

# Important Dates

**Friday, January 25:**

Professional Day/Clerical Day (No Classes 7-12)

**Monday, February 4:**

SHTA Executive Board  
Woodbury, 4:30PM

**Monday, February 11:**

SHTA Representatives Meeting  
SHHS, 4:15PM

**Tuesday, February 12:**

Board of Education Meeting

Administration Building, 6 p.m.

**Monday, February 18:**

President's Day (Schools Closed)

**Thursday, February 21**

Professional Day/Clerical Day (No Classes K-6)

**Friday, February 22:**

Conference Day (K-12, No Classes)

# SHTA news

## January 22, 2013

**ISSUE NO. 4**

## Message From the President

It's hard to believe that 2013 is upon us, but here we are beginning another year as teachers and members of the Shaker Heights Teachers' Association. It has been a busy two months since we last convened in Representative Council and many significant events have taken place. On November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2012 I attended the PTO Council meeting with Vice-President Dollye Finney to hear Annette Sutherland and Dr. Mark Freeman discuss transition plans for a new Superintendent. On December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012, Officers of the SHTA met with officers from OAPSE and Local 200 to discuss our perspectives on the transition to new central office leadership. On December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2012, I completed my "Meet and Greet" visits in the district by making stops at Onaway, Fernway and Mercer. I also attended a meeting with SHTA Officers, OAPSE and Local 200 at Central Administration to discuss transition plans with Dr. Marvin Edwards from the firm hired to find a new superintendent, Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates. Sadly, December 14<sup>th</sup> was also the tragic date of the Sandy Hook Elementary shootings in Newtown, Connecticut. Dollye Finney will discuss our response as an Association in her report.

As you can tell, many of the meetings I have attended dealt with the upcoming transition to a new Superintendent as Dr. Freeman retires this coming July 1<sup>st</sup>. I have confirmed my membership on the Stakeholders Advisory Committee that will meet throughout March to interview the final candidates for the Superintendent's position. Obviously, we are all heavily invested in the process of selecting a new administrative leader in our district. Dr. Freeman has been a champion for our schools and our profession during his tenure and we are advocating for a similar leader as his tenure comes to a close. I applaud the 89 members who completed surveys and the 112 who attended talk back sessions during the Superintendent Search sessions. I anticipate our full involvement as the process continues.

As an Association, we must also prepare ourselves for change. We have met throughout the winter and we will continue meeting to refine our Association goals to best position ourselves as a force for positive change in the district as we prepare for new leadership. We will continue our positive communications with the other collective bargaining units in the district. We will prepare for the end of our present contract in December of 2013. We will diligently strengthen our financial position as an Association through sound investments and informed budgetary decisions. Finally, we will propose ways in which our financial position may be made even more sound. We have faith that we will continue to have a School Board and Superintendent that support our students and our professionalism, but we also have to be prepared if unanticipated changes challenge the positive progress we have made and continue to make.

I am excited to begin another year as President of the SHTA. Visiting the schools throughout the district, especially on a tragic day like December 14<sup>th</sup>, reminded me what caring, dedicated, insightful and passionate teachers we have. I can't imagine another district where I would want to teach. I promise to continue my diligence in representing our members, our students and our district in the decisions I help make through this position. Please continue to let me know your concerns and your needs by contacting me at [morris\\_j@shaker.org](mailto:morris_j@shaker.org) or at extension 6033.

*Respectfully submitted,*  
**John Morris**

# Reports from the Executive Board

## VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Happy New Year!

I hope that you are off to a positive and productive start to a new year. I also hope that your building representatives have approached you to consider your contribution to the Silent Auction for the *Night for the Red and White*. These contributions should be submitted before January 20, 2013 and the contribution forms can be found on the Shaker Heights City Schools Web site on the [Shaker Schools Foundation](#) Link. The committee continues to support teacher attendance by offering a discounted ticket price of ninety dollars. I hope that you will contribute to the auction as well as plan to attend this event. *The Night for the Red and White* continues to provide substantial gifts to The Shaker Heights City Schools and the party is a blast. Thank you again for your generous support and contributions. This year for the first time the celebration will be held at the Tudor Arms Hotel at 10660 Carnegie Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio. The historic Tudor Arms building offers stylish and sophisticated accommodation. The event is on Saturday March 9, 2013 beginning at seven o'clock PM. The hotel is offering a discounted rate for attendees. Please see your Building Representatives to purchase a chance to win tickets to *The Night for the Red and White* and over night hotel accommodations. The Association is offering Apple TV as a silent auction item.

On a more somber note, in response to the tragic event at Sandy Hook Elementary School in December – the Association is sending acrylic reusable water tumblers to each teacher. The cups read, “from our hearts to yours”. The officers are in the midst of composing a letter to the effected teachers in support of their heroic efforts and their professional and personal commitment to their students.

I continue to represent the Association at bi-monthly PTO Council meetings. The Council has posted the [Educators Grant Form](#) on the school webpage and all teachers are encouraged to consider requesting these monies to promote learning projects that include and impact large numbers of students. Thank you teachers as your contributions continue to make a difference in the PTO Annual drive. Please consider making a contribution if you have not already done so.

The officers of the SHTA recently participated in an interview with the superintendent search committee. It was a meeting that included representation from all of the collective bargaining units within the Shaker Heights City Schools. Information regarding the search can be found on the [Shaker Heights City Schools' homepage](#). We are grateful to be active participants in the search process and we are thrilled that our President, Dr. John Morris, will be a member of the final candidate selection process. We have long enjoyed open positive dialog with our administrators and community. The central administration has recently shared with us their appreciation for the active leadership in the realignment with incentives and directives from the Ohio State Department of Education. Kudos to SHTA!!

We hope to ensure that our voices continue to be strong and sought after. It is not lost on us that we are losing a powerful academic advocate for the Shaker Heights City Schools, teachers and students with the upcoming retirement of Dr. Mark Freeman. In this event we must remain well informed about school policy and legislation. This information impacts us at a local, state and national levels. Many of our teachers are and have participated in the new teacher evaluation process which will effect all teachers in the fall.

In order to maintain strength and integrity we must continue to operate at the highest standards of professionalism and remain a finical powerhouse! Our voices, actions and monies speak volumes to all stakeholders in the collective bargaining arena. Please pay close attention to our finical statements and consider your part in the assuring our solid fiscal status.

*Respectfully submitted,  
Dollye Finney*

## SHTA MEMBERS REPRESENTING

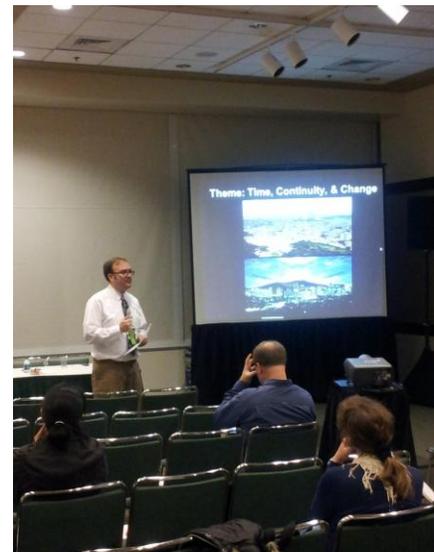
The middle school's West Team presented their cross curricular unit on the Silk Road to conference goers in Las Vegas at the *National Council for the Teaching of English* annual convention in November. Instructional activities focused on learning centers that offered a myriad of topics for students to explore. Maureen Carroll (social studies), John Koppitch (English), Jessica O'Brien (social studies), Paul Repasy (science), and Jennifer Weisbarth (math) collaborated with Sue Corbin (English/reading) for the project that was centered on the book of Silk Road folk tales titled *Stories from the Silk Road* by Cherry Gilchrist.



High School Science teacher, Nathanael Hsu, was named one of [\*Cleveland Magazine's Most Interesting People of 2013!\*](#)



High School Social Studies teacher Andrew Glasier presented at the *National Council of the Social Studies* annual conference in November 2012. His presentation with three other teachers from Iowa, Virginia and Hathaway Brown, focused on the teachers' experiences being a Korea Society Fellowship recipients, travelling to Korea in 2011 and how that has impacted their classroom teaching.



## TREASURER'S REPORT

I met with our accountants at Edward C. Hawkins & Co., Ltd. over winter break to square away our financial records from the 2011-12 fiscal year. They will be producing a compilation of our financial records and filing last year's tax forms.

We are approaching SHTA elections this Spring, a new superintendent beginning this summer, and a new round of negotiations next Fall. Each of these events on the horizon is reason to ponder our Association's financial security. A major point of concern, for me the treasurer, is the fact that we have not contributed to our General Fund in years. We haven't had money beyond our regular operating budget to do so. Please look over the current financial report and, if you didn't get a chance to, read my Newsletter report from the November SHTA Newsletter on [shtaweb.org](http://shtaweb.org).

*Respectfully submitted,  
Bill Scanlon*

### FINANCIAL REPORT

7/1/12

1/16/13

#### COMPOSITE BALANCE

Balance 7/1/12	869,229.39
Receipts 7/1/12 to present	57,091.85
Change in Valuation 7/1/12 to present	<u>54,640.42</u>
	980,961.66
Expenditures 7/1/12 to present	-29,957.07
Expenditures charged to last fiscal year 2011-2012	<u>-1,196.78</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>949,807.81</b>

#### BANK AND BROKER RECONCILIATIONS

##### A. KEY BANK (1/16/13)

Certificates of deposit

29 mo. @ 0.149%-Matures on 2/6/14	<u>21,222.30</u>
Total Certificates of deposit	21,222.30

Business Money Market Account (0.35% APY) 70,693.51

Unposted deposits and transfers 0.00

91,915.81

Less outstanding checks -1,413.33

**TOTAL KEY BANK** **90,502.48**

##### B. EDWARD JONES (1/7/13)

Regular Association Account 456,812.94

Advisory Solutions Account 402,492.39

859,305.33

**TOTAL** **949,807.81**

## Budgeted Accounts

	7/1/12					1/16/13
<u>Account</u>	<u>Budgeted</u>	<u>Debits</u>	<u>Transfers out</u>	<u>Credits</u>	<u>Transfers in</u>	<u>Balance</u>
Accounting	<b>5000.00</b>	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	5,000.00
Compensation for officers, representatives, et al.						
President	<b>9302.00</b>	4,651.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	4,651.00
Vice President	<b>5581.00</b>	2,790.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	2,790.50
Secretary	<b>5581.00</b>	2,790.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	2,790.50
Treasurer	<b>5581.00</b>	2,790.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	2,790.50
P.R. & R. Chairperson	<b>5581.00</b>	2,790.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	2,790.50
Editor	<b>4653.00</b>	2,326.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	2,326.50
Building reps. and alternates	<b>10000.00</b>	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	10,000.00
Conferences and meetings	<b>2500.00</b>	1,971.32	0.00	0.00	0.00	528.68
Fellowships and Grants	<b>3500.00</b>	465.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3,035.00
Insurance	<b>5000.00</b>	4,375.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	625.00
Legal	<b>5000.00</b>	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	5,000.00
Negotiations	<b>0.00</b>	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Executive Board expenses	<b>500.00</b>	524.10	0.00	0.00	0.00	-24.10
Officers' expenses	<b>500.00</b>	608.57	0.00	0.00	0.00	-108.57
Payroll taxes	<b>550.00</b>	263.06	0.00	0.00	0.00	286.94
Publications	<b>200.00</b>	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	200.00
Public Relations	<b>4000.00</b>	1,070.99	0.00	0.00	0.00	2,929.01
Social	<b>1800.00</b>	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1,800.00
STRS(TPO contributions)	<b><u>5100.00</u></b>	<u>2,539.53</u>	<u>0.00</u>	<u>0.00</u>	<u>0.00</u>	<u>2,560.47</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>79929.00</b>	29,957.07	0.00	0.00	0.00	49,971.93



## Shaker Middle School

**MOVEMBER participants:**  
Jeff Pattie, Caulton (Pete)  
Staunton, Dave Strauch,  
Mike Sears, Tracey  
Warren, Ron Saddler,  
Mark Nagal, and David  
Watson.

### PROFESSIONAL RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Several members contacted me with questions about the spousal coverage audit, open enrollment, life insurance, and the Flex spending plan during November and December. I also assisted members with questions about maternity leave and domestic partners. School district treasurer Bryan Christman and I met on December 19 to discuss insurance matters.

The spousal coverage audit was the first one since the contract changed five years ago, and there were a few concerns about it. One problem was that employers of spouses sometimes did not return the paperwork in a timely manner or they did not complete the paperwork accurately. This led to some members receiving letters stating that their spouse would be losing insurance coverage. Benefits specialist Sue Garber worked with the auditing company and with the members to take care of each situation before anyone lost their coverage.

The audit did uncover a problem for some members in the area of prescription drug coverage. Anyone whose spouse has Express Scripts as secondary coverage for prescription drugs must make sure their spouses show the pharmacy their insurance card with their primary coverage company from their employer. This company must pay for the prescription first. Later, a claim can be filed with Express Scripts to receive an additional benefit. For example, if a spouse pays \$35 for a brand name drug on their plan, they can submit a claim to Express Scripts and receive \$10 so their total payment equals our cost for employees (\$25). If spouses who are not employed by the school district use Express Scripts as their primary coverage at the point of sale or pharmacy, members will receive bills from Sue Garber to cover the additional costs or losses from our self-insurance fund. The problem described above does not occur with major medical insurance because Anthem will collect any lost money directly from the insurance company that is under contract with the spouse's employer.

An interesting contractual question regarding domestic partner benefits was brought to my attention and was discussed with John Morris, Bryan Christman, Sue Garber, and Superintendent Mark Freeman. During our last contract negotiations, we all agreed to add domestic partner language to the section of the contract about sick days. A member may use a sick day to care for their domestic partner. However, there is no contract language about insurance benefits for domestic partners who do not work outside the home like there is for spouses. Gay marriage is not legally recognized in Ohio. Anthem can provide domestic partner insurance benefits, but they are not in our current plan. The administration is considering granting domestic partner benefits and is currently researching the issue. It is possible that this potential benefit will have to be added to our current plan during the next contract negotiations. Personally, I feel strongly that this is a human rights issue where both the SHTA and the administration have an opportunity to demonstrate publicly that they support, honor, and respect all the teachers working in the district.

The new teacher evaluation system that is scheduled to go into effect next school year is a huge

concern for all of us. Even as I'm working on a committee to write a pre-test and post-test for 7<sup>th</sup> grade social studies, I'm still in shock that the results from those tests must be 50 % of my evaluation next year. I've spoken with John Morris and Eileen Sweeney about lobbying actions the PAC of SHTA may be able to help organize to protest the approach being taken by the state. I'm hopeful we may get somebody in the legislature to listen to us. I think a fair compromise would be to give school districts another year to hammer out the details of the pre-test and post-test situations and to only require two observations of every teacher on a three year cycle. Otherwise, we are looking at an amount of clerical work that will not be completed unless additional administrators are hired to work for months at a time. I don't believe this is the best use of our limited tax dollars.

Carefully read Bryan Christman's e-mail from January 14 about the changes on the January 16 paychecks, if you have not already done so. Also, study your check and make sure everything looks right. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns. Please look at the special feature called "FAQs about FMLA".

*Respectfully submitted,  
Mike Sears, chairperson*

## **PAST PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

In December and January, I continued to represent the Association at evening meetings of the Board of Education. The January meeting featured a presentation by Dr. Marvin Edwards of Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates on the leadership profile for the superintendent's position. Many of you contributed to the development of this profile and we will continue to monitor the progress in the search for a new superintendent.

The changes that were made to the health care coverage (deductibles and co-pays) and premium share (12%) have resulted in a savings for the district of \$800,000.00. Achieving that savings was accomplished by each one of you making a sacrifice. It would be wonderful if this savings resulted in a direct benefit to the membership; however, the county tax reappraisal has resulted in a decrease in property tax revenues of \$1.4 million,

half of which (\$700,000.00) will impact Fiscal Year 2013. So, savings in one area have been balanced by reduced funds in another area. It is an ongoing problem as we deal with the complexity of the present economy. The good news—yes, there is good news with this—is that the decisions that you made in the last contract are contributing to some level of stability in the district's finances. We have not experienced the severe cutbacks and divisiveness that have occurred in many districts. By making these difficult choices, you have preserved programs and jobs.

I encourage you to read the Treasurer's Report in the November issue of the Newsletter. It is on the [shtaweb.org](http://shtaweb.org) website. Bill Scanlon provides insight into the purpose of the general fund and the need to not just preserve but grow this fund.

I hope your winter break was restful and that 2013 is off to a great start for you.

*Respectfully submitted,  
Rebecca Thomas, Chairperson*

## **SOCIAL COMMITTEE**

Happy New Year!!! I hope everyone enjoyed their Winter Holiday Vacation. On Friday, March 15<sup>th</sup>, SHTA will be planning a Spring Break Social Gathering. We will dance, sing, eat, toast and enjoy our fellow colleagues at Pizzazz in University Heights. Please be on the look- out for more information.

*Respectfully submitted,  
Darlene Garrison, Chairperson*

*It was the labor movement that helped secure so much of what we take for granted today. The 40-hour work week, the minimum wage, family leave, health insurance, Social Security, Medicare, retirement plans. The cornerstones of the middle-class security all bear the union label.*

President Barack Obama

## LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

As you all know, HB 153 overhauled the way in which teachers will be evaluated beginning with the 2013-2014 school year. Teachers and administrators on the Evaluation Committee have been working to pilot the new system, as well as develop a plan to implement it. This spring, all buildings will have meetings to familiarize you with the new evaluation tools and expectations, as well as to set professional goals based on the Ohio Educator Standards.

In December 2012, HB 555 was signed into law. This bill made several changes to the Ohio Revised Code. Schools will now be assigned a letter grade for academic performance. This bill also revised the Student Growth Data requirements for evaluation, stating that the “entire student growth factor of the evaluation shall be based on the value-added progress dimension.” The student growth data portion of our evaluations continues to be unclear. A sub-committee of the Evaluation Committee is examining these requirements, although teachers are under-represented.

With the adoption of the Core Curriculum State Standards, assessments will also be changing. The PARCC assessments are being developed and will be replacing the OAA and, apparently, the OGT. These assessments will be computer based and are projected to be ready for states to use during the 2014-2015 school year, according to the ODE.

Peer evaluation and a long-term mentor programs are still being explored by committee members. While administration has opted not to work with peer evaluators for the 2013-2014 school year, it may be an option in future years. A long-term mentor program would support new teachers beyond their first year, as well as be a resource for struggling teachers.

Questions, as well as interest in participation in any of the committee work, should be directed to any committee member. Member lists, resources, and links to evaluation information are available at the Special Committees Link on the [shaker.org](http://shaker.org) website.

*Respectfully submitted,*  
*Lena Paskewitz, Chairperson*

## POLICY

We all owe Becky Thomas a “Thank You” for retyping our entire Constitution and By-Laws (wow). This is a much-needed fix because the formatting of the old version was very awkward on the screen. To be clear: on paper the new version will look the same as the

old version, but now a member will find it easy to “cut” from the Constitution and “paste” into whatever document they would like.

*Respectfully submitted,*  
*David Klapholtz, Chairperson*

### FAQs About FMLA

**1) What is FMLA?**

FMLA stands for the Family Medical Leave Act. Congress passed it in 1993 to help people who were either sick or serving as caregivers to take time off work without losing their job.

**2) When do I need to fill out FMLA paperwork?**

Whenever you miss 10 consecutive days of work because of illness or caring for a family member

**3) How much time off can I take because of FMLA?**

12 weeks per year or 60 work days

**4) Do I get paid when I use FMLA?**

When you use sick days, you still get paid. You have to have your doctor complete the paperwork and explain why you are missing so many days of work.

**5) Where does maternity leave fit in with all this?**

In general, a new mom may use up to 6 weeks of sick days for maternity leave (up to 8 weeks if there is a c-section). Additional leave beyond that time is determined on a case-by-case basis.

**6) Do I lose my insurance benefits when I'm on FMLA?**

No, but if you go on an unpaid caregiver leave for more than 12 weeks, you will need to COBRA your insurance.

**7) How does this get into AESOP?**

You enter it for days 1-5 and your building secretary enters it after that.

# MINUTES FOR THE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL MEETING

January 14, 2013

## Mercer Elementary School

President John Morris called the meeting to order at 4:29 p.m.

Lindsay Florence, principal of Mercer, welcomed the SHTA representative council.

The minutes of the November meeting were unanimously approved.

**ADMINISTRATION REPORT:** Lisa Howell stated she will be working on spring evaluations.

**PTO REPORT:** Dollye Finney reported on behalf of the PTO Council. Teacher Grant applications will be available online soon. She reminded teachers to submit receipts for last year's grants.

### OFFICERS' REPORTS:

**PRESIDENT:** John Morris stated he attended a meeting with the heads of the other district bargaining units on December 10<sup>th</sup> and discussed the state of the district and the upcoming changes facing the district. He hosted meetings at Onaway, Fernway, and Mercer to talk with members in each building. He attended a meeting held by the search committee firm for the new superintendent with other Shaker bargaining unit officers. He stated he will be on the Stakeholders Committee that will meet with the final three candidates for superintendent.

**VICE-PRESIDENT:** Dollye Finney reported that the SHTA's donation to the silent auction for *The Night for the Red and White* would be an Apple TV. She requested teachers consider making a donation to the *Red and White* silent auction. She discussed the gift of a beverage tumbler from the Association to the teachers of Sandy Hook Elementary.

**SECRETARY:** Matt Zucca discussed the SHTA's Annual *Red & White* Drawing to be held on February 11. Tickets are to be sold only to SHTA members. Money and all sold and unsold tickets should be returned to him on Thursday, February 7. He stated that this year's prizes in the SHTA's *Red and White* drawing are three sets of two tickets to the event. The first place prize will also consist of an overnight stay at the Tudor Arms Hotel.

**TREASURER:** Bill Scanlon discussed our current financial report. He discussed the need to increase membership dues to keep up with the day-to-day operations of the Association and to grow the Association's General Fund.

### EXECUTIVE BOARD REPORTS

**PAST PRESIDENT:** Becky Thomas stated she attended the December and January Board of Ed. Meetings. She reported that Dr. Freeman credited the teachers and their insurance benefit negotiations for saving the district about \$800,000. She encouraged members to re-read Treasurer Bill Scanlon's November report regarding Association Dues. She also worked on website maintenance.

**POLICY:** Dave Klapholz thanked Becky Thomas for re-typing the Association's Constitution and By-Laws.

**TEACHER EDUCATION:** Steven Smith worked with Ms. Finney and Dr. Morris on resolving an evaluation issue.

**PUBLIC RELATIONS:** Eileen Sweeney stated the SHTA placed an ad in the *Shaker Life Magazine* congratulating Shaker's National Merit Scholars.

**PUBLICATIONS:** Andrew Glaiser said that newsletter submissions are due on Wednesday. Please send them to him at [glasier\\_a@shaker.org](mailto:glasier_a@shaker.org).

**LEGAL AID:** Wendy Lewis had no report.

**LEGISLATIVE:** Lena Paskewitz reported that building principal's plan on conducting the new teacher evaluation process required for next school year.

**SOCIAL:** Darlene Garrison stated she is working on the spring social gathering at Pizzazz restaurant on March 15th.

**MEMBERSHIP AND ELECTIONS:** Stacy Elgart stated we currently have 400 members.

**PROFESSIONAL RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES:** Mike Sears reported working on insurance spousal verification. He met with Bryan Christman in December and discussed FMLA documentation requirements and other insurance issues. He stated that members need to make sure they are using the prescription drug plan correctly with regards to when the members' insurance plan is the primary or secondary insurance.

## **BUILDING REPORTS**

The following reps asked questions, expressed concerns, or made statements on behalf of the membership in their buildings:

**Boulevard** reported that a room heating issue has been resolved with the help of the Building Administrator.

**Onaway** also reported a room heating concern.

**The High School** reported that a grievance discussed in the November minutes will not be filed. Safety concerns regarding classroom locks were discussed. They questioned why exterior doors that were replaced had been locked and unable to be used. They reported that working with Marla Robinson, Assistant Superintendent, led to a quick and effective response and was very positive.

**OLD BUSINESS:** None.

**NEW BUSINESS:** A discussion about an Association dues increase.

**FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER:** The Association received thank you cards from Chante Thomas-Taylor and Darlene Garrison. John Morris thanked Lisa Hardiman for hosting the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:54 p.m.

**THE NEXT MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR MONDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2013.**

*Respectfully submitted,*  
*Matt Zucca, Secretary*

## AGE OF ACCOUNTABILITY\*

*This newsletter is a publication of the Shaker Heights Teachers' Association, an independent organization of professional educators in the Shaker Heights City School District. Signed editorials represent the opinion of the author(s) and may or may not reflect the thinking of other officers or members of the Shaker Heights Teachers' Association. Members and friends of the Association are invited and encouraged to express their opinions or share information via this newsletter.*

The last several years when describing education reforms the term “accountability” often comes to the forefront. The question educators need to ask is to whom should we be accountable? The easy answer is of course our students. That is why we got into the profession, to educate students. We may have gotten to this in many different fashions for reasons both selfish and altruistic. Yet we all made a commitment to helping young people grow. Unfortunately, the current list of reforms holds educators accountable to students in bizarre and cumbersome fashions. Are state created standardized tests designed to hold us accountable to student growth or to help real estate agents sell houses using school district “report cards?”

So are we being held accountable to parents of the students we teach? Recent legislation has called for parents of modest means to be able to choose which school they consider best for their child to attend, taking state funding with them. Built into No Child Left Behind (NCLB) are provisions to track Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) based on test scores of sub-groups within the schools and the overall school progress on test scores. These scores and information are sent to parents in a document that is neither explained nor discussed, giving parents a minor indicator of a school's potential at best, thus skewing choices and decisions.

Or are we being held accountable to building administrators? Not a single administrator has spoken to me about my students' test scores. They have discussed where, in general, we need to improve. On the few occasions I have asked about test specifics, I have had to go to support staff for the data. Administrators are very concerned that we all follow the same curriculum, give the same tests, and spend hours upon hours drafting curriculum maps that connect to the State of Ohio Standards, but have provided minimal guidance on goal setting through Professional Learning Communities or other teacher collaborative growth models.

None of the accountability models in place today, across the United States, work. They have

failed here in Ohio, most notably by punishing schools and districts that serve economically disadvantaged students. These tests are clearly correlated with socioeconomic status, yet they have been the major form of accountability that the state has used. Other fiascos include the Washington D.C. or Atlanta, GA school districts recent cheating scandals; or in Tennessee, which uses a Value-Added Assessment System, yet showed no improvement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress and, in fact, dropped in national rankings as other states improved. The repeal of teachers' collective bargaining rights in Tennessee exacerbates the problem of teacher morale and retention.

I propose a new model of accountability. A model brings all the stakeholders together to work with students individually, meeting their individual needs and targeted areas of growth, holding ALL stakeholders accountable. Parents need to be accountable for proper nutrition, checking assignments, getting the child to school on time and prepared, setting proper sleep schedule and communicating with the school. Administrators need to be accountable to helping teachers in every possible fashion to reach each child and limiting meaningless tasks that distracts from the process of teaching and learning. Administrators also need to allow for creative ideas to flourish, give teachers quality and frequent feedback about their teaching, build a professional community, schedule time for teacher collaboration, hire and retain top candidates and lead through example.

Students need to understand their responsibility also. They must be held accountable for their performance and behavior in the school community. I was dismayed to walk into the high school cafeteria and senior lounge and find trash littered throughout tables and floors after a lunch period. We as adults do not hold the students' responsible for their own clean up at lunch and therefore have failed them in multiple ways. At a local elementary school, students as young as five are responsible for cleaning their lunch, separating their trash and recyclables, and then cleaning the table with a vinegar and water mixture. This simple solution creates a larger sense of responsibility in the school itself.

Of course, we as teachers need to be held accountable as well. This needs to be a holistic accountability as our teaching goes way beyond the A, B, C's or 1, 2, 3's. Our performance needs not be measured by silly state-mandated tests, but through a more comprehensive process that addresses the students and communities needs. The more we allow for simple solutions to complicated problems the more we are destined to create even more dense issues.

**AG**

\*Thanks to the band Giant Squid for inspiration.