

THE ADVOCATE

Getting organized.



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THE ADVOCATE

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HOW WE LOSE

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In a year fraught with challenges for our Union, SDEA members must focus on the steps that will lead us to victory: building capacity and strength at our worksites.

cover photo by Rafal Dobrowolski
Cover: SDEA Special Education Steering Committee member Julie Sazama reports back to Association Representatives at the November Rep. Council meeting.

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BUILDING MOMENTUM

SDEA's special education organizing campaign moves forward.

BARGAINING

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WORKLOAD VICTORY

After a year and a half of negotiations, SDEA and SDUSD have reached agreement on workload.

ADVOCATE COLUMNS

Online

This month, The Advocate's recurring columns may be viewed by visiting the SDEA website: www.sdea.net.

DEPARTMENTS

THE ADVOCATE

SDEA President and Field Organizer Site Visits — November 2009

Working directly with SDEA members and sites is the most important work of SDEA staff and leadership. Each month we will include a list of the schools visited by SDEA's President and UniServ Field Organizers, as well as a handful of sites that deserve to be highlighted for their Union work. The list below includes membership meetings at sites attended by SDEA leadership or staff, as well as organization planning meetings held between Organizers and Association Representatives.

"We still have work to do as we build our Union at Lincoln High. Some recent victories have given members confidence, knowing that when we are united and act together we can get things done. At the end of the day we are SDEA, and if we are going to have a real voice in the work we do, our union must be strong from the ground up." — Lincoln High AR Liz Gekakis

Barnard Elem.
 Chavez Elem.
 Clairemont HS
 Crawford HS
 Farb MS
 Fletcher Elem.
 Hoover HS
 Jerabek Elem.
 Kearny HS
 La Jolla HS
 Lafayette Elem.
 Lewis Middle
 Lincoln HS
 Lindberg-
 Sweitzer Elem.

Mann Middle
 Marshall MS
 Marston MS
 Ocean Beach Elem.
 Rosa Parks Elem.
 Ross Elem.
 San Diego School of Creative and Performing Arts
 Serra HS
 Tierrasanta Elem.
 Tubman Charter School

Congratulations to Union members at Marshall Middle School, who organized a November meeting with parents to discuss SDUSD's budget and how parents and teachers can work together to protect their neighborhood school.

Association Representatives are encouraged to contact their assigned Field Organizer to schedule a site visit. For contact information and a list of which organizers are assigned to which sites, visit the SDEA website at www.sdea.net.



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Letters in Solidarity

Camille Zombro
 SDEA President



Marc Capitelli
 SDEA Vice President

Educators at the fulcrum of hope

SDEA Members—

Overworked, tired, divided, overwhelmed, apathetic. These words are being used to describe morale across the District just as we face the biggest crisis in generations. This frustration stems from the very real circumstance that now more than ever educators are under assault from so many angles—even as we struggle to continue serving as the lone barrier between possibility and the abject poverty looming over the heads of so many of our students. What's missing seems to be the hope, energy and the confidence that we can overcome these challenges, and that we can build the kind of system our children deserve. But the fact is that not only can we do it, but *only* we can do it—and our parents and communities will stand with us as we do.

The battles we face are on three fronts: budget cuts, bad legislation, and our own culture of shoring up broken systems to mask their dysfunction.

Despite chronic under-funding the state legislature thinks they can cut their way out of the situation. With no real leadership in Sacramento, the partisan bickering and dysfunction are leaving our students holding the bag. And these same leaders, along with our President and national leaders, are pushing new versions of the same punitive and destructive legislation for our schools. Obama's Race to the Top and the next incarnation of No Child Left Behind promise only to continue to dismantle public education, punish schools, and divide our communities. How disappointing, and yet how familiar to see our so-called friends line up behind these non-solutions.

These cuts and the increased workload they engender are potentially devastating to educators and our students. In school visits, union meetings and one-on-one conversations, a few patterns emerge as SDEA members talk about the challenges before us. First, we *are* overworked. We're doing more with less and the cuts keep coming. Class sizes go up, support staff goes down, but program changes and new work keeps piling on. Second, we're shoring up a system that is fundamentally broken. When we purchase needed supplies, work extra hours, and mask the problems, we reinforce the false notion that we can withstand continued

cuts. We enable legislators who think they can keep cutting and get the same, *or better*, results. Some of our teachers have experienced a 60 percent increase in class size from last year to this year! It is part of our culture and our nature as people who care for children to keep things from falling apart. No one suggests letting children get hurt, but our dedication is consciously being taken advantage of by a system that has come to rely on our good will. Educational and political leaders know that we will "dig deep" to soften the brutal blow they are imposing. We can stop this trend. Our new Maintenance of Workload language gives us contractual grounds to fight back. But this language is only as good as our willingness to stand together to enforce it.

In addition to these real and pressing needs, the fact remains that we're not spending enough time talking to one another and organizing. Does your school hold regular, well-attended union meetings? Do you have a site SDEA team in place to diffuse the work of the union? Do you have a way of knowing what matters to the staff at your schools and of working together toward solutions? We cannot do this unless we *all* take on the work of building the union. No one will do it for us; no one else can.

In this month's Advocate, we highlight the work being led by SDEA members to make sense of the myriad changes in Special Education programs. We discuss the new Maintenance of Workload provisions and how members can take back control of our work lives. And we get a picture of how SDEA members and parents can impact the District's priorities and the year ahead.

The truth is that we do have reason for hope. SDEA members are making a difference in schools across the District by talking with parents about working together to save our schools. We are beginning to do the work we need to do to create a strong, united Union. Our great challenges are also great opportunities, and there is no better or more important time than now for us to pull together. Because together, we *are* stronger.

In Solidarity,

Camille Zombro

Camille Zombro
 SDEA President

Marc Capitelli

Marc Capitelli
 SDEA Vice President

the road ahead

**November —
December 2009**

**January —
April 2010**

**May —
July 2010**

**August —
November 2010**

- SDUSD budget discussions & initial District “spin”
- SDEA bargaining cont.

- Possible Layoffs
- SDUSD budget doom & gloom cont.
- SDEA bargaining cont.

- Layoff fight continues
- District’s demands for bargaining concessions

- Fighting back against bargaining concessions
- Anti-union ballot measures
- School Board election
- Possible parcel tax
- Bargaining cont.

We **WIN** this fight if:

- We focus on both the short term and the long term.
- We work with parents to find common interests and issues that we can work on together.
- We remain confident and patient.
- We stay strong and persist—and resist attempts to divide us.
- We commit to strengthening our worksites (by building effective site teams and maintaining two-way communication).
- We focus on engaging members at our worksites in **collective actions that give them a voice in their futures.**

We **LOSE** this fight if:

- SDEA members sit on the sidelines and watch.
- We buy into the doom and gloom predictions of certain School Board members and District administrators.
- We fail to engage and activate parents and the community in our common cause.
- We start pointing fingers and fighting each other.
- We get scared and begin to think the worst is inevitable.
- We fail to engage, both as a union and as a community, in collective **ACTIONS!**

The past few years have been eventful ones for our Union. We’ve faced crisis after crisis—from hundreds of layoff notices two years ago to recent demands from the District for salary rollbacks and furlough days. But through our collective strength and solidarity we have been able to weather each and every one of these storms.

It is becoming apparent, however, that the approaching storm is different from what we have faced in the past. The timeline above illustrates a year peppered with more significant challenges than we have ever faced in a single year as a Union. The stakes have never been higher. Those who oppose public education and teachers are clearly using the present economic crisis as an opportunity to roll back decades of gains and protections that we once considered secure (and may even take for granted).

WILL WE LET THIS HAPPEN? The answer is YES if SDEA members sit on the sidelines as simple bystanders. The answer is NO if each and every one of us commits some time and energy to work collectively as a union for a common goal: To defend our public schools and keep our profession strong.

How we get where we need to be: What each site needs to build workplace capacity and strength

1. Active and engaged AR
2. Complete and functioning site team (ARs, CRs, Organizers)
3. Regular site meetings
4. Regular ACTION in support of union objectives
5. Regular site evaluation and reporting of Union actions

Special ed. organizing campaign continues

Beginning with the 2008-2009 school year, the District took a monumental step to change how services are delivered to all students who qualify for special education services. Out went the old system that explicitly designated a special educator's caseload, and in came the new Specialized Academic Instruction (SAI) model. SAI endeavors to provide the vast majority of students with IEPs the opportunity to have access to the general curriculum, while at the same time continuing to receive special education services. While the SAI model holds great potential for meeting the needs of children with IEPs, the District doomed this new program to turbulence by neglecting to involve educators in the lead up to these changes. The unsurprising result has been widespread contract violations of caseload sizes, work hours, and language dealing with equitable distribution of caseloads in general education classrooms. In addition to swelling special educator caseloads, general educators found themselves striving to meet the needs of newly included students with special needs without adequate training on how to deliver required services.

In response to these pandemic problems, SDEA members are undertaking an organizing initiative to deal with the myriad issues raised by the District's haphazard special education transition. In early November, over one hundred SDEA members, including both general and special educators, psychologists and speech and language pathologists met with the goal of looking at what were the real problem issues facing them out in the schools in delivering special education services. A group of self-selected educators volunteered to be a part of the SDEA Special Education Steering

See *SPECIAL EDUCATION*, page 7



photos by Rafal Dobrowolski

Top: Secondary educators assess their sites' commitment level. Below: Elementary educators discuss organizing solutions for special ed. issues.

Workload agreement signifies major victory

After months of negotiations, SDEA and SDUSD have reached and signed an agreement on Maintenance of Workload language. Initially proposed in October 2008 by SDEA, the new language ensures that members are not overburdened with an insurmountable workload unrelated to teaching. The agreement consists of two interdependent Memoranda of Understanding. One ensures that from the date of signing forward, the District must take into consideration the current workload of all educators in the bargaining unit before implementing any new curricular, structural or program reforms. The other MOU remedies residual workload issues since the fall of 2008, including Standards Based Report Cards, new technological changes (such as Data Director), and benchmark/assessment issues. Two outstanding workload issues related to special education still remain on the bargaining table. The two approved workload MOUs and SDEA's most recent proposals regarding special education workload issues are available on the SDEA website.

SDEA is one of the few unions that have successfully negotiated such language into our contract (a feat we have been trying to do since the 1970s). With the revolving door of administrators and superintendents who unilaterally increase our workload with each new reign, piling on the newest flavor-of-the-year educational reform without consideration for what we already have to deal with, maintenance of workload becomes ever

more necessary. We now have a way to push back against being overburdened and unable to teach and provide the services that our students are entitled to.

This language, contrary to some criticisms, does not prohibit the School Board from implementing new curricular or structural reforms. Rather, the new language ensures that the District must take into account the impact of such reforms on the current workload of the educators responsible for implementing the new programs. Educators will now be able to spend more time teaching and providing services to students instead of fretting about paperwork, data entry, and other duties unrelated to classroom instruction. We will now be protected from being overworked to the point of burnout, allowing us to focus on our core interest: our students and ensuring their educational success.

In order for the workload agreement to have any teeth, ARs and all bargaining unit members will need to vigilantly enforce it. Just like the rest of our contract, the language is only as good as the enforcement of it. Our ability to successfully negotiate this agreement reflects the effective organizing *all* SDEA members engaged in around workload issues. That level of organizing will be even more important as bargaining progresses. Even with this win, the rest of our contract is open for negotiations. All members must stay informed, engaged, and ready to do what it takes to protect what we have and win what we deserve.

Special education

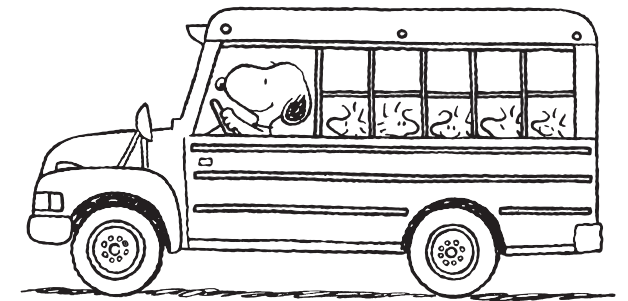
Continued from page 6

Committee, which will help the Union streamline how we deal with special education organizing issues. The issues and concerns raised by the group fell under three broad categories: issues that are in the scope of bargaining, issues relevant to state and/or federal law and a category for issues regarding curriculum and instruction.

The steering committee met afterwards to narrow the wide range of issues raised by the bigger group. The committee distilled the issues SDEA members identified into three top priority areas, and created a site reporting form that incorporated the overarching issues raised at the large group meeting. This form was used by sites to look at the problems they are facing and come up with viable solutions. The sites also gauged members' level of commitment to working towards the possible solutions. Sites had the opportunity to report back their discussions to another special education meeting that was held on Wednesday, Dec. 2 and open to all members. This was an opportunity for sites to share not only the problems they were dealing with but also what viable solutions each site was interested in pursuing.

The next special education organizing meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, Feb. 2 at 4:30 p.m. at the SDEA office. The meeting will include training on responding to violations of state and federal laws in the special education arena. Attendees will also begin to plan a forum that will invite the School Board and give them the opportunity to see what obstacles that our educators are facing in delivering special education services. Members who are interested in participating in the organizing campaign are encouraged to contact their site ARs to find out how to get involved.

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Online Special Edition: Advocate Columnists

Do I need to listen to the healthcare debate? Senate excise tax will hit union members hard

Healthcare reform has been in the national debate since the presidential primary process began two years ago. It still dominates the news on a daily basis, even though both houses of Congress have passed healthcare legislation. As educators, do we need to pay attention to this topic? The answer is a resounding yes!

When both bodies of Congress pass legislation on an issue, a conference committee is called for and the committee works to develop a compromise that both bodies can agree to. In the case of the healthcare bills, there is a discrepancy that looms large for all of us. The House of Representatives passed a bill that did not tax our benefits, but the Senate side passed a bill that imposes a 40 percent excise tax on health benefits beginning in 2013. The threshold for this tax could be set as low as \$8,500 for a single person's coverage and \$23,000 for a family's coverage. This would include medical, dental and vision benefits.

Now, I just checked PeopleSoft for the cost of my benefits as

stated on my pay stub and, as a single person, the district is contributing \$9,723.10 year toward the cost of my medical, dental and vision care. That means I will be paying this excise tax. If I am, wouldn't you as well? I'm not willing to pay a 40 percent tax to pay for healthcare reforms that do little to reform the healthcare crisis. I have never considered myself one of those wealthy Americans with a "Cadillac" healthcare plan. I have already called our members of Congress and I will speak with each one the next time I am in Washington, DC. What are you willing to do?

Elizabeth Ahlgren may be contacted via email at elizahlgren@yahoo.com.



Elizabeth Ahlgren
NEA Director, District 10

The new year signals a time to stop and reflect

Wow! Another year has come and is nearly history. As I get older, the years go by quicker and quicker. I want them to slow down. As a young person, I did not realize this, so I often do not stop to smell the roses as they say. When I hit my forties and fifties, I began to notice this fast pace phenomenon. So for you younger teachers and my retired colleagues, I urge you to make the most of each and every minute in the new year—2010.

Enough philosophizing. Of ongoing concern for retirees and active members is the state of our pension. CTA reports that they "interviewed CalSTRS and CalPERS executives regarding the current health of the respective pension plans. Even in these rocky economic times, both investment systems appear to be in very good shape." CalPERS offers a video center, online training opportunities and a list retirement fairs via the Education Center on the CalPERs website.

The NEA-Retired division includes 120,000 members and is led by retirees. CTA/NEA-Retired is an active affiliate of NEA-Retired. SDEA/CTA/NEA-Retired is unified and SDEA-R is led by retirees. SDEA-R currently has 800 plus retired members. If you know of any retired educators, tell them about SDEA-R and

direct them to our SDEA-R link to the SDEA website for the sign-up form. There are many more educators out there who could be members of SDEA-Retired.

Just a few notes for SDEA-R members: Whenever you send a check for one of our SDEA-R functions, the check should be made out to SDEA-R, not Diana Hayes. The check should be sent to Diana Hayes at SDEA as noted on the reservation forms. Don't forget the SDEA-R Breakfast Social at the Spice House Café at 9 a.m. on Monday, March 1, 2010. The Spice House is located at 9035 Clairemont Mesa Blvd., SD 92123. The phone number (858) 565-1028. Attendees will order on their own at this event.

Have a safe and happy holiday season and see you in the new year via print.

Note: Please see SDEA-R's website for an important correction regarding the upcoming luncheon.



Norma Heeter
SDEA-R President

Attention Retirees!

Don't forget to check out SDEA-R's new website:
www.sdea.net/membership/sdea-retired

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Show your SDEA style!

Calling All ARs!

Have you ordered SDEA t-shirts for your site this year? We only have a few hundred left, and they're going first come, first serve. The shirts are great to wear on bargaining days, for Union meetings, or just to show your SDEA pride! Order forms are available on the AR's Corner at www.sdea.net. And don't forget to send in your staff's red t-shirt photos to be featured in The Advocate or on the website!

What's black and red and awesome all over? An SDEA t-shirt! If you don't have one, see your AR ASAP to order one of your very own.



Speak up, SDEA!

The year brings new opportunities to share ideas with your fellow SDEA members through The Advocate. We encourage letters to the editor. Submissions should be emailed to Editor Erin Clark at advocate@sdea.net. Letters may be edited for length and clarity. Publication is subject to space constraints.

Advocate questions, comments and submissions may be directed to advocate@sdea.net.