

## BARGAINING UPDATE

The Bargaining Team is happy to report that we have reached a tentative agreement on a new, 3-year contract with the district. The agreement acquires some small gains for members of the Association while still reflecting the current budget crisis facing the state of California.

Due to the tough financial times, we have agreed to extend the class size increases and the 175-day academic year for the duration of the contract. However, should the fiscal outlook improve in the state we have contingency language that would begin restoring days to the calendar. While that seems unlikely today, we took steps to protect our members in case things did improve.

On the positive, next year will see improvements in both salary and benefits. The staff development (buy back) day in August will be restored to both the calendar and the salary schedule. This day will affect a 0.54% raise on the salary schedule. Teachers will report back on Monday, August 15, staff development will be on August 16, the teacher workday will be on August 16, and classes will begin on August 18. There is also a change to the health insurance benefit. Employer/Employee contributions will now be based on PERS Choice instead of PERS Select. As Choice is a higher cost plan, most members will either see a reduction in their monthly contribution to health care or be capable of securing a better plan at little or no cost increase. Member surveys were loud and clear that they wanted an improvement

## STATE OF EMERGENCY RALLY

At the last State Council meeting, Council members voted to adopt a series of actions to be taken during the week of May 9-13, 2011. After several years of budget cuts and the prospect of more, significant cuts coming, members want those in Sacramento to develop a real plan to solve the budget problem. Each day of the week focuses on a different activity. The theme for this week of action is LEARN. "L" events will take place on Monday, May 9th and are focused on contacting legislators via phone calls, emails, and visits. "E" events will take place on Tuesday and are focused on reaching out to 'e'very parent. "A" events will take place on Wednesday, May 11 and are for appreciation events for educators. "R" events are scheduled for Thursday and are to promote the need for revenue for schools. "N" events will be on Friday, to show the people that it is Not Business as Usual.

Here is Santa Clarita, the plan is currently being finalized. There are two events we would like as many people as possible to take part in. On either Tuesday or Wednesday, we are going to have a "grade-in." We are asking that teachers bring their lesson plans and any papers they have to grade with them to a central location in this valley. Over a light snack and/or beverage, teach-

in our health care costs and this agreement does that!

The concept of teaching a sixth period has also been placed in our contract. A pilot program was run this year under a MOU. The District and the Association have made some changes to the MOU language and placed it into the contract. The new language increases the number of sections permitted on each site and gives more of our members access to these opportunities. While teaching a sixth period is always optional for our teachers, more will be eligible to do so than under the pilot program.

Some of the other changes to the contract are a small change to retiree health benefits that brings them in line with what current employees receive and a change to the cash-in-lieu language. There have also been changes to SC 7 stipends that should make the stipends more equitable with student case load.

For the first time in three years, we have actually been able to improve our members position in salary and benefits. While it is by no means where we would like to be, it is a small step in the right direction.

A hard copy of the Tentative Agreement was distributed to members and it is also on the Association website. If you have questions about the agreement, please come to the general membership meeting.

*-Brian Breslin*

ers will sit and grade papers at tables for a couple of hours. So as people walk by the tables and ask what you are doing, you will tell them that you are grading papers or planning lessons for your students. The common misconception of many is that our day ends at 2 and we do nothing outside of that time. This is one way to convince them otherwise.

Then, on Friday, May 13, 2011 community groups, families, clergy, and various unions across Southern California are staging a rally at Pershing Square in Downtown Los Angeles to draw attention to the need to find a better budget solution than just more cuts to essential services. Music and entertainment will begin at 4, with speakers at 5 p.m. The easiest way to get to the square is to drive to the red line subway station near Universal Studios and take the subway to the square. HDTA is asking as many members as possible to attend, bring friends and family if you want. We ask that HDTA members wear their gray HDTA shirts at this event. Those HDTA members that attend and take the train will be reimbursed for the cost of their subway ticket, provided a receipt is submitted. Look for more information in the upcoming weeks.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I was going to use this month's address to talk about some of issues discussed at the latest TURN Conference but those will likely be discussed in next month's message as news closer to home became the focus of this column. Tuesday afternoon I was asked to be one of four district speakers at the invite-only budget forum to be held at Hart High on Thursday, April 21, 2011. Governor Jerry Brown is conducted these forums around the state and agreed to have one in Assemblyman Cameron Smyth district. Below is the speech I plan on giving.

Good afternoon. My name is Leslie Littman. I teach AP US History here at Hart High School. In addition, I am president of the Hart District Teachers Association and have served as the Superintendent of Public Instruction appointment to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing since 2003. As an active member of CTA and a Commissioner on a State Board I work with a lot of educational leaders up and down the state and I know and appreciate that we do things differently here in the Hart District.

For as long as this association has been in existence, members of the HDTA have worked hand in hand with the school board and district administration through any and all budget challenges the state has thrown at us. Along the way, the association has also worked with the district in passing school bonds as well as being a cooperative partner in establishing numerous academic programs. We have found a way to be flexible with our collective bargaining agreement so that it did not stand in the way of what is good for kids.

No where is that more evident than our Peer Assistance and Review Program. When the bill was signed over a decade ago, many districts backed away from the concept. We did not. Not only did we, the association and the district, establish the program for veteran teachers but we mandated that all first year teachers in the district be required to go through it as well. Teachers in the program are assigned a full time release consulting teacher who works with them to improve their practice. Several times during the year, the consulting teachers report to the PAR panel, 4 teachers and 3 administrators, who make the decision of whether or not that teacher stays employed in the district. Decisions reached by the panel are made by consensus as all agree that good teaching is essential in ensuring that the students receive a quality education.

Here in the Santa Clarita Valley, we have some of the best schools in the state, even though we are some of the lowest funded districts in Los Angeles County. We have numerous blue ribbon and distinguished schools, strong test scores, a large number of AP courses with high pass rates on those exams, high graduation rates, competitive sports teams, award winning extra curricular and co-curricular programs, and many of our students go on to higher education. Our schools provide a foundation for students to be successful as adults. Their future should not be sacrificed to solve a problem they did not

create. It doesn't make sense that a state with some of the highest academic standards in the nation doesn't provide the funding necessary for schools to meet them. But then common sense doesn't always seem to be common when dealing with public schools. If we want to continue to improve student achievement, if we want to prepare the students of today for the workplace of tomorrow, if we want to maintain our quality of life, then we need to ensure that the schools receive the funding they need.

We understand that in difficult times, difficult choices must be made. In this district we work together, with each doing their part, to establish new programs in good times and to make cuts to survive the tough times. Four years ago, we were in the beginning stages of developing an alternative pay system with a component that included measuring student achievement but the budget crisis stalled those efforts. To address this current crisis, we have had to cut categorical funding when flexibility rules allowed, made changes to employee medical benefits, eliminate 8th grade promotion, decrease the school year, and increase class sizes. We have made sacrifices and compromised and worked together to try and keep the cuts away from our students and maintain our strong academic program. But the future looks bleak. It will be very difficult to continue to achieve more with less. At the minimum, we need what we have this year. The potential cuts to funding will be devastating to this district and cause irreversible damage if we don't have at least that. There is really nothing left to cut that does not destroy program. We will likely see the elimination of electives, co-curricular and extra curricular programs, increased class sizes beyond the current 39, and probably our PAR program as well.

In these past four years, all of the employees of this district have made sacrifices and compromised in order to do what is best for our students because we know that what happens within these brick walls during their four years here sets them on the path to their future. We must give the students of today the same opportunities that the students of yesterday had and the students of tomorrow will have. We need our elected leaders to do the same. Thank you.

*-Leslie Littman*