



AD NOTES



President: Chris Francis, Volume XXIX, Issue 8, March 23, 2010

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Contract Survey Results 2010-2011

Thank you to everyone who took the time to take the Contract Survey. The data and comments provided by almost 1,000 members give the Association important information on members' opinions and feelings. This AdNotes reports some of the survey results and discusses trends found in the open response section. If an issue or concern is not addressed here, please feel free to email me or call the GGEA Office to discuss (cfrancis@ggea.org). Many comments relayed feelings of gratitude for the leadership GGEA has provided during these tough times. Thank you for the notes of appreciation.

Calendar - Spring Recess, Local Holiday, Starting Earlier

By a very slim margin, members prefer to maintain the Spring Recess between the 3rd and 4th quarters. This makes sense for several reasons. First, it is a natural break for both K-6 and 7-12. Elementary has finished parent conferences and secondary closes out the 3rd quarter. Secondly, it is a good break between the holidays in February and the end of the year. Next, it detaches the recess from a religious holiday, thereby giving balanced priority to all religious beliefs.

Many comments centered around aligning our Spring Recess with other school districts, especially for cases of child care. This is not possible, even if Spring Recess were attached to Easter. In a recent Spring Recess survey by the Orange Service Center, five of ten school districts did not have Spring Recess attached to Easter. Of the remaining five, three had Spring Recess after Easter and two before. No matter how it is scheduled, the majority of districts will not correlate with our placement of Spring Recess.

We are still attempting to get more flexibility in the placement of our local holiday. Many years we are pressured to place it on Good Friday because of another employee group's contract. Members have responded overwhelmingly that they prefer the Wednesday before Thanksgiving (60%) compared to Good Friday (20%). Members that observe this religious holiday would still be able to take a Personal Necessity Day for religious reasons. A majority of the respondents were in favor of returning to work earlier in September. To accommodate those who might have already made summer plans, this is something we will consider for the 2011-2012 school year.

Budget Cut Days (Furlough Days)

Almost 98% of the membership prefers Budget Cut Days (BCD) to a straight salary reduction. To be clear, a BCD is one day less of pay for one less day worked. The number of BCDs to be implemented, if they are necessary, will be decided over the summer after state funding and the effectiveness of our local budget cuts have been clarified. Most members prefer BCDs on student days, but some preferred non-student days so that student contact time was not lost. Another issue will be when to place BCDs. Many members voiced the desire to attach these days to other holiday breaks or longer weekends. However, we need to educate the community about the effects of these budget cuts and ensure that parents understand that a BCD is not a vacation day, but one less day of school for their children.

Several respondents were concerned about the placement of BCDs and having less time for state testing. This will not be the case. The testing window for the California Standards Tests begins

after a certain number of school days. BCDs will not count as school days, and therefore delay the testing window if they are placed earlier in the year. If we are forced to take BCDs, we will advocate that all employee groups take an equal percentage of days across the board. If an equal cut is taken, district administrators and principals would take more BCDs due to a longer work year. These cuts will be temporary to match our temporary funding problem.

Other Budget Options

As mentioned in the comments, other options do exist to close the financial gap between district funding and expenditures. Some of these options are viable, while others are a definite possibility. Freezing the salary schedule entails not granting step and column salary increases. While this would save money, it disproportionately cuts salary from a minority group of members that are due these step and column salary increases. This is not a very equitable solution. BCDs represent the same percentage salary cut across the board. Eliminating the 15 hours of stipend pay was also suggested. This would not free up any general fund monies as training is paid out of categorical dollars that are earmarked only for this purpose. Temporarily halting release days is another option. Yet, this also creates an equity issue as only K-8 would be losing prep time. Getting rid of Family Illness Days poses similar problems. The only costs being saved is that of the substitute, and other employee groups do not have substitutes for their positions. Other ideas of charging students for summer school, credit recovery, free and reduced lunches, and transportation are not viable due to the socio-economic class of most of our students and the potential loss of ADA and corresponding funding. A last option offered was to cut down on the number of Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSA) at the District Office. This is another case of categorical funding. By putting some of them back in the classroom, we would be creating a bigger drain on the general fund, and could lead to layoffs of less senior teachers. One idea mentioned several times was the possibility of a retirement incentive. This is a GGEA proposal for the next round of negotiations. We are also pushing for more leniency in asking the community for donations. This will have a dual benefit of further educating our parents about the impact of budget cuts and give our classrooms some much-needed supplies.

Please understand that our members are not the only ones feeling the effects of these cuts. Several District Office positions have not been filled, along with many classified positions. All groups will be paying the increased medical expenses. Students are feeling the pinch as well with higher class sizes and cuts to the libraries, intermediate intramural sports, music festivals, athletics, and the elimination of transportation for some students. If you have other ideas on ways to save money, please share. We need all possibilities on the table during these difficult times.

Workload

Workload was a major topic of the comments given. GGEA continues to advocate for an appropriate workload. The Association understands that the federal and state governments have applied tremendous pressure for us to succeed. Indeed, our members want to succeed and have greater student achievement. Yet, in attaining this goal, we want to work smarter, not harder. The vast majority of our teachers are already working at maximum capacity. We are exploring ways to work smarter, and our efforts at the elementary level this year are proof of this. We are also advocating for time to effectively learn and implement new training or curriculum before additional training is required. Again, if you have any suggestions, please let me know.

State Representatives

In conclusion, let's not forget who put us in this position. State representatives in Sacramento laid the burden on our backs and the backs of our students. State representatives deeply cut funding from public education before other options. State representatives deemed public education not as important as it should be. We, at the local level, have been left to pick up the pieces.