**MEA-Retired Tribune**

**March, 2023**

**Funding can help solve “Help Wanted” issue in education**

Help Wanted. Now Hiring. Sign-on Bonus. Same Day Pay. Work at McDonald’s, starting at up to $21/hour.

One can hardly pass a business, listen to a local broadcast media outlet or engage in a conversation with a friend without seeing or hearing a plea for individuals to apply for employment. Surely COVID-19 initially sent some employees to the unemployment rosters, at least for a while. It also created the opportunity for more to work remotely. New York, California and Illinois saw thousands of residents to do just that, fleeing to southern states with lower costs of living and warmer temperatures.

As the 2022-23 academic year began, many school districts in Michigan and around the country had opening day with jobs yet to be filled. Toward the end of last summer, Florida alone had nearly 8,000 teaching positions still open. Across the board, districts are experiencing a shortage in every employee group. Our Traverse City Area Public Schools has students from the high school on one side of town transported to and from their building some days and those on the west side to their school the other days. Guest teacher pay in some districts has risen dramatically and still fails to attract enough to fill the need.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, colleges and universities awarded just over 85,000 undergraduate degrees in education in the 2019-20 academic year. This is 19% fewer than the 105,000 bachelor’s degrees in education conferred on graduates in 2000-01.

We know what has happened in our own state this century, with legislation eliminating defined benefit pensions and insurance into retirement for those hired in the last decade or so. As recipients of those benefits, we know that we are, indeed, fortunate. When we were working in public schools, our take-home pay provided at least most of us with a living wage and decent standard of living. According to a study published by the Federal Reserve Bank last month, of the 10 college majors paying the lowest median salary five years after graduation, THREE of them were in education: early childhood education, elementary education, special education. The statistics for those employed in education 12-25 years later are even more shocking; FOUR of the ten lowest-paid majors are on the list: early childhood, elementary, special and secondary education.

**While many speculate on how the shortage of educators can be solved, we know this: Every education decision is a political decision.** While potential paychecks are not the only factor in declining interest in our beloved profession as educators, the almighty dollar surely ranks high on the list. With the most pro-public education Michigan Legislature we have had in office for many years, it is imperative that we stay connected with our own state senators and representatives, letting them know that the future of our state’s children is at stake. WE are the daytime face of MEA. WE can attend coffee klatches in our community and talk with lawmakers. WE can email and call their offices. WE can be citizen lobbyists. WE can donate to PAC. WE can make a difference.

**Protect our Schools formed to take action**

*“After*[*the latest mass shootings have reached a 20-year high*](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/a01#3)*, some steps have been taken at the state and federal levels to try and prevent gun violence in schools.  Unfortunately, it’s nowhere near what our members and our students need to stay safe.*

*It’s not an exaggeration to say this:****the lives of our members and our students are increasingly at risk.****”*

MEA UniServ Organizational Development Specialist Mark Hoffman sent this in an email last summer, helping form the MEA Action Team, Protect Our Schools. The group has met and several times since then, most recently on February 28. At that gathering, MEA Lobbyist Andy Neumann reported that the Michigan Legislature is currently moving bills—at least 11—some of which will be considered today, March 1.

The three main bills are the following:

SB76: Requires license or background check.

SB79: Penalties for leaving a firearm where it may be accessed by a minor.

SB: 83: ERPO Law—Extreme Risk Protection Order.

MEA is supporting all of these bills, and it is expected that other bills will be introduced in the future.

**Hoffman encourages all members to contact their legislators about the bills by clicking on this link:**

[**https://secure.ngpvan.com/WE71VqDYg0eGGGaQGaXzUQ2**](https://secure.ngpvan.com/WE71VqDYg0eGGGaQGaXzUQ2)

He also shared that Gov. Whitmer is on board with Protect Our Schools and has created a group to work on gun violence. He will be attending these meetings, planned for every Tuesday morning.

Be part of Protect Our Schools by clicking on this link: <https://secure.ngpvan.com/FF9nwcJwl0ypRMEtdMuULg2>

**Manistee County members spearhead artistic tribute to mentors**

MEA-Retired member Cindy Asiala is one of eight retired teachers on the board of the Arts and Culture Alliance (ACA) of Manistee County. All taught in the public schools, most of them at the Kaleva Norman Dickson school system, and were members of MEA/NEA.  According to Asiala, the Alliance’s current project is called Mentorship can be Life Changing. The project aims to place life-sized bronze sculptures of James Earl Jones and his mentor Donald Crouch on the grounds of the school in Brethren.

The recipient of countless awards—including two Emmys, two Tonys, a Grammy and an honorary Oscar—James credits his teacher, Mr. Crouch, with helping him find his voice. James did not speak in his early years because of a severe stutter. When he was in Crouch’s high school English class, he and other students had to write a poem and recite it in front of the class. James found that by memorizing the words in his own poem, “Ode to a Winter Grapefruit,” he could speak in public, and without a stutter. He went on to graduate from Norman Dickson Schools and from the University of Michigan and became a world-famous actor. Asiala said that in addition to featuring the sculptures, the project will include a Wall of Mentors with names of mentors who are nominated by the public.

The ACA was formed in 2006 to promote arts and culture in Manistee County. This current project is, according to Asiala, “its most ambitious project,” as it has a $100,000 plus budget. To date, the group has raised about 60% of that amount.  At press time, James’ sculpture has been completed by sculptor Bernadette Marca Zachia, and the sculptor is starting that of Crouch. The Alliance hopes to place the sculptures in fall of 2023.

Asiala and her colleagues are planning a program to share information about the life of Jones to K-12 students at Kaleva Norman Dickson, the school which can claim the renowned actor that overcame a disability as an incredibly successful graduate. Although members of the ACA are thrilled to be over the halfway point in their fundraising efforts, the group is still in need of $40,000 to reach their goal.

YOU can help ACA—spearheaded by MEA-Retired members—complete this tribute to mentors by clicking on the link below and donating to this impressive and important project.

<https://www.allartsmanistee.com/>

***Editor’s note: Checking out the sculptures and Wall of Mentors while enjoying some leaf-peeping sounds like a great fall field trip. Remember field trips? No permission slips needed for this one.***

**Sarah Says: From NEA-Retired President Sarah Borgman** Ever since I was in elementary school, (yes, we rode school buses and no one hovered over us as a personal taxi!), I’ve loved St. Patrick’s Day, not because of anyone’s history but because it was always a fun day. Now it has special meaning for me as my second great grandchild celebrates it as his birthday, too! He told me not to pinch him or I won’t get any cake.

How many other favorite memories do we all recall day by day? Recently, I heard Texas members recall precious memories of classroom and association activities, of student encounters and the “Aha moment”, of financial struggles on a low salary, and worse yet, of now expecting to go without a COLA—AGAIN—and still try to maintain a retirement with dignity. There were tears in telling these

stories and then there was fire in their eyes as they prepared to tell their own stories to legislators the very next day when lobbying their own state legislators.

Dear colleagues, tell your story! It’s a travesty to know after a lifetime of service that our educators are struggling because of well-funded retirement funds that are getting dusty! Tell YOUR story and tell it boldly. Educators deserve better!