

## **Four items we think you'll find interesting...**

One is about organizing work in Idaho that gave a grand morale boost to our colleagues – and helped them make a whole lot more friends. The next one is about the importance of school board elections – especially as those who seek to privatize the schools see the school boards as a nice entrée into getting control of the wheel of fiscal/political power. Watch where they are steering. The next one is about a great resource for policy makers. The Economic Policy Institute has been around 25 years now, and folks right, left and in the middle count on it for solid data. Since we believe all citizens should have an opportunity to see how the sausage is made and what the ingredients might be, here's an opportunity to have a look inside. Finally, and please forgive the layout, a story from the Ohio Education Association. It is inspiring.

## **A continuing request...**

We are still asking for stories about how budget cuts and the need to modernize your schools are affecting your work. We are gearing up for some action over the next two weeks to push for a School Modernization bill to be brought up in the U.S. Senate and your stories, and photos or video, would be of great value to bring to the Senate's attention. Go to <http://www.educationvotes.nea.org/> to submit your story. If you have photos or a video, you can let me know at [slemken@nea.org](mailto:slemken@nea.org).

Thanks you for your time!

## **Frank conversation and making friends...**

“Meridian, Idaho, was at the center of the labor organizing universe for four days in October. More than 120 people – most of them Education Support professionals – came from Alaska, California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington to contact current, past, and prospective Idaho Education Association members. Together, they had frank conversations about what it means to be a member and how the association can better serve public school employees, especially in times of attacks on our public schools.”

Just posted on the IEA website:

<http://idahoea.org/news/education-support-professionals-learn-organizing-outreach-skills2>

## **Mile high school battles...**

Denver's Public Schools Board election was flooded with outside money—and could be a model for pro-charter, anti-union 'reformers.'

BY MIKE ELK

"The Denver board election was seen as a pivotal battle for those seeking to privatize education as well as crack down on teachers' unions.

"School boards typically control massive amounts of money and assets that can be dished out through contracts for services, purchases of land, and diverted into charter schools and voucher programs. Despite school boards' power, however, until now board elections around the country have typically been fueled by door-to-door canvassing rather than high dollar fundraising. But increasingly, large donations from wealthy individuals and corporations are pouring into schools board races around the country to enact an agenda that attacks collective bargaining rights of teachers unions and increases the privatization of public education through charter schools and vouchers."

for the full article – go to....

[http://www.inthesetimes.com/article/12216/the\\_school\\_board\\_battles](http://www.inthesetimes.com/article/12216/the_school_board_battles)

## **Who are *those* economists???**

"The Congressional Budget Office came out with an eye-popping report this week showing that the richest 1 percent of households captures 20 percent of the nation's pre-tax income, up from 10 percent in 1979. During the same period, everyone else's share — the 99 percent — went down.

"But wait a minute? If the CBO report just came out this week, how did the Occupy Wall Streeters know to highlight "the other 99 percent"? Chances are they got it from the Economic Policy Institute, the Washington think tank that celebrates its 25th anniversary this week.

"And it's not just lefty protesters who turn to EPI for data on wages, income and unemployment. So does just about every economist and economics reporter in the country, whether they agree with EPI's liberal policy prescriptions or not."

Read the rest of Steven Pearlstein's in-depth report about this organization at [http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/steven-pearlstein-25-years-of-epi-speaking-up-for-the-99percent/2011/10/24/gIQAXvKMTM\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/steven-pearlstein-25-years-of-epi-speaking-up-for-the-99percent/2011/10/24/gIQAXvKMTM_story.html)

## **Finally....**

A story from the November 2011 issue of *Ohio Schools* Story by Ohio EA editor Julie Newhall. This is not online yet, but it is another example of what a colleague is doing out there on his job.

For Licking Heights' Ian Ruck being a bus driver is the most rewarding job around "Every minute of every single school day, we're expected to be at a certain point," says Licking Heights bus driver Ian Ruck.

"Because of our work and our awareness of what's happening along our route, we're security in a way. We know when things aren't right in a neighborhood."

The bus driver's vigilance proved especially important on May 5. At 8:30 a.m. that day Ruck was on his way back to Pataskala with an empty bus when he noticed a box-truck in front of him swerving in the eastbound lane on Havens Corner Road in Pataskala. Ruck kept watch as the truck swerved into a yard, hit mailboxes and drifted into the left lane. Following emergency protocol, he called the school district's transportation department and School Resource Officer Jacob Higgins.

Ruck followed the truck at a safe distance. Several minutes later, the truck pulled into the driveway of a farmhouse on Havens Corner Road. Ruck followed, pulling his bus in behind the truck to block it.

He and the owner of the farmhouse approached the driver, who appeared impaired. "I yelled to the homeowner, 'get the keys out of the truck,'" Ruck says. "Then I hid the driver's keys in case he became combative."

Higgins and Licking Heights Superintendent Thomas Tucker soon arrived, followed by Pataskala Police officer Mike Love. According to Ruck, it became evident that the truck driver was not drunk, but was confused and disoriented. He and the homeowner stayed with the driver until medics arrived to transport him to Mount Carmel East with stroke symptoms.

Ruck's quick response earned the bus driver recognition from the school district and city for going above and beyond what he is paid to do. In his citation, Higgins wrote, "Ian Ruck exercised courage and resolve that goes far beyond what can be taught in a driving course. Ian acted quickly and unselfishly and thwarted a situation that could have potentially devastated the entire community, had a crash occurred with a bus or other vehicle ... "

Pataskala Mayor Steve Butcher and Police Chief Bruce Brooks commended Ruck at a Licking Heights School Board meeting. The bus driver deserved the city's gratitude, Butcher said, for helping avert a potentially life-threatening situation.

For Ruck, who has been driving a bus for Licking Heights for four years, his actions are not an act of heroism, but rather an act of caring for his community.

**"I grew up here, I live here and I work here," says the 2004 Licking Heights alumnus. "Nearly 80 percent of our bus drivers live in the school district. That makes you more accountable to the kids and the community," Ruck says.**

"We're invested in this area and we help each other. Little things like that make a difference." Ruck's day typically begins around 6 a.m. when he arrives at work and completes a 15-minute pre-trip check to make sure his bus is ready and safe before his morning run.

At 6:30 a.m., he picks up and drops off students at Licking Heights Central middle school. He then drops off students at Gahanna Christian. (Under state law, Licking Heights must transport students who live in the district to neighboring schools if distance is not prohibitive.)

In the afternoon, he's back on the road, picking up the district's middle school students and then on to pick up students at St. Matthew's and Gahanna Christian.

In addition to the daily pre-trip checks, he must also clean his bus—a task made more frequent depending on the season and the weather. On some days, Ruck concludes his day at 5 p.m.

But often there are special duties to complete. On the day *Ohio Schools* talked with Ruck, he was to drive the Licking Heights marching band to

West Jefferson and back home again, making for a schedule that began at 6 a.m. Friday and would end around 1 a.m. the following morning.

It's a demanding schedule, but part of what Ruck considers the most rewarding job around. When Ruck was a kid, he says he was fascinated by the thought of driving a school bus. When he was in the fourth grade and his family moved, he found a friend and confidant in his bus driver.

"My bus driver took me under her wing," Ruck recalls. "She was the one I would talk to at times when I didn't want to talk to my parents. She listened."

These days, it's Ruck who takes time to listen to the nearly 100 students he see each day and to offer advice when needed. "Sometimes, we have more time to talk with them than their teachers do," he explains. "Kids ask some of the oddest things, and you hear everything—even things you wish you didn't," Ruck says.

"There are times I overhear a conversation and have to say, 'OK guys, I'm not totally naïve about these things, and this is something you shouldn't do. Is it really worth it?'"

The bus driver says the most challenging part of his job is keeping kids from causing too many distractions as he's driving, whether it's singing, jumping around or, more serious, bullying.

"We don't have a lot of authority like a principal or other administrator," Ruck says. But you have to make a call—what can you let go and what will cause you to pull the bus over." He notes with a smile that kids "tend to be more rambunctious" on chicken day. "There must be some additive in those chicken nuggets and patties," he says.

When he first joined Licking Heights, Ruck didn't feel he was getting the most value out of his local, and decided to run as a local leader in an effort to offer a fresh perspective. He served one year as vice president of Licking Heights Local SSA and has been the local's president since.

During his tenure, the local has updated its constitution and bylaws and increased its web and social media presence through a new website and the use of Facebook and Twitter to share information with members.

Like his colleagues, Ruck is very concerned about Issue 2 and its implications for safety. “If Issue 2 passes and Senate Bill 5 (SB 5) is law, our workload will go up,” he says. “There will be more children on the buses—buses could well be filled to maximum capacity— and that’s unsafe.

“If this passes, we’re afraid we will no longer have a voice in our workplace, and that means that we will not have a say in how many students are on a bus, who is driving a bus or how buses are maintained.”

At the time SB 5 was passed, Licking Heights Local SSA was in the midst of contract negotiations. “The biggest thing we fight—and are most fearful of—is privatization,” Ruck says. “With SB 5, we were afraid of what might happen to our jobs. Many of our bus drivers work two or three jobs because we don’t earn a living wage.”

**The hardest thing I’ve had to do is stand at the podium before members and ask them to accept a contract that included provisions no one liked.**

**We were over the barrel this time. We knew we had to take the contract even though it was flawed. The risk of not taking it—of not knowing the implications of SB 5—was too great.**

Ian Ruck, bus driver, Licking Heights

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