

SPECIALIST MEETING

Welcome everyone and thank you for taking the time to join us.

We are going to explore where we have been, where we are and what is coming.

We are here today to enjoy the solidarity of specialists together, so we know we are not alone.

As many of you know, because you were there, TEA, our union, called a surprise meeting last fall and threw us all collectively under the bus and then repeatedly backed over the advocacy team. Thank you to all of you who reached out afterwards in solidarity. Although it was temporarily debilitating, ultimately it inspired us to double down our commitment to serve and protect the specialists as a group. Despite that meeting, we have endeavored to gain understanding and work with TEA.

It seems the topmost brass felt undermined by our determination and actions from May through September. We hope you all know it was never our intention to go against the union, but rather to assist them. However, it was their inaction and unwillingness to assist us in any concrete way, that meant we had to take matters in our own hands and go it alone. We still are going it alone.

One important positive that came out of the summer TEA situation is that many, many specialists are now involved in TEA. Let's have a shout out to all of you who are now building REPS and are many members of committees. In fact, let us give our first door prize to a TEA rep!

We thank everyone for your union involvement, in whatever shape that takes. Especially important is writing and asking questions and comments to the TEA. They will be putting out a member survey soon, please out for it.

By gaining an understanding of the workings of TEA and now being on the inside, as well as speaking up, we are better able to make it the union we want it to be and need it to be.

Unfortunately, at this time, it is neither the union we need or want it to be. There is of course the larger picture of the whole district being frustrated. But for us, the specialists, after last fall, TEA has to earn back our trust.

Some trust was earned back when 2 union insiders met with the advocacy team.

One evening, the VP Mark Craypo joined us and on another occasion Ann McPartland, now Diversity rep but long time and future bargaining team member visited. Neither of them were in a position to do anything or make promises, but both shared important realistic information and they came away with a better understanding of our issues.

We gained insights on bargaining, as well as the tasty insider scoop that specialists as a group, with all of our letter writing, meetings with HR, organizing the public and our squeaky wheel actions are now being looked at as the reason why Scott Rich was transferred out of deployments and why we are safely working remotely. Huzzah!

But at the same time, there is a big disappointment. We have been informed that TEA will not be creating any MOU's on our behalf before the next formal bargaining.

We absolutely need language regarding deployment. We need a staffing formula and a max number of students we can see per fulltime job.

I personally find this TEA stance to be devastating, but refuse to take it as a final answer- we have to hold them to their promise of a MOU that they gave us at that difficult vote where we were muzzled in 2019.

As a reminder: A MOU is a Memo of understanding that is an addition to the contract, which usually turns into contract language at the next bargain. It is necessary for TEA to understand our working conditions and why we need an MOU. After our meetings with Mark and Ann, it became clear they did not truly understand the nature of our jobs. The district also does not understand.

We have been told by TEA that data is what they need. Data is our engine. We have not been able to get reliable data from TPS or TEA. Why? The data is not being managed well by either organization. This team, however, has done research through public record's requests, the district sites and old documents. But it is your survey answers that are turning heads. Please know the information you provide is valuable and confidential.

Thank you to everyone who has taken the time to fill out and return a survey, write or text.

Remember they falsely accused this specialist action team of not representing you all as a group. They tried to say it was just about us, the action team. Data that you provide, in any fashion, proves that false.

Currently Specialists are getting a raw deal, as you know because you are living this reality. TPS did not fix our deployments in the fall as we hoped, because they mandated a COVID hiring freeze. And as a result, the district and principals continue to make it more and more complex.

So be it, it is a history making pandemic.

BUT The issue is, long before the pandemic hiring freeze, open positions, made by folks leaving Tacoma, retiring or dying, have not been filled. Remaining jobs just get bigger. WHY IS THIS?

It is all about the budget.

And RED ALERT! The budgeting process for the next two years has begun. It is happening now.

Principals will be having their district FTE meetings in the next 2 weeks. Please discuss with your building admin what the specialist FTE should be in your buildings.

Here is what you need to know:

There is an innovator article that was posted on the HUB January 27 that explains that the 2 year budget planning process. Watch the 9 minute video that explains Budget by Priority. It is eye opening.

To sum up:

TPS has a process of allocating every dollar spent which requires that each dollar be attached to a proposal. Everything must be tied to student outcomes. They began to roll out this method in 2014.

No one has been formally advocating or proposing on our behalf of our subjects for the last two cycles and the results are obvious. We have had a substantial loss in positions in all 3 specialist areas. Meanwhile other positions, such as building coaches, instructional facilitators and K-3 support have been growing.

Because there is no TEA MOU to guide TPS to fund our positions, we have to do it ourselves.

In other words, without contract language, we have to inspire those in charge to fund our subject areas.

Specialists must get the district's attention, regardless of how TEA feels about it. Our collective actions last summer made a difference, so we can be inspired our future actions will make a difference as well.

We all have to start writing and asking who is in charge of our funding.

Who do we write? Everyone. Including members of the public.

I have written a number of letters over the last two years and have never had someone tell me about this budget by priority issue from CAB. I have been repeatedly told that specialists are not in my department. I do not think we are in anyone's department. We are simply a means to fulfill that pesky prep time mandate. But we know how important we are to students, so we must now engage in becoming someone's budget priority proposal. We must demand it.

The budget process focuses on student outcome. Meditate on why you do what you do and what it does for students, and share that. We must find people who will testify on our subject area's behalf.

Do remember-even though this year is this crazy ass pandemic year, we cannot take our eyes off the prize of what must be restored when we go back to regular instruction someday. There is a very real and present danger that we could be further marginalized. There is NO ONE out there to fight on our behalf. IT HAS TO BE US.