

Educators' Vision

Published By the Social Equality Educators (SEE)

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Why I'm Running for SEA Vice-President: Active membership, community partnership, and a whole lot more fun

by Jennifer Hall

When Eric Muhs and I tell SEA members that we are running for SEA President and Vice President, we mainly get verbal pats on the back in return. Once in a while, though, we're met with wide-eyed incredulity. A few folks have asked us why we'd want to run against entrenched leadership. I thought I'd best elaborate on this topic.



To put it simply, Eric and I, and our fellow SEE members, believe the SEA could be a better union.

We could be doing a better job of enforcing the contract, advocating for our students, and defending our members from harassment-style management. We could be following the lead of NEA, and actually defining best educational practices with our members. We could be doing a lot more to engage our membership. Rank-and-file Seattle educators are, to borrow the oft-used Hopi Elders' statement, the "ones we've been waiting for" -- the actual education experts who need to let the public, the media, and the 'neo-ed-reformer' business interests know what true innovation really looks like in classrooms, and in our communities!

SEE members, myself included, have written and passed far-reaching Resolutions and New Business Items at both WEA and NEA Representative Assemblies, including a resolution for the WEA to sponsor a "Teach Chase a Lesson!" event last May. Because of my own experiences, and those of other Seattle educators over the age of forty, I decided to focus on age discrimination in schools. Last July, I introduced a successful NBI at the NEA Representative Assembly, directing NEA President Dennis Van Roekel to speak out against the "harassment-style management and forced probations" of teachers over the age of 40, and to stress the countless contributions to public education made by veteran teachers.

One of the things that has most impressed me about the SEE meetings I have attended is that we actually talk about curriculum and best practices and we share

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Vote Today for Reps to WEA/NEA!

Candidates who support SEE include:

Noam Gundle (#03) Eric Muhs (#06) Mary "Liz" Law (#07)
Susan Kingsbury (#13) Jennifer Hall (#18) Daniel Troccoli (#26)
Roberta Lindeman (#43) Jesse Hagopian (#28)

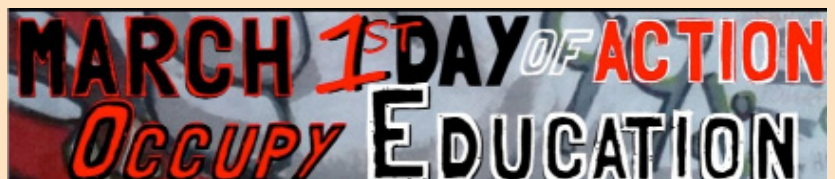
Members can vote until 11:59 p.m. on February 15. Vote online at: www.Bp4A.com/SeattleEA. Vote by phone at 1-800-538-9774. Initial Login (Member ID) requires a member to enter their SPS employee ID number. DO NOT enter any leading zeros (0). The initial PIN number is the member's zip code. Any problems or questions can be directed to Tricia Nielson, Elections Chair at seattleelectionscommittee@gmail.com or 206-283-8443 x119.

Events

1 February 29th: A charter school debate sponsored by WA State PTSA that will include a Rethinking Schools editor and UW Bothell professor Wayne Au

6:30-8:30 PM

Washington Middle School Cafeteria • 2101 S. Jackson St. Seattle WA 98144



2 March 1st day of action

Join with Occupy Seattle's Education Caucus, Parents Across America, Social Equality Educators for a march and rally culminating at the Gates Foundation Headquarters--the center push towards school privatization and high-stakes testing--where we will bring a simple message:

We refuse to pay for the crisis created by the 1%. We refuse to accept the dismantling of our schools and universities, while the banks and corporations make record profits. We refuse to accept educational re-segregation, massive tuition increases, outrageous student debt, and increasing privatization and corporatization. *They got bailed out and we got sold out.* But through nationally coordinated mass action we can and will turn back the tide of austerity.



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Mission

Social Equality Educators (SEE) is a new rank-and-file organization of educators inside the Seattle Education Association that seeks to transform education in terms that empower students, teachers, and the communities that our public schools serve. As members of the SEA we understand that the educator's union has a vital role to play in creating an equitable education system. As educators we understand the importance of using culturally relevant and holistic curriculum to empower our students. We have come together to fight against the corporate reform of our schools and to organize for a socially just education system.

Two More Years? It doesn't add up... Why SEA needs to "SEE change" in the spring election

Warning: there's a lot of plain speaking here. It's not our intention to hurt anyone's feelings, and we certainly appreciate everyone's hard work. But we're facing unprecedented challenges, and we believe it's time to talk very plainly about where we stand as educators. We've had some victories, and we've also had some defeats. But this is, after all, our livelihood, and we need to rise above "the personal", take off the rose-colored glasses, and make a plain assessment about where we are and where we want to be in a new contract 18 months from now.

Wages

Your 3 year contract has 1% raises for the 2nd & 3rd year. A "Memorandum of Understanding" presented for vote in haste in August 2011, when most members are absent, furloughed you for 1.5 days, effectively erasing the 1%. Meanwhile, your health care costs have risen, and inflation was 1.5% in 2010, and 3% in 2011.

Resources

We've seen resources for the classroom shrink, administration grow, and have failed to oppose this effectively.

- We must reverse this.
- This is the priority, far more than participating in ferreting out bad teachers.
- We want smaller class sizes.
- We want resources for kids: multi-lingual instructional assistants, graduation specialists, early childhood specialists, and libraries open into the evening.

Race to the Top

We opposed having anything to do with this, seeing it as a set of union-dividing, anti-teacher, anti-public education tools. Many union locals across the country stood up against it. It leveraged huge concessions in many states, in return for some limited federal money for a few. Its legacy is dubious: in Tennessee, for example, Race to the Top statewide testing for teacher evaluation has required, for example, PE teachers have to select another teacher's scores in a tested subject area to have their evaluations tied to. Absurd.

Your current SEA leadership saw participation in Race to the Top as essential. The "Innovation Schools" MOU revives many of RTTT's divisive anti-teacher provisions.

The New Evaluation System

We caved into the ed-reform argument that the "Opportunity Gap" is really the fault of teachers, accepting an onerous, time-consuming, and teacher-punishing subjective evaluation tool called PG&E. It's been the entire focus of professional develop-

ment for over a year now, and people are still baffled. Anecdotally, PG&E seems to be applied very differently, depending on the evaluator, and there is mounting evidence it's being used against both older teachers and new teachers. Who's next?

The MAP test

Speaking of evaluations tied to standardized testing, your current SEA leadership opposed a resolution insisting on ending the MAP test program. We see the MAP test as wasteful, corrupt in origin, and not useful in informing instruction. Furthermore, your current leadership negotiated a contract incorporating standardized test results, including the MAP test, into the evaluations of teachers of tested subjects. Research on this subject shows that class sizes are too small, and variability among students too great, for this to ever be statistically valid. We oppose the MAP test unequivocally, we oppose test results being used to evaluate teachers unequivocally, and we oppose dividing the teachers in our union with different evaluation methods.

The Contract

Revealing a new 3-year contract and requiring members to vote on it within 24 hours is frankly inexcusable. We've seen this kind of practice again & again from this leadership. The previously mentioned August 2011 "furlough MOU", and the more recent urgency around the "innovation schools MOU" are but 2 examples. This is not how we should do business.

Furthermore, threatening members with a strike if they don't approve a contract is ugly, especially when, as obvious to every member, no preparations whatsoever have been made for a strike. The lack of creativity in failing to initiate other kinds of less-than-strike actions is disturbing as well.

Activating Membership

Why, one little rally, during the difficult contract negotiations in August 2010? Why NO action on the August 2011 full-day furlough day? Why such a paltry, ill-organized, last minute action for the January 2012 furlough half-day?

We see the need for our union leadership to be in schools, meeting with teachers. We see the need for surveys. We see the need for much better electronic communication. We see the need for preparing and distributing talking points on charter schools, on health care consolidation, on school board elections, etc., etc. Our website should be an effective clearinghouse on research.

This leadership has not engaged membership. That has to change, or we may as well give up.

SEE's record on the issues

No-Confidence Motion on Goodloe-Johnson

In May 2010, a no-confidence motion in the current Superintendent, Dr. Maria Goodloe-Johnson, was put forward and approved at an SEA meeting at Ballard High School. It was subsequently approved at another 10 or so schools. At the insistence of SEA leadership, a general motion submitted for the June RA meeting was postponed until the general meeting in September. Not only did this leave school staffs that had already voted dangerously exposed and unsupported, it showed a profound lack of understanding of the mood of the membership, which voted more than 98% to support the motion in September.

The fallout of waiting to take such an important vote was to weaken the union's position during bargaining and give Dr. Goodloe an undeserved extension of her contract which ended up costing the district hundreds of thousands of dollars even when she was let go under scandalous suspicion.

We saw the continued tenure of Dr. Goodloe-Johnson as an immediate and ongoing harm to our schools, students, and community, and had the courage to stand up and say something very definitive about it. We saw the opportunity to show how weak and unsupported the superintendent was, and thereby ratchet pressure for a contract more in our favor.

Backing Interim Superintendent Dr. Enfield

While 3 different member-initiated motions were before the SEA board urging the School Board to uphold its promise to do a Superintendent search, SEA leadership were speaking publicly in favor of simply confirming Dr. Enfield as Superintendent. We find this dismissive of the membership at large, and bizarre given that Dr. Enfield was the primary architect behind bringing Teach for America to our district. We don't view those who support Teach for America as our allies.

Ask yourself :

- Am I better off than 2 years ago?
- Is my classroom in better shape than it was 2 years ago?
- Is my morale and job satisfaction improved from 2 years ago?
- Am I looking forward to voting on our next contract?

Then, I believe you will join with us in saying, "It's time to SEE change."

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lesson plans. Neo-Education-Reform organizations including "Stand for Children" and the "League of Education Voters" love to editorialize and dictate to the union at bargaining time, publishing messages that say things like, "Now hear this, SEA! It's ABOUT the kids!" Then, they accuse us of being "all about adults", and "protective of bad teachers". These are asinine assertions, of course. Bargaining is supposed to be about employee contracts. However, with SEA messaging as it stands, we are currently leaving ourselves wide open for ridiculous attacks, because our website and our public statements say little, if anything about what we, as education experts and the most dedicated, most impassioned, and most knowledgeable champions of our students know is best for our students. Our messaging is too defensive, and too general. We need to get specific. We need to host an official SEA Lesson Plan Project!

An SEA Lesson Plan Project would draw input from our most dedicated members, and allow for educators to network. The plans that we share would be linked to the SEA and WEA websites. As an adjunct to our plans, we can stream video of members delivering lessons. Sharing 'on-the-ground' best practices and usable lesson ideas is one of the better things that the NEA does. We need to add our 'local flavor' and follow suit!

In addition to a Lesson Plan Project that spans all disciplines, we need to make clear the fact that we are here to protect our members. Members who find themselves on "Improvement Plans" or "Plans of Assistance" are most often told that they must submit lesson plans. These plans are critiqued subjectively. Members are told to change the plans, or add to them. This results in too many stressed educators staying up through the night, not sure of what to write to please their evaluators. We must address this in bargaining. We must bargain a lesson plan format (or formats) to be used by members under scrutiny, with an eye towards comprehensible directions, and ease of completion.

Besides significantly increasing member advocacy, we need to change the way the general public views our union. V.P. Jonathan Knapp has stated that the SEA has a new strategy that builds the SEA "political portfolio" and moves toward a more defined legislative agenda. While it is definitely important to influence our legislators, and to not lose the ground we have gained through collective bargaining, we must also realize that growing our political portfolio entails Local Community Engagement, as well as continued local bargaining. "Stand for Children", "The League of Education Voters", the Gates-funded "Alliance for Education" and other neo-ed-reform groups have successfully drawn audiences in Seattle communities to showings of "Waiting for Superman" and charter school promotion meetings. They vaunt themselves as advocates for children, and voices for change, and they aren't. WE ARE! The SEA needs to be hosting public forums talking about the hard work our members have done (and are doing) to blaze a trail of true educational innovation in our schools. And, by the way, test scores are not innovation! Provisions that have been allowed to worm their way into our contract that allow for teacher evaluations based on test scores need to be bargained OUT!

Eric Muhs and I are experienced educators. We are mature, intelligent, and able to learn quickly. We are both innovators, who "think outside the box". Eric has won prestigious awards for his work as a science teacher. I have led successful fund-raising campaigns for local schools, and I currently fully embrace my roll as a teacher/advocate for my students, and as the advisor to West Seattle High School's Earth Service Corps. We have a successful school composting program going now, and we are building a sustainable school gardens program.

Eric and I are experienced speakers and writers. We are also both part-time artists/entertainers. Frankly, we will bring more fun into our union. We will engage and activate our membership and our communities. As your union leaders, we will vociferously enforce the contract, and we will not capitulate in bargaining. Here's the bottom line: We will provide more and better advocacy to our members. As hard-working rank-and-file educators we stand with you in solidarity, and we would appreciate your votes!

A Real Creative Approach to Education: Reflections on the MOU debate

A SEE statement

Charter's seem to be education's equivalent to vampires. Of course they suck money and high performing students away from public schools. And like nosferatu just when you think charters have been discredited, when you've voted them down 3 separate times and when they've seemingly died in committee, they get resurrected.

This is an all too familiar road that the 1% takes us down when there's something they desperately want. Think of Costco's liquor store privatization or downtown defeating the monorail or replacing the viaduct with a waterfront tunnel in an earthquake prone area. In our democracy, no matter how many times we vote no, they just keep coming back.

If history is any lesson, it tells us we can't counter the interests of the 1% through lobbying or getting out the vote alone. We can't compete for ad time and mailings with people who have more money than all of us combined. History shows us that working people win when they organize at the grassroots and fight back.

While the recently passed Creative Approach Schools Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) may present opportunities for some teachers in CASchools to implement their own curriculum or classroom structures without district interference, for a variety of reasons this will likely fail to solve systemic problems in public education or significantly close the achievement gap. SEA members voted in favor of the MOU for the right reasons – hoping to head off support for charters schools and lay the groundwork for teacher driven innovation.

Of course it is natural to focus on what we can do in the classroom. In that light it might make sense to resurrect the office of Race and Equity that Dr. Goodloe-Johnson closed as her first act as superintendent with the mission of ensuring that as many schools, CAS or not, have cultural competency. Another systemic change focused closing the Opportunity Gap in schools would be to provide scholarships to prospective teachers of color who want to work in Seattle Public Schools. There is great amount of evidence that shows that students of color who have teachers of color do more to apply themselves.

The roots of the achievement gap reside in economic inequality that pervades our society, better described as an Opportunity Gap students have when they come to school in the first place. Research has conclusively proven that a student's economic background is the most accurate predictor of success in school.

Further the major obstacle limiting what teachers can do in the classroom is the erosion of funding so prevalent that the WA Supreme Court upheld the ruling that WA is neglecting its "Paramount Duty" to fully fund education. We cannot innovate our way out of a funding hole. The condition in the MOU that any changes proposed by CASchools have to be "cost-neutral" highlight the limits to this strategy.

The corporate interests backing Ed Deforms like Charters and Merit Pay won't meet us halfway. The conditions leading to the Occupy movement show that the 1% are only interested in furthering their own agenda. The public is on our side, a recent poll of Seattle parents gave teachers an over 80% approval rating. Opposition to corporate driven policies of the 1% is at an all time high. Now is the time for our union to go on the offensive against these reforms that will do nothing to change education for the better and generate our own innovations while fighting for the increase in funding that our children deserve.

