
BCEA NEWSLETTER



Life since COVID-19

BY MEGAN SIMONS

In February I was slated and fully funded by MFPE to go to two NEA (National Education Association, our national affiliate) training conferences, one specifically for ESP’s (Education Support Professionals). A week before I was going to fly out, NEA notified all attendees that due to the pandemic, the conferences were canceled. These conferences are planned out strategically for at least a year and members from all over the nation attend, so this was a historical cancellation that affected thousands of people- or should I say protected thousands? That was the beginning of the effects COVID-19 had on me...in MT, we had not had our first case yet and it didn’t seem like it would reach us naively, that’s what I wanted to believe.

Even if you don’t adhere or agree to guidelines set forth by local/state/federal officials or have different beliefs than the mainstream media, etc., there is no doubt that your life has still been affected by this pandemic. I hope that no one has lost a loved one due to it and I am so happy with the way our governor has worked to protect our health. We certainly flattened the curve in MT and we should be proud of that, but our vigilance in the future needs to still be steadfast.

As your union president, I have asked some difficult questions and helped address what your workplaces should look like if you’re onsite. Aside from safety, the main concern was obviously folks

getting their paychecks regardless and that has been handled fairly. I have 'attended' many school board meetings via ZOOM, sometimes more than once a week, since the closure on behalf of all support staff. For weeks we teetered on the governor's directives and waited in two week increments for direction in the weeks to come, all the while staying home, sheltering in place. Thank you all for your confidence in my leadership and patience during this extremely difficult time.

On a personal note, my daughter was tested for it and we had to quarantine until we got the results back- scary! But she was cleared and because of the diligence of the CARES act passed by congress and the implementation by the district, I did not have to use any sick/ vacation time. To have to plan for instruction and work schedules is challenging because everything is so unknown related to the COVID-19 pandemic; it looks different for each



department, with some working remotely and some staggering days in their offices/workplaces to decrease the amount of people in one place at a time, etc. Everyone that has stepped up and taken on different roles to help out their coworkers, students, etc., your efforts are far-reaching and appreciated! And praise to all for enduring this unsettling time whether sheltering in place, working, worrying about job security or a combination of any or all the above! We, as support staff, will help shape what the future looks like and aid teachers, students, and coworkers as this continues to roll out. Often the ones (support staff) on the 'front lines', thank you for your dedication to the students and your jobs. Your union continues to work hard for you to ensure your health, safety and well-being!

My First Year as Your BCEA President

BY MEGAN SIMONS

Stepping up to do this job is definitely not for the weak-spirited! I have always enjoyed helping people and in this role I have collaborated with our SD2 administration, served on committees that affect all of our jobs, worked with fellow board members, etc. It has been

heartening and I hope that my efforts have not been in vain and I have made a positive impact, in the least.

This year, I have established a relationship with our superintendent by meeting monthly to bring important issues to the table and find common ground. I strongly advocate and demand respect for all support staff, ensuring that administration is adhering to our contract and everyone is being treated fairly. Our negotiations committee participated in a collaborative bargaining workshop in February that I hope will create a better platform for our voices to be heard. Diane Groves was the facilitator and brought admins, teachers and support staff together for three days to learn common goals and we realized that we're more alike than not. She brought us together in a way that is hard to explain without having participated in it but to sum it up: there is hope, we need to remember we are all human and we all want a safe environment where students and staff can thrive.

I have learned that sometimes members just need someone to talk to, but beyond that, I advocate for them and remind admins that we have rights and they are outlined in our contract. Not to mention the benefits! How grateful I am to have vacation, sick, etc. How grateful I am to past union efforts that I have the benefits I do. The work is never done though. There is always room for improvement and the hardest part about this job is that it may not be recognized by all and I cannot please everyone. I just want to convey that I want the best for everyone and that I am fair. I will continue to work with other union leaders to expand my knowledge and build on the foundation I've been given. A special thank you to our BCEA board for their support during my first term!

The best way I can be a successful president is to hear feedback from the membership. Right now, the BEA (teacher union) is in the infant stages of negotiating their contract, so there is nothing to report on regarding our negotiations since we haven't begun the process yet. We have a busy year ahead of us! Other recent business to mention regarding the district's insurance plan is that auditors recommended a 0-2.6% increase and SD2 went with a .5% increase to the medical premium. We have a healthy insurance fund but the reasoning behind this given was that they rather raise it a little bit now than have no increase for a while, only to be hit hard with a larger increase later. The Dental Plan did not have an increase this year. For each eligible employee, the District will continue to pay the full single medical/dental premium on the \$1,000 deductible plan.

In Solidarity and wishing everyone a happy, healthy summer-
Megan Simons, Your BCEA President

ESP of Quarter 3 - Kim Connolly

BY MEGAN SIMONS

I am pleased to announce that Kim Connolly has been nominated by me as an outstanding ESP. I love her sense of humor and friendly demeanor every time I talk or email with her about work orders and/or work being done at her school. Kim is a secretary at Castle Rock Middle School. Her favorite part of the job is the amazing fundraising that they do for the kids. Their biggest fundraiser is an annual Halloween carnival that boasts a haunted house, raffle baskets, carnival games, etc. The community rallies together to donate things and helps assemble the baskets. Other fundraising includes: coffee sales, Saturday Live, magazine sales, raffles like the one for the SUV donated by Denny Menholt (Castle Rock sold the most tickets this last year). One year they raised over 18K and this year they raised almost \$23,000! This money is used for chromebooks, teen pantry (provides essentials for kids that would otherwise go without, feminine products, snacks and other necessities), incentive prizes for kids for various things like raising test scores, field trips, etc. She has worked throughout the closure and recently took on some new job duties helping the SPED department with various things like IEP's, etc.

Kim is a single mom of her son, Logan, who is turning 14 this summer and will attend Skyview in the fall. She keeps busy with a second full-time job selling real estate. She worked for a title company in the escrow department for eight years and wanted to get back into that line of work but loves her job at Castle Rock, so she took on this venture in addition to her dedication to working for SD2! When she isn't working, she enjoys camping and boating- you may find her at Cooney Dam or the Tongue River, her favorite spots.

If you see her or talk to her, congratulate her on her nomination! Thank you, Kim, for all you do! If you would like to nominate an outstanding ESP, please contact us at: 281-5795 or bceabillings@gmail.com

ESP of Quarter 4 - Linda Leligdowicz

BY TESSA OLSON

A huge round of applause to our ESP of the quarter, Linda Leligdowicz. Linda currently works as a Secretary III at Facilities. Among other things, Linda helps maintain the budget for the maintenance of the School District building such as maintenance, construction, and safety. For example, help maintain the records of the Bond 2013 projects and the payments that go with it.

Linda is Billings born and raised. She attended Billings Public School – graduated from West High (Go Bears!). Her husband is a retired custodian from School District. She has been blessed with 3 daughters, 1 son-in-law, 1 step-granddaughter (18) who lives in New Mexico, and a 9 mo. grandson who lives in Park City.

Linda loves to spend time with her family (especially her grandson!). She would like to travel more. Maybe go back to Poland again and see more of her husband's family.

Her career with the school district started out about 32 years ago. She worked directly and indirectly – through the food service for about 5 or 6 years until Billings Public School hired a private service to do the food program. She then worked with the private food program for the district for 15 years at Riverside Middle School. In 2008 she was hired as Secretary at Facilities.

She has learned a lot from doing her job and learned a lot from being involved with the BCEA for the last 9 years as a board member. She says that the best part of her job is working with the Facilities Crew and knowing that we are helping to keep our students in a safe learning environment while they are in the school care. The highlight of her personal life, becoming a grandparent.

Linda encourages all Classified employees to become involved with their union to help make their jobs safe and respected for what they do.

The district celebrates Linda's departure as she is set to retire 9/1/20. Thank you Linda for your many years of dedicated service to our district, our students, and our union.

MFPE Annual Conference 2020

BY JENNIFER LELIGDOWICZ

Greetings to my fellow brothers and sisters! I had the opportunity to attend the Montana Federation of Public Employees (MFPE) 3rd Annual conference on April 17 and April 18, within the comfort of my home. As we look forward to the annual bus ride to Helena each year, this year was a lot different. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the conference was held virtually over Zoom. This was an epic year of attendance, with about 500 members/delegates! During the conference, we were able to vote on new leaders, constitutional amendments, and approved the year's budget. However, we received a large announcement that Eric Feaver, the President of MFPE, will be retiring this year. He has been a great advocate and strong leader for our Union and members. We voted in the following new leaders: Amanda Curtis for President, Bill Dwyer for 1st Vice President, Rich Aarstad for 2nd Vice President, and Michelle Wheat for Treasurer. I was pleased to see the turn out for the virtual meeting and see how everyone was involved. We did have two amendments for the Constitution that did not receive 2/3rds vote, so failed to proceed. As Eric Feaver gave his farewell, he mentioned one thing that stuck with me, "It rests on our shoulders to bear the burden of the labor movement and to defend it." I am eager to see what will become of this great Union!



Support Retirements (28 total BCEA members)

- Backer, Nancy Lewis and Clark Middle School Attendance Clerk 05/29/20
- Hanchett, Cynthia Meadowlark Elementary Instructional Paraprofessional 05/29/20
- Lambert, Lori Bench Elementary Instructional Paraprofessional 05/29/20
- Ponce, Marlene Alkali Creek Elementary Secretary III 05/29/20
- Sand, Mary Career Center Preschool Special Needs Assistant 05/29/20
- Taylor, Carrie: 0.47 Rose Park Elementary Instructional Paraprofessional/0.25 Rose Park Elementary Special Needs Assistant 05/29/20
- Todd, Pamela First Student Transportation Special Ed Bus Assistant 05/29/20
- Byars, Cynthia West High School Special Needs Assistant 05/29/20
- Graham, Julie West High School Attendance Clerk 01/23/20
- Hoy, William First Student Transportation Special Education Bus Assistant 09/16/19
- Sappington, Rhonda Lincoln Center, Finance Services Accountant IV 11/15/19
- Riplett, Billie Washington Elementary Instructional Paraprofessional 05/29/20
- Davis, Rhonda Skyview High School Instructional Paraprofessional Study Hall 05/29/20
- Derrig, Teri Arrowhead Elementary Secretary III 06/03/20
- Eschler, Burke Lincoln Center, Technology Information Specialist II 05/29/20
- Gipson, Teresa Lewis and Clark Middle School Instructional Paraprofessional 05/29/20
- Johnson, Peggy Eagle Cliffs Elementary Instructional Paraprofessional 05/29/20
- Lemieux, Jessie Medicine Crow Middle School Instructional Paraprofessional 05/29/20
- McLaughlin, Katherine Skyview High School Special Needs Assistant 05/31/20
- Selvey, Constance Lincoln Center, Technology Information Specialist II 06/30/20
- Staszczuk, Linda Miles Avenue Elementary Instructional Paraprofessional 05/29/20
- Yurian-Benzie, Rita West High School Attendance Clerk 05/29/20
- Zyph, Cecily First Student Transportation Special Education Bus Assistant 06/01/20
- Jackson, Nina Warehouse Library System Services Coordinator 06/30/20
- Lebsock, Bartie Ponderosa Elementary Instructional Paraprofessional 05/29/20

- Neill, Sherry 1.00 West High School Registrar 06/30/20
- Chaffin, Deborah Castle Rock Middle School Special Education 5/29/20
- Schnetzer, Barby Castle Rock Middle School Attendance Clerk 5/29/20

20 year members:

- Cindy Hagstrom- Instructional Paraprofessional, Ponderosa
- Pam Krogstad- Secretary III, Lincoln Center (Music Dept.)
- Barb Newman- Secretary II, Warehouse (Teachers Resource Center)
- Janice Stow- Instructional Paraprofessional, Burlington
- Brenda Emmett- Instructional Paraprofessional, Orchard
- Cheryl Schwartz- Special Needs Assistant, Lincoln Center (Student Services)
- Lugene Turcotte- Secretary II, West High
- Carol Fenton- LPN/assistant, Lewis & Clark
- Cathy Earles- Secretary III, Castle Rock Middle School
- Carleen Worley- Special Needs Assistant, Senior High
- Sheryl Hoffman-Alpers- Title I support, Broadwater
- Melanie Schwartz- Special Needs Assistant, McKinley
- Kim Forquer- Attendance Clerk, Will James Middle School

Other News:

This year's recipient of the Bonnie Slough Memorial Scholarship (offered exclusively for BCEA members) was Melissa Wichman, 2020 Skyview graduate. She is the daughter of member Lynette Wichman. Lynette works at Bitterroot and Skyview as an Instructional Paraprofessional. Congratulations!

Lindsey Principe and Tessa Olson ran unopposed, so they retained positions by acclamation. Amber Desmarais ran unopposed and by acclamation is the new BCEA secretary and will replace Linda who is retiring.

Due to COVID-19, all board minutes can be viewed at bceabillings.org. A paper copy of this newsletter is available by request only.