

Connections



Continuing the Commitment May, 2015



VEA Board Meetings January and March

Dennis Joseph Pfennig

The VEA Board of Directors held its second formal meeting of the academic year January 24-25 in Richmond. With all Board seats now properly filled, several items were cleared without debate: the 2014 audit was accepted; the *Strategic Plan* fleshed out; Joey Mathews, Loudoun President, was elected to fill an unexpired term on the NEA Board of Directors as he was the only member to file for the seat; and procedural items were moved for transfer to the VEA Convention for approval.

The Board heard reports on *Read Across America*; on NEA's desire to make a \$10 per member assessment used to defeat attacks on public education now planned to expire in 2016 permanent; from the President of the Virginia PTA on its partnership with VEA in hosting a rally in

Richmond April 18 to pressure lawmakers to do more for education than in the past few years; on the VEA's push to get more members to participate in *Easy Pay*---each district back in October set a goal for increased participants. VEA-Retired set a goal of six---as of this writing we have four.

Not all issues were dealt with quickly. A proposal to establish a new class of VEA membership---associate --- was debated at length and in the end required a roll call vote. The measure passed 17-14; it now will go to the VEA Convention in March where it will require a 2/3 vote to go into effect.

Not all news from the VEA president and Executive Director was positive... (a) Income in 2014 was \$10.7 million, while in 2013 it had been \$11.1 million. (b) Membership also fell...as of December 2014 VEA had 38,691 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) members (There were actually 43,214 members but as ESP members pay reduced dues, the FTE number is below that figure.) and (c) 2015 budget negotiations were not finalized. Other unwelcome news was that the Elections and Campaign Practices Committee rejected a suggestion that VEA-Retired petitions for office could include electronic signatures as well as traditional handwritten ones. This notwithstanding, an ad hoc committee established by the

VEA-Retired President will continue to look at ways that retired members scattered across the state and beyond can more actively participate in helping fellow members get their names on the ballot for office.

Some news from the Virginia General Assembly was also troubling. One member of the House of Delegates wants to arm teachers, another wants to let businesses discriminate against gays under the guise of religious liberty, and third wants to change the state constitution which presently mandates all lottery money be used for public education to allow a portion to be used to fund veteran job training. This would reduce money traditionally set aside for K-12.

As VEA-R is now the largest "local" in the organization, your voice was heard. There is no doubt on the part of any Board member that VEA-Retired President Eddie Fifer and VEA-R Council member Dennis Pfennig were active participants in the two-day meeting.

The third meeting of the VEA Board of Directors took place Thursday, March 26, 2015, prior to the opening of the Association's annual convention in Hampton. Much of the meeting was centered on procedures for both the VEA & NEA Conventions that would follow. **In addition, discussion centered on:**

- a. **The Put Kids First Rally** in Richmond April 18
- b. Staff reports
- c. Last year's convention only having 612 delegates and how this needs to be increased. (The 2015 convention had only about 550 registered participants.) To address this, a Board member moved support of a motion to study moving the VEA's annual meeting to the fall. This, an identical motion to one which failed at last year's convention, won Board approval. However, on the floor of the Convention on Friday morning it failed on a roll call vote of 299-245.
- d. A grant given by NEA to counter VEA membership loss--the grant offer was approved by unanimous vote of the BOD.
- e. A proposed amendment to the NEA Constitution that will be presented in Orlando that would increase NEA delegate strength from those states that have united with AFT. For example: under the proposed amendment, Florida would increase its delegates by 967 and NY by 2,684.

The following additional motions were made and acted upon for movement to the Convention:

- a. The VEA continue efforts to protect teacher performance records and evaluations from public disclosure. Passed by both the Board and the Convention.

- b. Continued support for the **Put Kids First Rally** April 18. Passed both the Board and Convention.
- c. Support the idea of parents being able to register to vote when registering children for school. Failed at the Board; passed at Convention.
- d. While not addressed at the Board, the motion it supported at its January meeting to amend the VEA Charter to provide for "associate membership" failed when presented on Friday March 27 to the Convention.
- e. The Board's January motion to eliminate cyber delegate voting at the Convention, however, was passed by delegates on March 27. So did a Board-sponsored Charter Amendment guaranteeing that VEA-R will be treated as a VEA district when it comes to Board of Directors' representation, i.e. one Board representative for every 2,000 members. Thus, the present VEA-R two Board seats are secured.

NEA® Dental & Vision

These are challenging economic times for many retirees. Trips to the dentist can strain already tight budgets past the breaking point. NEA members can receive dental and vision plan options that are both affordable and easy to use.

- Covered services include preventive care like routine exams and cleanings, plus dental procedures such as crowns and implants.
- Freedom of choice: Visit any licensed dental professional you choose.

Obtain a quote by calling (855) 865-2285

SAVE THE DATE!!!

VEA- Retired Annual Meeting scheduled for Oct. 19-20 in Williamsburg. Details on VEA website soon.

The Next Step.....



Membership is an important component of a successful organization. We have all encouraged by recruiting retired non-members and encouraging active members to pre-join. But what is the next step?

The next step is to create and enlarge local retired chapters. Join or start a local chapter in your area. The VEA-Retired has grant money to help create local chapters and to improve existing ones. Local chapters are becoming more

active in their local school divisions and local associations. We need this activity and visibility in all areas across Virginia. Take the next step and be an active member in a local VEA-Retired Chapter.

Grant applications are reviewed twice a year and amounts up to \$500 per local are available. You can find out more about the VEA-Retired Grants on-line at www.veanea.org or through Carol Donohue, retired liaison, VEA headquarters (1-800-552-9554 X 325) in Richmond.

President's Column Eddie Fifer



Yes, Virginia, there is a VEA-Retired; alive and doing well. Not only is our membership growing, but new chapters are being formed. There are already several chapters across Virginia, but there were none in Southwest Virginia, until now. Two chapters are being formed; one in Wytheville and one in Abingdon. Each has held two meetings to get the ball rolling. Many thanks to Denise Davis and Phillip Forgit with his NEA TOP grant for making this possible. VEA-Retired also has grant money to develop

and support VEA-R chapters. Contact VEA for more information.

You can rest assured you were well represented at the VEA Convention in Hampton this year. We, as delegates, were able to meet prior to the opening session to discuss the upcoming issues. We were then able to better represent your interests as we spoke on the floor of the convention. Your delegates were true to form with their constant presence on the floor and their generous contributions to the VEA Fund for Children and Public Education. Our Fund Chairperson, Marjorie Clark did an excellent job as we had 100% delegate participation and again surpassed all VEA districts in the per delegate amount contributions. We also had new Easy-Pay members and several members increase their amount. At the convention, we also had our VEA-Retired table. I want to thank those Council members who were not delegates, but volunteered to help Martha Wood at our table. Due to their hard work, we were able to get ten VEA members to pre-join VEA-R.

As my first year winds down, I am concerned that some members need to feel a better connection with our association. Serving on the Council, being an NEA or VEA delegate, and participating in VEA-R Lobby Day are ways to feel

connected, but the best way is to be a member of a VEA-Retired Chapter. You can join a chapter near you or start a new one with VEA-R grant money. It is my hope that every VEA district will eventually have at least one VEA-R Chapter in it. Remember, you can be as involved as you want and we are here to help, but you must take the first step. We are all VEA-Retired and together we can make a difference.



Retired Members Rallied for Education!

Along with teachers, students, PTA members, community leaders, and elected officials, VEA Retired members flocked to the Capitol on April 18th to send a message that Virginia needs to Put Kids First.

The rally kicked off at the Richmond Convention Center with performances by local groups, speeches, and kid activities. The group then marched to the Bell Tower at Capitol Square, holding signs and shouting the slogan.



The campaign continues to raise awareness about underfunding of schools, class sizes, over-testing and the need for more pre-K opportunities. Wear red on May 5th to show your support for public education and all educators.

VEA Retired at the Delegate Assembly *Marjorie Clark*

Fifteen retired members attended this year's VEA Convention. All delegates were challenged to contribute \$50 per person. Traditionally, VEA-Retired has been one of the most generous delegations. This year VEA-R contributed \$3770 for a per person contribution of \$251.33.

Why is this important in 2015? This year across Virginia will be electing every General Assembly member--both delegates and senators.

The districts statewide are seriously gerrymandered, making it essential that we use our support wisely, selecting candidates who will **put kids first** and who will be **friends of public education**.

Part of making strategic choices of candidates is using past voting performance numbers to indicate where our supported candidates could realistically have a chance. We need to get voters who support education to the polls. In some districts, June primaries to choose the candidate for one of the parties may be the only choice we have in that district because that person will not be opposed in November.

Our support--both dollars and votes--makes a difference for education.



VEA R Election Results

Congratulations to the following VEA-R representatives!

Barbara Wilson was elected Secretary/Treasurer for a two-year term beginning August 1, 2015.

VEA-R Council Congressional Districts – this year, the odd number districts were up for election. For a two-year term, beginning August 1, 2015, here are the results:

1st Congressional District
Director - Maureen Abrahamson
3rd Congressional District
Director - Lola Vann McDowell
11th Congressional District
Director - Marlene Parker

No one ran from Congressional Districts 5, 7, or 9.

VEA-R Council Meeting

The next VEA-Retired Council Meeting is September 17-18. Location is not yet determined but will be posted on VEA's website in early September. The meeting starts at noon and concludes the following afternoon.

Any retired member can attend the meeting.

Life Insurance Gain for Retirees

The General Assembly approved a bill on life insurance after retirement that improves the benefit for a small number of retired educators. The minimum life insurance benefit for those who retired with at least 30 years of service is \$8,000 and will be adjusted for cost-of-living. The bill is effective on July 1, 2015.