



BEVERLY HILLS EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Educational Employees Working Together

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CONSENSUS

A Newsletter for BHEA Members
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Candidates' Forum Reveals Meshkaty Support for Merit Pay

On Oct. 22, two Beverly Hills homeowners' associations and the PTA Council co-sponsored a school board candidates' forum where Board of Education Pres. Nooshin Meshkaty, one of the four candidates, said she would support merit pay for teachers if such a decision were reached at the negotiating table. Merit pay is a controversial concept whereby teachers' salaries are linked to their students' test scores. At one point in the forum, Meshkaty said that the district's Data Director program can be used to track student performance. Conceivably, such data could form the basis for a merit pay system.

Two other candidates in the race, Lisa Korbatov and Jake Manaster were unequivocal in stating their opposition to merit pay. Both Manaster and Korbatov said flatly that they were not in favor of merit pay. Manaster said that a strong superintendent would increase performance more than merit pay.

Here are some other things each of the front-running candidates said at the forum:

Jake Manaster: "I care deeply" about employees, in reference to the carpet business he runs as the CEO. If faced with a budget deficit, he would cut program before cutting salaries or increasing class size. He would adopt a "work-with" attitude. He said the district's current budget documents are too confusing.

Lisa Korbatov: She would include teachers' input on curriculum matters. She would stress academic excellence. She would work for greater student discipline to make the academic environment more conducive to learning. She would advocate for transparency on Measure E facilities bond decisions and spending. She lamented the breakdown of civility on the current Board.

Nooshin Meshkaty: She said "not a single teacher has been laid off" during her term on the Board (see fact-check* below). She said the district needs to offer more electives. In response to a budget deficit, she said she would not cut program or increase class size. She said the key to rebuilding confidence in the Measure E bond project is to fill open or interim administrative positions.

The election is Nov. 3. BHEA encourages all of its members to educate themselves on the issues and participate in political discussions and activities.

* **FACT-CHECK:** On March 10, 2008, the district served layoff notices to 35 certificated BHEA unit members. Over the next two months, BHEA and CTA legal assistance supported these 35 members in their due process rights during the layoff proceedings. On May 9 the Board of Education acted to rescind 24 of these notices but go forward with 11, resulting in 8 of our members losing their jobs and another 3 being cut to part-time status. The meeting minutes show that Meshkaty voted in favor of the layoffs. Since then, several of the laid-off members have been hired back in BHUSD as openings occurred while others never returned.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE by Chris Bushee **BHEA, CTA, and NEA Work Together to Advocate for You and Our Members**

Public education has increasingly become a byzantine world of competing opinions, ideologies, and power struggles. The intensity comes from all sides and from all levels. We as educators have two choices: 1) take it or 2) help shape it.

The National Education Association (NEA), the California Teachers Association (CTA), and the Beverly Hills Education Association (BHEA) are all affiliated and work in concert with one another. You belong to all three organizations. Each of these organizations is run by our members. CTA and NEA are so large that they also hire professional staff to help carry out the work of our union, but the decision-making power for NEA, CTA, and BHEA rests with our members through votes of our representative bodies and through the periodic election of members to leadership posts.

So, how have we, collectively as a union, advocated for public education through our membership and support of NEA, CTA, and BHEA? How have we helped shape our future?

NEA (3.2 million members nationwide):

* **Race-To-The-Top:** NEA is working to steer this White House initiative away from merit pay schemes, which would link teacher compensation to student test scores. RTTT is an attempt by the Obama administration to offer money to states that can innovate their public schools the most. To be eligible for RTTT, the White House has demanded that there be no "firewalls" between student test scores and teacher evaluation. California made changes to its laws recently to be able to vie for RTTT funds. NEA and CTA have been working together to protect teachers' wages and employment by arguing that student performance is measured in multiple ways and not defined solely by a test score. * **Social Security Offset:** NEA continues its multi-year effort to repeal the federal law that drastically reduces social security benefits for California teachers who retire with CalSTRS (state pension) but who are also eligible for Social Security. Any BHEA certificated member who has worked or will have worked enough hours in the private sector will only receive about one-third of the Social Security benefits he or she would ordinarily be entitled to. Why? When you activate your CalSTRS pension, it triggers the federal law that shaves off roughly two-thirds of your earned Social Security benefits. Of course, our members don't think this is fair, and NEA advocates for you in Congress every year to repeal this law.

CTA (340,000 members statewide):

CTA's integration into the fabric of our state cannot be overstated. CTA is the preeminent authority on virtually every aspect of public education in California. With 20 standing committees populated by hundreds of our member representatives and a phalanx of policy writers and advocates, CTA not only

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On 3-2 Vote, Board Fills Vacant District Office Administrative Position

- **Board of Education members Meshkaty, Lurie, and Demeter are swayed by administration's plea for manpower.**
- **BHEA President asked to keep position vacant, redirect money toward classrooms. Fenton and Goldberg concurred.**

When former Coordinator of Special Projects Diane Mead became the assistant principal of Beverly Vista on Oct. 19, this left a vacancy in a district office position that oversaw professional development, BTSA, and PAR. The district had two options available: 1) close the position and parcel out its responsibilities among the remaining administrative staff as was done when the district closed the Coord. of Child Welfare and Attendance position formerly held by Toni Staser, who is now the HAW principal, or 2) fill the vacancy. On Oct. 27, the Board of Education acted on Supt. Jerry Gross' recommendation to fill the position. It was a divided vote. Board Pres. Nooshin Meshkaty, Board Vice-Pres. Myra Lurie, and Board member Myra Demeter voted to fill the position. Board members Steve Fenton and Brian Goldberg voted against. The Board selected HS English teacher Christiane Elhabr to fill the coordinator position.

BHEA Pres. Chris Bushee addressed the Board when the agenda item to fill the position came up. He told the Board that BHEA's opinion on the coordinator position had nothing to do with the district's choice of a candidate. He noted that he didn't even know who was selected because the personnel report listed the recommended candidate's name only as "to be announced." (The district administration revealed Elhabr's name after Bushee finished addressing the Board.) Bushee lauded the district for absorbing the Child Welfare and Attendance work and closing that position in August, but noted that this was accompanied by roughly \$300,000 of cuts to classified jobs that resulted in several layoffs. He asked the district to keep the position vacant and use the recouped money to do any of the following: 1) hire more teachers in areas where there are large class sizes, 2) purchase more supplies and upgrade technology for students, or 3) reduce the number of unit member layoffs that may materialize in the spring as a result of poor economic conditions. Bushee estimated that closing the coordinator position would save at least \$100,000 a year on an ongoing basis. He stressed that this was a chance to make a statement about priorities.

Goldberg said that closure of this position is an opportunity to rethink how we structure the Ed. Services Dept. He also added that having small class sizes is a good thing. Fenton asked if there was a compromise that could be reached, but none materialized during the discussion.

Ed. Services Asst. Supt. Ilene Straus said the district has already cut back by eliminating the Child Welfare/Attendance and other teacher-on-special-assignment positions. She advocated for keeping the Coordinator of Special Projects position, noting that the district can apply some categorical funds.

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understands and promotes the very real conditions under which students learn and thrive, but also successfully navigates the legal sea of legislation and regulations that so greatly impact public education. * **Initiatives:** More than any other state in our country, California loves initiatives. CTA has been a leader at channeling our members' desires into real political gains. CTA wrote and championed Proposition 98, the landmark minimum-funding legislation that has endured more than 20 years and kept our public schools solvent. In 2005, CTA mobilized one of the largest campaigns in history and built coalitions with police, fire, and nurses' associations to defeat Gov. Schwarzenegger-sponsored Props 74, 75, and 76, which would have stripped educators of due process rights for negative evaluations, diminished union membership rights, and eviscerated Prop 98. Voluntary dues contributions help support our initiative fund. * **Financing Public Education:** CTA has saved public education from financial ruin. CTA worked tirelessly to protect money that is owed to school districts under Prop 98 from gamesmanship in Sacramento. The state currently owes schools around \$11 billion that will be repaid over time as the economy improves. Every year, there are attempts in Sacramento to whittle away at this figure. And every time, it is CTA that is there to protect the funding that we need for our classrooms. * **Member Benefits:** You enjoy access to one of the most extensive and supportive array of benefits offered by any employee organization in existence. Automatic benefits at no additional cost to you: \$1 million of educator liability insurance; \$2,000 to \$50,000 death/dismemberment plan; \$1,000 to \$150,000 NEA life insurance; \$1,500 to \$3,000 disaster relief plan. Voluntary benefits at additional charge: \$25,000 to \$400,000 of group life insurance; disability insurance that protects 75% of certificated salary, 67% of classified salary; access to CTA Well-Baby program for new mothers; discounted auto and home insurance; member rates for loans and savings at First Financial Credit Union; travel and entertainment discounts; credit card program; rental car program. * **Scholarships:** You are eligible to apply for educational scholarships for yourself and for your dependent children. Voluntary dues contributions help support our scholarship fund. Explore all of your benefits online at CTA.org in the members-only section.

BHEA (430 certificated and classified members):

Contract/Legal: BHEA defends and enforces our collective bargaining agreement. BHEA acts as your advocate when disputes arise with the district on contract language interpretation. BHEA representatives have established working relationships with our administrators to resolve many contractual disagreements informally. BHEA uses the formal grievance procedure to find resolution to other disagreements. BHEA's Executive Board can also decide to pursue binding arbitration to resolve contractual disputes that run their course through the grievance process. BHEA advocates for your legal rights under California Education Code by first working with our administrators to find informal resolutions. If such resolution cannot be found, BHEA can file motions with the Public Employment Relations Board to seek legally binding enforcement rulings. BHEA forcefully defends the due process rights of teachers in their dealings with administration. BHEA works with CTA to provide legal defense if our members face layoffs and to provide legal advice for members who need it for employment-related matters. * **Organizational:** BHEA works to keep our members cohesive in a variety of ways. Schools sites hold periodic union meetings. BHEA schedules social events for our members. And BHEA calls our members to action when our own rights are threatened or when the quality of our students' educational success is threatened. Over the last three years, BHEA organized and called our members to Board of Education meetings to draw attention to administrative directives aimed at the classroom, layoffs of our members, non-inclusive decision-making, and threats to our compensation. * **Political:** BHEA has enjoyed success working to elect union-friendly school board and city council candidates here in Beverly Hills. Educators and support staff are in a unique position to recommend politicians who will assist us, the employees, in our efforts to bring the highest academic achievement to our district. Voluntary member contributions help BHEA create the resources necessary to run successful campaigns. | Remember, you are BHEA. Together we are stronger.