

# NEA Directors' Report

## Nevada Directors: Natha Anderson - Peg Bean Notes from September 2011 NEA Board Meeting

### NCLB Relief: Educating the Whole Child

"Educators want common-sense measures of student progress, freedom to implement local ideas, respect for the judgment and the right to be a part of critical decisions," said Dennis Van Roekel, NEA President. "This plan delivers." President Barack Obama announced the new waiver option on Sept. 23 at the White House with a handful of NEA members joining other observers. The No Child Left Behind waivers promise to remove the threat of sanctions for failing to meet AYP yet continue to focus on the high poverty schools. States can submit applications by November 14 and set "ambitious but achievable" goals, including a shift to college and career readiness standards instead of the narrow focus of test scores in English and Math only. In addition, struggling schools (identified as the lowest performing 5 percent of Title 1 schools) would receive more flexibility and support in trying to improve achievement. Changes to the teacher evaluation system and support systems would not be required to be fully implemented until the 2014-2015 school year.

The things NEA likes in the law include: the continued focus on high poverty schools and the use of NEA's term "priority schools" as a designation; the inclusion of the professional input of educators into the waiver process; and the requirement for multiple and "valid" measures when conducting teacher assessment. Van Roekel said he argued hard for the inclusion of the term "valid" in any reference to testing because "every teacher ought to be able to demonstrate evidence of student learning," he said. However, NEA continues to believe that no current standardized test is reliable and valid as a measure of teacher quality.

President Obama echoed many of the complaints that educators have been raising since the law was first passed in 2002. "Teachers too often are being forced to teach to the test," Obama said. "Subjects like history and science have been squeezed out. And in order to avoid having their schools labeled as failures some states perversely have had to actually lower their standards. Experience has taught us that, in its implementation, No Child Left Behind had some serious flaws that are hurting our children instead of helping them. "We can't let another generation of young people fall behind because we didn't have the courage to recognize what doesn't work, admit it and replace it with something that does," Obama said.

The No Child law expired four years ago, and Congress has failed to agree on a new version amid partisan fights over other domestic issues such as deficit reduction and healthcare reform. Instead, it has passed temporary extensions each year. Van Roekel stressed the waivers are only an interim solution and the new Congressional law dealing with education still needs to be passed.

### Promoting Public Education On the Hill

After attending a legislative briefing, your NEA Directors (Peg Bean and Natha Anderson) and NSEA President (Lynn Warne) went to the hill to discuss three major issues: the American Jobs Act; the Super Committee and the needed changes to NCLB Reauthorization. Although the major talk of the day was the upcoming announcements of the NCLB waivers, we knew the law still needed to be passed by Congress.

We started with Congresswoman Shelley Berkley who met with us personally. She voiced concerns over the conditions existing in many of Nevada's schools and how hard NSEA members work to help our children. Berkley is hoping the Jobs Bill will pass so the infrastructure of schools and class size reduction will become priorities. She voiced



concern about the Super Committee's commitment to working together to do what is best for everyone - not just those in their party. She was, however, hopeful that people would put party politics aside to do what is best.

Next we met with one of Senator Heller's aides. We asked for the Senators' support in passing the jobs bill as it would help many of our schools by revitalizing them with different programs. Ms. White (Senator Heller's aide) explained he was still working through the bill but would keep us in the loop with information when it comes available. She believes Senator Heller would be supportive of an ESP of the Year Award (as he has been supportive of this concept in the past).

We returned to the Congressional offices to meet with Congressman Heck and his education aide. Congressman Heck was very personable and spoke of the problems he had with the Jobs bill - he agreed with the educational portions of the bill but had difficulty handling some of the more superfluous areas (such as road construction). He voiced the same concerns with the Super Committee as Congresswoman Berkley, both the timing of it as well as how partisan it might be but was hopeful of an outcome which would help Nevada.

Our final stop of the day was with Senator Reid. Senator Reid had planned to meet with us but was called away at the last minute for a floor session. Jason Unger, Senator Reid's education aide, discussed the NCLB waivers as well as the Super Committee's timeline in making budget changes.



## **WE Are Ohio: The Collective Bargaining Fight Is Never Over.**

Ohio is currently fighting to repeal Senate Bill 5, a measure which rolls back collective bargaining powers for public employees. In an effort to help in this fight the NEA Board of Directors voted unanimously to give \$5 million to the OEA in their effort. The money is from the Ballot Measure Legislative Crisis fund (a fund discussed at the RA in July). Board members from Ohio expressed heartfelt thanks for the funding. If you have family or friends in

Ohio, they can become involved in the effort by going to [www.weareohio.com](http://www.weareohio.com).

## **Leading OUR Profession: *Communication, Committee and History***

In separate presentations, President Dennis Van Roekel reminded the Board how important being aware of the changes in our profession is becoming (and has always been). In one presentation, the consistency of communication was discussed as there is a very small, but vocal, group of opponents who are attempting to hijack public education - it is time for us to be the voice of reason. NEA has released a communication booklet to state organizations to help with this message of reframing education reform. The three messages highlighted by the booklet are: hold all of us accountable for our children's success; invest in the classroom priorities that build the foundation for student learning and ensure every student has a qualified, caring, committed teacher.

The second presentations dealt with the NEA's Committee on Effective Teachers and Teaching (a draft report is planned to be released to the Board of Directors October 15). President Van Roekel created the Committee so teachers and ESPs can "lead the profession". We are continually on the defensive; this committee could be seen as the offensive in this discussion. Bill Raabe, Director of the Center for Great



Public Schools is assisting the committee. He promised the report will be "Bold...provocative. It will challenge members to think about what they are doing." Raabe believes this will be an opportunity to organize as enemies of public education are continuing to attack collective bargaining.

The final presentation was actually about our history. In one portion Michael Edwards, Director of NEA Labor Relations, shed light upon our continual fight for workers rights in organizing and collective bargaining for members of the education profession. This very fight has been around since before 1961 (when New York teachers overwhelmingly voted to support collect bargaining rights). The second portion President Van Roekel invited education consultant W. Patrick Dolan to talk about the shift in education because of NCLB. The structure of educational rule has shifted dramatically in a very short time frame because of this law. It was the school which was the center of the community, the school board (and the state legislatures) which set the standards as well as the licensure and evaluations practices. With NCLB, this quickly shifted to the national scene. This overnight shift from local control to federal mandates has changed teaching at its core and opened up the possibility of interventions by companies who do not see potential in the child, but instead the potential profit. This is upsetting, but it is also an opportunity for us to start tapping into other resources. As Dolan stated, "Who will do the change and where is up for grabs. The federal government is forcing the states to do it, the states are forcing the sites to do it but the sites don't have the resources....This is a disaster in terms of careful design and what data do we want to use. It is not clear at all what level of decision making is responsible for doing it." The board spent quite a bit of time discussing this issue and we all realize this is a conversation which will continue. One of the more important aspects brought up was the idea of remembering our history but preparing for our future.

President Van Roekel concluded the discussions with an anecdote of a teacher who just wanted to close her door and teach. She balked at the idea of professional development and collaborating with others. Refusing to look at ways to improve our profession is like a doctor who tells her colleagues, "I wish you would stop coming up with new drugs and procedures. I just want to shut my door and practice medicine."

## Report of the Vice-President

*"Kids can't wait until Wall Street reforms itself and the global economy turns around. You only get one year to be a second grader - schools are not our favorite charity... They are our most strategic economic investment."* Lily Eskelsen (Vice-President of NEA).



It is due to this passion and commitment to our students Lily has been asked to serve on many different education reform panels as well as being appointed to a White House commission on Hispanic issues. She continues to work on the NEA Task Force on For Profit Colleges and Universities. During her report to the Board she also made a few remarks about the need of Congress to get some real bills to pass and help our schools. If the bills are not passed, there is a real possibility of 100% of our schools being labeled as failing because of the way the current NCLB law is written. Eskelsen believes there are some real opportunities for educators' organizations to be a part of the conversation as opposed to being told what will happen.

## Report of the Secretary-Treasurer

Becky Pringle explained how we continue to "exercise caution and be good stewards of our members' money." Due to the cuts in education positions across the nation, our member numbers are decreasing (by about 2.2%). Luckily, our retiree and students numbers are growing across the nation as is the

membership for Higher Education. We have been able to accommodate this decrease in our budget by attempting some different measures when it comes to communication among the board as well as in other areas (for example, the December Board meeting will be cut down to one day with the other portion of the meeting being a virtual meeting). The Board voted to approve the deduction of \$90,754 from the Contingency fund to pay for the New Business Items passed at the 2011 Representative Assembly (the lowest amount request in many, many, many years).

Pringle continued her presentation with the framework for the 2012-2014 Strategic Plan and Budget. The NEA priorities include: communications, organizing Great Public Schools, advocacy and fiscal health. These translate to two specific Strategic Goals - Strong Affiliates for Great Public Schools (as in preserving the voice of the education professions to advance public education in America) and Uniting the Nation for Great Public Schools: all of America's students deserve to be education in Great Public Schools.

The primary function of the first goal is to help affiliates (both state and local) in fending off the continual attacks on member rights. This assistance can come in many different forms - financial as well as technical assistance, member engagement support and facilitating the sharing of best practices throughout the association. Goal two is aimed at helping struggling schools with intensive support and lessons learned (as well as fostering Association and member led school transformations).

## **Report of the Executive Director**

John Stocks became the 11th Executive Director of the NEA in August of this year. He realizes that "we are in difficult times" but instead of being dejected by the continual attacks on public education, Stocks has decided to take a different approach. He used the analogy of the Chinese symbol of crisis - one part is danger while the other part is opportunity. He realizes this is a challenging time for our organization so when he started in the position he met with the Executive Committee and looked at the 15 objectives of our mission. Of those objectives, 11 areas are "green" on the dashboard.

Let's start off with the good: Academic achievement is increasing and the gaps in achievement are getting smaller because of our members. The public perception of schools is positive - according to a recent Phi Delta Kappa poll, 77% of the public grade their child's public school as an A or B. The continual showdowns with the governors around the nation have put some of the education issues front and center so the survival of the middle class (which realistically is part of the labor movement) is a central issue in our growth.

Now for the bad - the four areas which are yellow or red on the dashboard all revolve around the shrinking middle class (which are our members) which leads to the financial health of our affiliates. Stocks stated, "We could go into survival mode and focus exclusively on the survival threats but we need to go into a multi-year strategy" which would allow us to explore the challenges for opportunity and applaud our successes.

Stocks ended his presentation discussing the need to include ALL members in our union. "Our support professions are under attack to privatization which is a slow bleed...whenever it starts to happen, we have to go to the barricades and fight it. It is a critical issue which must be fixed and we must do it with professionalism. Every constituent member (including students and retirees) is important.

## **Report of General Counsel**

We are now down to 27 states (as opposed to 33) which still have public sector bargaining rights with no changes to them. In 12 states (of which Nevada is sadly one) due process right have been significantly modified - there were once longstanding statutory protections for teachers which now no longer exist. Now only 39 states have due process rights at all (down from 48 just a year ago). We continue to face significant

legal concerns and challenges including a bill in Alabama (AL HB 56) where school employees have to determine the documented status of their students and their students' parents. If either is not documented, the school and educator must report this information - and it is a crime if they fail to do so.

## Observances

On Friday, September 23 the GLBTQ caucus introduced the board to Graeme Taylor, the son of NEA (Michigan) members. We found out how Taylor, a 10th grader, defended a teacher for standing up to a bully who made a homophobic comment. The Michigan teacher was suspended for defending his students and Taylor (along with a few other students) made comments to the local school board about what the message this sent. You can check out his speech on YouTube and see his very funny appearance on Ellen DeGeneres regarding the same issue. Taylor will definitely be a voice we will be hearing in the future. To say he was inspiring would be an understatement. Taylor's message was clear, "Your students count on you to advocate for goodness". Taylor ended his inspiring presentation by leading the board in the Bully Free Pledge. For more information about the Bully Free pledge and materials that go with it, please go to NEA Bully Free Schools website: <http://www.nea.org/home/NEABullyFreeSchools.html>.



The American Indian and Alaska Native Caucus arranged for Kevin Gover, director of the National Museum of the American Indian to speak to the board about the importance of the elimination of stereotyping. He eloquently explained how stereotyping and bullying tactics go hand-in-hand. His goal is to educate policy makers (as well as others) so there is much more accurate knowledge of Native Americans. Decisions should be based on accurate knowledge of Native Americans rather than misinformation from popular culture. If we were to believe the history books, the Native American population stopped existing after the Trail of Tears. The reality - there are now more Native American indigenous people than there were prior to 1492.

## A few more pieces of news and tidbits:

- Dennis Van Roekel is the Vice Chair of Educators for Obama.
- There were 2150 educators on the conference call with Vice President Biden - over 1,800 were NEA members.
- Van Roekel called upon members to write letters to the editor in support of the Jobs Bill (sample letters can be found at [www.educationvotes.org/ite](http://www.educationvotes.org/ite)). Add your own personal experiences and write a letter to your local newspaper!
- Please continue to make and solicit contributions from members to The NEA fund for Children and Public Education to support friends of education! To set up your own personal fundraising page go to <http://go.NEAFund.org>. Currently only 6% of NEA members are members of the PAC; we could do even more with the support of more members.

For further details and/or clarifications on any of the information, please contact either Natha Anderson ([nathaanderson@sbcglobal.net](mailto:nathaanderson@sbcglobal.net)) or Peg Bean ([gfrijole@aol.com](mailto:gfrijole@aol.com)). FYI - the next meeting of the NEA Board will be December 8th (for the virtual meeting) and December 10th.