

IMPORTANT DATES

Tuesday, January 20: K-5 Family Math Night

Friday, January 23: Professional/Clerical Day. No classes 7-12.

Tuesday, January 27: BOE Work session.

Monday, February 2: SHTA Executive Board Meeting @ Fernway.

Tuesday, February 3: Incoming 9th graders Orientation @ SHHS.

Wednesday February 4: Professional Day, No classes K-8.

Monday, February 9: SHTA Representative Board meeting @ SHHS

SHTA news

January 20, 2015

ISSUE NO. 4

Message From the President

Here's the thing: the teaching profession right now is in the darkest place it has been in since I began teaching eighteen years ago. Underfunded and under researched testing methods, inaccurate and unrepresentative evaluation methods, corporate reforms that are attempting to turn schools into businesses, low morale, and high anxiety are the dire realities of our profession today. Follow our Facebook page and the Cuyahoga County Educator Summit page and you will see the avalanche of articles on the challenges facing the teaching profession today. Many of our colleagues who are within five years of retiring are opting to retire sooner than later. New teachers are getting out of the profession and college education students are rapidly finding new directions. If you don't believe me, a simple Internet search will support my observations. Our profession is in crisis.

Here's the other thing: the act of teaching is still one of the best things you can do with your life. Conveying knowledge to our students, seeing them grasp new concepts, watching them grow both intellectually and emotionally are among the greatest experiences in the world. The act of teaching has not changed. Granted, we have less time to teach because of all the mandates and testing. However, as long as we can help our students grow and see the positive impact we are having on their lives, we are doing some of the most important work this life has to offer.

So what's my point? It's this; we have to hold the duality of an undermined profession with the profound human act of teaching. That's what we have to do in order to survive today. We have to remind each other that the act of teaching is even more important and enduring than the attacks on our profession and that it's worth fighting for with all of our being. I hope these are words of encouragement. They are the ones I keep telling myself.

It's been a busy two months since we last convened as an Association. Negotiations have taken up much of the last two months. I have also dealt with calendar concerns; writing a letter to members, collecting teacher statements, and presenting to the Calendar Committee. I also met with the Cuyahoga County Union Summit to unify teacher organizations throughout the county. We will meet again on a vision statement and a testing position statement in March. I requested support for a teacher and former representative at the High School who began chemotherapy last month. I worked on a delayed start schedule at the High School with Principal Mike Griffith. I would like to thank Mike for his flexibility, insight, and efforts to keep the schedule in compliance with our contract. Finally, I assisted a member with legal concerns at the elementary level.

Winters in Northeastern Ohio often feel like they take up nine months of the year. The cold and gray often amplify the challenges facing our professional lives that much more. Please do your best to encourage one another to keep up the fight and persevere until the sun comes out and the corporate reform movement is eradicated from our profession. I know I'm waiting for both. The SHTA gives me hope that we still have a voice within our district, our city, our county, and even our country. I promise to fight for our profession both in Shaker and beyond and I encourage you to do the same. As always, I am available at morris_j@shaker.org or x6033 to answer your questions and address your concerns.

*Respectfully submitted,
John Morris*



**SHTA President John
Morris leads the
January SHTA
Representatives
Council Meeting @
Mercer School**

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

Reports from the Executive Board

VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Happy New Year.

I hope everyone had a restful break and is energized and ready to get back to our important work of educating.

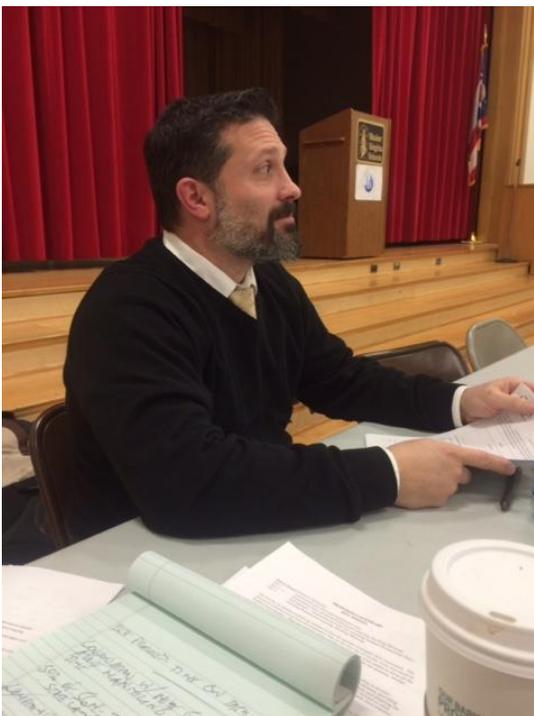
Over the past few months I have been working with the negotiation team on creating a new contract. I also have been working with the Calendar Committee on developing next year's academic calendar.

I want to thank those of you who made a contribution to the Silent Auction for *A Night for the Red and White*. Donations from teachers are very popular sought after items at the auction. The SHTA's donation to the silent auction this year will be two tickets to a performance at the Playhouse Square and a gift certificate to Edwin's Restaurant on Shaker Square. Staff members are again offered discounted tickets at ninety-five dollars to support teacher attendance. The celebration will again be at the beautiful and elegant Tudor Arms Hotel. The event is on Saturday March 7, 2015 beginning at seven o'clock PM.

I encourage everyone to purchase a chance to win tickets to *A Night for the Red and White*. The money raised from the tickets will help the Association cover the cost of the tickets and the silent auction donation. Please see your building representatives for tickets. Thank you again for your generous support and contributions. *A Night for the Red and White* continues to provide substantial endowment to the Shaker Heights City Schools.

I would like to remind the recipients of the SHTA Fellowship to submit receipts for reimbursement. I would also like to encourage our members to make a contribution to the PTO annual drive.

Respectfully submitted,
Matthew J. Zucca



**SHTA Vice
President Matt
Zucca at the
January
Representatives
meeting @
Mercer School.**

TREASURER'S REPORT

Greetings. I hope everyone had a peaceful Winter Break and was able to rejuvenate yourself with some quality family time.

Since the last newsletter in November, I have been fairly busy as a member of our negotiating team working with the administration team through the Interest-Based Bargaining Process. It is moving forward productively.

I have also spoken with our accountants a number of times to square away our financial obligations for the last fiscal year. I worked with John Morris to file our financial report with SERB, keeping us recognized as a functioning nonprofit organization. I also attended a Union Summit with John and Eileen Sweeney where we discussed a response to the state's testing focus.

The current financial report is on the following pages.

*Respectfully submitted,
Bill Scanlon*



**SHTA Treasurer
Bill Scanlon
explains our budget
at the January
Representatives
meeting @ Mercer
School.**

Shaker Heights Teachers' Association
 Profit and Loss Standard
 July 1, 2014 through January 15, 2015

01/15/15

Jul 1, '14 - Jan 15, '15

Income	
Income	
Member Dues	86,640.00
Total Income	86,640.00
Investments	
Change in Value for Key Investment	-7,233.00
Edward Jones Investment Income	32,366.52
Change in Value in Edward Jones	-22,812.84
Interest-Savings, Short-term CD	8.95
Key Investments Income	763.58
Total Investments	3,093.21
Total Income	89,733.21
Expense	
Operations	
Accounting	7,385.00
Compensation	18,683.00
Conferences & Meetings	1,378.87
Executive Board	496.27
Fellowships & Grants	1,275.00
Insurance	5,116.00
Legal	5,104.00
Legal Aid Committee	6,536.70
Negotiations	26,816.68
Officers' Expenses	2,109.47
Payroll Taxes	484.77
Public Relations	1,646.00
Publications	405.00
Social	286.00
STRS (PTO Contribution)	4,680.62
Total Operations	82,403.38
Total Expense	82,403.38
Net Income	7,329.83

Shaker Heights Teachers' Association

Balance Sheet Standard

01/15/15

As of January 15, 2015

	Jan 15, '15
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ASSETS	
Current Assets	
Checking/Savings	
Key Bank (checking)	22,859.77
Key Bank Investments	0.69
Key Investments2	85,422.92
Total Checking/Savings	<hr/> 108,283.38
Other Current Assets	
Edward Jones 13760-1-1	446,871.51
Edward Jones 13768-1-3	567,074.64
Total Other Current Assets	<hr/> 1,013,946.15
Total Current Assets	<hr/> 1,122,229.53
TOTAL ASSETS	<hr/> 1,122,229.53
<hr/>	
LIABILITIES & EQUITY	
Equity	
Opening Balance Equity	53.69

EXECUTIVE BOARD REPORTS

PROFESSIONAL RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES REPORT

In the November newsletter, I asked members to tell me about both their experiences with long-term substitutes during extended leaves and their opinions about the school calendar. I'd like to thank everyone who contacted me and other members of the Executive Board regarding these two issues. John Morris compiled all the calendar concerns and forwarded them to the administration. As a result, the Calendar Committee came to the January representative council meeting to answer questions. I met the new Director of Human Resources, Darlene Bushley, in December and we talked about ways we could make the extended leave process smoother for both the teacher and the substitute. I'll have more details about this as our conversations continue in the coming months.

I filed a technology grievance on behalf of members from every building in November. A grievance hearing was held on December 18. I recently received a report on the hearing from the grievance-hearing officer, Darlene Bushley. I'll have more to report in February about the specific actions being taken to improve our current working conditions as they relate to technology. During the last two months, I have also helped members with maternity leave, job sharing, sick leave questions, and OTES. I am scheduled to attend a discussion about the state law as it relates to OTES with both teachers and administrators in February. I continued my work with the Interest-Based Bargaining team. As always, it is a joy to work with professionals like our members who are dedicated to children.

*Respectfully submitted,
Mike Sears, chairperson*

PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMITTEE

I hope all members had a restorative and restful winter break. Happy New Year! The public relations committee has submitted an advertisement in the Shaker Heights High School yearbook. The next issue of the *Shaker Life* magazine will contain a SHTA advertisement. The *Shakerite* newspaper has altered its format and this has caused the Association to reevaluate our advertisement in this publication. I've also received a confirmation with Madison Printing regarding SHTA-wear. Details regarding this will be forthcoming. The hunt continues for the perfect teacher appreciation gift.

*Respectfully submitted,
Bob Bognar, chairperson*

EVALUATION COMMITTEE

The Evaluation Committee met in November to continue work to revise the Evaluation Rubric. This work reflects a need for more clarity in the rubric, both for teachers and evaluators. Additionally, we are striving to make revisions that can be effectively applied to all levels and content areas.

As we are nearing the end of the first semester, all of you should have had a minimum of one walkthrough. An email containing the information from the walkthrough will be sent. Peer walkthroughs will be put into the system by Emily Rucker. The Peer Evaluation Coordinator for your level is the reported evaluator, even though the walkthrough was completed by your Peer Evaluator. For those of you in a Formal Evaluation year, you should be receiving your January Formative Evaluation form from your evaluator by the

end of the semester. Teachers on an Informal Evaluation year may have already had their observation cycle with their evaluator. I am interested in how this experience was the same or different from the Formal Evaluation experience last year.

Several new and recurring concerns have been brought to the attention of building representatives and committee members. Among these concerns are scheduling of conferences and observations, required lesson content, walkthroughs, and the inclusion of supporting evidence to evaluation ratings and reports. The Evaluation Process Packet clearly states the following protocols:

- Teachers and evaluators should schedule the pre-observation conferences, observations, and post-observation conferences at *mutually agreed upon* dates and times.
- Information from pre and post-observation conferences and observations *should be used as evidence* on the Observation Summary Form. (This statement is clearly written on the form.)

In light of the continued concerns, I am in the process of collecting information from all buildings about these specific concerns, as well as any other issues. Please be sure to communicate concerns about your experience with your evaluator to your building representative or an Evaluation Committee member. The Committee will work to clarify the process, as well as to address instances where the process as written is not being followed.

As I've stated in previous newsletter submissions, the goal of evaluation is Professional Development for teachers. Many teachers have expressed that they have benefitted from the process and are growing as teachers from the experience. Administration has clearly stated that the Evaluation system is not to be used as a "gotcha", but rather a way to collaboratively examine practice to promote professional growth. Unfortunately, this is not what many teachers across the district are reporting as their experience. Until this goal is consistently met in all buildings, we will continue to communicate concerns, make needed revisions, and address specific instances where the protocols are not being followed.

Respectfully submitted,
Lena Paskewitz, chairperson

PAST PRESIDENTS COMMITTEE

Happy New Year! The SHTA website has been placed on a new server at Banshee Computer Consulting in Novelty, Ohio and an archival copy has been established. It has been great to work with Kelly Rogers at Banshee. She provides professional assistance for our website needs. Besides working on the website, I have attended the regular meetings of the Board of Education and the Finance and Audit Committee. I also provide information and assistance to President John Morris and his team. I appreciate the opportunity to serve the SHTA.

Respectfully submitted,
Becky Thomas, chairperson

POLICY COMMITTEE

This month's policy focus concerns *By-Law IV, Section C: Building Representatives*

The Building Representatives:

1. Shall represent their respective building groups in the deliberations of the Representative Council.
2. Shall call and preside at all building meetings of members of the Association in their respective buildings.

With all the changes and transitions that continue to occur in our educational world, many issues arise that Our Association needs to address. It is important to communicate concerns and ideas with our building representatives so that they can be shared during our councils and documented. Please take some time to send your building representatives any issues that you feel should be brought to the council's attention.

*Respectfully submitted,
Tim Kalan, Chairperson*

MEMBERSHIP/ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

Our Association has a total of **404** members. Here is the breakdown by building:

<u>Building</u>	<u>Members</u>
Boulevard	24
Fernway	24
Lomond	34
Mercer	29
Onaway	29
Woodbury	63
Middle School	70
High School	131

*Respectfully submitted,
Stacy Elgart, chairperson*

SALARY TENURE COMMITTEE

IBB Negotiations are proceeding satisfactorily and will hopefully conclude this month.

*Respectfully submitted,
John Morris*

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

WANTED: SHTA PAC TREASURER

Seeking a politically minded Association dedicated person to oversee the duties of Treasurer.

DUTIES INCLUDE: Bi-Annual reporting to the B.O.E. & keeping abreast of state election laws. Time commitment is approximately a couple hours/month
Interested? Contact Eileen Sweeney at:
pacshed@gmail.com

WANTED: SHTA PAC MEMBERS

Seeking Association dedicated people to participate and represent the SHTA politically.

Committee members will develop political positions on issues impacting the SHTA and organize political actions. Time commitment is approximately a couple hours/month
Interested? Contact Eileen Sweeney at:
pacshed@gmail.com

MINUTES FOR THE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL MEETING

January 11, 2015, MERCER School

SHTA President, John Morris started the January 12th, 2015 Rep. Council Meeting at 4:33PM. **Mr. Lindsay Florence, Principal of Mercer Elementary School** welcomed SHTA members to Mercer.

MINUTES from the November Representatives Council meeting were accepted. Motion to accept minutes made by James Schmidt and seconded by Paula Klausner.

Administration Report

Dr. Gregory Hutchings from central office was present at the Representatives Council Meeting along with the members from the Calendar Committee. Members on the Calendar Committee are: Tom Wise, Marla Robinson, Jeff Isaacs, Erin Herbruck, Michael Griffith, Ruth Heide, David Glasner, Chris Hayward, Steve Wilkins, Matt Zucca and John Morris

- Dr. Hutchings welcomed everyone back to the second half of the school year and Happy New Year.
- Continue to collaborate to provide students a quality education by following the strategic plan.
- Dr. Robinson brought the Calendar Committee team to answer questions and discuss concerns dealing with proposed calendar.
- Dr. Hutchings appreciates the work of Dr. Robinson and the Calendar Committee.
- The proposed calendar creates an impact on the break-up in the days of the week. We need more 5-day weeks.
- If parent conferences are in October or before the end of the quarter, it is still breaking up the 5-day week.
- Todd Keitlen from Woodbury had a question concerning the week before the start of school on the proposed calendar. Teachers having time to work in their classrooms and the days set aside for professional development. The days have not been planned yet but the calendar is set up for teachers to get in their classrooms first.
- Dr. Hutchings pointed out that some of the decisions made about the calendar came from teacher feedback. Teachers wanted time to collaborate with other colleagues and more time for vertical alignment.
- Annie Haney from Fernway had a concern about the lack of time before the start of the school year spent with incoming kindergarteners and family members. Teachers will have input with this decision.
- Bob Bognar from Woodbury voiced a concern about the readiness of the school buildings. Most buildings are not ready for teachers to enter and begin working in classrooms before the start of the school year. Summer cleaning schedules are being created. Steve Wilkins is working on this area.
- James Schmidt from the High School voiced a concern about the number of professional days and childcare being an issue for teachers with children in the district. Also, a concern with less instructional days means we are losing time spent with students.
- Mike Sears from the Middle School suggested that the school buildings be open for teacher access the Sunday before the first day of school.
- Jennifer Goulden from Boulevard voiced that professional development is valued but there is just a lack an opportunity to actually synthesize the material given.
- Amanda Ahrens from the High School asked if there were other options for the first five days of school.

PTO Report – Jeff Isaacs talked about the Family Engagement Series. With the Thursday snow day, the Wellness Day will have to be rescheduled. John Morris thanked the PTO for their hard work and dedication to *Test Mania*.

Officer's Report

President, John Morris

- For the last two months, negotiations have consumed a bulk of his efforts.
- Statements about the proposed calendar went directly to Marla Robinson and the Calendar Committee. Names were not attached to the statements sent.
- Attended Union Summit meeting. Working on a vision statement and we will meet again in March.
- Requested support for a high school teacher who has become ill.
- Worked with Mike Griffith on the Delayed Start schedule to make sure it was following the contract.

Vice President, Matt Zucca

- Busy working with negotiations.
- Attended meetings for the Calendar Committee.
- Was a part of the team working with the grievance regarding technology.
- The form to make a donation for the silent auction *A Night for the Red and White* is due by January 15th. I consider making a donation, it is a way to reach out to the community. The donation is not due by January but the donation intention form is due at that time.

Secretary, Darlene Garrison

- Please take an active role and sell raffle tickets for *A Night for the Red and White* Event. All money and ticket stubs are due to me by Thursday, February 5th. We will pull names on Monday, February 9th at Representatives council meeting. Three members will be selected to win two tickets for *A Night for the and White* Event at Tudor Arms Hotel on Saturday, March 7th.

Treasurer, Bill Scanlon

- Discussed the current financial report.
- Attended meetings for negotiations; very busy with that.
- Met with accountants to organize books for last fiscal year.

Executive Board Reports

Past President, Becky Thomas

- Attended the Board of Education meeting.
- Attended Finance and Audit meeting.
- Worked on SHTA website.

Teacher Education, Steve Smith

- Attended technology grievance hearing.
- Worked with Matt Zucca and Donita Townsend to help a SHTA member.

Membership/Elections, Stacy Elgart - not in attendance for this meeting.

Policy, Tim Kalan

– Attended the OTES Evaluation Committee meeting

Public Relations, Bob Bognar

- There will be a SHTA ad placed in the *Shaker Life* Magazine.
- SHTA ad will change in the *Shakerite* magazine.
- SHTA shirts are almost ready to purchase. They are red polo style shirts with black lettering.

Legislative, Eileen Sweeney

- Attended Union Summit meeting.
- Attended the technology grievance hearing.
- Busy with negotiation meetings.
- Has been monitoring the State House and Ohio Board of Education.

Evaluation, Lena Paskewitz

- Attended OTES Evaluation Committee meeting

Publications, Andrew Glasier

- Wednesday at Midnight newsletter submissions were due.

Legal Aid, Chante Thomas – No report at this time

Social, Selena Brown - No report at this time

Professional Rights and Responsibilities, Mike Sears

- Participated in the technology grievance hearing. Thank you to Jim Sweeney for his assistance with the grievance hearing.
- Administration said that they would be creating a report to discuss the technology issues. Still waiting for the report.
- Helping members with maternity leave.
- Assisting some staff members with job sharing.
- There were some calendar concerns but all concerns were forwarded to John Morris.

Salary Tenure, John Morris

- IBB is proceeding satisfactorily and will hopefully be ending soon.

Building Reports

Boulevard, Jennifer Goulden

1. Substitutes

- A lack of substitutes continues to be a problem. There were 12 days where there were no substitutes to cover classes, including Specials classes (music, art, library), regular education classes, special education classes, and support staff. The result is that many teachers are regularly missing planning periods. Also, support staff must be pulled from their responsibilities to cover regular education classrooms. As a result, their students are not being serviced.

2. Heat

- There is a continuing issue with a lack of heat in the building. The building administrator, custodial staff and district maintenance staff are responsive and working hard to solve the problem but the lack of heat continues to be a problem. On several occasions, students and teachers wore coats in the building in order to stay warm.

3. SLOs

- Several teachers who must submit SLOs as part of their evaluations have had difficulties. Boulevard's administrator has been very supportive but there is very little feedback from Central Office concerning how to write the SLOs, when they are due, and how to revise, despite many attempts by the teachers for clarification and support.

Fernway, Annie Haney

- There is still a struggle with substitute teachers. Also, the assigning of preferred subs is an issue.
- OTES concerns, walkthroughs are being used for data purposes and it appears that names are being attached.

Lomond, Donita Townsend

- There were some evaluation issues that were passed on to the Evaluation Committee

Mercer, Lisa Hardiman

- Issue with the lack of substitutes in the building.

Onaway, Paula Klausner

- Issues with substitute teachers or lack thereof. A substitute teacher fell asleep in class.
- Dealt with some job sharing issues.

Woodbury, Amy Santos

- Substitute issues, lack of substitutes. One substitute fell asleep during class with students.
- Some concerns with OTES.

Middle School, Paul Repasy

- Issues with copy machines.
- Lack of substitute teachers continues to be an issue. There were 8 uncovered classes last week.
- Concerns regarding Middle School scheduling for next year. Not sure if there will be positions cut or added.
We are just unsure of what's going on.
- There are some issues with SLOs, We need better communication.

High School, James Schmidt

- Attended the Technology Grievance meeting as a representative of the High School.
- Attended the November Finance and Audit Committee meeting.
- Met with a member to discuss the procedure for taking a Leave of Absence.
- Met with a member to discuss the process for not continuing with a supplemental contract.
- There is an issue with a discrepancy between the number of units that teachers were promised for working on the SLOs for their departments and the number of units that the Administration is offering to pay them. (up to 4 units vs. ½ unit from Administration)
- Some teachers will still not have the 50 minute uninterrupted lunch period as guaranteed by our contract under the newest and most currently revised Delayed Start Schedule.
- There is a persistent and ongoing issue where additional evidence presented at a Post-Conference is not being accepted by certain administrators per the agreed upon Evaluation Process.
- There is a continuing problem with the lack of available substitutes in the building and the need to ask teachers to give up their valuable planning time to cover these otherwise uncovered classes.
- There is an issue with the lack of substitutes in co-taught classes.
- There is an issue that walkthroughs are still not being conducted anonymously as agreed upon for informal walkthroughs conducting by non-observing administrators.

Old Business - None

New Business

– How is the delayed start schedule being handled in the K-4 buildings?

Good of the order

-John Morris thanked the Mercer building representatives for hosting the January representatives council meeting.

Next Rep. Council meeting is scheduled for Monday, February 9th at the High School

Motion to adjourn meeting made by James Schmidt and was seconded by Tod Torrence.

Meeting was adjourned at 6:30PM

*Respectfully submitted,
Darlene Garrison*

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



SHTA January Representatives Council Meeting @ Mercer school. Special thanks to Mercer Representatives Lisa Hardiman & Robyn Feinstein in their fine Buckeye gear for hosting the meeting.

Are We Special Any More?

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.

Before Henry Ford implemented the use of the assembly line process to create low cost automobiles, cars were created by craftsmen, working to build specialty products. Workers at Ford's assembly line were eventually offered \$5/day pay. In our history books, Ford's new high wages were seen by Ford as a way to allow for workers to be able to afford the product. What is often not mentioned is that the former craftsmen, now assembly line workers, were quitting their jobs at the Ford factory. The tedious and repetitive nature of their jobs left them with little satisfaction either for a job well done or for completion of the creative process. The automaticity of the job destroyed the workers connection to crafting a product and thus left them disinterested in the work they were doing. Ford was trying to retain workers and incentivize them with a higher pay to keep the assembly line from collapsing.

Teaching is a creative field. In order to teach well, one must engage and explain in a myriad of fashions to connect to multiple students in multiple manners. Decisions need to be made quickly using the teacher's knowledge of the students and the curriculum. Each field of study has separate constraints and needs that have to be taken into account. During any given day teachers have to make thousand of choices and connect with many people with different needs and personalities.

In the Shaker Heights City School District of the past, this complexity and creative endeavor was supported by a vast amount of respect for the professionalism of the teacher. Teachers were supported in making decisions concerning their professional development, their curriculum, their assessments, their grading policy, their collaboration with colleagues, their teaching style and much more. Within the buildings, teachers had extraordinary power to work with administrators to set goals and procedures. Bureaucratic paperwork was kept to a minimum and even copying was taken care of. When I first became an SHTA representative at the high school the most frequent complaint was the lack of parking. The professional support was reflected in our commitment to our students as we encouraged them to develop as scholars and citizens. School was hard in Shaker and students met that challenge. Teachers felt responsible for making sure students did the best they could because the community respected us and allowed us professional freedom. We, as teachers, had to deliver. We stayed late and often met on weekends. We spent hours and hours grading; we often met with colleagues; we grew professionally and we reflected on our practice.

To be fair, there were some issues with consistency and repetition of subject matter. Students may have had several Ancient Egypt projects. Teachers at different grade levels saw the need for better communication about content and improvement in the transitions between grade levels and schools. This was happening, as teachers reached out to one another.

Several years ago, through Board of Education and state mandates, an assembly line approach to teaching, complete with mechanization (computer instruction) and measurement began to permeate the schools. A call for standardized tests & exams, lock step curriculum, standardized professional development, an influx of bureaucratic paperwork and now standardized grading policies have left teachers disempowered and students feeling like widgets. It matters not that my 11th grade government students who are struggling readers fail the majority of tests they are given, now they must take a ludicrously long exam with an 11th grade vocabulary.

Before these mandates, I chose project-based learning opportunities that taught real-world skills, such as using Microsoft PowerPoint to engage and teach an audience, which often took weeks to complete. Before, if I saw a class or opportunity for professional development that I felt was necessary to better my teaching, I filled

out one sheet of paper for approval and went. Before, we were given oversight for our different grade levels and subjects to do what was best for those students in our class and given ample time to prepare for them. Before, we demanded time to discuss teachers' concerns, not write SLO's and pick test questions from standardized tests from other states. Now we rush from teaching classes to district-mandated professional development and to district-mandated meetings. We do district-mandated bureaucratic paperwork, create district-mandated short-cycle assessments used for every child as if they were clones, and grade district-mandated assessments. Maybe we get some time to plan but there is never time for reflection.

For years, I heard these frustrations from colleagues in other districts: the bureaucratic paperwork, interfering school board, and endless initiatives that were not given enough time to digest before the *next* came about. I asked questions in wonder about how little the teachers were trusted. Now I just add my own anecdotes. What made us special was the teachers in this district and the power they had. That strength has been slowly taken from us and with that our "specialness."

AG