From the President's Desk

What Does My Union Do for Me?

Here are two examples of contract issues brought to my attention during my most recent school visits. From the document Agreement Between the Ontario-Montclair School District and the Ontario-Montclair Teachers Association, effective July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2022.

Materials

Article IX – Materials/Space

A. Allotment for Materials (page 33)

The contract states:

“All Unit Members will be provided basic class-appropriate consumables, such as paper, pencils, pens, crayons, markers, erasers, glue, tissues, etc. Furthermore, the District shall annually allot to each school additional funds as follows:...”

It goes on to describe how our allotment of $15/student works for middle school and elementary, in GenEd SpEd classes provided to our classrooms for “discretionary instructional materials” (not consumables). The consumable materials are not a part of our classroom budgets (the $15/student); these materials are used up throughout the year and need to be replaced as needed. They should be provided when requested, not rationed at only certain times of year. While OMTA understands the need to save money when possible, it makes no fiscal sense to limit the number of pencils or the sheets of paper a classroom is allowed. If this is an issue at your site, please talk with your principal. If you cannot come to an agreement about what our contract language means, let me know and let’s work together on it. We have a contracted right to have consumable materials provided to our classrooms as needed and beyond the budget allotments to our classrooms each year. Additionally, all new teachers should be provided the full allotment of classroom supplies needed to set up a room.

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Music is alive, well and growing in Ontario Montclair School District.

The Music Department is made up of a team of well-educated and talented music educators who are passionate about teaching music to our students and have interesting and diverse backgrounds in the music industry. We are made up of four 3rd grade Orff/Kodaly music teachers; Ms. Joanna Porraz, Andres Valenzuela, Mr. William (Bill) Arciniega, and Mr. Richard Melendrez. The K-6th conservatory music teacher Mr. Daniel Silva. Four 4th – 6th grade elementary instrumental music teachers; Mrs. Denise Dominguez, Mr. David Askren, Mr. Daniel Salcido and Mr. Max. One IB music teacher; Mrs. Krissy Staykova. Six middle school teachers. Mr. Chris Taylor (Serrano), Mr. Eufemio Escalante (Vina Danks), Ms. Britney Martinez (Oaks), Mr. Emerick Doan (Wiltsey), Ms. Josenee Chein (De Anza) and Mr. Doug Elkins (Wiltsey).

This year we have added the awesome 3rd grade team to our department. They are experts in the Orff music system and Kodaly (pronounced “Ko-di”) system. Teaching these musical structures to our 3rd graders will give them more than just a lesson in music, it adds knowledge so important that it can help them with their learning. The lessons will give our students the opportunity to learn how to read the music language and play instruments like xylophone, basic percussion instruments, and the recorder (song flute). They will also learn to sing. Playing, singing and reading music helps students in more the just music alone, our teaching can actually help a student become a better reader and mathematician!

The music department has many after-school ensembles that meet each week and challenge our district musicians to play even beyond the normal classroom rehearsals. They perform in the Elementary Honor Band at De Anza, the Elementary Honor Orchestra at Vernon, the Oaks Jazz Band Program, the award-winning Marching Bands at Oaks and De Anza, and soon at Wiltsey, the Mariachi Band at Vina Danks, Honor Choir group, Guitar Programs, SDC site music programs, and a Symphonic Orchestra Group at De Anza.

Our main focus at these ensembles, is to give our students every opportunity to learn and experience music at every level. These music ensemble opportunities come together for our students because of the camaraderie, collaboration, and the support our department has for each other. This is something that comes naturally for all my music colleagues. We are often found supporting each other at rehearsals, concerts, parades, shows, and other events where our ensembles rehearse and perform. We do this because of our willingness to give our students the best musical experience possible and because of the great leadership from our Music Director, Ms. Veronica Bucheli. Ms. Bucheli is always supportive of our music programs and shares our passion for music and the arts for our students here in OMSD. We also have much gratitude for Elementary and Middle School Educators as well as all Administration for your support.

Our Lead Music Teacher is Mrs. Denise Dominguez is the most awesome and caring team leader one could imagine. She is the organizer that always helps with all our needs. She creates our performance schedule for all outside performances and one of her biggest accomplishments this year is that she led our new 3rd grade Orff-Kodaly qualified music teachers as we expanded the music program to include our 3rd grade students at each elementary site. Next year we are hoping to expand our program to other primary grade levels.

In Closing, keep an eye out for the new programs that will be coming in the future and thank you for all your support at OMTA!
Job Shares
By MaryKay Scheid

Most of us are familiar with the concept of job sharing. In a job share, two people share a single job. In many cases, the individual interested in a job share opportunity is experiencing a life change such as having a child. But the job share option often appeals to more than just new parents.

I participated in a job share when my son was in high school. He went to iPoly (a public school in the LAUSD system). The public transit system did not offer a reasonable transportation option, so I needed to do the driving. I had the great fortune of working the 60% share of a 60/40 job share until my son got his driver’s license.

In a job share in OMSD, the job share partners earn a percentage of their salary and benefits allocation in accordance with the percentage of the year worked (for example, 50% salary and benefits for 50% work). The employee can still access single, 2-party or family benefits, but will be responsible for a much greater share of the premiums than those working full-time and receiving 100% of the benefits allocation. As long as the member works a minimum of 50% of the year, he or she will advance a full year on the DISTRICT salary schedule (those working less than 50% of the year advance only every other year).

For your retirement, the years of service credit will be equal to the percentage that the member is working. In other words, because the member is NOT contributing 100% of their STRS contribution, they will NOT earn a full year of service credit. This is an important point to note, for retirement planning purposes.

For the employee, a job share provides greater flexibility in work schedules and a healthier work/life balance. For the employer, a job share option can contribute to better retention of top talent and increased efficiency and productivity. Teacher burnout is real, especially in the midst of this pandemic. So why aren’t job shares more popular?

In OMSD, there will only be one job share team next year. I have multiple theories about the reason for such low participation. There is little information provided and there was a very tight timeline this year (new contract language now requires the District to provide 45-days’ notice of the deadline to apply). Administrators do not want to be bothered. And the District believes continuity in service is important for students. While I understand the need for routine for the sake of the students, I contend having the same two teachers does offer continuity. When teachers are sharing one job, their students rarely if ever see a substitute teacher. Furthermore, students benefit from the option to learn from two experts rather than one. We have a greater opportunity of reaching all learning modalities, sharing planning time and adjusting for individuals or groups of students more easily. According to one observer: “Two people, by default, always bring in more competencies than one person.” Two people have a better chance of meeting more student needs.

If you are interested in a job share for the 2022-2023 school year, contact OMTA. We will create a list to help members find possible job share partners.

Your Voice Matters!

Between elections and surveys, OMTA has asked your opinion a lot lately. As a warning, we will continue to do so in the upcoming months.

We are all OMTA and we all need to voice our opinions. The elections aren’t always easy if you don’t know the candidates. Our candidates have done their best to introduce themselves to the membership though it’s difficult to meet 1000 colleagues, all working at different sites. But that’s just one kind of election.

There are also elections where we vote on contract language and even money. A few weeks ago we had a vote to ratify the Tentative Agreement (TA) to change language in our contract. There was quite a bit of money at stake. OMTA sent out the language of the TA, held contract hearings, and answered questions from the site reps so they could pass on the information to members. Still, out of approximately 1.050 members, only 495 voted. The language was ratified and the School Board approved the TA at their March 10th meeting. The money will be coming soon. Everyone who has worked in Special Assignments over the year, your pay adjustment is retro to July 1, 2021.

Next we will have another bargaining survey where you will be able to inform the bargaining team what you want to see happen in the upcoming bargaining for 2022-2023 school year.

And then one more vote, this time for a State Council Rep. And while it’s unlikely that bargaining will be finished by the end of the year, eventually there will be a vote on the next TA.

We know it’s a lot of voting/survey responses, but please: read, ask questions, and VOTE.

If you have any questions you may contact our office assistant, Jennifer Rentschler. She will be able to help. If you are not a member or are not sure, and wish to be, please also call/email Jennifer.

But no matter, please learn about the candidates/issues and VOTE.
What is collective bargaining in simple terms?

By Brad Joplin

Collective bargaining is the process in which working people, through their unions, negotiate contracts with their employers to determine terms of employment, including pay, benefits, hours, leave, safety policies and more. Every year the Ontario/Montclair Teachers Association (OMTA) and the Ontario/Montclair School District (OMSD) engage in this process to negotiate our contract.

The Educational Employment Relations Act (EERA) provides legal right as public-school employees to organize, unionize, and collectively bargain over wages, benefits and other terms and conditions of employment. It is the EERA that guides the process of collective bargaining.

The Bargaining Team is comprised of unit members that represent many of the different categories of employment of our members, elementary teachers, middle school teachers, special ed teachers, nurses etc. The team is normally 6 to 8 people. The OMTA president is not part of the team but is integral in planning with the team.

The articles of the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) to be negotiated by OMTA are selected by analyzing the data obtained through several sources. One of these sources is the bargaining survey that is sent out to all unit members. The data allows the Bargaining Team insight into what issues and concerns the unit members have. Negotiating salary and benefits also has a unique fact-finding process. Data is requested from the district and with the help of CTA’s computers analyzes it giving us key information into the district financials. Gathering comps from similar neighboring districts pay schedules is also incorporated into the plan. The State of California’s budget is another key factor that must be considered moving forward and often key information is not available until the Governor’s May revise.

The process begins by having the negotiating teams Sunshine their proposals to bargain. “Sunshine” Proposals are a public notice requirement of Article 8 of EERA. EERA requires initial Association proposals to be presented at a public meeting of the District, such as a board meeting, and thereafter be part of the public record. Proposals should address the appropriate area of the CBA to be negotiated. After the “Sunshine”, a date will be set to begin negotiating.

Over a number of weeks the 2 teams will negotiate on the selected articles until a tentative agreement (TA) is reached. At the end of each negotiation session, the OMTA team will send out a communiqué to its members to update them on our progress. After a TA is reached, the Bargaining Team will present the TA to the OMTA Executive Board for voting. When it is approved, it goes to the Site Rep Council for voting. The next step is to have a contract hearing in which the TA is shared with the unit members. This allows the unit members to read the TA and ask any questions they may have of the Bargaining Team. After the hearing the unit members vote on the TA to ratify or not. Once ratified the agreement is then presented to the School Board for their vote. Once passed, the negotiated items are now part of the CBA. Now, the process starts over for next year.

Remember to read your collective bargaining agreement and understand your rights. Be aware of your rights as a teacher in OMSD. If you have questions, ask your Association representative or more experienced colleagues. Attend local Association meetings and district board meetings. The Association exists to help you and your students – and is stronger if you are involved!

I hope this sheds some insight regarding this process of collective bargaining.
Right to Representation

This is ‘buried’ in Article III – Association Rights

I. Representation Rights

The contract states:

“…The Association shall be entitled, upon request of the unit member, to represent unit members in all matters within the scope of representation.”

Most of us think this will never be an issue for us, but many of us have found that there are situations where having someone in a meeting with us is helpful for additional perspective, comfort, even inspiration and support, in cases of disputes.

If you are asked to meet with administration and you are worried there will be some sort of disciplinary action taken, you may have a union representative present with you. If you are in a meeting and a disciplinary issue arises, you may stop the meeting and ask to reconvene when a representative can be present with you. A Rep can be your Site Rep, the OMTA President or designee, or a CTA Rep. It’s your right not to have to deal with uncomfortable situations alone.

It’s important for each of us to read our Agreement so we know more about how our Union protects our rights. But there is always an OMTA Rep or Eboard member who can help us to understand the contract and apply its provisions.

Please contact us with any questions.

~ Tracy

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