

A look at MFT history

The 1948 Minneapolis teachers' strike

In 1948, the labor environment wasn't like it is today.

Strikes by public employees were illegal. Collective bargaining as we know it didn't exist. And the Minneapolis Board of Education thought it could do as it liked.

Or, at least until the Minneapolis Teachers' Strike of 1948.

Teachers were beginning to organize to fight for their rights and for better learning environments for their students. St. Paul teachers had struck in 1946 over some of the same issues we still face today—classroom

sizes (at that time up to 50 students per room), pay equity and old or antiquated equipment.

At that time, the St. Paul schools were run by the city council and mayor—a condition that was once the case in Minneapolis and is the case today in Chicago.

In 1947, the Board of Education voted to cut the school calendars for 1947-48 and 1948-49 by two weeks each—a total of four weeks—due to budget considerations. That unilateral action resulted in pay cuts of up to ten percent for teachers who were already underpaid.

Leaders of the MFT's men's and women's unions—yes, they were separate organizations in those days—came together on behalf of their 1,100 members and on February 24, 1948, a strike was called.

The "Happy Warrior" himself, Minneapolis Mayor Hubert Humphrey, took the position that it would be best to "wait awhile" and see what transpired, according to news accounts of the day. But Humphrey also favored an increase in the mill levy to allow for better funding of schools, which was the other great local issue of that time.

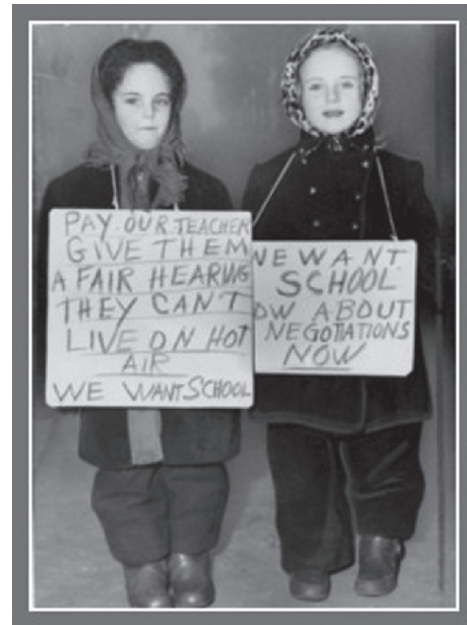
Nearly 65,000 students were out of school for four weeks while negotiations took place. Governor Luther Youngdahl got involved, negotiating personally with the board for wage increases which

the rank and file voted down.

In response, Governor Youngdahl requested that the schools be opened with substitute and non-union teachers—an action that understandably upset the MFT membership, which immediately picketed.

Eventually, more than 2,000 teachers—almost double the number who were actually MFT members at the time—were off the job until negotiations took place which were acceptable to membership.

The end result? On March 22, 1948, teachers and students returned to class. The teachers had won wage concessions—the salary range offered by the negotiating committee started at \$2,500 and extended to \$4,450 yearly—but the Board also agreed to place the budget at pre-strike levels.



Images courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society

The lesson learned? When teachers work together, things get done.

We work in an environment every bit as challenging as that of the Minneapolis teachers of 1948. Class sizes are still too big. Some teachers don't feel like they have a voice in the direction of their jobs or the education of their students.

But, you do have a voice. It's through your union. Teachers struck in 1948 to give today's MFT greater power at the bargaining table and in the community. The idea is to use that power constructively, for a better Minneapolis and a better world.

That's why your union is here, and why each of us needs to be active in it. ■



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Minneapolis Federation of Teachers & ESPs, Local 59

January 2015

A Union of Professionals

www.mft59.org

Survey results released

The Minneapolis Federation of Teachers recently conducted a survey of teachers and related service professionals with interesting results.

Beginning in late October, respondents were asked to answer up to 25 questions on a variety of topics including preparation time, PDPLC, morale, technological needs,

district support, student behavior, and many others. There were nearly 1,200 responses. Participation was voluntary and anonymous.

"We want the best possible communication between union leadership and its members," MFT 59 President Lynn Nordgren said. "Part of that process involves hearing what you have to say about your day-to-day

jobs, which will help MFT advocate for what's best for students and those who serve them. We received thousands of written comments as

well and while we are still sorting through them, we want you to see some of the results."

Here's a sampling of some of the survey findings:

Eighty percent of respondents said they teach in classes of between 23 and 33 students, with two percent in classes of 40 or more. Thirty-eight percent of respondents said they were at least somewhat dissatisfied with their class size, while only eighteen percent said they were 'very satisfied'

with the size of their class.

The new MPS suspension policy did not receive passing grade from respondents. Forty-three percent said it did not help establish the best learning environment for all students, with another third having no opinion. Other issues included not having enough support or training on the new policy and students

with social and/or emotional issues not receiving proper attention to their needs.

Respondents were split on the environment in Minneapolis schools. Thirty-five percent said morale in their schools is either below average or poor. Clearly, more work needs to be done in terms of culture and climate.

Fifty-seven percent of respondents

Survey

Legislative Update

By Sydney Jordan

MFT participated in the Minneapolis Regional Labor Federation's (MRLF) Labor 2014 program this year to maximize voter turnout in key targeted legislative races around the metro area.

Without much competition in our Minneapolis House races, we focused on the suburban house races in 44B, 48A, 49A and 49B. Our Education Minnesota and MRLF-endorsed candidates

Jon Applebaum (44B), Ron Erhardt (49A) and Paul Rosenthal (49B) had close races but won their seats on Election Night while Yvonne Selcer (44B) won reelection after a recount.

We were also successful in reelecting Senator Al Franken, Representative Keith Ellison, Governor Mark Dayton, and all of our constitutional officers. For School Board races, MFT made thousands of door knocks and phone calls and made

postcard mailings to all members.

We will be holding our annual Education Minnesota Legislative Dinner with our Minneapolis Senators and Representatives on Thursday, January 15th at Elsie's Restaurant, located at 729 Marshall Street NE in Minneapolis, across the street from MFT. It's free, with happy hour at 4:30 and dinner at 5:30. Please email me at sjordan@mft59.org to RSVP. ■

Stand up — stand together

Rally planned for January 13

MFT leadership is planning a "Stand Up and Stand Together for Students" rally before the January 13, 2015 Board of Education meeting. We'll meet in the Davis Center cafeteria at 5:00 p.m.

Parking is available on the street or in the lot behind the Davis Center. A group of MFT members will address the board during the pre-meeting public comment period.

As MPS transitions leadership, we want a strong, unified presence at the meeting to welcome new leadership and be sure they understand we have a strong and important voice. We know what works, so it's time to get focused on the best solutions for our students.

We know you're busy but it's time to get things right in our district, so please attend. Come to the Davis Center and wear union blue on January 13!

Survey - cont. on p. 2

The Power of Hope Message from the President

By Lynn Nordgren

"The first and last task of a leader is to keep hope alive – the hope that we can finally find our way through to a better world."

– John Gardner

It is time for a change in the mindset of our district administrators. It is time to stop using a deficit model of leadership that focuses on all that is wrong in our schools, our employees and our students. That model has led to a deficit of hope.

Our school district is in a crisis. The workload is out of control, the bureaucracy is oppressive, there are continuous mistakes coming out of the central office, and staff morale is low. Employees are shamed and blamed for student results even though we are doing what the central office asks. The model is not working and it is not how we will ensure student success.

It is time for leadership that inspires hope and creates a positive climate of trust, collaboration and support. This is what is expected of us in our

schools as we work with our students and each other. We must now demand that same expectation of our leaders – starting from the very top with the new MPS Superintendent.

As teachers and related service professionals, we know hope is the foundation of learning and change. Hope is what gets you up every day, knowing there is always a chance to move forward and find what works for each of our students. And, hope is what brings students to school – that internal quest to grow – even for those whose hope is deeply buried. When we stop hoping, we stop moving forward.

Hope is centered on people. It is not about an endless succession of big and unfocused plans that "shift" and "accelerate". It is not about constantly changing budgets, policies and procedures. It is not about deflecting responsibility in a press release or blaming all of those around you if your plans do not work. It is not about unreliable test scores or

subjective observation results. And, it is not a numbers game that creates smoke and mirrors around student behavior and graduation expectations.

Hope is about the truth. It is grounded in knowing and understanding what truly works and then coming together to make what works happen. Hope is

about believing even when the odds tell you not to. Hope inspires and motivates. It is time for a change in the mindset of all of us who work in MPS. We can no longer be victims of an ineffective and inefficient school system. Together, we can collaborate to build a better MPS and fight for the things we all

know are best for students. We know this will not be easy so we need to stay strong.

It is our own hope that will inspire the much-needed education revolution that's on its way. ■



Lynn Nordgren

Survey - Cont. from p. 1

said they don't have enough time to get ready for daily work with students. "I spend hours at home every day (weekdays and weekends)," one respondent wrote, "as well as come in an hour early every day, and stay late when my schedule allows, and I still feel as though I'm never caught up." This was a common theme.

Only 39 percent said they felt at least somewhat respected and trusted by district leadership. "The district rarely asks for input from teachers. And when they do ask, it is disregarded," one respondent said. Interim Superintendent Goar has stated he would like to make progress on this issue.

Forty-two percent said they didn't have enough time to prepare for the start of the school year, and only 29 percent of respondents say they have fewer meetings.

One-third of respondents said they found Focused Instruction to be a valuable tool, only 15 percent said it had been well implemented and 43 per-

cent said the benchmark tests were not of good quality.

Only 19 percent of respondents said there had been a reduction in the number of tests for students, with 44 percent in disagreement. The newly-formed Assessment Committee is working on reducing the number of tests students must take.

Written responses were passionate, too.

"Working for the Minneapolis Schools, in almost any capacity, has become very stressful," one wrote. "The administration at the Davis Center doesn't seem to hear this, or be concerned."

"[I] continue to feel like

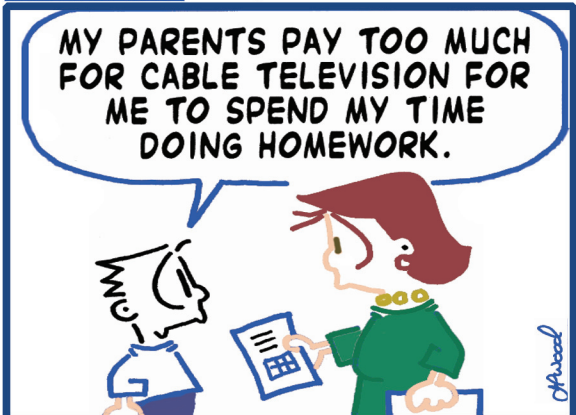
I have to defend my years of experience and education/background to our critics," another wrote. "Thank you to Union Leadership for continuing on for the greater good while increasing the participation of ALL of us."

"My biggest issue has always been class size," one teacher wrote. "Thank you for making it an issue. Now, if we can get some funding for resources, I may never retire. Thank you for asking my opinion!"

"Keep up the good work. The struggle continues," another added.

Watch the MFT website at www.mft59.org for additional survey results. ■

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Ten ways you can get in trouble

By Bonita Jones, Business Agent

- 1) **Appearance of inappropriate contact with students.** Never touch a student in anger or affection. Be aware of cultural differences.
- 2) **Being unwilling or unable to perform your job.** You must perform the duties of your job and show ethical behavior towards colleagues, families, and students.
- 3) **Failing to supervise students.** Ask a colleague to watch your students if you need to leave class. Contact the office if leaving the school.
- 4) **Forgetting that everything done on a computer leaves a trail.** Inappropriate sites are no more than a couple of inadvertent clicks away. If you see inappropriate content showing up, tell the IT department.
- 5) **Inability to account for student/school/district funds.** If you can't handle money well, let someone else do it.
- 6) **Failing to follow directions.** Legally, insubordination is a repeated, willful violation of a lawful and appropriate order. Directions have to be legal and safe.
- 7) **Going to investigatory meetings with administrators without Union representation.** If you believe the conversation will result in discipline (or changed working conditions), you have the legal right to have a union steward present - but you must ask for it.
- 8) **Believing that the right of free speech provides unfettered protections.** Be careful about what you say about yourself, students, or the community. You may voice an opinion but do so respectfully.
- 9) **Coming to work when you aren't healthy.** An employer will expect you to take steps to become physically or mentally healthy. Take the initiative to contact health providers before it becomes a big problem.
- 10) **Forgetting that probationary is probationary - by law.** State law says the district may take action for almost any reason to terminate a probationary employee's contract. MFT will do as much as possible to support you if anything happens. In all cases, be sure to contact MFT Business Agents Mike Leiter (mleiter@mft59.org) or Bonita Jones (bjones@mft59.org) immediately if you need assistance. Or, call us at 612-529-9621. We're here to help. ■

We need to hear from you!

Over the last few weeks, MFT has started a number of efforts to engage with you, the membership. We've started a #ThankYourTeacher Twitter campaign to encourage teachers to follow the union in social media and start a regular buzz about the good work teachers do. Also, the poll of members that was highlighted on our front page allowed us to hear from nearly 1,200 of you on issues of importance to you in the classroom.

We're not only communicating electronically. MFT has sponsored meetings on issues like adult bullying and student de-escalation techniques to help our membership in their day to day work. This modest

edition of the *Educator* is the starting point for bringing back a newsletter communication with you.

For now, this publication will be issues-based, and will appear as needed, with the goal of a regular production schedule at the start of the 2015-16 school year.

Yet, a newsletter is only as good as its content, and we want to hear from you about what you want to read in your publications. To do that, contact any of the MFT Communications Committee members listed below. We want and need to hear from you to make the *Educator* the best newsletter it can be going forward.

Thank you in advance!

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Organizing update

Time to mobilize

By Sydney Jordan

MFT will focus on member mobilization organizing extensively after winter break. President Lynn Nordgren will visit each site to hear from teachers about their concerns, their negotiation and legislative priorities, and their vision for MFT's direction.

Many school stewards have already set meeting times. If teachers or ESPs have additional concerns, I'd love to schedule one-on-ones with anyone interested. Please contact me at 612-296-3495 or e-mail me at sjordan@mft59.com. In other organizing news, we will once again have a Membership/COPE drive. The Committee on Political Action exists to do fundraising and make contributions in connection with appropriate political races. We will also door-knock members to tell them about the campaign. Watch for more information. ■

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