

EACC Board of Education Update

October 14, 2014

Good afternoon, my name is Linda McLaughlin and I am President of the Education Association of Charles County.

As the school year gets into full swing, some common themes have arisen. Everyone is feeling the stress of testing. We have been told by numerous educators around the county that testing students during the first two weeks of school was “brutal” - for the students, teachers, administration and staff. Our phones have been ringing and our emails full with teachers overburdened with an unimaginable workload. Teachers are despairing because there are simply not enough hours in their day to get everything done. Teachers are working 10-14 hour days, plus weekends. There are Special Educators who have huge case loads and are completely snowed under by IEP paperwork, planning for classes, IEP meetings, and of course, testing. Edline is frustrating the elementary teachers because it was supposed to make things easier, but it has not. We have been told that training has been limited and sometimes inadequate to the needs of the specific teacher. There is a feeling that even the “super users” don’t know the program well. How much training was given to the trainers?

Were they comfortable with the program before delivering training? The deadline for SLOs looms before us, yet as of last week teachers cannot choose their targeted students in Insystech. We have had teachers throw up their hands in defeat and quit in September and October, barely 2 months into the school year. Retired teachers have admitted sheepishly to me that the reason they retired within the past two years is that they did not want to deal with what they saw on the horizon. They saw this very situation of increased testing, increased workload, a new evaluation system, but no increase in staff or resources to make it happen. Teachers feel the sting of being two steps behind with no COLA this year. They feel betrayed by their Commissioners, who did not see the need to support a budget that would reward them for a job well done. The staff at the Central Office is fielding each concern we bring them with a cool head and amazing flexibility. But the natives are restless. Teachers do what they do because they love it. We love our students, and we want to see them succeed, but it seems that this year the saying “Do more with less” is bearing a punitive ring. Teachers are starting to believe that no one is listening to their concerns, morale is low, and they are becoming more fervent in their desire to be heard.

They are telling us that this is not the dream of being an educator that they once had as a college student.

This frustration worked well for education - friendly candidates in the Primary elections as our voter turnout was tremendous. The EACC continues to work tirelessly towards getting our “Dream Team” of education - friendly candidates elected in November.

Our 2 MSDE SLO Leadership Cadre and EACC members Leslie Schroeck and Holly Walsh, have created 2 SLO workshops on October 13th and October 15th called “Shedding Some Light on SLOs”. The Office of Instruction helped facilitate the use of the Staff Development room in the Starkey building for that purpose. We hope that the added tutorial included in these two workshops will help teachers to feel more confident and less stressed about the SLOs and Insystech.

EACC held its yearly Senior Certified Representative Training and 27 new Reps were trained, which is our largest group to date. At the training our new Reps learned how to assist our employees with issues dealing with the contract, legal matters, and professional development opportunities offered by the

Association. We have at least 1 Rep at each school, most of which are certified.

Courtney Dowling, Dan Besseck, and I have been visiting school buildings to interface with our members. We want to create a higher visibility of EACC in the schools and give our members (and potential members) a chance to speak to us one on one. By October 31st we will have visited all buildings in Charles County. It's been an amazing journey to meet members in their "natural habitat" and see why they are so proud of their schools. In the midst of an overwhelming workload, our teachers still choose to do extra work for our students. For example, at Diggs Elementary school, there is an after school Science Club that has 55 first grade students. There is also a Chess Club at Diggs that boasts the County Chess Champion for the elementary grades – oh, and by the way, he's in Kindergarten. Those club sponsors take their own time, on top of lesson plans and team meetings and SLOs and testing and real life obligations, to sponsor those clubs, because it benefits the students. Some of these after school programs provide a stipend for the teacher, but some do not. We need to support them so they can continue to make that choice to volunteer their time for the students' benefit.

The MSEA Convention is this week, October 17th and 18th in Ocean City, Maryland. We have 25 members from Charles County attending the MSEA RA as delegates, and two graduating “MSEA Emerging Leaders.” The conference portion is free to members and has many workshops available. To see the workshops, you can go to www.marylandeducators.org

EACC is confident that if we continue to work collaboratively with the Board of Education, with the Superintendent and her staff, and hopefully with our education-friendly candidates that will be elected in November, that we will be able to aid and retain some of the best educators in the state of Maryland. We cannot afford to lose one more teacher, or dampen one more educator’s spirit. Our students and our educators deserve better.