New law brings needed changes to teacher evaluation
Letter to members

Ask them!

That was the suggestion I made to the State Board of Education when MEA and AFT Michigan were invited to offer recommendations on how to make Michigan public schools the best in the nation. I told them the professionals employed in Michigan schools are the experts on what students need. Listen to what those experts have to say and encourage them to speak up. Good things will happen when you do.

In addition to the improvements in the M-STEP testing process suggested by our members, this Voice issue highlights more times when MEA members were heard by legislators and decision makers.

This fall, we launched a new statewide ad campaign called, “Ask Me.” It shares the common frustration felt by MEA members when policymakers, most of whom haven’t set foot in a classroom in years, make decisions that impact students and educators without asking for input from those who serve on the front lines. View the ad on YouTube at goo.gl/3jnjVa and hear our members share their ideas on what should be done to help students and strengthen public education.

After four years of legislative committee hearings, attempts to introduce legislation, input from our members, and the efforts of our lobbyists, there is a statewide teacher and administration evaluation system in place. It’s been worth the wait since this is a major improvement over the present haphazard evaluation process. In this issue, there’s an analysis of the new law and an FAQ to guide your members and administrators through the new law’s implementation.

It was the actions of ESP member Pam Marcusse from Grand Rapids that spoke louder than words when it comes to her union activities. She is a tireless advocate for her members and a frequent volunteer for the Kent-Ionia Central Labor Council AFL-CIO who honored her with the prestigious 2015 Willie Dale Jones Spirit of Solidarity Award. She humbly speaks of all of the time and energy she puts in helping others by saying, “It’s just the right thing to do.”

MEA-Retired serves as the voice on education issues at the Capitol and in the public when our active members are on the job. They complement our efforts to protect public education, students, our working conditions, and our future pensions and benefits. Whether you’re still on the job, or considering retirement, or already retired, they can use your help. Learn more about joining MEA-Retired at www.mea-retired.org.

This issue also reminds us of some important dates coming up next year—the 2016 Bargaining, Public Policy and Professional Development Conference in February and the MEA ESP Statewide Conference in March. Be sure to put them on your calendar.

Don’t miss our members in the “Ask Me” video. Story on page 20.
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Cover photo:
Jora Winn Brummette, an 8th grade science teacher at Chippewa Middle School in Okemos, helps one of her students with a lesson on force and motion. Jora will be affected by some of the provisions in the new evaluation law. Photo by Miriam Garcia.
This September, Pam Marcusse, a member of Grand Rapids Education Support Professionals (GRESPA), was honored with the 2015 Willie Dale Jones Spirit of Solidarity Award for exceptional volunteer service by a west Michigan union member. The Award is presented by the Kent-Ionia Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO and they couldn't have found a more deserving recipient.

Pam is an active volunteer in the Grand Rapids labor community and in the MEA ESP family. In Grand Rapids, Pam and her husband helped organize the monthly Feeding America Food truck where she is a regular volunteer. In the past two years, she has served at 18 food trucks because she says, “It’s the right thing to do.” This past Thanksgiving, she and her husband volunteered to stock more than 20 food baskets for needy families.

Pam is an active member of the local Kent-Ionia Labor Council Community Action Team and helped with planning the annual Labor Day West Michigan Labor Fest. From marketing the event to managing the many volunteers, she coordinated the day’s activities.

And she just found out about the Women’s Caucus and is now a member of that group also. The Caucus raises money for the local Women’s Resource Center to help women who are going through a divorce or having difficulty making ends meet.

Her activism doesn’t end there. Pam serves on MEA’s ESP Caucus Board and the ESP Public Relations Committee, chairs the Leon A. Brunner Award Committee and is a member of the ESP Statewide Conference Planning Committee.

Pam said, “I believe in the union and all it stands for. I am here to fight for the rights of workers.” She comes from a union family. Her father organized workers at a paper mill. Her husband is active in the UAW. But, Pam confesses that her grandfather was not union—that is until he started receiving the pension the union bargained for him and other members.

The Willie Dale Jones Spirit of Solidarity Award is presented in honor of a retired UAW member who was active in the Grand Rapids labor community, like Pam. In 1999, Jones was murdered by four young men who targeted him after they saw him take out his wallet to donate to a funeral fund set up at a local bowling alley.

“Just like Willie, I’m here to give back to people that don’t have as much as I do. I am honored that others believe that I am doing right by my union and my community,” Pam said. “It’s also an honor to be given an award named for Willie Jones because I believe so much in what he stood for.”

Pam Marcusse