

Important Dates

Monday, March 25

Special Election concerning Dues Increase, All Buildings

Thursday, March 28

Spring Break Begins

Monday, April 8

Classes Resume
SHTA Executive Board meeting,
Woodbury @ 4:30PM

Tuesday, April 9

Board of Education meeting,
Administration Bldg @ 6PM

Monday, April 15

SHTA Representative Council
Meeting, Lomond @ 4:30PM

SHTA news

March 18, 2013

ISSUE NO. 6

Message From the President

One of the most difficult challenges I have had to face as president thus far is advocating for a dues increase. I know how difficult it is to increase your economic output when your input has slowed. However, I am proud to say that our representative council genuinely reflected compromise in their proposal of a \$100 increase. In the spirit of transparency, the two strongest views at our meeting were that we go for a \$150 or a \$50 increase. Truly, the representatives looked to their building members to find out what they desired. To me, the \$100 increase represents the mathematical and ideological middle ground for this increase. We will still be over a decade away from making the contribution to the general fund that we want, but we are taking a step in the right direction. And when you think that our *tax-deductible dues* are still far less than half the amount paid by national associations, including the two other bargaining units in our district, the amount doesn't seem quite so daunting.

The beauty of our Association is that you have a voice. You can talk directly to a representative in your building. You can call an officer for any reason and we respond because we desire communication and input. We truly represent you. That attitude extends to this dues increase. On March 25th we will hold a special election on this dues increase. I hope that as an Association we can unite and pass this increase, strengthening our general fund and sending a message to our incoming leadership. It's an opportunity that we haven't had for 16 years. However, I encourage you to vote your conscience. That is what being a member of an Association is about.

It has been a tremendously busy February and March. I sent and received correspondence concerning our proposed dues increase. I helped address special education concerns at the High School with Joel Rathbone. I attended the high school building meeting led by Joel and James Schmidt. I met with Lena Paskewtiz, Addie Tobey and Andrew Glasier several times concerning Peer Evaluation. I discussed officer and executive board transitions with Dollye Finney. I also had regular conversations with Mark Freeman, Bernice Stokes and Marla Robinson concerning Peer Evaluation as well as proposed schedule changes at the Middle School and Woodbury. I corresponded with several concerned members at Onaway about the disproportionate amount of time elementary teachers have to spend on Progress Book for report cards and I am presently working with Dr. Stokes on solutions. I attended the *Night for the Red and White*, talked to Bob Bognar about building concerns at Woodbury, and I have been deeply involved in the shareholders advisory group that interviews the three superintendent candidates. I have also had the pleasure of seeing many of you at the high school upper cafeteria for the public presentations and Q&A with each candidate. It's been a busy month. Please contact me directly if you have any questions or concerns about these issues or any other. You have my best wishes for a restful Spring Break.

Respectfully submitted,
John Morris

Reports from the Executive Board

VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Happy March Madness! I hope that you are looking forward to a well-deserved Spring Break.

The *Night for the Red and White* was held on Saturday March 9, 2013 at Tudor Arms. Thank you so much for your Silent Auction contributions and your attendance at the Night for The Red and White. There were approximately 750 tickets sold and that is in no small part thanks to each of you! I will share more information about the evening as it becomes available.

I would like to encourage all fellowship recipients to submit receipts for reimbursement as many winners fail to claim their awards each year. If you have questions regarding this process please feel free to contact me at #4916.

The profession of teaching is under intense pressure - and it appears to be en vogue to bash teachers. These teacher critics often hide their disdain for our profession under the guise of "accountability". After all, they state, private sector workers are held to high accountability standards. Why should teachers be different?

We agree that high standards are a needed benchmark to establish effective educational programming. However, unlike our private sector colleagues we are unwilling to reject any materials- because our "materials" are our students. As a matter of fact, we embrace the different and divergent materials we are sent. We learn and grow as the result of our interactions with these different non-conforming materials and these irregular materials turn out to be amazing vivacious human beings. We are in the business of education; the education of humans beings... all human beings. Each of you has chosen to teach and it is a noble profession. Thank you. A well-deserved thank you, I might add.

The Shaker Heights Teachers' Association is at an important crossroads. We stand to protect your professional dignity. We are faced with the implementation of the State of Ohio's Teacher Evaluation Process. This process is constantly unfolding and will no doubt continue to involve SHTA personnel and possibly our finances. We need to continue to show our strong negotiations stance by maintaining a powerful financial presence. The Association is asking you for increased dues. I encourage you to support this request.

We also support our The Strongsville Teachers in the efforts to secure a professional and dignified contract.

Have a restful and well-deserved spring break!

*Respectfully submitted,
Dollye Finney*



**SHTA Executive Board
Members dressed in Black
in Support for Striking
Strongsville Education
Association teachers.**

**SPECIAL
ELECTION:
Monday, March 25
To vote on increasing SHTA
dues to \$300/year.
Absentee ballots will be emailed
Tuesday, March 19th.**

TREASURER'S REPORT

As you can see in the minutes of the March Representative Council Meeting the decision was made to send a \$750 contribution to the Strongsville Education Association. Our hearts go out to our fellow teachers in this nearby district during what must be a terribly difficult time for them. Witnessing this happening so close gives us a real life example of the anti-teacher political climate hanging over our state. It serves as a reminder to me of how vigilant we must be in strengthening our Association.

Because this is such a politically charged situation, the Political Action Committee of the Shaker Heights Teachers' Association (PAC of SHTA) is moving to support the Strongsville Teachers. Any member who wishes to make a personal contribution to the Strongsville Teachers can send a check made out to "PAC of SHTA" to Bill Scanlon at the High School. The PAC will collect these checks and send on the total to the Strongsville Education Association. We hope this streamlines the process of directly supporting fellow Ohio teachers while on the whole defending our profession.

The debate about whether to increase the dues has been discussed for the past month or so. I feel a dues increase is important, not to aid in the year-to-year spending of the Association, but to contribute toward our General Fund. For the first 20 years of the Association's independent history members contributed to and built a General Fund that established the strength of our Association. Their sacrifice over the years (I'm sure \$140 in the mid 80s was a considerable sum) helped the Association gain ground and establish the Shaker Teachers as some of the highest paid teachers in the state. I would feel like I was shirking my duty if I didn't likewise support a sacrifice on my part to further strengthen the Association's voice. I want to do my part for the future of all teachers in the Shaker Heights City School District.

*Respectfully submitted,
Bill Scanlon, Treasurer*

The SHTA is on   us @
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Shaker-Heights-Teachers-Association>

PROFESSIONAL RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Members are concerned about possible schedule changes for next year being discussed for Woodbury and the Middle School. Earlier in the year, concerns about the number of professional meetings during contract hours at both the elementary schools and the high school were brought to my attention.

As you hear about these things and participate in these types of discussions, it's important to review our contract and use it as a guide. If you believe the contract is being violated, please keep a written record of your allotted planning time and your pupil contact time. I would be happy to look at any individual's schedule and compare it to our contract language. We must be united in our efforts to make sure we are following the contract.

For example, in section 9.02 (Teacher Day), the contract states a seven and a half hour work day for elementary teachers and an eight hour work day for secondary teachers. These hours could vary across the district, but must be between 7:45 am and 4:30 pm. This does not mean we are expected to attend meetings, do bus duty, or supervise students for almost nine hours a day. Building administrators may set the hours for a work day at the beginning of the school year, and maintain them consistently. For example, 8:00 am to 4:00 pm could be an eight hour work day for secondary buildings within the hours listed in the contract. Section 9.02 also mentions that each member is guaranteed a fifty minute lunch break every day.

In 9.03 (Pupil Contact Time), the contract states that teachers shall have no more than 320 minutes of pupil contact time. Homeroom and conference period are included in the 320 minutes. Elementary teachers have a twenty minute planning period each day, while secondary teachers have one planning period a day. Secondary teachers teach five classes per day.

Please contact me if you suspect there are contract violations in your building.

*Respectfully submitted,
Mike Sears, chairperson*

PAST PRESIDENT'S REPORT

In February, I attended the Board of Education meeting and the meeting of the Finance and Audit Committee. I also signed up to do the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES) training in May. I think this training will be an opportunity to help with peer evaluations and I recommend that you consider becoming trained in this system. As the legislators and state board of education change the policies for teacher evaluations, we as teachers need to be involved in the process.

In March, I was not available to attend the Board of Education/State of the Schools meeting. I know our President, John L. Morris, and Vice-President, Dollye Finney, attended along with other teachers, so our Association was well represented.

At the Monday, March 11, meeting of the Representative Council, there was a unanimous vote to send a monetary donation to the Strongsville Education Association in support of their efforts for a fair contract through collective bargaining. On Tuesday, I delivered our donation to the OEA office in Middleburg Heights.

I was able to attend all three public sessions with the candidates for superintendent and am eager to have the process continue.

*Respectfully submitted,
Rebecca Thomas, Chairperson*

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

The Evaluation Committee presented an overview of the new evaluation system in all buildings within the last month. I encourage you to submit questions, comments, or concerns for inclusion in an FAQ document being created by the committee. The pilot of the new system has continued this spring. While legislation mandates the core elements of the evaluation system, committee members are working to create a program that incorporates best practices and is focused on individual professional growth.

The first piece of the evaluation system that all teachers will be responsible for is a Professional Growth Plan, which will be used to help guide planning and conference discussions with evaluators. Teachers will be asked to reflect on their teaching practices through the lens of the Ohio Standards for the Teaching Profession, as well as data on student performance. The Professional Growth Plan will identify one goal for student achievement outcomes and one goal for teacher performance. While Growth Plans will be self-directed for all teachers next year, teachers will have an opportunity to create their plans at their building evaluation workshop. Dates for these workshops are yet to be determined.

As you all know, Teacher Performance ratings (from observations, conferences with evaluators, and walk-throughs) will determine 50% of our final evaluation rating. The other 50% will be determined by Student Growth Measures. The enormity and complexity of this is clear, although little else about it is. Many teachers and administrators are working to determine how various assessments may be used to meet this mandate. Final decisions and clarifications will be communicated as soon as possible, although the state continues to make changes to requirements and approved assessments.

More than 70 teachers have expressed interest in taking the OTES training and participating in the Peer Evaluation pilot next year. Any teacher who would like the opportunity to be a peer evaluator must take the OTES training, although many teachers are taking the training for the sake of becoming well versed in the new system. It is the goal of the Peer Evaluation Committee to help facilitate a strong, well-planned pilot program.

With this goal in mind, we are asking all teachers interested in participation in the Peer Evaluation pilot to confirm registration for the OTES training by March 27. Principals have asked that teachers who would like to take the training on school days get approval prior to registering. The Peer Evaluation Committee (Addie Tobey, Andrew Glasier, and I) will work with principals and participants to establish evaluation teams for next year. In addition to the growth opportunities that Peer Evaluation could provide, it is also a way in which we can maintain a high level of professionalism.

Respectfully submitted,
Lena Paskewitz, Chairperson

POLICY COMMITTEE

Lately there has been discussion of an increase to our dues. So this month's 'Law-in-the-Limelight' is the first part of **By-Law VII: Dues.**

BY-LAW VII FINANCES

A. Dues

1. A change in the amount of dues shall be presented to the membership for its approval.
2. Dues will be collected through payroll deductions or by check. Members who select payroll deduction shall have ten (10) equal deductions starting with the first pay in October of the current school year. Members who choose to pay by check must do so in full, prior to October 1st of the current school year. Payroll deduction shall automatically continue from year to year unless the member notifies the Association and payroll office in writing, prior to October 1st of the current school year, that he or she wishes to stop payroll deductions.
3. Any teacher employed by the Shaker Heights City Schools after January 1st of the current school year, may join the Association and his or her dues will be one-half (50%) of the current dues assessment for that year. Any teacher employed after the start of the current school year, but prior to January 1st, may join the Association at the current dues assessment (100%).
4. Association dues are not prorated by contract status, nor is any portion of the dues refundable.

Respectfully submitted,
David Klapholtz, Chairperson

SOCIAL COMMITTEE

The Annual *SHTA/Shaker Heights City Schools Spring Recognition Reception* is scheduled for Thursday, May 23rd. This very special event will be held at Shaker Heights High School in the upper cafeteria. We will begin this special celebration at 3:45. Please plan to attend and give recognition to our colleagues. You will receive more information about the Reception in the near future.

Respectfully submitted,
Darlene Garrison, Chairperson

MEMBERSHIP/ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

There will be a special election to vote on the proposed increase to SHTA dues Monday, March 25, 2013.

This May, the membership will elect our 2013-2015 officers. Any member with tenure, who has been an active member for the three years immediately preceding the election, is eligible to be an officer. Each candidate for office must initiate his or her candidacy by means of a petition containing the signatures of at least five percent of the active members. Please contact me to obtain a petition. They will be available when we return from spring break and must be filed with me no later than 4 PM Friday, April 26, 2013.

Respectfully submitted,
Stacy Elgart, chairperson

Public Relations Committee

The increase in our membership dues is very important to our future. The political climate continues to bring unfavorable policies for unions and collective bargaining. This month the Ohio State Legislature changed the parameters of referendums. The new law shortens the period of time citizens can collect signatures to put a law on the ballot. In this manner, the state legislature has made it more difficult to repeal laws. This was the very process used to repeal Senate Bill 5. Why would the legislature want to do this now? The current legislature has more ambitions to curb the

power of unions.

What is next? The state legislature will continue to pursue policies to dismantle public education by vilifying teachers and inhibiting their rights. Many unions and public officials believe that the Ohio Legislature will propose a Right To Work bill in the coming months. Right To Work legislation would eliminate the requirement of non-union workers to pay their fair share in the benefits they receive as a result of contracts negotiated by unions. Research on Right to Work states has proven that the states that have these laws have lower average wages. Right to Work legislation means...the right to work for less. In an indirect way, this is the end of the existence of unions.

Our colleagues in Strongsville are fighting for the right to a fair work contract. The negotiations with its Board of Education have resulted in reprehensible depictions of teachers in the media. The BOE has acted in a hostile manner towards its own teachers.

The atmosphere and attitudes towards teachers is negative. The bottom line is that we must put ourselves in a strong position for the future. The SHTA can do this by continuing to build our strike fund. The increase in dues would help us accomplish this. This would communicate to the administration that we are a strong association. It would allow us to negotiate our contract more favorably.

The historical relationship between the Shaker Schools and the SHTA has been a mutually respectful. The coming changes in our leadership, the political climate and the economic stressors could mean drastic challenges in the future. The increase in union dues will bolster our ability to meet upcoming demands.

Respectfully submitted,
Eileen Sweeney, chairperson

MINUTES FOR THE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL MEETING

March 11, 2013
Shaker Heights Middle School

The President, **John Morris**, called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m.

Danny Young, principal of Shaker Heights Middle School, welcomed the SHTA representative council.

Mark Freeman, Superintendent of Shaker schools, also welcomed the rep. council members.

The minutes of the February meeting were amended to include Steve Smiths's motion for a dues increase. The motion was stated as follows: "Dr. Morris, I would like to introduce a motion to increase the dues of the Shaker Heights Teachers' Association from our current \$200 to \$350." The minutes were unanimously approved.

ADMINISTRATION REPORT: **Lisa Scott** reported that the spring evaluation for non-continuing contract went well and the spring evaluations for continuing contract were being worked on.

PTO REPORT: There was no PTO Council representation at the meeting

OFFICERS' REPORTS:

PRESIDENT

John Morris reported that he attended many meeting the past month. He attended *A Night for the Red and White*. He discussed the change in the opportunity for peer evaluation for next school year. He met with the Stake Holders Committee that will be interviewing the three candidates for superintendant position. He encouraged members to attend the Superintendent Candidate Forum. He met with administration regarding potential schedule changes at both the Middle school and Woodbury. He wrote two letters in support of increasing the Association's dues. He stated that the administration would be making a change to progress book for the K-4 teachers. He stated he would be attending the State of the Schools Address.

VICE-PRESIDENT

Dollye Finney reported that she attended *A Night for the Red and White*. She stated that teacher donations went for a high dollar amount as they traditionally do. She has been meeting with the PTO Council as a member of their nominating committee. She will be attending the future Race to the Top meeting. Finally, Ms. Finney announced that she would be retiring at the end of the year.

SECRETARY

Matt Zucca took attendance for the meeting. He also stated he attended *A Night for the Red and White*.

TREASURER

Bill Scanlon discussed our current financial report. He has been paying Association bills. He will be planning the Investments Committee meeting for the spring. He attended the meeting held at the High School regarding the proposed dues increase.

EXECUTIVE BOARD REPORTS

PAST PRESIDENT: **Becky Thomas** stated she attended the district's Finance and Audit Committee meeting. She will be attending an OTEs training conference.

POLICY: **Dave Klapholz** had no report.

TEACHER EDUCATION: **Steven Smith** has been working with teachers regarding spring evaluations.

PUBLIC RELATIONS: **Eileen Sweeney** reported that she place ads in the *Shaker Life* magazine and the *Gristmill*.

PUBLICATIONS: **Andrew Glasier** said that newsletter submissions are due on Wednesday. Please send them to him at glasier_a@shaker.org. He discussed the new teacher evaluation process at all the buildings. He also stated that many people have signed up for OTES training. He encouraged members to attend the Superintendent Candidate Forum.

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

LEGISLATIVE: **Lena Paskewitz** discussed the new teacher evaluation process at all the buildings. If members are interested in being OTES trained they should contact her.

SOCIAL: **Darlene Garrison** stated the spring recognition reception will be May 23.

MEMBERSHIP AND ELECTIONS: **Stacy Elgart** stated an election will be held on Monday, May 20 to vote on building representatives, and officers. Petitions will be available on Monday, April 8 for those interested in running for office. Deadline for submission of petitions is Friday, April 26, at 4:00 p.m.

PROFESSIONAL RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES: **Mike Sears** was unable to attend the meeting. His report will appear in the Newsletter.

BUILDING REPORTS

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

Fernway had a concern regarding the slow response time to address the malfunctioning security system.

The **Middle School** held a membership meeting and discussed the proposed dues increase.

The **High School** held a membership meeting and discussed the proposed dues increase. They also discussed way to strengthen the Association.

OLD BUSINESS

A motion was made to bring to the floor for further discussion the tabled proposed dues increase. The motion was seconded and voted on and passed unanimously.

The discussion on the proposed dues increase continued. Concerns of the amount and how the increase would be used were mentioned. A desire to provide future strength and stability to the Association was mentioned.

James Schmidt made a motion to bring the proposal to a vote. It was seconded by **Joel Rathbone**. A vote was taken which did not pass, more discussion continued.

James Schmidt made a motion to amend the current proposal to increase the dues of the Shaker Heights Teacher's Association from \$200 to \$250. The motion was second by **Joel Rathbone**. A vote was taken and the amendment passed.

Darlene Garrison made a motion to amend the amendment to increase the dues from of the Shaker Heights Teacher's Association from \$250 to \$300. Aimee Grey seconded the motion. A vote was taken and was passed.

A vote to take the amended proposal of Association due increase from \$200 to \$300 was passed. The membership will vote during a special election held on March 25.

NEW BUSINESS

Dollye Finney made a motion that the SHTA, in support of the Strongsville Teachers' Association, give a donation of \$750 to the teachers to support them as they strike. The collective bargaining process is the backbone of our organization and as a collective bargaining unit, it is important that we support other professionals as they face difficult negotiations and difficult times and to show our united support of all teachers. The motion was seconded by **James Schmidt**. The representative council voted unanimously to approve the donation.

FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER

John Morris asked the membership to wear green as a sign of solidarity with the Strongsville teachers. He thanked the Middle School for hosting the meeting and encouraged members to attend the Superintendent Candidate Forum.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:45 p.m.

THE NEXT MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR MONDAY, April 15, 2013 at Lomond.

*Respectfully submitted,
Matthew Zucca, Secretary*

The Power of Our Association

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.

When I was hired at Shaker Heights, I felt very lucky. My job was intense and the requirements rigorous, but thanks to the support of administrators and my teaching colleagues, I was offered an abundance of resources that helped me succeed. I paid my dues to our Professional Association, yet knew little about what it did. Before No Child Left Behind and school funding cuts, teaching in Shaker Heights City Schools did not seem so turbulent.

Things have changed. Conservative attempts to privatize education through legislation and unpredictable school funding formulas have led to a dramatically reshaped our profession. My perspective about the Shaker Heights Teachers' Association has evolved as well. From when I first served as a member of the evaluation committee in 2003, to my current position as publisher of the Association's newsletter, my appreciation of this organization's significance in terms of the well being of its members, non-members, our students, and the community as a whole has expanded. We are a progressive, adaptable, responsive and thoughtful group that consistently fights for what is right for education.

Membership issues are a major focus of the Association's leadership, and are surprisingly time consuming. If a member believes that an evaluation is unfair, or a family leave situation arises, or someone faces nonrenewal, the leadership of the association spends countless hours in meetings, on the phone, examining documents and interpreting the contract to help the members. While serving as head Representative of the High School, I met frequently with administration to discuss

members' concerns, held monthly meetings with the Principal to discuss building issues, persistently working to find common ground despite the difficult nature of conflicts to make sure contractual agreements were honored. This is just one way we serve our membership.

Contract negotiations are another important responsibility of the Association. Our current short and flexible contract has served the Association well for many years. Our contract language compares favorably to others in the area: we have reasonable pupil-contact time, planning time, more steps for longevity, privileges such as job-share, leaves of absence, and tuition reimbursement in addition to our salary and benefits. Because of our commitment to our membership, we have managed to face this tough economic period without lay-offs. As our current contract expires at the end of the year, the preparation process has already begun within the leadership of the Association. The contract provides the framework for the terms and conditions of our employment. Because it discourages favoritism, new teachers and experienced teacher know they will work the same school day, be evaluated with the same guidelines, and follow the same absence and leave procedures.

Keep in mind, personnel costs are the largest area of the school district's budget. Every item in the contract is a "money issue." Class size, teaching load, duties and responsibilities to non-curricular activities (to name simply a few) are always subject to negotiation. It is easy to implement changes that save money—and that money might even go into raises for teachers who are still here—but it is critical to prevent cost-cutting ventures when the detrimental effects are unreasonable for the teaching and learning process. Many times, negotiations are not about what you see in the final contract; they are about changes that did not get made. The Association strives to maintain jobs, educational quality, and a reasonable school/ work environment.

Our Association codifies procedures in the district. What if you went into the evaluation process and did not have any knowledge of what was expected? How would you feel if you were transferred without any explanation or rationale? What if you attended a disciplinary meeting and could not have any representation? In many jobs, this happens with great frequency. Through the work of the Association, we

have a system in place—not only through the contract, but also through past practice. If you planned a family illness day or a personal day on a day that became a snow/calamity day, your leave day is restored. This procedure was established after letters and discussions between the Association leadership and the Administration. I am currently a member of an Association committee that has met with administration for the past two years to discuss and implement new evaluation procedures, refine the mentor program, explore Peer-Evaluation as well as other topics. The Association works with administration to ensure that the process is fair, effective, and meaningful for teachers.

The leadership of the Association attends many meetings on behalf of the membership, representing the teachers and our interests in the district, the community and beyond. As President, John Morris serves on the Instructional and Administrative Council, the superintendent's group that reviews issues and activities across the district. The Vice-President attends the meetings of the PTO Council. Officers and Executive Board members are regular participants on district committees like Race to the Top and the Evaluation Committee. The Association is represented at the meetings of the Board of Education, and the Finance and Audit Committee, the Night for the Red and White and is part of the levy campaign committee. With the establishment of the Union Summit, the President meets with Association leaders across Cuyahoga County on issues of importance to all teachers' unions, whether independent or with national affiliation.

The Association informs and represents the membership in the community and beyond. In committees, at school board meetings, at Union Summits and at conferences, the Association represents the voice of its members. We also communicate through this newsletter, emails and other means to members and others our collective voice.

I have grown through my experiences to many years and open eyes and ears to come to understand the Association's role in our district.

It was a process for me to realize that our independent Association better fulfills our members' needs rather than joining a national organization. I have come to appreciate the tremendous work that the leadership takes on. I have seen the Association grow and address the concerns not only of this district but those of the profession as well. I take great pride in saying that I am a member of the Shaker Heights Teachers Association.

AG

Letters to the Editor

Governor John Kasich. SB5. A limping recovery from the Great Recession. House Bill 555, with its new teacher evaluation process and unspecified "student growth measures." The ongoing Strongsville teachers strike. Uncertainty as a new superintendent prepares to step in. Is everyone feeling warm and fuzzy?

No? Well, it is understandable if we admit that increasing tensions have altered the landscape of our profession. When I began teaching at Shaker Heights High School in 2000, I was struck by the feeling that I had hit the jackpot, as far as landing the ideal teaching position. Although I had some incredibly challenging classes that year, and was inexperienced and overwhelmed by the demands of the job, I felt incredibly supported – by my colleagues, my administration, and by the Shaker community. I admit that the ugly realities faced by others in the teaching profession felt far away from my reality. This feeling of "Shaker exceptionalism," to quote one of my colleagues, allowed me to focus my attention on the things that really mattered: planning my lessons, creating materials, attending workshops to gain new ideas, and learning about new resources and technologies. As a Shaker teacher, I was fortunate, indeed.

Today, I am still thankful to be a Shaker teacher. Yet, the intrusion of political realities into my professional life has forced me to take off my blinders. Despite the fact that we teach in a renowned, innovative, and highly respected school system, we do not teach in a bubble! The "outside world," which has become increasingly hostile to

teachers and education in general demands our attention. That is why I am supporting the proposed dues increase (from \$200 per year to \$300 per year) that will be put forth for the Association membership to vote on March 25.

I have spoken to quite a few of you about this proposed increase. I recognize that these are financially strained times for many, and that we are being asked to contribute more, but I urge you to put this in perspective. Isn't additional protection in these politically unstable times worth this relatively small financial sacrifice? We should all support this dues increase to send a message of solidarity and strength. In the past, our Association leadership has worked tirelessly to advocate for us, and to secure effective legal representation to guide us through some very uncertain times. Thanks, in large part, to this leadership, we were able to retain step increases on our salary schedule and negotiate a 1% stipend for both this school year and for the next. These negotiations took place at a time when the fate of collective bargaining rights teetered on a precipice, and while our interests were preserved, the process was costly, as noted by Treasurer Bill Scanlon in the last SHTA Newsletter. Now, we need to support our Association so they can best represent us in the upcoming round of negotiations.

Among other things, our future definitely holds a new teacher evaluation system, a new superintendent, an expiring contract (December 2013), and a proposed levy (May 2014). We need to support our Association to send a message: "We believe in our Association and want to build upon previous teachers' contributions to prepare for whatever the future holds."

Here at Shaker, we've still been *relatively* unscathed by the blows being dealt to our profession. We are still fortunate; let's keep it that way.

Sincerely,
Aimee Grey,
English teacher, high school