



SPRINGFIELD EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

REACTION LINE

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Parting the Red S.E.A - *Red Sea* is a

direct translation of the Greek *Erythra Thalassa*, once called the *Erythraean Sea* by Europeans. The Romans referred to it as the *Sea of Hercules* (*Pontus Herculis*). Western geographers consider it as *Sea of Mecca* (*Mare Mecca*) and *Gulf of Arabia* (*Sinus Arabicus*). Some scientific minds think the name may be due to the seasonal blooms of the red-coloured *Trichodesmium erythraeum* (sea

sawdust) near the water's surface. Others, of a more historical nature, believe that the name *red* is referring to the direction south, just as the *Black Sea*'s name may refer to north. Regardless, this critical body of water has been at the intersection of history and religion from the very earliest accounts of humankind.

To many, it is an important backdrop to the narrative of the *Israelites exodus* from the oppression of the ancient Egyptians. And the *allusion* to such, rightly signifies our collective union situation. We are all believers. We have staked our livelihoods to our professional beliefs and in doing so, have committed wholly to our students, our educational communities and public education. The work we have done and continue to do each day, is proof that we value the time honored concept of learning and the institutions under which we all provide educational services to society. It has led us across some *difficult and exhausting ground*, locally and as a nation. In our moments of sheer joy and feats of success with children and academic victories, we have simultaneously experienced mass grief and moments of the type of frustration uniquely experienced in few professions, making some wonder if it could be changed.

But right now, at this moment, we have an opportunity to push back the tides. We have a collective energy that could win back some of the respect and conditions lost to help us all find a better tomorrow. "Some" state that we do not have the collective bonds or strength to "break our chains"... that we are disjointed, lost and selfish. But that is simply untrue. We are stronger than they think. We are united. We have clairvoyance, the energy and the high ground; citing years of concerns and constant pleading for positive change that would benefit our lives and students.

August 9, 2022, our membership voted with a responding 80% “no” vote to not accept the offering of the BOE and the District. A month later, the bargaining team returned to the table, with a clear directive from the membership to return to negotiate for what was missing. We went back with 12 clear proposals based around safety/security, women’s benefit equity, workload vs caseload and long standing special education and classroom concerns and compensation. Unfortunately, September 9, the same BOE and District team we sat across from, just a month earlier, stated that they would not take this proposal back to the rest of the board... we would receive nothing additional... they would file for mediation... and that was that.

Thursday, September 15th, we officially began our donning of red and/or our SEA red shirts, our social media abounding with beautiful and blazing red photos of unity. Each week we will continue to do so, utilizing additional gestures to symbolize our ever strengthening resolve as necessary, which it appears we may need to. Do not fret though. We are one and we are together. Together, we can take care of each other and we can make it. Together we can rally for what is missing and we can fight for better. And together we navigate together toward an improved reality for our students, educational communities and achieve what is so rightly needed.

Legend Adorned in Gold - There I stood...

plastic, bronze colored shield and sword in hand, spartan corinthian helmet rattling loosely around my dome, adorned in nothing but some faux leather armor, a deep blue pleated battle skirt and knee-high leather strap up sandals (**tropéziennes**). Looking out into the crowd of roaring City Basketball Tournament fans, and Sandy Wands sly smile, I said to myself, “How in the world did Ms. Wands talk me into this?”

Sandy Wands grew up in Springfield and graduated from Springfield High in 1959. She studied to become a teacher at Bradley University and then returned to Springfield School District and began her teaching career at Fietshans High School. Upon the opening of Southeast, Sandy migrated to SSHS, and spent the remainder of her career as a Spartan educator. She passed last Spring, but taught at Southeast for over 30 years, focused intently on not only making students brighter but pushing them to give back to their school, their community and and making them better people.

Sandy taught literature and english, coached track, sponsored student council, was an exceptional friend and changed the lives of Spartans forever. SSHS honored her posthumously at a celebration of life at the Firefighters Club July 31 and again at the August 26, Friday night Varsity Football Game. Many of her students, friends and fans were present to give her a proper send off into the Educational Valhalla, as she deserved. Legends like Sandy, who once roamed the halls of our schools and bolstered our union strongholds, never die though. They live on in our professional history, educational fabric and union posture forever. Onward Spartans, standing tall. Onward...



One, Two... Thirty One - According to the previous 2019-22 mutually agreed upon contract between the Springfield Education Association and the SPS186 Board of Education, *“Beginning with the 2020-2021 school year, no class in grades K-2 will exceed 26 and no class in grades 3-5 will exceed 29. No class in grades 6-12 shall exceed 31 except in special education, physical education, driver education, music, team teaching, individualized instruction, and similar programs. High school teachers shall have a student load maximum of 165 students. All alternative education sites shall have a class size limit of 14... High school and middle school P.E. class sizes will be limited to 45 students per teacher per period.”*

In an informal August 2022 union litmus test of buildings, it appears that many of our colleagues are sitting at reasonable class sizes. But some are pushing the upper contractual limits. Two elementary teachers have already been forced to split classes or move schools. Let us be honest, contractual maximum limits and what is best for students are still far, far apart. It has been argued, by administrations, that class sizes are irrelevant, or even that a teacher could actually have too few students. We all know the realities of such drivel. In this educational, post COVID environment, reasonable class sizes are critical. Over 66% of our District’s students have been measured at levels 1-3 grades below the appropriate reading and math levels since many years before COVID was even a word. Now, many of our students are reentering school lacking the essential life and relationship skills to properly absorb a full day’s instruction, despite our very strongest summer school efforts in recent history. Our middle schools have no stop gaps, allowing struggling students to potentially fail every single class and still be promoted to high school. Our high school digital course make up program, although better than no learning at all, allows students to make up an entire semester’s course in a little over a week. And our lack of school boundary updates and nepotistic and classist transfer policies allow a massive academic, special education and school population imbalance across the board.



If any class exceeds contractual limits, the following language also applies: A. The principal will notify the Superintendent or his/her designee. The classroom teacher or Association Representative will (also) notify the SEA President or his/her designee. This notification will be completed within five student attendance days of the initial violation. B. The District has a grace period of 10 student attendance days (15 if at the beginning of the school year) from the day the overage occurs to resolve the class size violation without grievance from the Association.

The Union completely embraces the concept of grace and flexibility, however that does not mean that class size limits, or any contractual language for that matter, should be precluded. Your union supports smaller class size limits and the peace, safety and improved learning that it can bring our schools and students. Please reach out to your building representative (ARs), SEA Executive Committee representatives, SEA President (Aaron Graves) or Uniserv Director (Sean Burns) if you have questions or require additional concerns about classroom limits or other workplace conditions.

[Liaison Ladies](#) - Nancy Knowlton, coral reef biologist and a former Sant Chair for Marine Science at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, once said, “Small steps taken by many people in their backyards add up”. She may have been talking about pollution or reversing climate change, but I like to think she may have been referring to another technique used by those trying to move key issues. It is called liaising (verb).

By definition, a liaison (noun) is “someone who helps groups to work effectively with each other”. They have been utilized in governments, militaries and other organizational units throughout history. Organizations like [U.S. Geological Survey \(USGS\)](#), [Energistics \(Energistics\)](#), and [Consortium for Ocean Leadership \(COL\)](#) liaise in global scientific and governmental realms, between governments, nonprofits, and corporations. Warrior women like Madonna Thunderhawk (pictured in caption), used liaising and activism for decades to bring about positive change for the Lakota people and other Native American tribes.



Liaising is something that is integral to school districts and unions. Traditionally, labor unions and human resource departments handle the majority of employee / employer relations, but SEA values this local concept to such an extent, that we bargained it as part of our contractual language with the Board of Education. According to our SEA Contract for use at the building level. Here is how it works:

24.1 BUILDING COMMITTEES - The teachers shall elect a liaison committee in each building or any unit responsible to a principal or appropriate supervisor. The principal or supervisor will meet with the liaison committee or the association representatives at least monthly, if requested by the committee or representatives, to discuss matters of mutual interest and concern. The Association shall establish guidelines for the election process. The Association Representatives shall be responsible for conducting the election, if a liaison committee is created. The current committee shall be operable until a new committee is elected. The committees shall present the principal a prepared agenda at least 48 hours prior to the meeting.

24.2 LEADERSHIP TEAMS - The building leadership team (i.e. site instructional leadership team, SEA building liaison committee or association representatives, etc.) will meet annually to prioritize and review the number of committees and meetings.

Please consider the value of such building committee work and the need for proper establishment within your buildings or ancillary organizational structures. The results from such, have proven positive in the past and SEA is convinced that this is the part of the way moving forward.

Today a Reader, Tomorrow a Leader - In May of 2022, the Springfield Education Association emailed a survey regarding our literacy curriculum, Units of Study (UoS) and teacher satisfaction. 139 teachers responded. The results were not surprising:

- 52.3% of teachers find UoS to be “not effective”.
- 32.6% of teachers find UoS to be “somewhat effective”.
- 86.2% of teachers believe we need a writing curriculum that includes foundational writing skills such as grammar, sentence structure and conventions.

The district has yet to formally acknowledge these results.

In the past several years, many [news articles](#) and [podcasts](#) have been released regarding the efficacy of Units of Study. District 186 is currently in limbo regarding this curriculum. A handful of elementary teachers will pilot a “new and improved” curriculum that adheres to more [recent research](#) around reading (also known as the “science of reading”) later this year. However, questions remain about whether or not we should continue with Units of Study or select an entirely new reading, writing and phonics curriculum. This conversation should also extend to our intervention curriculum, Fountas & Pinnell LLI. This curriculum is [not considered evidence-based](#).

A small group of teachers gathered over the summer to discuss these issues. We requested a meeting with Superintendent Gill, Dr. Moody, Mr. Scott and Mrs. Thomas. The meeting request was acknowledged but a date was never set. One positive occurrence from the summer was the formation of a Dyslexia Task Force. It will meet from August-February to establish screening criteria and remediation procedures for students with a dyslexia diagnosis or signs of dyslexia. Look for continued updates on this effort as it will impact all of us.

Those who teach K-2 will note that some changes were made to the curriculum guides this year, most notably the introduction of decodable readers. While this change is a noble start, there was no explanation of “why” to accompany the change. A Zoom was held to go over the changes and a brief paragraph is included in the curriculum guide to announce the change.

We deserve more.

We deserve professional development explaining the “why” around these changes. Most of us were taught to use contextual strategies, also known as “3-cueing”, to teach early reading- “look at the picture”, “get your mouth ready” and “skip the word”. Simply telling us not to teach in this way will not create a true change. If you believe this strategy works, why would you stop using it?



Instead, we need professional development that provides the most up-to-date cognitive and educational research. How do our brains read? Why do some children struggle but not others? What is the best way to teach early reading skills to older students?

The curriculum is the “how”. We need the “why”.

As professionals, we deserve training from outside experts. The district should offer professional development that teachers can complete on their own time or with a cohort. The district should consider offering a stipend to those who choose to complete professional development on their own time. Most online providers offer different dates and times that work with teacher schedules.

We also deserve to know the process around curriculum selection. We deliver the curriculum. Collectively, we should all have a say and should be updated about the selection criteria and timeline. Curriculum selection should not be a secret.

Together, we can demand to be part of the conversation and receive the training we deserve. It is happening in other districts in Illinois. It should be happening here. If you are interested in joining us as we guide this conversation, please reach out to Melissa Hostetter: melissamhostetter@gmail.com or Aaron Graves: seapresident@gmail.com
We expect to meet again in late September or early October

Melissa Hostetter
1st Grade Teacher
Lee Elementary
SEA Literacy Task Force Chair

Title I \$\$\$ - Surefire Cure For the Blues

According to ISBE, "Title I, Part A - Improving Basic Programs provides supplemental funding to state and Local Education Agencies (LEAs). The funding provides resources to LEAs and schools with high percentages of children from low-income families. Title I resources improve education quality and help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. Title I services focus on children who are failing or who are most at risk of failing to meet state academic standards." This federal money has parameters, but SEA wants all of you to know that there is more than one way to "write this blues song" and here are the many ways that it can be spent.



INSTRUCTION

- Funds used to increase the participation of low-achieving students in advance coursework.
- Summer school classes for low-achieving students
- Before, after, and/or Saturday school tutoring.
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STAFF SALARIES

- Hiring additional teachers to reduce class size
- Hiring additional teachers to serve as reading/math interventionists
- Substitute pay for these teachers when absent
- Supplemental nurses/social workers
- Supplemental guidance counselors can be hired to provide supplemental guidance services
- Supplemental paraprofessionals to support instruction
- Supplemental paraprofessionals to support instruction

SUBSTITUTE

- Funds used to pay substitutes for Title I funded staff at the school level that is budgeted for in the school's plan
- Funds to pay substitutes to allow certified teachers in Title I schools to attend professional development as provided for in the school plan

TEACHER INCENTIVES

- Financial incentives and rewards may be provided to teachers in Title I schools identified as Newly Identified, Continuing School Improvement, Corrective Action, Plan to Restructure, and/or Restructure.
- The purpose of these financial incentives and rewards must be to attract and retain qualified and effective teachers in those schools.

Mr. D's Corner

"Fear No Evil"

Fear can paralyze a person, group, or institution. It can move us forward or paralyze us completely. It can motivate us to try harder or lead us to give up completely. Last year, toward the end of the third quarter I began to experience medical issues. I was scared for life medically and fearful of possibly losing my job. I had to use all my sick days and utilize our SEA Sick Bank.

My IEA and SEA union representatives worked with human resources who worked with cabinet level District 186 Administration at 1900 to help me. They worked together to ease my worry. They listened to some "not so nice things" I had to say. All parties were attentive and they cared.

I am an outspoken person who has never really feared for his job. I used to say, "I was looking for a job when I found this one!" A bit cocky I know but I also know that I am a good hard worker and I have value. I firmly feel that I would have another job by the end of the day because of the value I possess.

Since joining District 186, four years ago, I have noticed folks who are seemingly afraid to speak their mind. Folks who have something to say but won't say it for whatever reason. I am here as proof that it is possible to respectfully say your piece, however harsh your truth, and still have a job. It is not until we all become invested as SEA Members that we will grow. It is not until we understand and believe in our value as good people and educators that we will feel empowered.

There is always a solution if we work together to find our way through to find out what the solutions are. Fear no evil, no matter how big it may seem in your mind.

The next Mr. D's Corner will focus on listening... for real. I want to discuss how to really listen with the goal being to understand the experiences of the other person or institution. Listening, without thinking about what your response is going be. Listening to understand and not to pass judgment.

Happy first quarter. Education is not teaching people they don't currently know. Education is teaching people behaviors they don't know. Educate to liberate! Educate to empower.

Until next time,

Mr. "D" From the Corner



At Face Value - Three and a half years ago, in the spring of 2019 with District health insurance costs continuing to rise, the District recommended a 20% premium increase to all employees taking health insurance with the District. After Union negotiations, the Board eventually settled on a 10% increase for employees who had any version of a family plan (Employee with dependent, Employee with spouse, or Family) and a 16% increase for members on the single plan. However, the District did not provide any additional money from District funds to cover plan costs, thus further exacerbating the insurance plan debt. And, in May of 2019, the District elected to borrow \$3,000,000 This money borrowed came at a cost of approximately \$90,000 in annual interest.



At the end of 2019, our collective SPS186 district employee medical expenses were \$21,914,255 (still a fortune, but actually down \$237,912 from the previous year and a historic first). The amount allotted from employee and district contributions, have come up short of that total, but it was hoped the meteoric rise in costs had slowed. And in the spring of 2020 (in the first month of the pandemic), against the recommendation of the contractually established District Health Insurance Committee, the following minimizations of your health insurance plan under the guise of a lean financial prediction for the District:

- Aggregate deductible increase on singles from \$1250 to \$1500 and the family deductible from \$3750 to \$4500 (17% increase)
- Increase in the aggregate out of pocket expense on single from \$3250 to \$3900 and family from \$9750 to \$11,700 (17% increase)
- Increase the ER copay from \$250 to \$300 (17% increase)
- Increase the Office Visit (OV) copay to \$30 and the OV specialist copay to \$50
- Increase the drug card expense \$5 on generic/preferred brand name/non preferred brand name (from \$10/\$35/\$50 to \$15/\$40/\$55)
- MAJOR reduction in pharmaceutical benefits through the forced implementation of [prior authorization](#), member pay the difference, [step therapy](#) and [balanced formulary](#).

In 2020-21, SEA members had a 9% premium increase for single plan holders and 5% for families, and reported incurring additional costs of anywhere between \$2000-\$3000 in addition, Then last year, our employee premiums went up another 20% in the midst of an absolute war between Springfield Clinic and Blue Cross Blue Shield, the District switched carriers to Cigna. And although everyone was promised that the plan would be identical, and some respite from the crisis, many are seeing increases in pharmaceuticals, specialists and mental health provider costs already.

This insurance increase is devastating. SEA would ask that you reach out and share your story and data with the union and the board of education (if you see fit). Armed with accurate information and hard truths, we will be better prepared to capture the realities that we are experiencing as a collective. We can never truly move ahead, if the cost of bread, milk, diapers and insurance are beating down our financial door. Now is the time to rally. It is never too late to tell your truth.



SEA Has The Blues Open Mic Night - "Teacher Blues" -

Pete Seeger, was a 1940's activist and songwriter. He was not a traditional "blues singer", rather more of a folk singer, but he captured the simultaneous plight and catharsis of many educators and educational professionals. Seeger sang, "I've got the teacher's blues, those blues are on my mind, 'Cause inflation's got me, done left me far behind." Other Classic blues artists captured the plight of us layflok in education. Lightning Hopkins sang, "It is a sin to be rich, but a low down shame to be poor." And my favorite of all times, John Lee Hooker

captured the soul of hard times in a haunting piano and guitar echo back song called "Hard Times, hard times, they gettin' me down..."

The evening of September 15th, over 100 SEA members, families, and friends of ours from the community gathered together. We rekindled our bonds, we sang along with and listened to songs of expression, and we reminded ourselves that we all have immense value in our community and that our worth is great. It was a moment to relax and a moment to once again realize our collective power and solidarity. It was a moment to look into each other's eyes and know, through our bonds and support, that we are all going to be ok.

SEA might have the blues but the "SEA of Red" is a wave of change... and its swell is strong.

September Calendar of Events

ALL EVENTS SUBJECT TO RESCHEDULING

6 & 19 - Board of Education Meetings - 6:30 p.m. - [View Live On Channel 22](#)

11 - Remembrance of 9/11 - Salute to Our First Responders, Law Enforcement Officers and Veterans

13 - AR Meeting 4:20 - IEA PDC

15 - SEAs Got the Blues Open Mic Night - Obed and Isaac's - 3:30 - 7 pm

15 - Micah Miller Board Member Fund Raiser - 5 - 7 pm - [D.H. Brown's](#)

27-29 - [Rosh Hashana](#)

October Calendar of Events

ALL EVENTS SUBJECT TO RESCHEDULING

4-5 - Yom Kippur

5 & 19 - Board of Education Meetings - 6:30 p.m. - [View Live On Channel 22](#)

10 - Columbus / Indigenous People's Day

13 - AR Meeting 4:20 - IEA PDC

24 - [Diwali](#)

31 - Halloween

The delicacy of our personal and familial fabric, the most obvious first. Watching others overseas experience fear and loss through social media or on the news is powerful, but often we are shielded from collective tragedy by selfless actions of our ancestors and the good fortune of being an American. This time it is different though, possibly it is our family having possible compromised immune systems or respiratory issues, and every action we take, viewed through those concerns... no one immune to the immense power of a virus with no vaccine and everyone a potential carrier.

The fragility of our economy, medical resources and supply chain, also quite revealing. The initial blitzkrieg by our neighbors on grocery stores, depleting them of essential items, to the point many were questioning if they may have to make alternate plans for basic toileting... in itself, made me briefly question our societal judgement. Medical providers unable to acquire basic protective gear and equipment, having to rethink their best judgement as professionals. And the stock market's plummet, local run on banks for cash (after a strong run of unprecedented gains), reminded me that everything hinges so delicately on the other.

Questions as to continuity of government, education, social services, and the like made me think of the previous freedoms taken (or not yet granted) from those in this nation and others abroad. As edicts arrive from state and federal authorities and screening processes are put into place, one can't help but wonder how, as scary as this seems, what life may be like in a government with malintent. Again, so very fortunate to be weathering the storm here.

Last, but not least, my eyes clearly open to our inexplicable irony of social interaction. For the past 10-15 years, we have been intentionally withdrawing from each other and society, into our social media and online worlds. But now restricted from personal interaction, due to social distancing protocols, our potential quality time with our family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, civic and religious groups and the like has come to a screeching halt. And now all of a sudden, what didn't seem so important... the basic gift of socialization, is once again viewed as a treasure.

There are certain to be many more life lessons to be learned and tough times ahead, so until we are on the other side of this thing, please continue to put your families first, pay heed to all certified medical and governmental regulations, lean on your friends and colleagues (within social distancing protocols), let your Union know of any needs or concerns you may have, and look positively forward to a time soon that we can look back on all of this stronger and wiser and say, we made it through that by standing TOGETHER. Union strong.

-Aaron

