President’s Reflections

December is upon us, and 2019 is winding down. It has been a great year for GEA, and so many of you have been involved. For results of our recent GEA elections, see page 7.

I know that things get hectic in our schools as the holidays approach. I hope that the celebrations are joyful, and that your vacation is restful. Looking ahead to January, there are a few events to add to your calendar.

On January 23, there will be an informative seminar on retirement, with representatives from Granite District and from the Utah Retirement Systems. See the flyer on page 8. It’s never too early to plan ahead!

At the end of January, the Utah Legislature begins its annual session. It lasts into the second week of March. Every Friday during the session, the UEA hosts “Educator Day on the Hill.” This is a great opportunity to get up-to-date information on what is happening in the legislature, and to learn how to talk to your representatives face-to-face. Call or email me here in the GEA office if you are interested in joining me on “the Hill” one Friday.

Before the legislative session starts, many of our Granite-area legislators will attend the January meeting of the GEA building reps. We seat the legislators with people who teach at schools in the districts they represent. These are really good conversations about what teachers need. If you have a concern that you would like communicated to your legislator, talk to your GEA building rep, and ask them to pass it on.

At the last meeting of the GEA building reps, we announced the winners of the GEA bulletin board contest – check out the winning entries on page 2.

In this issue, you will find information on the Wellness Clinic and Utah Retirement Systems. In the “Advo-cats” column on page 5, there is good advice on getting involved in the political process, on how to approach your evaluation, and on how to deal with difficult parents.

Page 3 has an in-depth look at the state’s process for policing educator licenses. Take a look through some of the cases – this will give you a good sense of how the process works, as well as a sense of situations to avoid. If you ever find your license at risk this way, give GEA a call - you definitely shouldn’t go through this alone.

If there is a theme to this issue, it is “you are not alone.” Whatever the challenges we encounter in our teaching careers, we never have to face them alone – we are in this together. I am grateful to have all of you in my corner. Happy holidays.

Dates to Remember:

Mon. Dec. 9: Tax Reform Task Force Meeting: 5:00 p.m. Utah State Capitol
— Tues. Jan. 7, GSD School Board Meg, 7:00 p.m.
— Wed., Jan. 8, GEA AR meeting, 4:30—6:00 pm
— Thurs. Jan 23, GEA Retirement Seminar, 5:00 -7:00 UEA Auditorium
Great GEA Bulletin Boards

Each year, GEA’s building representatives team up with other teachers in their building to create newsworthy bulletin boards—message centers for GEA news and information. The best are chosen to receive a cash or movie tickets award. To view all the fantastic submissions, link to GEA’s website.
Often in this newsletter “UPPAC” or the “Utah Professional Practices Advisory Commission”, is referenced, but who or what is this group and how does it affect educators?

UPPAC is a committee of nine educators and two community members who are charged with reviewing applications for a teaching license and complaints or allegations made against teachers to determine what administrative action, if any, should be made against their teaching license. The committee is advisory, as it states in its name. Once the committee reviews a complaint, it makes a recommendation of action to the Utah State Board of Education for final decisions.

In addition to the committee, USBE has prosecuting attorneys on staff who perform investigations of complaints against teachers and present evidence to the commission regarding the allegations.

GEA believes students deserve to feel safe in their classrooms. We also believe educators, being held to the highest of standards as community “role models,” need protection from unwarranted accusations. UPPAC can effectively end a hard-earned career as they review issues through ultra-conservative lens.

As a member of UEA/GEA/NEA, you have the benefit of attorneys who are steeped in education law and understand how accusations and or personal criminal instances can ruin your career. Following are a few statewide cases posted in the UPPAC News, July 2019, which allows insight into some of the decisions made against a teacher’s license.

UPPAC Case No 18-1472: An educator physically moved students in non-emergency situations, grabbed items from students’ hands, and spoke negatively about her students to her paraprofessionals during class. ...received a letter of warning.

UPPAC Case no. 17-1450: An educator engaged in several boundary violations, including hugging students, calling them pet names, and kissing a female swimmer on the forehead following a big race. ... received a letter of warning.

UPPAC Case no. 17-1451: An educator had one-on-one interactions with a student and spent more time with the student than is usual. He exchanged text messages with the student which were not always related to school matters. ... received a letter of reprimand, with a flag to remain on his CACTUS account until the educator completes a boundary training course.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1534: DCFS made a finding of physical abuse against an educator on two incidents with his son. The educator self-reported this finding to his principal. Since the finding, the educator has been committed to the DCFS safety plan and sought counseling for himself and his son, who has ADHD and sensory processing issues. ... received a letter of reprimand to remain on the educator’s license for not less than two years.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1486: An educator placed the signatures of multiple parents, teachers, and administrators on IEPs and other forms. The educator says she had permission each time she did this. However, in several instances, it was confirmed that the person did not attend an IEP meeting, did not sign the IEP form, and did not give the educator permission to sign his or her name on the form... license was suspended for not less than three years.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1488: An educator failed to follow district policy when making purchases for the school drama program and misused school funds by making personal purchases with a school credit card... license was suspended for not less than three years.

UPPAC Case no. 17-1438: An educator engaged in extensive electronic communication with an eight-grade student, mostly on a phone app called Remind. They discussed personal issues, such as body image issues, the student’s problems with friends, and the fact that the educator wasn’t married yet...license was suspended for not less than three years.
Healthy Lifestyles: Granite District Wellness Clinic

Schedule an Appointment:
Download the My Premise Health app or visit mypremisehealth.com or call 801-964-WELL (9355)

Address:
4163 S. 3200 West
West Valley City, UT 84119

Hours of Operation:
Monday – Friday, 7 a.m. – 7 p.m.
Saturday, 8 a.m. – 1 p.m.

If I’ve had the flu, do I still need to get a flu shot?

Yes! We are exposed (especially in the petri dishes called “classrooms”) to dozens of viruses, and you can’t guarantee that the flu you contracted was influenza. Even if your health care provider diagnoses your symptoms as seasonal flu, we are subject to multiple strains of influenza every year, so you need protection against those you haven’t had. It’s best to get your annual flu shot by late October—but December is not too late!

Get your flu shots at no cost—bring the family!

For immediate mental health services and crisis intervention, this link contains options and resources for you and your family. You’re not alone: reach out; support is waiting. https://www.graniteschools.org/hr/benefits/employee-resources/

GEA Members Speak Out

“I became a teacher to help students succeed at life, be safe, get social emotional help; not teach a subject. Too much focus has been made on scores, too little on the students’ welfare. Teachers do much more than teach and test, but that is how we are treated and expected to show growth. Some days, the fact that “Billy” sat in his chair without screaming obscenities at other students is the best that I can expect.”

—Ken Woods, Granite School District Educator
Dear AdvoCat,
I have a team member in my school that refuses to join GEA because they don’t believe teachers should be involved in politics. What would you suggest I say to this comment? I really want my friend and colleague to enjoy the benefits of GEA/UEA/NEA.

Signed: Lost for Words

Dear Lost for Words:
Let me first say that your friend absolutely has the right to believe that teachers should stray from politics. Many members feel the same and still join the Association because there is so much more to GEA than political policy. The thing to realize is that they are in the Association for their personal benefit and are losing out on being a change agent for the teaching profession. Stray cats forget how to be a part of a unit and instead fight for individual turf. Cats who are involved members of GEA know that eduCATors who are involved in politics at the local, state, and national levels understand that working together to make things better for their profession is what creates change. These eduCATors participate in statewide committees and commissions, and speak out to the Utah State Board of Education and State Legislature. Staying outside of the system means you are ignored by those IN the system—and we do not want to be ignored by politicians who govern all things education.

Here’s an idea! Invite your friend to one of the Friday “Educator Day on the Hill” events sponsored by UEA. I guarantee they will experience first hand the impact educators have on legislation impacting their classrooms and students.

Dear AdvoCat,
I am having a rough start to the year and am afraid my evaluation scores will be weak. What can I do to influence the low scores I continually receive from my principal?

Signed: Feeling Hopeless

Dear Hopeless,
First of all, don’t sign your evaluation on first review. Your principal should be sharing a draft evaluation with you first; “meow-allowing” you the opportunity to supply evidence that would affect any of the lower scores. Once you have gathered evidence, discussed the evidence with your principal, and negotiated changes to initial scores, you can sign or finalize your evaluation. You always have the right to request that you have representation in these evaluation meetings. Contact one of your AdvoCats for more advice and direction on this process.

Every cat has a bad day or two. Give yourself space to improve, accept feedback, look into some coaching resources, and get back on track. You have a clowder of AdvoCats in your corner!

Dear AdvoCat,
While I’m proud of myself for the professional relationships I’ve been able to create with the parents of my students, I have one student’s parents who have a history of threatening civil suit against teachers and the district. How can I protect myself from being a target?

Signed: Stumped

Dear Stumped:
You shouldn’t have to put up with such caterwauling from anyone. My advice is to maintain your professional demeanor, don’t meet with the parents alone, and record the meeting on your phone. As long as you are present in the meeting, you have the right to privately record for personal reasons. If they choose a legal source for resolution, you should call your AdvoCats right away!
Update on Proposed Changes to State Funding for Education

The Utah Legislature is in the process of considering sweeping changes to Utah’s tax system. The UEA is actively involved in this conversation with legislators, because of the effect these changes could have on funding for public schools. For more information on task force proposals, see https://myuea.org/issues_action/uea_under_the_dome/issue_tax_reform.aspx

The legislative task force has held a series of public meetings at the capitol this fall, and at each successive meeting, more teachers have attended, wearing red shirts to visibly proclaim their support for education funding. At the last meeting on November 25th, the hearing room was full, and it was necessary to arrange two overflow rooms.

The next meeting of the task force is scheduled for Monday, December 9, at 5 p.m., in the Utah State Capitol House Building, Room 30. You can show support for public education at Tax Task Force meetings by attending and wearing #RedForEd.

When the task force finishes its work, it will send proposed legislation to the Utah Legislature as a whole. The legislature may meet in a special session in December to consider these tax changes, or they may wait and consider the changes in the regular legislative session that starts January 27th.

Either way, all of our representatives will have a say. So, another way you can show support for public education funding is to write to your own representatives in the Utah Legislature. Tell them you are a constituent and explain how a lack of public education funding affects your students and your classroom instruction.

You can find out who your representatives are by entering your address here. https://le.utah.gov/GIS/findDistrict.jsp

Heidi Matthews, UEA President shared in a recent email to all UEA members the following:

“Our message to the legislature continues to be:

Teachers cannot support any plan unless it assures secure, sustainable and growing revenue for public education. Current proposals do not provide that assurance.

The tax reform plan is not ready for a special session. Legislators should not rush to pass a massive tax reform plan before there is ample opportunity to fully understand plans to safeguard education funding.”
We have completed the GEA elections and were excited to see how many candidates stepped up to run; that is the sign of a healthy organization. We were also happy to see the great voter turnout – over 1500 of you voted in the elections for GEA board and for delegates to the NEA RA. Thank you to our candidates, thank you to everyone who took the time to vote, and big thanks to the GEA building reps who conducted the elections.

You have re-elected Katie Anderton, Calvin Smith Elementary, to a second three-year term on the GEA Executive Board.

For the other “at-large” seat on the board, you have elected Beth Niederman, Frost Elementary.

And for the Ethnic Minority seat on the GEA Board, you have elected Shantelle Ford.

All of these GEA Board seats are three-year terms, beginning in June 2020. Congratulations to Katie, Beth, and Shantelle!

In the election for Delegate to the 2020 Representative Assembly, our top vote-getters were:

Archer Birrell, Hillside Elementary and,

Beth Niederman (see picture at right).

Thank you to all the strong GEA leaders who stepped up to run for office. We are proud of the passion, courage, and gift of your time to run and continue to lead in our organization.

Congratulations to the candidates who won the majority of GEA votes!
GEA RETIREMENT SEMINAR
Granite District Retirement Info
Utah Retirement System (URS)

Whether you are new to the profession, or at the end of your career, smart planning is the key. Join us to learn more about your benefits.

Thursday, January 23, 2019
UEA Auditorium
5:00 – 7:30 p.m.
875 East 5180 South

5:00-6:00  Granite District Retirement Information
6:00-7:30  Which URS Plan? A Long Term Look for New Employees
6:00-7:30  URS Q & A for those getting close to retirement

☆ Members: Free  Non-members: $10.00

**Please RSVP to the Granite UniServ Office:
801-266-4411 or mary.jones@myuea.org
Have Questions About Retirement Healthcare?
Let Us Help You Understand Your Options!

Learn the Basics of Medicare
Planning to retire soon? Healthcare can be one of your largest expenses in retirement. Make sure you understand your options. Read Medicare Basics, a practical introduction to your Medicare Options at www.pehp.org/medsup.

Free Presentations
Join PEHP Health & Benefits for a free, one-hour presentation about Medicare and Supplement plans. You're welcome to join us — you don't need to register. Two upcoming presentations in Salt Lake County are below. See full schedule at www.pehp.org/medsup.

Medicare Enrollment
You're eligible to enroll in Medicare and PEHP Medicare Supplement...
- When you first become eligible for Medicare
- When your current coverage ends
- During annual open enrollment, October 15 through December 7, 2019

We also invite you to check out our website: www.gea-ut.org

Follow us on twitter
GEA_Utah

Like us on facebook
Our page is: GEA