

THE SCHOOL BELL

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ACTION NEEDED!

The legislation renewing federal special education guidelines and funding (IDEA) is currently in the “mark up” phase, which means amendments and changes are occurring. Congressman DeMint from South Carolina is proposing to add a Voucher Amendment to the bill. This amendment would basically make the Florida Voucher system a standard for the entire country. In addition to draining public dollars out of public schools, this bill lacks accountability, completely undermines parental and students’ rights, threatens long-standing civil rights laws (IDEA and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973), and will do nothing to ensure that the achievements of students with disabilities is raised.

We need you to contact your member of congress and urge him to not support this amendment.

MEA SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Mark your calendar! Monday, June 23rd is the MEA Scholarship Fund’s Golf Outing, held at the MSU Forest Akers West in East Lansing. Entry forms and further information will be in the next issue of “*The Voice*”. All proceeds go to the fund, which underwrites scholarships to public school graduates, with preference give to children of MEA members.

COME CELEBRATE!!

Thursday, May 8th from 4:30 – 6:00 pm at the UAW Hall in Three Rivers - that’s the place to be! The 5E/G Coordinating

Council of the Southwestern Michigan Education Association will be celebrating 150 years of the MEA with a recognition dinner for special friends of public education.

Each district was asked to nominate a business or organization from their community to be recognized for giving countless amounts of time, products, or publicity in support of their local public schools. Five local groups have been selected and will be recognized at this celebration:

Cassopolis - The Cassopolis P.T.O.
Constantine – Phil and Pat Portinga
Marcellus – The Marcellus News
Mendon – The Mendon P.T.O
Three Rivers – Walnut Street Floor Cloths & Custom Stenciling

Come hear the Three Rivers’ choir and enjoy a light meal before the recognition ceremony. This event is free of charge, but seating is limited. Those interested in attending should contact their building representative or president by April 25th to reserve a seat.

MEA DUES

The Representative Assembly of MEA will meet on May 2nd and 3rd to consider, among other legislative initiatives, an increase in dues. Your 5 E/G Coordinating Council and local leaders are aware of the situation and have had many discussions at the Council meetings. Just for your information, your dues have remained the same for the past three years and they were higher 10 years ago than they are today. For the past few years our expenditures have exceeded our revenues. Why?

There are many reasons but one of them is the economic climate.

RETIREMENT IMPROVEMENT BILL

On Thursday, March 27th, a bill to make significant improvements in the retirement of all public school employees in the future was introduced in the Michigan House of Representatives. HB 4486, sponsored by Rep. Jack Monire (D-Flint), would increase the so-called multiplier for all years of service after March 31, 2004, to 1.75% of the final average compensation of the employee.

Under current law, the pension of school employees is calculated by multiplying their final average compensation by 1.5% and multiplying that product by their total number of years of service. For employees under the MIP plan, the final average compensation is the earnings average of their best three consecutive years of service. For employees under the Basic plan, the final average compensation is the earning average of their best five consecutive years of service.

HB 4486 calls for the multiplier to go to 1.75% effective April 1, 2004. This means that the final average compensation for employees retiring after that date would be multiplied by 1.75% and this product would be multiplied by their number of years of service. The effect of this change is to increase the pension of each individual by approximately 16.66%.

This bill has nothing to do with any potential early retirement incentive (ERI), rumors of which have abounded for the past six weeks. As of this date, there have been no bills introduced in either house of the Michigan Legislature to provide an ERI for school employees.

HB 4486 has been referred to the House Appropriations Committee. Current law provides that

the committee must receive a cost analysis for the Department of Management and Budget prior to any action on the bill. Such an estimate has not been forthcoming as yet. Unofficial estimates place the cost of this bill as high as 3% of total payroll for all public school employees in the state, although currently we have not been able to verify this. This is because there is a large unfunded accrued liability for current employees. All of their existing service has been funded on an assumption of a 1.5% multiplier. To now count those years under a 1.75% multiplier adds substantial cost that has not yet been funded. Under current law all such costs are paid by local school districts from their general fund operating revenue.

Check the MEA web page, <http://www.mea.org> or the Legislative web page at www.michiganlegislature.org for updates.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

April 18	MEA Closed – Good Friday
April 14 – 29	Kathie in Ireland
May 2-3	Spring RA
May 6	Teacher/School Family Day
May 8 th	150 th Celebration at UAW Hall
June 23 rd	MEA Scholarship Fund Third Annual Golf Outing

