

Today

MEA-MFT

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A publication for members of MEA-MFT

Anna Baldwin Teacher of the Year

‘T here are so many things I want to tell people about the absolutely fabulous teachers we have in our state,” said Dr. Anna Baldwin, speaking at the Montana Teacher of the Year Celebration in Bozeman October 17.

Baldwin, an English/history teacher at Arlee High School, will get many chances



Anna Baldwin speaks at the celebration.

to tell those stories in the coming year. As the 2014 Montana Teacher of the Year, she will serve as an ambassador for the teaching profession and represent Montana

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2014 Montana Teacher of the Year Dr. Anna Baldwin at Arlee High School. TODD BIGELOW PHOTO

State employee members score major victories

Tom Fulton, a probation and parole officer in Miles City, is debating how to spend the increase in base pay that showed up in his paycheck beginning this September. “Savings, or maybe toward a new gun,” he figures.

Jennifer Wasson’s pay increase will go toward her young children’s needs and savings. “We’ll be able to live without as much stress about the next bill coming due,” she said. Wasson works at the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind in Great Falls.

Wildlife biologist Brent Lonner of Fairfield also has two small children. He is looking forward to the pay increase that will begin when his local MEA-MFT union finishes bargaining and ratifying its contract. “It’s a big improvement for folks, getting that extra in your paycheck,

whether it’s for family things, mortgage, or car payments,” he said.

Across Montana, MEA-MFT state employee members like these are reaping the benefits of MEA-MFT’s victory in passing the state pay plan (House Bill 13) through the 2013 Montana Legislature.

The pay plan gives state employees a 3% base salary increase in 2013 and a 5% increase in 2014. It also provides a

10% increase in the state’s contribution to state employees’ health insurance premiums each year in 2014 and 2015.

“We bargained the pay plan in 2012 and passed it through the 2013 Legislature against long odds,” said local president Rich Aarstad. “Local members of MEA-MFT, MPEA, and AFSCME testified in committee for the pay plan,”

(Continued on p. 4)

MEA-MFT goes to court to restore GABA

When MEA-MFT member Charlene Suckow retired from teaching in Great Falls after 32 years, she left with warm memories and a modest monthly pension check.

She also left with a contractual promise from the State of Montana: that after

at least three years of retirement, her check would increase by 1.5% every year to help her deal with inflation.

Like thousands of other retired Montana teachers and public employees, however, Suckow may not see much

(Continued on p. 6)

Love your union

BY ERIC FEAVER
MEA-MFT PRESIDENT



‘Be empowered to drive this great union forward.’

August and September are the two of the more frustrating months of the year.

Yeah, almost as frustrating as a four-month tea party dominated legislature every other year.

During these two long months, a relatively small number of MEA-MFT members resign from membership, surrendering voice and vote in union matters, going their own way, sometimes blasting away at us as they walk out the door.

With each and every resignation, however small in number, I want to reach through the internet or US mail and scream: “Stay a member! Love your union!”

Are we perfect? No.

Do we meet every individual member need and expectation? No.

Do our best efforts always produce good results? No.

But over the last year or two have we significantly enhanced state employee compensation? Yes, we have.

Have we successfully amortized and saved retirement pensions for all active and retired members in the Public Employees’ and Teachers’ Retirement Systems? Definitely.

Have we fought back and defeated every scurrilous attempt to privatize our public schools? For sure.

Did we help secure the largest increase in state funding of our k-12 public schools in history? Without us . . . it would not have happened.

Have we helped create a viable, credible, powerful coalition of public school classifieds, teachers, administrators, and trustees to protect and enhance quality public education for all God’s children? Absolutely.

Have we worked with the Office of Public Instruction and Board of Public Education to revamp our school accreditation standards and ramp up the need and model for locally negotiated teacher and administrator evaluation systems? You betcha.

And were we not there at the beginning of the Montana Digital Academy and have helped nurture its positive, progressive steps forward?

No question whatsoever.

Are we not there for National Board Certification, Teacher of the Year, Karen Cox grants, and Jim McGarvey scholarships? They don’t exist without us.

Do we not continue to sponsor the largest, most dynamic teacher-designed and teacher-delivered, cross-grade, cross-curriculum professional development conference in Montana? Forever!

And with one unhappy exception, have we not organized higher ed faculty across the Montana University System and community colleges and breathed new life into the Coalition of Union Faculty to represent and advocate for organized faculty at the board of regents? Believe it.

Have we helped sustain public employees’ right to organize and bargain collectively? You damned right.

And have we helped grow the Montana State AFL-CIO. Yes, sir, we have.

So, what is there NOT to love about our union, your union?

Dues?

Staff?

Leadership?

Political action?

OK, I hear that plenty. But without these union things, would there be anything left to love collectively, good for all of us, like competitive salaries, pensions, health care, gender and minority equity, educational innovation, member rights and benefits?

Without our union, how do any of us individually secure these things and protect and advance outstanding government and public school programs and services for the local and state communities in which we live and serve?

Really, how?

So, love your union . . . be a member . . . stay a member.

Be empowered to drive this great union forward.

Your dues, your voice, your vote matter.

Love your union. ■



Nominate now: MEA-MFT Members of the Year

Every year, MEA-MFT honors three outstanding Members of the Year: Education Support Professional (ESP) Member of the Year, Public Employee Member of the Year, and Higher Education Faculty Member of the Year.

Nominations are now open for the 2014 members of the year. Nominees must be members of MEA-MFT in good standing for at least five years.

To nominate: Send your nomination to MEA-MFT President Eric Feaver, efeaver@mea-mft.org or 1232 E 6th Ave., Helena, MT 59601. Explain why the person you are nominating deserves this recognition. Include your contact information as well as contact information for the nominee.

Deadline: Nominations close December 13, 2013. All three Members of the Year will be honored at MEA-MFT's annual Representative Assembly March 28-29, Helena. ■

Mark your calendar: Southcentral regional training

MEA-MFT continues its popular regional training in 2014, with the first training of the year scheduled for southcentral Montana. It takes place in Billings, February 28-March 1.

All MEA-MFT members are invited to attend this event, all expenses paid.

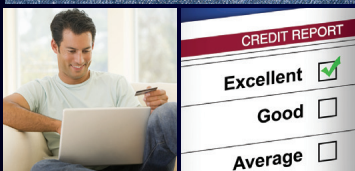
Whether you're new to the union or a veteran member, these training sessions provide plenty of useful skills, information, networking, inspiration, and fun. Learn more about better communications, strengthening your local, bargaining, member rights, grievances, conflict resolution, stopping workplace bullying, and much more.

Here's what some MEA-MFT members said at previous regional trainings: "Great way to energize and empower members." "Thanks for bringing it to an area close to me." "It was awesome!" "Excellent information!"

Watch for more information at www.mea-mft.org. Meantime, please mark your calendar! ■



A warm & happy holiday season from your board & staff at MEA-MFT



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07/13



We did it. Together.

- 3% & 5% base pay increase.
- 10% & 10% health benefit increase.
- Historic local bargaining gains.

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State employee victories

(From p. 1)

then we stood shoulder to shoulder in the halls of the capitol advocating for our pay plan. We were met with consternation at first, but as the battle wore on, legislators began acknowledging our presence and engaging in open dialogue about the need to support state workers after four years of little or no pay increases.

"It was a grassroots effort, and now local affiliates are bargaining the increases into their local contracts. It was direct action at its best."

In all, the state pay plan provides \$115 million in additional money for state employees—a historic boost for state employees and also for local businesses and communities across Montana.

Getting the money into your paycheck: MEA-MFT staff and local bargaining team members worked feverishly through the summer and fall to get the pay plan money to state employee members as soon as possible.

Each state agency must include the plan's provisions in the local contract before employees of that agency see the money in their paychecks.

"Usually the state pay plan is implemented in October, but this time the implementation date was bumped up to July," said Erik Burke, MEA-MFT executive director. "This means most state employees got the raises earlier than usual, but it also gave us less time to bargain."

Many of MEA-MFT's state employee locals have completed their bargaining. Some are still in the bargaining process. Some locals chose to roll over their previous contract, adding the 3% and 5% base pay increase and 10% and 10% health benefit boost. Others bargained substantial changes to their contracts, including some historic improvements in working conditions and compensation, along with the "3 & 5 and 10 & 10."

"It's all great news," said MEA-MFT Field Consultant Brian Ehli. "Our members on the local bargaining teams have been doing an excellent job." Here are some highlights:

Local bargaining victories

Federation of Probation and Parole Local 4464 (statewide). In addition to securing the 3 & 5 and 10 & 10, MEA-MFT members on this local bargaining team negotiated mandatory reopener language. This means if more money becomes available in the agency's budget, the bargaining

team can go back to the table with management and negotiate additional increases.

The union team also bargained an adjusted step progression for officers who have worked one to five years. "That was a nice boost," said bargaining team member Tom Fulton, an officer in Miles City. "Probation and Parole has been hurting for a raise for a long time. We've been eagerly awaiting relief so our officers and staff can get paid for the work they do."

While this year's bargaining gains were significant, there is plenty left to do, Fulton emphasized. Officers and staff are still below the national average for pay.

Bargaining team: Melissa Strecker, Charlie Martin, Tom Fulton, Ron Linn, Penny Ray, Mike Touchette, Larry Nielsen (MEA-MFT field consultant).

Montana School for the Deaf and Blind (MSDB) Local 4027 (statewide, based in Great Falls). Along with the 3 & 5 and 10 & 10, the union team at MSDB implemented a major pay increase for teachers, audiologists, and other licensed employees. The additional increase comes from "parity" money appropriated by the 2013 Legislature.

The parity money addresses a huge gap in salary between licensed staff at MSDB and those in the Great Falls Public Schools. Some licensed staff at MSDB were as much as \$20,000 behind their peers in the Great Falls schools, said bargaining team member Jennifer Wasson.

MEA-MFT members at MSDB worked hard during the 2013 Legislature to get the money appropriated, Wasson said. They e-mailed and called legislators. They brought several students to the state capitol to give performances and demonstrations on sign language and Braille.

"We brought the school to the legislature," said Wasson. "We had to make legislators aware of who we are and what we do for kids. We serve over 500 kids all across the state."

Representative Bob Mehlhoff, a Great Falls legislator and MEA-MFT member, played a key role in getting the parity money appropriated.

As a result of the funding and subsequent bargaining, some MSDB teachers will receive substantial increases, said MEA-MFT Field Consultant Jerry Rukavina. "We had a fantas-

(Continued on p. 14)



MEA-MFT member Tawnya Galland, a state employee in Billings, raves about the new state employee health centers and the low-cost, high quality services. She has been able to take her 13-year-old daughter to the Billings health center for immunizations for school, a physical to play sports, and other services. "And none of these things have cost me anything," she told AFT's *Advocate*. Galland works for the Dept. of Public Health & Human Services. AFT PHOTO

Healthier choices

Better, more affordable health care for state employees

Staying healthy is nearly everyone's goal. For Montana state employees, it's getting easier and less expensive.

Because of a 10% increase in the state's contribution to health insurance premiums and cost containment measures in the state health plan, state employees will see an average 2% increase in take-home pay in 2014, according to Governor Steve Bullock's office.

The 10% increase in the state's contribution to premiums was negotiated as part of the state pay plan by the union bargaining team composed of MEA-MFT members and staff, along with our fellow state employee unions. State employees will enjoy this increase each year of the biennium (2014-2015).

"The positive impact for state employees is huge," said MEA-MFT Field Consultant Brian Ehli. "What we bargained in the pay plan far exceeds any increases in health insurance rates that state employees may see. It's like an additional raise." Ehli represents MEA-MFT on the State Employee Group Benefits Advisory Council.

The increase amounts to \$73 per employee beginning January 1, 2014 and \$81 per month beginning January 1, 2015. These health cost

savings will largely offset the fact that the 2013 Legislature reduced the pay plan from its original 5% and 5% base salary increase to 3% and 5%. "Most state employees will still receive 5 and 5 when you take into account the health premium reductions," Ehli said.

Health incentives: The state is also increasing its health incentives for 2014, offering state employees a \$10 discount per month for getting health screenings and \$10 discount per month for not using tobacco. "You add these up, and that's significant money," says Ehli. The state health plan has reduced costs by emphasizing wellness, including the screenings that allow people to find and fix health problems before they escalate into a costly crisis.

State health centers: Montana's new health centers are also making health care better and more affordable for state employees. Former Governor Brian Schweitzer, who was elected with help from MEA-MFT, put the centers into place with an executive order.

The health centers offer convenient, high-quality services for state employees and their families. There are no out-of-pocket costs: no (Continued on p. 15)

'State employees will see an average 2% increase in take-home pay in 2014, thanks to an increase in the state's share of health premiums and cost containment measures in the state health plan.'

Good news on Montana's public pensions

The good news for Montana's public pension plans continues. Both PERS and TRS have amortized, thanks to bills passed in the 2013 Montana legislative session. Governor Steve Bullock caused these bills to be introduced; MEA-MFT played a major role in getting them passed. In addition, strong returns continue to affect PERS and TRS pension systems positively, according to the Montana Board of Investment Pension investment return summary for September 2013.

Restoring your GABA

(From p. 1)

more of that 1.5% Guaranteed Annual Benefit Adjustment (GABA) hedge against inflation come January 1, 2014. The 2013 Legislature reduced the GABA for retirees in both the Montana Teachers Retirement System (TRS) and the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS).

Suckow's annual 1.5% GABA "is a modest increase, but it over time it makes a difference," she said. Losing part of her GABA will make it tougher to get by.

"There are a lot of folks with more problems than me," she said. "I have friends really worried about how they are going to stay afloat."

So Suckow stepped up to the plate to serve as a plaintiff in one of two MEA-MFT-promoted and funded lawsuits aimed at preventing any reduction in GABA for all enrollees in TRS and PERS. She is one of several retired and still actively working teachers and public employees serving as plaintiffs in the case.

MEA-MFT is taking the lead on the TRS litigation and working with other advocacy organizations on the PERS litigation. The TRS case was filed in October and will be heard in Helena District Court, 10:00 A.M., December 4. The PERS litigation was filed November 1.

"We have great legal counsel," said MEA-MFT President Eric Feaver. "We have compelling legal arguments. We expect to win."

MEA-MFT's case is simple: "The GABA that was in place prior to the 2013 legislative session is a contractual right for retirees in the PERS and TRS systems," said Diane Fladmo, MEA-MFT's research director and pension expert. "We must defend that right for our members. The legislature's attacks on GABA are unconstitutional."

GABA: the background. Before the 1990s, the Montana Legislature provided occasional pension increases to retirees in PERS and TRS on an ad hoc basis. But the increases were random, not always actuarially funded, and retirees couldn't be sure they would happen. Inflation nibbled away at pension checks, leaving some retirees dangerously close to the poverty line.

So in the 1990s, MEA-MFT and other public employee advocates spearheaded legislation to

provide a *guaranteed* benefit increase *every year*: a Guaranteed Annual Benefit Adjustment. The Montana Legislature passed GABA for PERS retirees in 1997 and for TRS retirees in 1999.

Fast-forward to the 2013 Legislature. With Montana's pension systems facing unfunded liabilities due to the market crash of 2008 that tanked investments nationwide, Governor Steve Bullock caused the introduction of two crucial bills meant to stabilize the state's two primary pension systems.

MEA-MFT members, leaders, and staff worked hard to help pass the governor's bills, which provided funding to amortize PERS and TRS and keep them strong now and in the fu-

ture. Through a "shared sacrifice solution," the bills asked public employees and their employers to contribute more (1% each) to the pension systems. The bills also provided funding from other sources, including coal, state lands revenue, and a sweep of "excess" school district retirement reserves.

The governor's two bills passed, amortizing and saving PERS and TRS. Unfortunately, the legislative majority saddled both bills with amendments reducing GABA effective January 1, 2014.

"The legislature did not need to reduce GABA in order to get TRS and PERS on solid financial ground," said Fladmo. "Legislators knew that. MEA-MFT made it clear we would challenge any GABA meddling in court. But some legislators refused to vote for the bills without amendments endangering GABA. And the bills had to pass in order to save pensions. It's as simple as that."

Char Suckow agrees. "I was in the camp that wanted the legislation passed even with the GABA cuts," she said. "We needed to do something to fix the pension systems. Hopefully we will win the GABA battle in court. We sure could not win it in the legislature."

Suckow believes MEA-MFT and its allies *will* win. "GABA is a contractual right, a constitutional right," she said. It's a right that is important to younger MEA-MFT members as well as retirees.

"Defined benefit pensions [like PERS and TRS] are the most effective way of ensuring (Continued on p. 7)

'We have great legal counsel. We have compelling legal arguments. We expect to win.'



Montana Developmental Center staff members start the first leg of a relay race on the facility's new walking path. Clients stationed along the 1.5 miles of trail continued each leg of the relay. ELIZA WILEY PHOTO, HELENA INDEPENDENT RECORD

Celebrating excellence at MDC

"Walking on the Nature Trail helps me calm down." That's how Charles (last name withheld), a client at the Montana Developmental Center (MDC) and chair of the MDC Client Council, described the benefits of a new walking trail completed on the grounds of MDC this fall.

The trail winds around the perimeter of the MDC campus in Boulder and gives clients an opportunity for exercise and a connection with nature. Celebrating the opening of the nature trail gave staff and supporters an opportunity to explain MDC's goal to be a center of excellence for in-patient services for Montanans who have serious disabilities and behavioral issues.

MDC clients, many of them court-ordered to MDC, undergo intensive treatment with the goal of being discharged to appropriate community provider settings.

Carol Dailey, mother of an MDC client, explained how MDC helped her son gain control over his life and behavior after a community placement failed to meet his needs for intense supervision. "Your work is honored and respected," she said, speaking directly to MDC staff. "My whole family thanks you."

After staff and clients participated in ribbon cutting and a celebratory relay race, MDC's thriving garden was showcased as another way to help MDC clients connect with the outdoors, do meaningful work, and provide fresh food

at MDC. Straw bale planters put the garden at wheelchair height.

One MDC staff member noted that the garden is about giving residents responsibilities and treating them like adults, thus allowing them to *become* adults. "Whether or not this garden ever produces an herb, it produced a human being," he said.

A group of Montana legislators tried to pass a bill closing MDC in the 2013 legislative session. MEA-MFT and its members fought the bill, explaining to legislators that it would leave many clients with nowhere else to go. The bill ultimately failed, but its sponsor plans to try again in 2015.

MEA-MFT represents registered nurses and other professional employees at MDC.

Thanks to all the dedicated MDC staff for doing work that matters! ■

'Your work is honored and respected. My whole family thanks you.'

Carol Dailey, mother of an MDC client, to MDC staff

GABA (From p. 6)

retirees can live in relative comfort in their senior years," Suckow said. "And right along with our public employers, each and every one of us, active and retired, has made the necessary contributions to pay for the pensions we receive."

A lot of younger public employees don't necessarily think about pensions now, she said. "But they will later."

Watch for updates on the case at www.mea-mft.org ■

CUF links:

Higher ed members share info via Coalition of Union Faculty



Dave Shively, chair of CUF, teaches Human Geography, Community and Environmental Planning, & Water Resources Management at UM.

Time was when faculty unions on different campuses around Montana had little contact with each other. That's changing.

Through MEA-MFT's Coalition of Union Faculty (CUF), formed in 2010, local faculty union leaders are sharing ideas, bargaining resources, and strategies, and working together to improve higher education in Montana.

CUF is composed of the presidents of MEA-MFT's local faculty unions (see list at left).

"We have better communication between the campuses now, primarily through CUF," said Dave Shively, a professor at the University of Montana who serves as chair of CUF and president of his faculty union.

"Better communication is allowing us to be more aware of issues we may have in common." Some of these common issues include relationships between local faculty unions and

administrations, the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE), and the Montana Board of Regents.

The networking also allows CUF members to help each other with individual issues on individual campuses. MEA-MFT Field Consultant Tom Burgess plays an important role, Shively said, because he helps with bargaining on most campuses and can share information among CUF members.

CUF now has a stronger presence at the Board of Regents than ever before, "making them aware of our interest and commitment to improve the University System," said Shively.

CUF members hope to work with the regents to secure better funding for higher education at the state legislature. The legislature's share of funding has dropped dramatically over the years, causing more reliance on tuition dollars.

"Students are footing the bill for higher education; that has been the trend nationwide for decades," Shively said. "We hope to help stop the erosion of state support—at least to stabilize it."

CUF is also concerned about faculty salaries in Montana, which are lowest of any comparable higher education institutions in

the country. "However you compare us, we're essentially at the bottom," Shively said.

CUF members are working with OCHE and the regents in a Faculty Salary Task Force to develop data and models "designed to help us understand how far Montana institutions are behind comparator institutions," said Shively. The aim is to pull salaries up to help recruit and retain quality faculty.

The task force is planning a messaging campaign to tell stories that illustrate the problem, showing how some departments are having a hard time hiring new faculty because compensation is so low. "It has been a positive process," said Shively. "We all have the health of the system in mind." The next CUF meeting takes place January 3-4, 2014, in Helena. ■

Faculty bargaining progress

Bargaining is completed for MEA-MFT faculty union affiliates at UM Missoula; Montana Tech; and VTEM, the union representing faculty at four different two-year colleges.

Local faculty unions on these campuses bargained a 2.25% base salary increase, plus an additional \$250 across-the-board increase on base salary. The state pay plan (HB 13) funded 1.4% of the base salary increase, said MEA-MFT Field Consultant Tom Burgess. The additional money came from local campus budgets.

"With pressure from the Coalition of Union Faculty and help from the Regents, we've worked with campuses to provide additional money for faculty salaries," Burgess said. Individual unions also bargained specific improvements on items such as merit, promotion, inversion and compression, market adjustments for hard-to-recruit and retain disciplines, and stipends for additional work beyond the normal faculty responsibilities.

"We're not making any deep dents in Montana's low faculty salaries yet, but we're coming closer," said Burgess. "Our faculty members have gotten a raise four years in a row. We're still behind the national average, but we're making progress. We won't stop until we get Montana's faculty salaries up to par."

Local MEA-MFT affiliates on other campuses are still in bargaining. ■

CUF members

Ronnie Laudati, FVCC Tenure
Janet Novotny, FVCC Adjunct
Leslie Beard, FVCC Classified
Gail Ring, GFT
Jane Wynne, DCCU
Bryon Steinwand, Helena College
Rachel Finn, MCCC
Kari Cargill, MSU Bozeman
Grant Mittman, MT Tech
Mary Verploegen, MSU Northern
Curtis Smeby, MSU Northern
David Shively, UM
Mike Gilbert, UM Western
Marilyn Besich, VTEM
Josef Crepeau, Missoula College
Keith Edgerton, MSU Billings
Laura Alvarez, PPC
Greg Clouse, MSU Northern

Abbreviations:

FVCC: Flathead Valley Community College
GFT: Glendive Fed. of Teachers
DCCU: Dawson Community College Unified
MSU: Montana State University
UM: University of Montana
VTEM: Vocational Technical Educators of Montana
PPC: Program & Policy Council

Fighting for Head Start

MEA-MFT member-leader Shannon Bender spoke truth to power this fall at a “Back to School” rally against corporate tax dodging.

The rally, cosponsored by MEA-MFT, shed light on the millions of dollars Montana loses each year because of corporate tax dodgers.

“Big corporations that are sending their money overseas and not paying their fair share in taxes are hurting all of us, all the way down to the littlest ones,” said Bender, a family advocate with Opportunities, Inc. Head Start in Great Falls, which serves five counties. Bender is also president of her local MEA-MFT union.

“Every day, I see the miracles that Head Start works in the lives of disadvantaged children and their families,” Bender said. Yet this year, loss of federal funds due to sequestration has forced Head Start to discontinue services for tens of thousands of children in the U.S.

In Montana alone, 221 children and their families lost access to Head Start services because of sequestration cuts. Many staff have lost jobs.

Bender noted that when sequestration cuts hit the airline industry, “all the airlines had to do was complain that passengers would have to wait longer, and their money was reinstated. The services we provide to Head Start children are far more important and longer lasting than people having to wait a little longer to board their plane.”

Research shows every dollar spent on early childhood education like Head Start saves taxpayers \$7 down the road. Head Start students are more likely to stay in school, go to college, and avoid teen pregnancy and crime.

Update: With Congress now in budget negotiations, sequestration cuts are on the table again. If the sequester is allowed to continue, Head Start faces even deeper cuts in 2014. More children and their families will be hurt.

What you can do: Contact Montana’s U.S. Senators Max Baucus and Jon Tester and Congressman Steve Daines. Ask them to support full funding for Head Start. Contact info here: mt.gov/govt/congressional_delegation.mcp ■

Working for Head Start members

Sequestration, a slow economic recovery, and all kinds of other factors might have made 2013 Head Start bargaining pretty daunting — but not



for the dedicated team of bargainers in Great Falls Child Development Local 4090.

Over the summer, this MEA-MFT local settled a two-year agreement that reflects both the contract’s maturity and the extensive preparation of the bargaining team.

Led by President Shannon Bender, this team rocks! Both salaries and contract language were improved through bargaining. That’s not easy to do, but the hard work paid off.

“Contract maturity” refers to the progressive nature of a contract’s history over time, as issues are brought to the table and addressed in positive, forward-thinking ways that use the full creativity of both sides of the table.

The contract now has more personal leave (and a pay-out for unused personal days) plus guaranteed interviews for current employees wanting to move into other positions. The union team also won a 4% and 3% salary increase—very welcome in these tight economic times.

Credit goes to both the local union team and to Opportunities, Inc. (the employer), because without the positive and proactive relationship between them, this would not have happened. Fair contract settlements are never about good luck; they result from smart work. Congratulations to our Great Falls Head Start members! ■

Shannon Bender speaks at the rally against corporate tax dodging. State employee member Jill Cohenour, fourth from right, also spoke at the rally.

‘In Montana, 221 children and their families lost access to Head Start services because of sequestration cuts.’

Teacher of the Year

(From p. 1)

in the National Teacher of the Year event. To be named Montana Teacher of the Year is the highest honor a Montana teacher can achieve.

Nearly 350 educators and public school supporters attended the Teacher of the Year Celebration to honor Baldwin and finalist Paul Swenson, a science and math teacher at Lone Peak High School in Big Sky. Finalist Jan Krieger, a Spanish teacher at Chief Joseph Middle School in Bozeman, could not attend the celebration due to a previously scheduled trip to Nicaragua and will be recognized at a later event.

The 2014 Teacher of the Year and finalists were chosen in September. (Selection process described below). The Montana Professional Teaching Foundation administers the program.

Superintendent of Public Instruction Denise Juneau presented Baldwin with her award at the celebration, which was held in conjunction with the MEA-MFT Educators' Conference.

Baldwin holds a Bachelor's degree in literature from Georgetown University, a Master's in English Teaching from the University of Montana, and a Doctorate of Education: Curriculum and Instruction from the U of M.

Baldwin describes her teaching style as "active, carefully structured, and adventuresome." With Arlee located at the southern gateway to the Flathead Indian Reservation, Baldwin works to connect with her students by "being sensitive to their many cultures: traditional, teenage, or cowboy culture, for example."

Her teaching reaches far beyond her own students: Baldwin's methods were chronicled in a video called *Inside Anna's Classroom*, a documentary showcasing best teaching practices. Her work has earned her numerous awards, including the national "Excellence in Culturally Responsive Teaching Award: Teaching Tolerance" in 2012.

As 2014 Montana Teacher of the Year, Baldwin hopes to use her position to "celebrate students and colleagues" and to "cut through the negative rhetoric surrounding education issues and the demoralizing treatment of our profession with resoundingly positive, supportive, and constructive messages."

Before introducing Baldwin, 2013 Montana Teacher of the Year Eileen Sheehy of Billings told



Finalist Paul Swenson, science and math teacher at Lone Peak High School in Big Sky, at the Teacher of the Year Celebration.



Finalist Jan Krieger, Spanish teacher at Chief Joseph Middle School in Bozeman, in his classroom.

CONGRATULATIONS to Anna Baldwin, Paul Swenson, and Jan Krieger, all MEA-MFT members!



Above: Anna Baldwin with her parents, children, and husband at the celebration.
Right: Baldwin in the classroom.

KAREN PETERSON PHOTO, VALLEY JOURNAL



the celebration crowd tales of her adventures as a teacher and offered some advice to new teachers: "Teaching, if you get it right, is not going to be what you expect it to be," she said. "Some days it's going to be worse. But over the breadth of your career, if you listen carefully for the right lessons and let the other stuff go, it will be immeasurably better than you expect."

You can read Baldwin's and Sheehy's full speeches at mea-mft.org/our_foundation.aspx

Teacher of the Year selection process

The Montana Professional Teaching Foundation has a four-step process for selecting a Montana Teacher of the Year:

1. The foundation solicits and receives nominations. Anyone may nominate a teacher: educators, parents, students, trustees, neighbors.
2. Each nominee is asked to complete the application necessary to qualify for consideration as National Teacher of the Year.
3. The foundation assembles a committee to screen the applications, including teachers, administrators, trustees, representatives from OPI and the governor's office, and a lay person. The screening committee selects three finalists.
4. The foundation assembles a completely different committee, similar in composition to the screening committee but also including the current teacher of the year, to interview the three finalists and make a selection. ■

'Support Montana Teachers' campaign launched

Who is your favorite teacher? Almost everyone has a story of a teacher who changed our lives. Too often, those stories go untold.

Not any longer. MEA-MFT's Montana Professional Teaching Foundation (MPTF) is inviting Montanans to share those stories through the foundation's new "Support Montana Teachers" campaign.

The foundation launched the campaign this November to inspire young people to consider teaching as a profession and to support teachers working every day in Montana's schools.

"Support Montana Teachers" is part of a new effort to raise funds and visibility for the foundation. MEA-MFT created the foundation in 1996 to promote great teaching and high quality public education in Montana.

Through "Support Montana Teachers," Montanans are asked to share their stories about the positive role a teacher played in their lives and to consider making a donation to the Montana Professional Teaching Foundation in honor of their favorite teacher.

"As these stories are told, via Facebook, Twitter, and online, they will become part of a social media quilt of good will and understanding about the importance of teachers in our communities," said Eric Feaver, chair of the foundation.

Please share your story about a teacher who made a positive difference in your life or the life of a friend or loved one. You can share your story, pictures, or video at www.facebook.com/supportmontanateachers. Tweet your story to @MTteachers on Twitter.

Learn more about the campaign here: www.supportmontanateachers.org

Apply for Karen Cox Memorial Grants by December 2

Are you a teacher who reaches into your own pocket to pay for school supplies or classroom enrichment projects? Consider applying for a Karen Cox Memorial Grant to help.

Deadline for grant applications: Dec. 2, 2013. To download the grant application form and see previous grant recipients, visit this site: mea-mft.org/our_foundation/programs/karen_cox_memorial_grants.aspx ■

Double your impact: challenge grant

Every dollar donated by individuals to the Montana Professional Teaching Foundation (MPTF) before the end of 2013 will be matched up to \$10,000, thanks to a challenge grant made to the foundation by donors who wish to remain anonymous.

As folks consider end-of-the year, tax deductible charitable giving, they can double the impact of each dollar they donate to MPTF.

You can make your tax deductible donation to MPTF by visiting www.supportmontanateachers.org. Or mail a check to: Montana Professional Teaching Foundation, 1232 East 6th Avenue, Helena, MT 59601.

Donations to the foundation directly support the foundation's endowment and the foundation's programs and activities (listed at right). MEA-MFT provides administrative support for the foundation. ■

Montana Professional Teaching Foundation programs

- Montana Teacher of the Year program
- Karen Cox Memorial Grants
- National Board Scholarships & Candidate Support
- Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics & Science Teaching
- Jim McGarvey Scholarships

Saving for college?

Now you can save for your children's college fund (or your own) while helping the Montana Professional Teaching Foundation at the same time. The foundation is working in partnership with College Savings Bank, the program manager for the Montana Family Education Savings Program.

When MEA-MFT members sign up for the savings program through the College Savings Bank web site, the Montana Professional Teaching Foundation will receive a royalty for each deposit made.

These royalties will fund the foundation's efforts to promote excellence in teaching and learning in Montana. Learn more here: <https://www.collegesavings.com/MPTF> ■



The TRUTH about Common Core Standards

Supporting the Common Core in Montana

MEA-MFT has joined with other public education groups in support of Common Core. These groups recently formed the Montana Public Education Center (MT-PEC) to provide accurate information about Montana's great public schools. MT-PEC is spreading the word that Common Core is good for Montana kids, so long as the state provides enough resources to allow schools to comply with the standards.

Groups in MT-PEC include MEA-MFT, Montana Assoc. of School Business Officials, Montana Rural Education Assoc., Montana Quality Education Coalition, Montana School Boards Assoc., and School Administrators of Montana.

Change of any kind can make folks nervous. And too often, people with an agenda try to exploit that nervousness.

Take the hullabaloo over the new Common Core State Standards, for example. No doubt you've read some of the wild accusations about the standards. But when you look at who opposes the standards in Montana and nationally, it reads like a who's-who of the individuals and groups that constantly try to discredit public schools in their attempt to get tax dollars for private schools.

So, what are the Common Core Standards? Who is behind them? Here's the scoop:

The Common Core State Standards set grade-by-grade benchmarks for what k-12 students should learn in math and English. They were designed to create a clear, consistent level of knowledge for students no matter where they live.

State-led initiative: The Common Core State Standards Initiative came from the states—from governors and chief state school officials. They were developed with input from teachers, school administrators, and other education experts.

Common Core is not part of any federal program. Individual states decided on their own

whether to adopt the standards. Only four states decided not to adopt them.

Montana was the last of 46 states to adopt the standards because Montana's education leaders wanted to make sure they were right for Montana students. Educators, business leaders, and others across the state helped review the standards. Twelve public meetings were held over two years before the Montana Board of Public Education voted to adopt the standards in 2011, on the recommendation of Superintendent of Public Instruction Denise Juneau.

Top teachers support Common Core: This fall, Mary Moe, Montana's 1987 Teacher of the Year, authored a letter in support of Montana's Common Core Standards. Twenty-two Montana Teachers of the Year (see p. 13) signed on to the letter, which has been printed in many Montana newspapers. Here's what the letter says:

Montana Teachers of the Year for Common Core

As Montana Teachers of the Year, our life-work has been dedicated to engaging Montana students in learning experiences that prepare



Montana Teachers of the Year stand solid for Common Core. Here, 13 of them, plus friends, stand together at the Teacher of the Year Celebration Oct. 17. From left, back row: Tom Pedersen, Jon Runnalls, Terry Beaver, Paul Andersen, Gary Carmichael, finalist Paul Swenson. Front: Eileen Sheehy, Anne Keith, Superintendent Denise Juneau, Jack Johnson, Nancy Stucky, Debi Biegel, Mary Wren, Anna Baldwin, Patty Myers.

them for the challenges and opportunities of the future.... We proudly reflect the good work that some 10,000 Montana teachers do every day and every year.

Collectively, the 22 of us have over 500 years of teaching experience. We've taught at the elementary, middle, high school, college, and graduate school levels in Montana. We teach English, math, language arts, social studies, science, and other subjects, but mainly we teach kids.

Our experience has taught us that Montana's students are best served when:

- The expectations of the state are expressed in relevant and rigorous standards.
- Local communities, relying on local teachers' professional expertise, map out a sequence of courses and curricula that meet those standards within the context of community values.
- Classroom teachers have the latitude to design learning experiences that challenge, excite, and intrigue students as teachers deliver the community-approved curriculum aligned with state-approved standards.
- In our classrooms, schools, and communities, all students feel respected for who they are and are encouraged to explore what they could be.

Standards in all professions change over time. As individual professionals, we have watched Montana's Board of Public Education adopt new accreditation standards throughout our careers.

We have watched the development of Montana's Common Core Standards for English language arts and mathematics. We have never connected with one another to weigh in on them collectively. We do so now to say this: **We support Montana's Common Core Standards. Here's why:**

- Montana's Common Core Standards are more rigorous, more specific, and more comprehensive than the standards they replace.
- Montana's Common Core Standards prepare students to make smooth transitions into colleges, careers, and citizenship.
- Montana's Common Core Standards help kids who move out of Montana or kids who move into

Montana enter their new school with the skills and knowledge they'll need to stay at grade level.

- Montana's Common Core Standards honor Montana's long-held tradition of local control of our public schools, as well as our constitutional and statutory obligations to understand, recognize, and preserve the cultural heritage of Montana's American Indians.

- Montana's Common Core Standards infuse English and math competencies into other subject areas, just as processing information, solving problems, and communication are infused in all aspects of adult life in the 21st century.

- Most importantly, Montana's Common Core Standards establish goals that guide teachers in their design of instruction without limiting their professional judgment in how to deliver it.

Implementing Montana's Common Core Standards will require much of Montana teachers. We'll need to develop new skills, design new learning experiences, and ensure that assessments play a relevant but appropriate role in students' learning experiences.

We know that Montana teachers are up to the task and that our students and our state will be better for our efforts. ■

Read the Common Core Standards here: www.corestandards.org/the-standards

Information gap: Two-thirds (62%) of Americans have never heard of the Common Core Standards, including most parents, says the latest PDK/Gallup Poll. Of those who *had* heard of the standards, many wrongly thought the federal government was forcing states to adopt them. (It's not.)

What's so great about Common Core Standards?

1. They preserve local control. Local Montana educators and school boards will decide how to meet the standards and set curriculum locally.
2. They deepen problem-solving skills and critical thinking.
3. They promote greater opportunity for all kids, no matter where they live.
4. They bring back flexibility and creativity in teaching. No more "drill & kill" test prep.

The following Montana Teachers of the Year concur in the statement in support of Common Core:

Anna Baldwin	2014	Arlee	HS English & Digital Academy Native Amer. Studies
Eileen Sheehy	2013	Billings	HS US Government & AP US Government & Politics
Tom Pedersen	2012	Helena	HS Honors Biology II & Senior Science Seminar
Paul Andersen	2011	Bozeman	HS AP Biology & GATE Physical Science
Anne Keith	2010	Bozeman	8th Grade Math & Communication Arts
Sally Broughton	2009	Monforton	6-8 Social Studies & Language Arts
Steve Gardiner	2008	Billings	HS English & Journalism
Gary Carmichael	2007	Whitefish	HS US & Modern World History
Debi Biegel	2006	Bozeman	K-5 Instrumental & Choral Music
Mary Wren	2005	Great Falls	HS Math
Alyson Mike	2004	E. Helena	8th Grade Physical Science
Jon Runnalls	2003	Helena	Middle School Science
Judie Woodhouse	2002	Polson	HS English & Journalism
Terry Beaver	1999	Helena	HS Biology
Patty Myers	1998	Gt. Falls	2d Grade
Kim Girard	1997	Glasgow	HS Math
Nancy Stucky	1992	Billings	Elementary Special Education
Kay Brost	1994	Broadus	K-6 Librarian and Gifted & Talented
Mary Moe	1987	Col. Falls	HS English
Hal Stearns	1986	Missoula	HS History & Sociology
Ken Price	1984	Helena	HS Chemistry & Physics
Jack Johnson	1972	Billings	8th Grade US History, Current Events, & Math

State employee victories

(From p. 4)

tic bargaining team and excellent cooperation from management,” he said. The union team also figured out ways to get additional money to employees not included in the parity legislation. Plus, the team bargained a new provision allowing employees to carry over more personal days, up to six. “That really helps morale,” Wasson said.

MEA-MFT bargaining team: Steve Sangwin, Jennifer Wasson, Staci Bechard, Yvette Jackson, Jerry Rukavina (MEA-MFT field consultant).

Montana Federation of Historical Society Workers Local 4367

(statewide, based in Helena). In addition to the 3 & 5 and 10 & 10, the local union bargaining team negotiated language to set up a pay progression schedule in their contract, where the legislature can’t tamper with it.

“It was very much a cooperative deal,” said local president Rich Aarstad. “There’s no way we could pull it off without management behind us. Bargaining lasted 35 minutes, total. Our local has worked really hard to have more than just a working relationship with management. It’s been extremely beneficial for both sides.”

The union and management bargaining teams signed an agreement calling for creation of a joint committee to develop a pay ladder in the contract, above and beyond any pay increases passed by the legislature. The committee will determine what will trigger pay increases—such as anniversary of employment and specialized training.

“The committee will establish benchmarks throughout all staff positions,” Aarstad explained. “We’re not talking about huge increases. We’re such a small agency that the career ‘ladder’ will be more of a career ‘path.’ But at least it will provide some kind of monetary increase to help recruit and retain employees.”

The Historical Society has been a “revolving door” for employees since the state pay freeze several years ago, Aarstad said. “New employees are hired at rock bottom prices, and they move on. We’re looking to bring new hires up to market within five years, so people see they can have a career here; it’s not just a stepping stone to a better deal.”

MEA-MFT bargaining team: Rich Aarstad, Jeff Malcomson, Amanda Trum, Tom Ferris, Larry Nielsen (MEA-MFT field consultant).

Department of Revenue Local 4993 (statewide). Along with the 3 & 5 and 10 & 10, this local’s bargaining team won several new protections. For example, the contract now provides 20-minute breaks for every four hours worked. “We’ve never had this in the contract before,” said bargaining team member Kevin Bock.

Another big win, Bock said, is a provision saying that if an employee is assigned to a new position that doesn’t work out, the employee can go back to his/her former position or a similar position with no loss of seniority. Additional new language clarifies due process before discipline or discharge, mandatory overtime payments, and stipulates that management must notify the local union for review of department policy changes 10 days before implementation.

MEA-MFT/MPEA bargaining team: Kevin Bock, Steve Creigh, Diane Brittain, Kyla Gardiner, Linda Sather, Danette Tenneson.

Montana Federation of Women’s Prison Employees Local 4699

(Billings). The bargaining team for this local secured the 3 & 5 and 10 & 10 plus several new provisions. The contract now allows 12 days of release time for union officers to do union work, with half of the time paid for by the prison and half by the union.

The contract also addresses a training and safety equipment issue. In the past, the facility had only two outdated tasers and only a couple of officers were trained to use them. New language requires the prison to purchase additional and updated equipment to protect the officers in their daily duties. All officers will receive training. At least one officer must have a taser during transport of prisoners. Training will be ongoing, with periodic updates. “That was a really big win,” Greenfield said. “Our members didn’t feel it was safe enough before.”

Another change in pay came in an increase of 3% to the market rates for the pay bands. This ensures that individuals who earn increment increases on their anniversary dates will not only get the 3% increase as of July 1, they will also get a full increment jump instead of the difference between their 3% increase and the value of the next increment.

Finally, the new contract provides for new uniforms and allows union members to wear a

‘That was a really big win. Our members didn’t feel it was safe enough before.’

Jeff Greenfield,
MEA-MFT Field
Consultant



Locals still bargaining

The following state employee locals are still in bargaining, and making good progress:

- Montana Assoc. of Fish & Wildlife Biologists Local 4687 (statewide)
- Montana Youth Challenge Program Employee Union Local 7722 (Dillon)
- Federation of Montana State Prison Employees Local 4700 (Deer Lodge)
- Federation of Montana Veterans Home Employees Local 4697 (Columbia Falls)
- Montana Development Center RNs Local 5133 (Boulder)

patch on their uniforms with their local union number: Local 4699. "It's a bit of pride," said Greenfield. "That's a great thing."

MEA-MFT bargaining team members: Tim Hosa, Joe Dompier, Jeff Greenfield (MEA-MFT field consultant).

Federation of Public Health & Human Services Local 4573 (statewide). In addition to the 3 & 5 and 10 & 10, the DPHHS union team bargained something new: a retention study group. "I'm excited about it," said Jill Cohenour, a chemist at DPHHS and president of the local union. "It's huge."

The group, composed of union members and management, will investigate ways to retain experienced employees. They will look at all options, such as creating a career ladder tied to pay progression.

"Other departments have pay progression, but we don't," Cohenour explained. Because the department has previously focused on raising starting salaries in order to recruit new employees, she said, "we got to the point where some 10-year employees were making almost the same amount as new employees; for example, in our child support enforcement division. Morale was at an all-time low."

Seasoned employees are the ones who train and mentor new employees and take up the slack during vacancy savings, Cohenour said. "To keep these folks, you've got to pay them."

The local union has tried to bargain pay progression into the contract for years. This year, the union team and management team found themselves on the same page philosophically, at least, in wanting to keep experienced employees. So the union team suggested creating the study group, which will survey all DPHHS employees, asking about job satisfaction and other issues. The group plans to issue a report in the spring.

The union team hopes the study will lead eventually to pay progression. "That would give people something to point to—gaining skills and moving to the next level of pay," said Cohenour.

MEA-MFT bargaining team: Jill Cohenour, Theresa Becker, Pauline Giacomino, Dena Helman, Renne't Sarbu, Kelly Johnson, Rachelle Spatz.

Congratulations to our state employee locals and thanks to their great bargaining teams! ■

Healthier choices (from p. 5)


copays, no coinsurance, no deductibles. Waits are short, usually less than five minutes. The state's health plan saves money by using the health centers, and the health centers pass those savings on to state employees. Everyone wins, taxpayers and state employees alike.

State employee health centers have opened in Helena, Billings, and Miles City. The state envisions creating 10 centers around Montana. MEA-MFT member Tawnya Galland, a state employee in Billings, is a big fan of the new health centers. She recently was featured in AFT's fall 2013 *Public Employee Advocate*, enthusing about the time and money she saves by using the Billings center.

"I tell my coworkers that they need to check it out," she said. ■

Learn more about the state health centers:
<http://benefits.mt.gov/pages/health.center.html>



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Protecting our fish & wildlife heritage

Amazing member Brent Lonner: wildlife biologist

Brent Lonner is an area wildlife biologist for the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. He covers the southern end of Montana's Rocky Mountain Front. An active MEA-MFT member, Lonner serves as bargaining chair for his local affiliate, the Montana Association of Fish and Wildlife Biologists Local 4687. Here is what he says about his work, union, and life:

What we do: State fish and wildlife biologists are entrusted by the public with conserving and managing Montana's fish and wildlife and their habitats. We collect and analyze data, provide science-based fishing and hunting season recommendations, give fish and wildlife information to the public, and work with other public agencies and private landowners.

Why it matters: From an economic and recreational perspective, Montana's natural resources are an important part of many people's lives. As biologists, we help assure that our natural resources will be there for future generations of Montanans to enjoy.

Toughest part of the job: In addition to the technical/scientific aspects of the job, biologists deal extensively with the public. Good communication skills and the ability to establish rapport with many different kinds of people are important and sometimes challenging. Also, the job requires problem-solving skills to address complex fish and wildlife issues.

What I love about the job: Being out in the field and seeing people enjoy the results of many years of hard work



Wildlife biologist Brent Lonner looks through a gunstock-mounted spotting scope during a spring bighorn sheep survey.

to maintain and improve our natural resources. One good example of this is Montana's successful fishing and hunting heritage and opportunities.

Why I belong to MEA-MFT: Being affiliated with MEA-MFT means having important assistance in working for our interests and those of the resource, negotiating our contracts, and providing biologists with quality advice and legal representation in all job concerns.

MEA-MFT provides lobbying strength as we push for improvements in job conditions and compensation. Through this affiliation, our local joins thousands of other state employees during statewide bargaining sessions with the State of Montana on pay, compensation, retirement, and health insurance.

What I do for fun: I like spending time camping, hunting, fishing, and hiking with my family or just enjoying the peaceful serenity of being in the great outdoors.

My family: As a fourth generation Montanan, I grew up in Bozeman and now live with my wife (Della) and two kids (Devin and Mia) in Fairfield.

Community involvement: I enjoy talking with kids about the importance of our natural resources.

After working with youth groups and having kids of my own now, I feel educating our youth about our natural resources is extremely important. For me, it's like reliving the joys of my youth all over again.

Thanks, Brent, to you and your colleagues for doing work that matters! ■