



AT ISSUE

Elementary Planning Time

May 31, 2011

It's About Time: Teachers Pack School Board Meeting to Fight for Planning Time

Over 350 MTI members packed the McDaniels' Auditorium on May 23 to protest to the School Board, the District Administration's plan to eliminate elementary teacher directed planning time currently provided on Monday afternoons, and replace it with District directed professional development.

Every seat was filled, and dozens stood or sat in the aisles and hallway, overflowing the Auditorium. **Educators clad in red MTI Solidarity shirts.** Joining hundreds of elementary teachers in solidarity were several middle and high school teachers, SEAs, and SEE-MTI bargaining unit members, as well as parents. Twenty-one teachers stepped up to the microphone to speak directly to Board members. **They shared powerful and often emotional testimony relative to the work they do with students and their need for time.**

What Teachers Shared with the School Board:

"There is value in having teacher-directed time to prepare materials. You have not hired fools. You have hired highly skilled professionals who constantly seek to improve, who give of themselves constantly, because they want your children to be successful. Our achievement gap is our common enemy, but it is not of my making, it is not because I do not have enough staff development. It has to do with poverty and the sooner our society faces that and puts the resources that these kids need in place, the sooner we will have the successful school system we need".

*"We didn't get planning time because of the wisdom of the school board or the superintendent or through their good - heartedness. We got it because the teachers had a strike. **In 1976 we had a strike, out for two weeks in the middle of the winter. John Mathews was our Executive Director and Paul Soglin was our mayor** ... Monday planning time was so important that we had all of these elementary teachers out on the picket line. I never thought in my life I would be back here talking about it."*

*"**Monday planning time is not a luxury, it's a necessity.** Without it, teaching the way you want us to teach, the way we want to teach, will not just be difficult, but impossible."*

*"**No amount of professional development can be effective without time to plan for its implementation.** Compensation has been reduced, morale is low and stress is high. At the very least, respect and support us by preserving our already inadequate planning time."*

*"**Teachers are constantly developing themselves professionally in self-directed ways.** This (management's) plan pits professional development against existing professionally-directed planning time. Something needs to give. The pie does not get any bigger, something needs to go."*

*"**Splitting blocks of planning time diffuses its effectiveness.** In a crazy, busy day we need to think about blocks of time to support differentiation efforts, collaborative efforts."*

*"**There is an important voice missing from these discussions with downtown administration. It's the voice of your well trained, highly professional staff.**"*

*"**We have a relationship gap, how our children feel in our classroom.** If my students don't feel like they belong, I have lost the battle. Those students with special needs need special relationships. The time you are taking away [at the beginning and end of the school day], is time you are taking away from them."*

*"I have been watching body language tonight. Sometimes there's been laughter, sometimes there's been head rubbing, maybe a little chair rocking because you've heard some things that are funny and you've heard some things a million times. **Well, this is what professional development looks like.**"*

“When I start a lesson and its not going well and I can hear the rumbling in the class, I have three choices:

- a) I can forge ahead because it’s **my** lesson and I spent a lot of time on it and I **love** my lessons;
- b) I can try to modify it half-way through though I’m still going to lose a lot, or;
- c) I can go back to the drawing board and figure out what’s going to work for my students.

I hope that you’ve heard enough that you know that **you’re faculty is rumbling and that this is not working. Reconsider and maintain the planning time we currently have.”**

*“No matter how effectively and efficiently we collaborate and plan, we can’t be the teachers we want to be, nor can we be what we need to be, within the confines of this highly fragmented 5.5 hours of planning. So, we come in early, we stay late and we take it home. And you know what? As professionals we expect to do that, but we are human. **And we have limits and other demands on our time and energy and need to be respected.** We put kids first. **Don’t erode our ability to be the best for them.** Please respect our professionalism. Please support us in the work we do for our District’s youngest students.”*

And finally:

“Please help me decide what to eliminate from the planning time that is being removed from my week:

- ***Shall I stop distributing literature from non-district sources, for which the district has given their permission for classroom distribution? (This would be my first choice. It would save me a few minutes every day. It would also cut down on paper waste and focus family attention on school missives.)***
- ***Shall I choose not to fill out the multi-page questionnaires from outside agencies such as Social Security, Social Services, private practitioners, and many other members of the community that depend on me to help decide whether a student's family will receive needed treatment or benefits?***
- ***Shall I stop sending home a weekly class newsletter that informs families about our activities, reminds them about what is coming up, gives them tips for better collaboration with the school, showcases their children's achievements and creates stronger school/community bonds?***
- ***Shall I stop coordinating the school garden effort? There is a strong PTA committee that might be able to do it without staff input, but will it continue on a path that best suits students' learning needs?***
- ***Shall I stop reviewing the pages of teacher information that accompany lesson plan suggestions for reading, writing, spelling, handwriting, math, science, and social studies?***
- ***Shall I stop filling out the paperwork for the PBS plan the District is trying to implement?***
- ***Shall I stop implementing creative approaches and solutions that are meant to individualize learning and contain my work efforts to district mandated materials and techniques?***
- ***Shall I stop planning field trips, which are not mandated by the District?***
- ***Shall I stop trying to make learning a fun, life long habit that touches every student and just teach to the test?***

*There are only a finite number of hours/minutes/seconds to every day. The District needs to take a lesson from Stephen Covey's 7 Habits For Highly Effective People. It is called Put First Things First. You place your highest priorities into your planner first, then fill in the smaller time slots with less important activities, and then use every teachable moment to accomplish whatever is left. Elementary teachers have been doing this since time began. **But we are getting more and more frustrated as administrators refuse to acknowledge that our time is finite.** We are urged to 'teach smarter' while task after task is added to our diminishing planning time.*

Like the doomed polar bears swimming their hearts out, searching for shrinking patches of melting ice, teachers are tiring as we try to stay effective while time and resources that we depend on are disappearing. We need our polar bears and we need our teachers. Polar bears cannot solve the problem of global warming and teachers cannot solve the crises facing public education. Give us what we need to teach, and we will not let you down. We will help your children find the tools they need to build a brave new world, but we need our planning time to do it.”