



## Royal Oak Education Association

# Reporter

March, 2007

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## Bargaining Crisis

Slow progress was made in bargaining during February as we achieved tentative agreement on two more non-financial issues. However, bargaining on March 12<sup>th</sup> was an entirely different story. After we presented a comprehensive and reasonable 3 year salary proposal (which includes this year), Board attorney Gary King and Executive Director Cheryl Goodgine asked for a private conference with Laurie and me. They all but declared their unwillingness to continue to bargain directly with us. They expressed to us that the parties (ourselves and the School Board) have a "philosophical difference" in the use of fund equity for labor costs. They went on to mention the probability of mediation in the near future. Their use of the phrase "philosophical difference" is very important. It means two things. First, the Board won't consider using any of the 14 million dollar fund equity for teachers' salaries or benefits. (They also won't consider profits from building sales such as the recent 2 million dollar sale of Mark Twain for salaries or benefits; we've already asked.) Second, the Board is acknowledging that money is available. They are saying specifically that they won't use it for salary or benefits. That is why they labeled the issue a philosophical one and not a financial one. Their philosophy has earned them the antipathy of some state legislators who want to limit the amount of unused fund equity that a district can accumulate. Royal Oak was cited in a recent Free Press article as one of the highest districts in unused fund equity in Oakland County which means that we have become the county poster child for inappropriately withholding tax dollars from students and teachers.

As I mentioned in last month's REPORTER, traditional bargaining is not conducive to dia-

logue. Dialogue tends to lead to mutual understanding, which tends to lead to agreement. The lack of dialogue is more suitable to Administration's temperament than ours as we would have liked to work collaboratively, but the School Board slammed the door on cooperation with teachers when it hired an attorney to bargain for them. Now, they are slamming the door on any reasonable chance of successfully bargaining a contract by declaring their intention to pursue mediation.

The Board's last proposal is that we pay \$2,500 per year for reduced MESSA coverage or participate in a health savings account. A health savings account is the most inferior form of insurance available. As President, I would never accept that for ROEA members and our families. At the Board's behest we will soon be using a mediator at bargaining. Historically, mediators have not been helpful to teachers. The goal of mediation is a contract and whether that contract reflects fairness and the needs of teachers is entirely secondary to the mediator. My speculation is that the real reason for the Board's action is to eventually impose a contract upon us that doesn't include MESSA health insurance. In order to legally impose a non-negotiated contract upon us, they need to go through the legal step of mediation. In my opinion, we need to be prepared to do whatever is necessary, up to and including a strike, to preserve our rights to bargain a contract with adequate health care benefits.

-Sid

**ROEA Rally**  
**Thursday, April 26**  
**6 PM**

# Letter to the Editor



Chris Baer

This letter, written by ROEA Vice President Chris Baer who is a fifth grade teacher at Upton, has been submitted to the Oakland Press as part of our crisis team's efforts to keep the community informed about the challenges of teaching and the importance to the community of a good contract for teachers.

Dear Editor:

I've been a teacher in various Royal Oak elementary schools for 24 years. You'd think that with all that experience, the job would become easier. The truth is, with experienced colleagues and I agree that teaching has never been harder. The stress and workload of the job seems to intensify each year, especially with the ever present Michigan education funding crisis.

Budget costs have reduced both teaching and support staffs, while expectations to reach the same goals for ALL our students have increased. With fewer staff members, class sizes are larger, and everyone has to work longer and harder to accomplish our collaborative mission. I arrive at school at 7:30 every morning, and generally work until 5:00 p.m. On a good day, I may get a full 57 minute lunch break, but that rarely happens. At the end of the school day, I pack my roll able tote crate with hours of work to do at home. At least another forty-five minutes each day is spent in answering school related e-mail messages and inputting grades into a computerized grade book. Then there's committee work, night functions, and all the little extra things we teachers volunteer to do on our own time. Sundays are reserved for writing lesson plans, parent newsletters, and documenting or reporting student growth.

Since the budget for school supplies keeps shrinking, like most teachers in Michigan, I find it necessary to purchase many of my own teaching supplies, classroom furnishings, and student incentives. Students who are unable to pay for class field trips, student newspaper subscriptions, or homework materials, are also "sponsored" from my pocketbook. No child is left behind.

A recent survey reported that as a result of budget cuts, Royal Oak teachers spend between \$1,000 and \$3,000 a year of their salaries on school related expenses. Last year I personally spent an amount at the upper end of this survey scale, and I know that my teaching supply needs are less than those of a beginning teacher. I worry about that because a starting teacher's annual salary is around \$37,000. They have student loans to pay off, and tuition payments for graduate classes that are required by the state to maintain their certification. Quite frankly, I don't know how they manage it.

Are you aware that Royal Oak teachers and support staff have been working since June without a contract? We haven't had a cost of living pay raise in several years. Each year we are asked to make more and more sacrifices in our health benefits, and then watch as our pay slowly decreases and our workload increases. It's depressing.

I want to let your readers know that I am truly dedicated to my profession, and having taught for 24 years, I am committed to continue to do what I love until I reach retirement age, or can no longer keep up with the ever accelerating pace... but I worry about the future. What is going to happen when Michigan has to face the predicted severe shortage of teachers? The reality is, without the funding needed to support education, fewer "highly qualified" college students are choosing teaching as their career pathway. To be honest, I can't say that I blame them.

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## CONTRACT FEATURE

### PAID LEAVE

Sick leave benefits seems to be our most frequent Contract Feature topic. But since there continues to be misunderstanding of contract language by teachers and intentional misinterpretation of the language by administrators, it's worth a revisit.

#### Sick Leave for Personal and Family Illness

You are entitled to sick leave for yourself for any medical reason. You do not need pre-approval. If you are sick on a day adjoining a holiday it doesn't matter, you just call in sick. For

example, you do not need permission to take sick leave on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving. Sick leave should be used for all medical appointments.

Sick leave for family members has been contentious. The union's position is that you have the same rights to attend to the health and medical needs of family members as you do for yourself. The Administration is attempting to use poorly written contract language to limit these rights. The ROEA will fight to insure that should your spouse, child or any other family member need medical attention, you have the right to as many paid days as you need to take care of them.

As with sick leave for your own personal illness, you do not need approval for a family illness day; just call in to the SEMS system. And you do not need to request special permission for

*Continued on Page 3*

*Contract Feature...Continued from Page 2*

family illness if it adjoins a holiday.

**Business Leave**

You have up to three days of your annual allotment of 11 days to use for personal business. If you do not use those days, you do not lose them. They convert to carry-over days for the next year. One of your days is discretionary which means you don't have to stipulate what you are using the day for. The other two days are non-discretionary days and you do have to stipulate that you are using the days for their intended purpose. We are attempting in bargaining to do away with the form as it is both insulting and unnecessary.

For either type of business leave you are notifying the district that you are taking the day, not requesting permission for a day. Business leave days that adjoin a school holiday or fall within the last five days of the school year need the approval of Joint Committee. This is the only category of leave days that

need approval. Business days extending holidays that are used for family events such as out of town weddings or reunions are typically approved. Days that merely extend a vacation probably won't be approved.

**IN SUMMARY:**

-Only personal business leave adjoining a holiday or within the last five days of the year needs the approval of Joint Committee; nothing else does.

-You don't need the approval of the district to be sick or take care of a sick family member.

-Don't rely on an administrator's interpretation of sick leave; they have been less than forthcoming with teachers. Check with your building rep or call the ROEA office.

-Paid Leave begins on page 33 of the contract.

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## Retired Teacher as Special as Those He Taught

**Jack Salter**  
**Daily Tribune**

How many of you remember 1964? That year, the Supreme Court ordered that congressional districts must have equal population, a bill establishing Medicare was signed, and "My Fair Lady" won the Academy Award as the top picture. In sports, the Cleveland Browns defeated the Baltimore Colts 27-0 in the National Football League championship, the St. Louis Cardinals defeated the New York Yankees four games to three in the World Series, Northern Dancer won the Kentucky Derby, and Illinois defeated Washington 17-7 in the Rose Bowl.

Also in 1964, a young man named Tom Steeby started teaching school and began making a difference in the lives of thousands of young people. Steeby's first year of teaching was spent on the island of Molokai, in the Hawaiian Islands. The last 41 years were spent in Royal Oak, with the last 13 at Longfellow Elementary School.

Steeby is a graduate of Eastern Michigan University and received his master's degree from Michigan State. I imagine his favorite colors are green and white, as those are the colors of both schools. He has been a special education teacher his whole career, which is not an easy job.

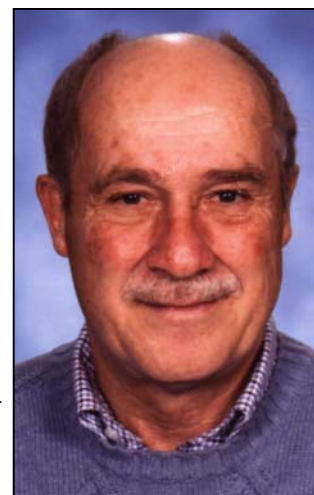
Steeby spent many years working on the Special Olympics lo-

cally and at the state event each May. He has taken great pride in watching his students achieve emotionally, socially and academically. Steeby still hears from many of his former students and has formed many lasting friendships.

Ill health forced Steeby to retire sooner than he would have liked. A special party, at the home of Longfellow Principal Judy Juneau, was held this past Dec. 8.

Steeby and his wife Penny have two children, Laura and Daniel (Jessica), and Steeby loves being "papa" to the sun shines in his life, Emily and Olivia.

My hat is off to Steeby for dedicating his adult life to those special education children. It takes a special person to do that. May he enjoy his retirement knowing that he has made a difference in the lives of so many young people.



Tom Steeby

# Classified

All of the people who advertise in the Reporter are connected to the ROEA, ROESA or ROESPA. They are either members of the union, spouses of members, or retirees. You can expect a high quality of service and commitment to the needs of fellow union members as a result. Classified ads are also posted on our web site, ROEA.com.

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