



The Focus

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Got ideas for future newsletter articles? We would love to hear from you!
Let us know at communications@etanews.org.

ETA Retirement Celebration

Please join us in honoring this year's retirees! The festivities will be 3:45-5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, June 6 at Mexico Lindo (5635 Silver Creek Valley Road). All are welcome! RSVP to president@etanews.org by Friday, May 26.

Update on School Closures

by ESD Communications Director Charles Crosby, reprinted with permission

At the last Board meeting on May 11, Trustees reviewed the recommendations from the Facilities Advisory Committee and reiterated that there will be no decisions on the repurposing of any school sites for the coming school year as they continue to review various options. While this work continues there will be no changes made and all District schools will continue as normal.

Evergreen School Board Considers Merit Pay for Principals

On the agenda for the May 11 Board meeting was a seemingly innocuous item: "6.6 Approval of Evergreen School District (ESD) and Evergreen Administrators Association (EAA) Meet and Confer Agreement – for July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017." ESD and EAA had come to a Tentative Agreement which included a 2% raise in administrative salaries, aligned to the corresponding Collective Bargaining Agreements with ETA and CSEA. The discussion took an alarming turn when Trustee Bonnie Mace proposed a motion to approve not a percentage raise, but an equivalent dollar amount that could be distributed unevenly among principals according to performance. It was not clear how performance would have been measured. Trustee Jim Zito spoke out several times in support of the motion, using the analogy of private enterprise to support the idea of merit pay. In private industry, the argument goes, managers set goals and are paid according to how well they achieve them.

Trustee Sylvia Alvarez spoke strongly against the motion. She argued that since ESD and EAA had come to a Tentative Agreement, it was the Board's job to simply approve or decline. Unilaterally amending the agreement, according to Alvarez, would amount to an unfair labor practice. She went so far as to suggest that EAA file an Unfair Practice Charge with the California Public Employee Relations Board if the motion passed.

ETA members Brian Wheatley, Rita Swencionis, and Howard Friedman spoke against the motion. They agreed with Trustee Alvarez that the motion violated the spirit of the agreement between ESD and EAA and should not be considered. Furthermore, they pointed out that a public school district's goals are very different from – and arguably more complex than – those of a private corporation and should not be managed in the same way.

Upcoming Events

June 6

ETA Rep Council and retirement celebration

June 8

School board meeting

July 30 – Aug. 3

CTA Summer Institute

Despite concerns about the impropriety of the motion, the Board took it seriously enough to vote on it. The motion was narrowly defeated, with Trustees Mace and Zito voting for and Trustees Alvarez, Venkatraman, and Welch voting against.

It is difficult not to wonder whether this strange incident was only the beginning. Although merit pay will not become a reality in Evergreen during 2016-2017, the door has been opened. And is it just me, or did that open door let in a bit of a chill?

Rita Swencionis Honored for Outstanding Service

Congratulations to Rita Swencionis, recipient of the 2017 WHO (We Honor Ours) award for her decades of making a difference in the lives of students, families, and teachers.

Rita began her education career as a teacher in Alum Rock, where she taught for 2 ½ years. She has been with Evergreen since 1999. Rita taught at Katherine Smith for twelve years before moving to Holly Oak. She has mostly taught 5/6 combos and 6th grade, with a few 4th, 5th, and 4/5 combos along the way. Rita has served as your ETA Treasurer for the past eight years. Before that, she was ETA Grievance Chair, Site Representative, and elected delegate to the NEA Representative Assembly, the main policymaking and legislative body of the National Education Association.

It's no accident that Rita was willing to serve as a Strike Captain in her early days of teaching in Alum Rock. She comes from a strong union background. She grew up in New Jersey, where her father worked as an electrician. The IBEW (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers) was not strong in New Jersey at the time, so Rita's father went to Pennsylvania to find a union job. The pay and benefits there were significantly better. "I learned early on what the power of unions meant for workers," Rita says.

Before becoming a teacher, Rita was a proud member of the ILWU (International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union), where she served on the Safety and Elections committees and achieved Black Book Member status (ILWU's highest member status). She also worked as a paralegal, legal assistant, and legal secretary for 22 years. Working at a labor law office helped her realize that "teachers have an incredible amount of power that they don't understand. The unionized labor force in the U.S. has been decreasing, but most teachers are unionized. Exert your power."

When asked what advice she would give her ETA colleagues as she rides off into the beautiful sunset of retirement, Rita says, "I would advise teachers to stand up for themselves. Ask for what you want and need for your classroom. When people walk in to observe, tell them what the students need in your classroom. There you have them, one on one." Take advantage of that opportunity to speak up on behalf of your students. "The administration does not have your back," she warns. "The union has your interests at heart. Teachers have their students' interests at heart. Trust the union and trust yourself."

"I had an excellent public education as a child," Rita says. "I emulate those teachers that I had, despite what the latest educational fad might be. Follow your hearts in the same way. I'll miss you all. I'll totally miss the kids and teachers. The lesson plans and the grading, not so much."

Rita, ETA will miss you. Thanks for always having our back.

2017 ETA Scholarship Update

This year, the ETA Scholarship Committee granted a record \$7,100 in college scholarships to eight former Evergreen students. Thank you to all who donated to help turn their college dreams into reality!