



REPORTER

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Representing Teachers and Educational Support Professionals
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ESP Bargaining

Hillsborough CTA is currently in the process of gathering input from ESPs across the county in order to assess the needs of ESPs and formulate contract proposals as we prepare for bargaining this summer. As always, the participation of HCTA members is vital to ensure that your voices are heard and your concerns are addressed. At press time, over 600 ESP have responded to our survey!

Over the next weeks and months, HCTA will be holding various meetings for ESP members and

will create workgroups to address the primary concerns in more detail. Members can submit suggestions by attending one of the meetings or by emailing their HCTA Staff Representative. After the list of bargaining issues has been defined, it will be made available to ESP members, so they can provide feedback.

The HCTA Bargaining Team will likely have its initial bargaining session with representatives of the District in June. The initial meeting will involve a review of District finances as well as opening statements from the

union Bargaining proposals will not be made at this meeting. We anticipate that both HCTA and the District will present their full proposals in late June. Following that, the District and HCTA Bargaining Teams will meet regularly until a tentative agreement is reached on a new contract.

When a tentative agreement is reached we will provide all ESPs with a written summary of the agreement and information on the ratification process.

The Importance of Voting...

...in elections and other contests by Jean Clements & Stephanie Baxter-Jenkins

We admit it — we are frequently perplexed by how people vote and even more amazed by the people who do not vote at all. When we talk about voting, we're referring to actions beyond simply casting a ballot in an official race for office. Of course, we believe strongly that everyone should vote in official elections and given that it's an election year, you will hear plenty from us about the need to be politically aware and active in the coming months.

But as we conclude the school year, we feel it is important to discuss two important ways you will be asked to vote on issues "closer to home." We want to highlight these because they are extremely important as they relate to your lives at your school site.

1. *Joint Poll by HCTA and the District regarding EET Related Issues.*

As you read this article, you will probably have already received information about providing your input on some specific EET questions (whether notice should be given for informal observations by the peer, a choice to substitute a different term for the word "developing" and a score ratio change). This poll will ask teachers, as well as principals

and assistant principals, three questions. We urge you to participate. We also urge you to consider carefully how you vote, keeping in mind not just how you feel today, which is very likely tired, overworked, and not as supported as you would like, but how you may feel in the future.

One of the questions you will be asked is whether you wish to retain the current equal score split between principals and peers

each particular choice has specific consequences.

There are many people who believe the principal should have a higher weight when it comes to evaluating instructional personnel at a school site. Under this line of reasoning, the principal knows each teacher at the site and has a broader knowledge of the school and the students, as well as the challenges or benefits in the particular environment. Moreover, there are many individuals who have long-term professional relationships with their administrators and the mutual trust and respect that come from such relationships. Plus, for good or bad, if you've taught for any significant amount of time, you are comfortable with, or at least clear about, the fact that the principal has an evaluation function.

While there are many people who have had a great peer experience, we know others have had a less than optimal experience. If we consider the arguments above, it isn't hard to imagine that people would vote to change the scoring ratio.

But before you cast that vote, we want to urge you to consider some alternate arguments.

"...as in all votes, each particular choice has specific consequences."

at 30 points each or whether you would prefer a system where the principal has 35 points and the peer has 25 points.

We do not want to tell people how to vote and, as employee representatives, it is our job to represent the opinions of our members. And we will do that. At the same time, we want to urge you to consider the options carefully because, as in all votes,

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In our opinion, there is something to be said for balance. We like the idea that fellow teachers, counselors, speech pathologists and others — fellow union members — are an equal weight in the system. Peers, as a group, are *our people*. They are teachers or counselors who did the same job you do and will do that job again soon. We don't know every peer personally, but we do know a lot of them. The peers we know took the job because they love teaching, they believe in teachers and they truly want to help teachers be the best they can be as professionals. They also want to ensure that teachers are treated fairly. Those same peers would likely say the system has not evolved to where they believed it would be — and *should* be — where they feel they are able to give the kind of support they want to be able to provide. But they want to see it get there, they want to support their colleagues and they want to ensure fairness for everyone.

Just as we understand that there are people who feel an obvious comfort level with their principal, there are many who do not. Our goal in pointing this out is not to bash administrators. Many were HCTA members and many are fabulous; but not all teachers trust that they will be evaluated fairly or accurately by their administrator. While you may be very comfortable with your principal now, you may not have the same principal next year or five years from now. We believe it is important to remember that fact when you vote.

We also want to point out a practical truth, which applies in nearly all negotiations: *once you*

let something go, it is hard to get it back. We say this because the district is willing to let you vote to give more power to management at this moment in time. This is a win-win scenario for them; they either keep the status quo or they get more say for managers. There is no guarantee we can vote in the future to return to the balance you may easily vote away today. We agree that people should get to give their opinion on this because we know it is an issue that people feel strongly about.

All that said, with ideal principals and ideal peers, you may philosophically believe that principals should have more weight in evaluations... and that's fine.

Whatever you decide, we urge you to participate and we ask that you consider, not just how you feel today, but how you felt in the past or how you may feel in the future if you find yourself at a different school or with different leadership.

The results of the poll are not binding — any changes made to the evaluation process will have to be voted on to be ratified.

2. SIP Waivers — Specifically Waivers Related To Planning Time.

As you know, we have a contract which contains various provisions regarding meetings and planning time. There are also means, as part of the school improvement process (SIP), whereby a faculty may waive portions of the contract. We all agree that teachers do not have enough planning and preparation time.

While we understand the need to provide some site level decision making in a district this large, we have seen an

unprecedented increase in waivers of the contract with regard to planning time. We're concerned that, in an era where employees are expected to be excellent at all times, we are also seeing faculties being routinely asked to give up some or all of their planning time for other activities.

As discussed above, please consider the choices you make today and how they will impact you and your colleagues in the future. You have the right to vote "NO" when being asked to waive your contractual planning time. So please read all waiver requests carefully and make sure they are clear and comply with the rules for waiver proposals, as well as voting.

"Once you let something go, it is hard to get it back."

We are in no way suggesting that you vote down all waivers. We just want to urge you to consider the benefits of the waiver proposal(s) carefully before voting. The proposal may be ideal for your needs, it may need modification, or it may be something which hinders, rather than helps, you and your colleagues. Also remember that all waivers must be reviewed and reconsidered each year. What was best for you and your school one year may not be best for you another year.

Elections

Congratulations to:

**Vice-President
Marilyn Dupree
Lavoy Exceptional Center**

**FEA Board Seat 3
Peter Terzian**

**CHECK OUT OUR
NEW WEB SITE!**

www.hillsboroughcta.org

Retiring?

For those of you who are thinking about retiring soon, I want to inform you about the retired branch of Hillsborough CTA. As you know, as a member of HCTA, you're eligible for many discounts, insurance plans, and the very valuable ACCESS card.

However, all of those benefits disappear once you leave the school district and are no longer a member of HCTA...unless you continue your membership through the retired local, HEA-R!

I urge you to join our group, keep ALL of your benefits and discounts, and enjoy the interesting activities we schedule monthly.

Our dues are very reasonable at \$51.00 for one year or \$450.00 to pay for a lifetime membership. This low fee keeps you in good standing as a member of HEA-R, FEA-R, NEA-R, and AFT-R.

For more information go to HCTA's web site at www.hillsboroughcta.org.

- Merrilyn Crosson
HEA-R President

HCTA Gives Back!



"HCTA will be giving a free book to every student at Crestwood Elementary."

First Book, a non-profit, provides access to new books to children in need. Thanks to a partnership between AFT and First Book, Hillsborough CTA has the opportunity to get high-quality, brand-new books into the hands of students from low-income families across Hillsborough County.

With the support of AXA, Horace Mann and Hillsborough County PTA/PTSA, we'll be giving a free book to every student at Crestwood Elementary, Hillsborough County's largest elementary school and a Title I

school, at the end of May.

The result of the First Book program shows how much of a positive impact a few books can make on a child. In a 4-month longitudinal study of 2,564 students, they found the following:

- It improves children's interest in reading overall.
- It increases children's desire to learn. Sixty-nine percent of program administrators found books from First Book were "very important" in children's decisions to read more and improve their reading skills.
- It increases reading at home;

more than 70% of children reported increased literacy activities at home after receiving books.

The program also has a positive outcome for schools. A survey of 1,800 members of the First Book network found that 99.1% said new books would allow them to increase educational opportunities or activities, including parent involvement.

Stay tuned! We are working to partner with First Book on a district-wide event this fall.

JOINING TOGETHER TO HELP TEACHERS & STUDENTS!



Thank You!

The Hillsborough National Board Certified Teacher Council would like to thank everyone who came out to support the "Mitchell 20" fundraiser for the Mary Gonzalez Scholarship!

We chose "Mitchell 20" because it illustrates that teacher-led, student-oriented, grassroots efforts can overcome some of the immense obstacles that public educators currently face.

Special thanks to HCTA and Famous Tate for making the viewing possible. Because of the support of these organizations and the generosity of the many people who made donations, we were able to not only meet, but exceed, our financial goal for this year.

“That’s Not What I Heard...”

Myth busting the top EET rumors

by Aimee Ballans & Sabrina Gates-McCarthy

As teachers, we often plan for students to categorize information in an attempt to inspire thinking and to promote analysis. Such was the purpose of *The Book of Lists* which sold over eight million copies worldwide and included facts stranger than fiction, intriguing information, and must-talk-about trivia. Each night, popular talk show host David Letterman gives his *Late Night Top Ten List* for the day to further viewer analysis and promote discussion. In the spirit of *The Book of Lists* and Letterman’s Top Ten, let’s take a pause to review what might be the current list of the Most Common EET Myths.

1. *Myth: Peer Evaluators are given quotas or limits to the number of Accomplished and Exemplary ratings they can assign.*

This myth is closely related to commentary that Peer Evaluators are told not to assign “exemplary” ratings or that ratings from the first year of implementation feel different from the current year. Observers are trained to observe lessons and then analyze the observation based on the rubric. There is no bell curve application to what observers see; it is more WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get).

Differences between the implementation last year and this year can easily be attributed to additional training of the observers, leading to a deeper understanding of the observation rubric. Additionally, adjustments to the rubric language which took place last summer provided a clearer vision for assessing observation data.

2. *Myth: They have to find at least three things wrong so they can write their report.*

Commentary related to this myth often uses the word “ding” or is related to the preceding myth. In synthesizing what is observed in a lesson, observers are trained to consider what could improve the teaching and learning in the lesson. It could be that the proficiency level of a teacher is rated “accomplished” for a component, thus the challenge of the observer would be to discuss ways that could further enhance learning and possibly lead to a proficiency level of “exemplary”.

In analyzing lessons, the sole purpose is to promote student learning. By having the opportunity to be a teacher’s mirror, an observer is in the unique position to share in the moment of that teacher’s instruction and facilitation of learning. Most teachers do not receive enough positive or constructive feedback about their practice of teaching craft. Having an observer focus on you and your practice is an opportunity to promote professional learning and support continued

professional growth.

3. *Myth: The Evaluation System is a “growth model”.* This is related to commentary that observers give lower ratings in the first observation so they have room to show that a teacher improves over the year. The evaluation system is not a growth model. The system is designed to evaluate what a teacher is doing to promote student learning. It is not designed to measure growth from one observation to the next. The evaluation system does promote growth as teachers analyze the feedback they receive from observers and then reflect on their practice, giving foundation for improving their craft and impacting learning.

**“As union members,
we know that our
voice is power.”**

4. *Myth: Teachers are not supposed to discuss their ratings with other teachers.*

Commentary related to this myth includes the perception that discussing observation ratings is in some way inappropriately giving another teacher information or is unethical. Teacher collaboration is a vital part of teacher growth. The evaluation system values all professional collaboration (it is in the rubric; Domain 4). Constructive discussion related to observation feedback is a productive way to gain additional ideas, to enhance your professional network, and ultimately, further promote learning. Stephanie Hirsh, Executive Director of Learning Forward (formerly the National Staff Development Council) shares the idea that one of the highest forms of professional learning is to have a genuine, collaborative conversation with a site-based PLC group.

Taking this into consideration, know that when discussing observation data, asking someone to rate an observation without seeing the lesson is not fair to anyone (the person you are asking, the observer, or you). Stress relief conversations are not the same as conversations to promote reflection and gain insight for future decision making. Both conversations are legitimate and important—one gives you a moment to unload and the other gives you a moment to uplift.

5. *Myth: The Peer Observer is not familiar with the standards, techniques, or content complexities for my lesson.*

This is related to commentary that observers did not teach my...grade, specific subject, or specific level. Observers come with a variety of experiences. For

example, a high school principal may have never taught high school English, been the band director, or have taken Macro Economics since attending college, and yet they earned an Educational Leadership degree, went through a screening process, and were hired as an administrator, which places them in the position of observing and evaluating all teachers at their site.

Peer observers have also gone through a rigorous application process followed by intensive training to place them in the position of observing and evaluating teachers.

Additionally, Peers are provided with ongoing training from content area supervisors and district trainers to further their knowledge of current curricular and pedagogical expectations. Observers have access to many resources including the *Next Generation Sunshine State Standards* online and district subject area supervisors. Due diligence is given to gaining needed insight to each lesson observation.

6. *Myth: Your observation rating is usually going to be your evaluation rating.*

Commentary related to this myth concludes that a low mark on a single observation will lead to a low mark on the final evaluation; also related is the idea that a developing component rating equates to being an overall developing teacher. Observations are opportunities to collect insight into a teacher’s daily practice by rating components. Components are not weighted equally. Component weights vary from 2% to 9%. Components in Domain 3 carry the greatest weight (9%).

The evaluation at the end of the year is a synthesis of the entire component data collected in observations from that year. A rating assigned to a component does not equate to a teacher being labeled any proficiency level. Teaching is hard and definitely not simplistic; assessing the nuances of teaching is equally hard and complex.

7. *Myth: I don’t put anything in the journal or respond to the request for information after an informal observation because it won’t impact my ratings.*

Commentary around this myth is rooted in a misunderstanding of the purpose for these types of communication and may sound like “I don’t get credit for things that happen outside the lesson, so why share?” or “They are only looking for extenuating circumstances like a fight or a fire drill, they don’t care about what was happening in the lesson”.

Although an observer can only rate an observation based on what they see, when the time comes to synthesize all of the information in preparation for the evaluation, all information (including what is posted into the bucket) is used to create the most complete view of the teaching performance for the year. This is why the bucket is a living

and vital part of the evaluation process.

The same is true for sharing information about what preceded and what came directly after the informal observation. This information contributes to understanding the decisions a teacher made during the lesson and how those decisions impacted student learning. Certainly, events like a fire drill and a fight are also need-to-know information, but so might the bell work discussion which preceded the observer’s entry into the room, if it gave context for the discussion which occurred during the observation.

8. *Myth: The new system will affect my pay.*

Commentary surrounding this myth takes many forms and includes many misdirected ideas. The fact is that most people (based on when they were hired) will have choice as to whether they convert to the Career Ladder pay scale or remain on the current-styled pay scale. The Career Ladder salary scale *has not been proposed or negotiated*. If you choose to remain on the original pay scale, you will continue to receive negotiated increases. In the current political and economic times, it would be premature to stipulate what the Career Ladder pay scale would look like. Regardless of having options for pay scales, we have and always will be evaluated. To best prepare for the choice in pay scale options we must first gain as much understanding of the system which is used to evaluate our performance, then apply ourselves to performing at our best, followed by being informed employees who closely follow information disseminated by the district and our union.

Each of these myths is ultimately rooted in a misunderstanding of the changes that are part of the transformation of our district’s evaluation system. Change is never easy. Experts tout that for a change to be completely internalized it takes between three and five years. Considering that we have been riding the wave of this change for just two years, we have made some impressive gains.

As educators we know that knowledge is power. Seek to know all that you can by attending workshops, participating in webinars, reading literature, and participating in powerful, collaborative dialog with your peers.

As union members, we know that our voice is power. As we continue to mold the evaluation system through continued committee work and our union leaders continue to give voice to our input, consider what your needs are, share your thoughts about continued improvement and give voice to not only concerns, but also to the positive changes and moments you see.

We invite our students to change on a daily basis; we certainly can rise to a similar challenge and be even more successful than we have been in the past.

