTEE OF THE METROPOLITAN TEACHER RETIREMENT PLAN

Trustee  
**Barbra Vaughn** (Cockrill Elementary)

## Know *your* contract!

**Who grades student progress?** Every year, teachers in Metro are faced with challenges related to assigning grades to students. The Board of Education, central office administrators, and principals talk about setting high standards for students, yet at the same time some administrators announce to their faculties that, "You are not allowed to give any student a grade less than 50."



What about the principal who announces the lowest possible grade is 60% or 65%? Additionally, some teachers are faced with administrative requests to meet certain quotas for the numbers of Ds and Fs they assign. Are these high expectations for student learning?

Assigning grades is ultimately the responsibility of the teacher even though principals have the discretion to change a grade.

Article II, Section E "Grading Procedures" states in part:

*Teachers shall have the right and responsibility to determine grades and student promotions. An administrative change in a teacher's decision on grade or promotion shall not be made without prior consultation with the teacher. A teacher may request that the decision of the principal or the results of the consultation be reviewed by the appropriate assistant superintendent or designee.*

Generally, teachers would be on solid legal ground to assign the grade he or she believes best reflects the student's work in the class so long as the grade can be justified. If principals insist a grade should be higher, they may follow the procedure outlined above to change the grade. Thus, no teacher should have to change grades if they can justify the averages, scores, or ratings they have assigned. There is no requirement in the contract for principals to approve grade changes made by the teacher of record.

No administrator or other individual has the authority to change a teacher's grade "without prior consultation with the teacher." After all, changing a student's grade without following the proper protocols could be construed as fraud, which one could argue is conduct unbecoming a member of the teaching profession. Ideally, the district should take action against grade-changers who repeatedly fail to follow protocol.

## Get paid a day's pay for PD!

Article VII, Section F on page 32 says in part, "A certificated employee shall be compensated at his/her daily rate for pay for one (1) day of professional development in exchange for three (3) professional leave days. Such professional development shall be specified within the School Improvement Plan and approved by the employee's direct supervisor. Such professional development shall be completed outside the regularly scheduled workday. Payment shall be made in half-day (3 ¼ hours) or full-day (6 ½ hours) increment. (2009)

## UPCOMING EVENTS



### December

- 13 Professional Council—Date Change**  
4:00 p.m. at Central Office

### January

- 6 MNEA Executive Board Meeting**  
4:30 p.m. at MNEA Headquarters
- 13 MNEA Representative Assembly**  
4:30 p.m. at MNEA Headquarters
- 30 I Can Do It! Workshop**  
(classroom management)  
8:00 a.m. at MNEA Headquarters
- 24 Professional Council**  
4:00 p.m. at MNEA

### February

- 3 MNEA Executive Board Meeting**  
4:30 p.m. at MNEA Headquarters
- 15 Retirement Workshop**  
4:30 p.m. at MNEA Headquarters
- 17 MNEA Representative Assembly—Date Change**  
4:30 p.m. at MNEA Headquarters
- 21 Professional Council**  
4:00 p.m. at Central Office

### March

- 3 MNEA Executive Board Meeting**  
4:30 p.m. at MNEA Headquarters
- 10 MNEA Representative Assembly**  
4:30 p.m. at MNEA Headquarters
- 21 Professional Council**  
4:00 p.m. at MNEA

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## Think *before* you speak

### Then think again...

Have you ever spoken and wished that you could immediately take the words back? Unfortunately, we do not have the luxury of taking words back after spoken. In this age of technology if we enter words on the computer there is that fraction of a second to hit the delete button before sending. We can always save as a draft and rethink our words. We can always decide to never hit the send button. But periodically we find ourselves preparing a response in the heat of the moment or when we are distraught and we hit that send button. The truth is no matter how fast you think you are or hard you try you cannot unsend once it is gone.



This is especially true when we speak. Stop and count to 10, remember that? (or count to 100 if you need more time) This is a great practice. The counting allows you to concentrate on something else, it helps to focus on the real issue and if nothing else it allows your heart beat to slow down so you can stop and think. We understand that these are stressful times for educators but do your best not to let the stress create a situation for you that causes someone to question your professionalism. Teachers and administrators in Metro Nashville are some of the most professional educators around. Relax – Count to 10 – Take a deep breath – and teach!

Reasons why you should think before you speak.

- 1) So that you can maintain your professionalism.
- 2) It allows time for you to gather your thoughts.
- 3) Because it is next to impossible to retract words spoken in frustration.
- 4) Your words may become a part of a written record, and they do not reflect who you really are.
- 5) This protects you from having your words cause a negative response.
- 6) Because you do not want the discussion to be redirected from the real issue.
- 7) It supports your desire to have a productive conversation.
- 8) It allows you to consider what you want to say how you want to present yourself.
- 9) Sometimes it allows time to hear what was not said.

“I know that you believe you understand what you think I said, but I'm not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant.”

## Members receive discounts

During the month of December each year, MNEA members should receive their TEA membership card (“ACCESS Card”) via U.S. Mail. The ACCESS card is actually a discount program that provides special offers on everything from hamburgers to cruises. This year's card will be more environmentally friendly, so be on the look out for a post-card with a tear-out membership card.



Members report that they have saved in excess of their annual dues by using the ACCESS card in Nashville, across the state, and throughout the nation. In order to take advantage of the discounts, members must first activate their cards. To activate your card, go to [www.mnea.com](http://www.mnea.com) and select the ACCESS Card link in the sidebar or at the bottom of the page.

## Awards deadlines set for spring

The Board of Directors of the Tennessee Education Association has set **February 15** as awards deadline for most TEA annual recognitions this year. Awards include:

**Cavit C. Cheshier Association Achievement Award**, which is named after the long-time, former TEA Executive Secretary, recognizes local Associations for developing and implementing exemplary, innovative programs to increase or maintain membership, enhance the professional development of members, and provide opportunities for teacher involvement in political and community action programs.

**Distinguished Educator Awards Program** goes to teachers, education support professionals, administrators, and higher education faculty who inspire students, parents and colleagues and promote public education in their communities.

**E. Harper Johnson Human Relations Awards**, which is named for the former Assistant Executive Secretary of TEA who was instrumental in the creation of TEA's Human Relations Committee, goes to an individual and a local association for outstanding achievements in the area of human relations.

**TEA's Friend of Education Award** is presented to an outstanding individual and an organization in recognition of significant contributions to the improvement of public education on a local or state level.

**TEA's School Bell Awards** honor media representatives for their coverage of education news and issues as well as the tremendous role they play in shaping public opinion.

**The Susan B. Anthony Award** is presented by TEA's Status of Women in Education Committee to a person who has been active in the field of women's rights and/or has furthered the achievement of equal opportunity for women and girls.

## Let's hear from Erick

Think back to when Dr. Register came to MNPS. He looked at the PALS Program and decided it was ineffective for two reasons. First, there was the problem of scale, which MNEA argued about for years to no avail! Then, there was Register's concern that school-based coaches, mentors, and master teachers would better serve the needs of our teachers and students. Again, a theory that is hard to argue.



Skip forward to the end of negotiations in May 2009. As the MNEA agreed to remove the PALS language for the collective bargaining agreement, administration officials promised (1) academic coaches would continue to serve in the non-evaluative, support role formerly filled by PALS and (2) a centralized screening process would be implemented. To be sure, the vast majority of academic coaches know their role well and know the difference between being a colleague and supervisor.

The centralized screening process promised for summer 2009 was not actually implemented until the following spring because of confusion, lack of follow-through, or changes within Leadership and Learning. The result was that a few individuals, perhaps well meaning, selected individuals for the wrong reasons. Sometimes principals chose their instructional coaches because of personal friendship or loyalty; sometimes they chose individuals because of the cost associated with hiring more-experienced teachers to serve as coaches. Fortunately, Dr. Register recognized the problems and instituted the promised screening process and changed the method by which academic coaches are accounted for to remove the disincentive to hire experienced teachers as instructional coaches. Remember academic coaches are not assistant principals!

Here is the contract language on academic coaches from Article X, Section G:

*Academic coaches shall assist new and experienced teachers with instructional strategies.*

*Academic coaches must document their support for each teacher and shall not be used in an evaluative or administrative capacity. In order to build trust and facilitate improvement, the Board agrees not to use any documentation created by an academic coach or any testimony from a coach in evaluation or dismissal proceedings.*

1. Academic coaches include:

- a. Numeracy Coach
- b. Literacy Coach
- c. Technology Coach
- d. Academy Coach
- e. Consulting Teacher
- f. Other similar positions

2. Academic coaches will work with principals and assist classroom teachers with the following activities:

- a. Non-evaluative classroom observation and feedback including best practices
- b. Goal setting
- c. Parent communication skills
- d. Demonstration teaching
- e. Lesson planning
- f. Workshop, in-service program, and college/graduate/distance learning program selection to support individual teacher professional learning
- g. Classroom management techniques

## Save your check stubs!

MNEA advises members to keep all of their paycheck stubs ("payroll advice"). In order to have an official record of dues deductions, members are advised to retain **their December 21 check stub**. That stub will show the MNEA dues deductions for the preceding 12 months.

The total amount for the tax year represents partial dues payments for two separate membership years (the last part of 2009-2010 and the start of 2010-2011). Thus, the amount will not be equal to annual dues for either year. In most cases, the total dues deducted for the 2010 tax year should be **\$573.30**. Individual amounts may vary based upon several factors.

## The National Women's History Museum Bill losing ground

The National Women's History Museum Act, which appears to be stalling in Congress, would allow land adjacent to the National Mall in Washington, D.C. to be purchased as a new home for a comprehensive museum dedicated to preserving and celebrating women's roles in society. The proposal would merely authorize the National Women's History Museum (NWHM), a nonprofit and nonpartisan institution, to purchase land at 12th Street and Independence Avenue S.W. in Washington, D.C. at fair-market value. Since it is federal property, Congress must pass legislation authorizing the sale.



WOMEN'S HISTORY  
DESERVES A HOME IN  
WASHINGTON, DC

Members of Congress have the opportunity for bipartisan activity to recognize women's successes, build on their accomplishments and empower future generations by passing The National Women's History Museum Act. Once the legislation is enacted, the Museum will have to raise private funds to purchase the vacant lot at market value within three years. The National Women's History Museum Act is ready for Congress to act immediately. The bill is the exact vetted and cleared language previously introduced in earlier Congresses for the National Health Museum. Once the health museum chose to move to Atlanta, the legislation was re-introduced with only a name change to quickly facilitate Congress' action.

The NWHM currently has an award-winning, web-based Museum ([www.nwhm.org](http://www.nwhm.org)) as well as a permanent "preview" exhibit in its temporary offices. In addition, NWHM sponsors CyberExhibits, permanent and traveling exhibitions and classroom curricula that celebrate legendary female heroes as well as preserve the stories of women whose lives have too often been lost to history.



More details and up-to-date information at [www.mnea.com](http://www.mnea.com)