



THE ADVOCATE

September/October 2004

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Our Union Takes First Place in State Growth and Wins National Award

Our local union's state affiliate, the Texas Federation of Teachers, annually offers two growth awards, one for headcount and one for percentage growth. Four to five years ago, our local union was consistently taking second or third place in percentage growth among unions affiliated with the Texas Federation of Teachers. Last year, our union was awarded first place for percentage growth for 2002/2003. We are proud to announce that, for the second year in a row, we have been recognized for first place in per-

centage growth. In addition, we received a "Pride of the Union" award from the national American Federation of Teachers for our growth. Federation president Alan Hall says, "These awards acknowledge the hard work of our members and officers here at NHMCCD. Clearly, employees believe in what we do and have demonstrated that belief by joining and participating. Based on percentage growth, we are the fastest growing AFT affiliate in Texas for two years running."

Salary Increase

There is good news on the financial front for most NHMCCD employees for the 04/05 academic year. This news follows bad news for 03/04, a year in which employees received no salary increase. (See the February, March/April, and May 2004 Advocates for background. If you need copies, let us know).

For 04/05, this academic year, a 7 to 8% raise would have been necessary to get employees back even with where we were in 02/03. The union advocated vigorously for the district to make up as much ground as possible. Our goals were to raise the consciousness of everyone as to what no raise last year meant to employees and to generate conversation. We clearly met those goals. In particular, we were concerned about employees on the lower end of the pay scales who struggle to pay their bills and worry about having enough gas to get to work. We feared that they couldn't afford to provide health insurance for their families or buy medications. Medical costs in particular have hit employees hard.

The union didn't expect the Board to provide a 7 to 8% increase in one year at a time when state funding is still reduced. We did expect, however, better than what we were hearing last spring, a 3 to 4% raise for this year. Our expectations were met. The Board approved a 5% increase with a \$1,500 minimum. The AFT particularly applauds this minimum. 5% of the Chancellor's salary is significant; 5% of the lowest paid employee's salary is not. A \$1,500 minimum equals a 9% raise for the lowest paid employee. We applaud the minimum because it not only significantly helps employees at the lower pay levels, it also helps keep the gap between top and bottom salaries from widening more dramatically.

The AFT is gratified that the administration and Board were listening. At a Board workshop on this year's budget, an open public meeting, on a show of hands only one Board member, David Vogt, voted against a 5% raise. Dr. Pickelman deserves singular recognition here. In communicating with me about the raise, he wrote, "Wish we could do more, but I am satisfied,

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Salary Increase (cont'd)

especially compared with what most other Texas community colleges are doing.” At the August convocation, Dr. Pickelman cited several district challenges and initiatives, one of which is “maintaining competitive compensation.” After the Board meeting in which this year’s budget was approved, I spoke briefly with Board president, David McIver, who echoed Dr. Pickelman’s sentiments about wishing more could have been done and emphasized the Board’s recognition of the importance of maintaining competitive salaries. The union also wishes more could have been done, but we are pleased that a major step forward was taken by the Board and that the administration and Board acknowledge that more needs to be done. The AFT looks forward to working with the administration as the district develops the 05/06 budget.

The state of Texas needs to play its part in this situation. As Dr. Pickelman pointed out at the convocation, state appropriations for community colleges decreased 5.1% from 02/03 to 03/04. He informed employees he is president-elect and also chair of the legislative committee for the Texas

Association of Community Colleges (TACC) and that the number one priority for TACC is that “The legislature must restore funding to community and technical colleges.” The union’s state affiliate, the Texas Federation of Teachers (TFT), has an even more aggressive priority: the state should provide “full formula funding” to community colleges, a responsibility the state has ignored for years. Community colleges can’t meet increasing demands in the state while experiencing declining state funding. Dr. Pickelman also noted the state’s poor track record in funding for NHMCCD benefits. In the last eight years, the state’s contribution has increased only \$595, while the employee’s contribution has increased \$1,087 and the district’s contribution has increased \$3,187. As a result, the TACC has as its second priority that “The 79th Legislature must fully fund employee benefits for community and technical colleges faculty and staff.” The union welcomes this priority. It is in concert with the TFT’s goal to stop the hemorrhaging employees are facing in health care costs which are, in large part, the result of decreasing state funding in the last two years. The responsibility

for increased health care costs does not lie with the district. It lies primarily with the state. On this issue, the TACC and the TFT are partners.

The news for this year wasn’t good for all NHMCCD employees. Ten of them, three directors and seven support staff, have reached the top of their pay category and will not receive the 5%. That means that they aren’t receiving a raise for the second consecutive year. From time to time, the district adjusts the salary ranges preventing employees from “topping out.” The 5% was applied to salaries, but ranges were not changed. On the heels of not providing a raise last year, this year would have been a particularly good one to adjust the ranges. There are no caps for faculty and upper administration. Attention must be paid to this issue regarding staff.

In the meantime, the AFT celebrates a step in the right direction. We appreciate the Faculty Senates at Kingwood, Cy-Fair, and North Harris for their endorsement of the union’s position on salary.

Alan Hall

Election Notice



Every two years, the election of Federation officers is scheduled for the following positions: President, Campus Vice-Presidents, Secretary, Treasurer, and Newsletter Editor. In addition, the election of Paraprofessional Chapter (support and professional staff) positions for President and Campus Vice-Presidents takes place at the same election in November of even-numbered years.

Union members who are interested in running for an elected office or in nominating another member for a specific office should contact Federation Secretary Bob Locander at NHC by Monday, November 1, 2004. As stated in the Federation constitution, balloting will proceed for only the elective positions where two or more members have been nominated.



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Interpreter Salaries

Disabilities Services at NHMCCD provides interpreters for the hearing-impaired in many arenas at NHMCCD, such as signing for students in the classroom and in club meetings, signing for faculty members in meetings, and signing for students and faculty at events like graduations and convocations. NHMCCD has done an excellent job of reaching out to the disabled community. NHC, in particular, and more recently Cy-Fair College, have made significant strides in this regard. Recently, a troubling trend began to emerge among our interpreters. The college district began to lose both part-time and full-time interpreters. Interpreters across the state are in high demand and, as is often the case in these circumstances, interpreters began to ask for more money for their services about eighteen months ago. Private agencies who provide interpreters were willing to pay increased salaries, and interpreters could easily make a livable wage by contracting with agencies.

Over the last eighteen months, NHMCCD lost 31 part-time interpreters. The reason is clear from the following chart. On the left is the hourly rate that part-timers were making at NHMCCD for 2003/04. The second column shows the hourly rate agencies now charge for interpreter services. They were charging the college \$45 per hour for 2003/04 but started passing their increased costs on to NHMCCD this fall. The third column shows what our interpreters could make as freelance interpreters contracting with these agencies. The math is not hard to follow. Interpreters could easily double or better their salary by working for an agency. I'll come back to the fourth column in a moment.

<u>NHMCCD Current</u>	<u>Houston Agency</u>	<u>Freelance Interpreter</u>	<u>NHMCCD Proposed</u>
Level I \$13.00	Level I \$55.00	Level I \$25.00-\$30.00	Level I \$25.00
Level II \$15.00	Level II \$55.00	Level II \$30.00-\$35.00	Level II \$30.00
Level III \$17.00	Level III \$55.00	Level III \$35.00-\$40.00	Level III \$35.00
Level IV \$19.00	Level IV \$55.00	Level IV \$40.00-\$45.00	Level IV \$40.00
Level V \$20.00	Level V \$55.00	Level V \$45.00-\$50.00	Level V \$45.00
	After hours \$75.00		

<u>NHMCCD Current</u>	<u>Houston Agency</u>	<u>Freelance Captionist</u>	<u>NHMCCD Proposed</u>
\$15.00	\$55.00	\$25.00-\$30.00	\$25.00
	After hours \$75.00		

In roughly this same eighteen months, NHMCCD lost five full-time interpreters due to low salaries ranging from \$25,000 to \$36,000. One of these interpreters left the district after five years of service. She left in tears because she wanted to stay.

However, moving from \$28,000 to \$53,000 annually with an agency was too much to pass up. Another full-time interpreter went from full-time with the district to part-time with an agency but making more money. These losses of full and part-time interpreters came at the same time that the demand for interpreters was dramatically increasing in the district, especially at Cy-Fair. The problem was worsened by the fact that the district posted eight positions with a salary range of \$22,300 to \$24,124, positions for which the district received no qualified applicants. There were seven applicants; two knew a little sign language, and the others were Spanish interpreters.

Professionals in Disability Services witnessed the erosion in full and part-time interpreters, knew that salaries in the area were increasing, and began to have informal conversations among themselves and mid-level administration regarding these events eighteen months ago. About six months ago, Disability Services recommended an 18% increase in full-time salaries to be able to retain current employees and be able to attract new employees. The union has an email from Deborah Wender, former disabilities counselor at Montgomery College, dated February 14, 2004 informing a supervisor that "District HR will consider a formal proposal for a salary increase to \$33,000 - \$35,000 for the 04/FA semester. Earl Campa has spoken with Jean Grove regarding



Interpreter Salaries (cont'd)

this proposal. Sandi Patton and Amy Hall will make this request based on supporting data.” This same email indicates that part-time interpreters were being paid \$35 to \$40 per hour plus travel time at agencies. The projected cost for the proposed increase was under \$150,000. Human Resources conducted a market survey of area colleges and, according to Jean Grove, Director of Compensation and Compliance, found that NHMCCD’s salaries were in line with others. As a result, the proposal to increase salaries was rejected. In order to meet the demand for interpreters, Disability Services was then forced to consider hiring interpreters from agencies at a cost of \$55.00 per hour beginning this fall. According to Disability Services, the projected cost for this semester alone to hire agency interpreters was \$489,539. That figure admittedly represents the worst case scenario, which assumes the district would be unable to hire any interpreters. DSTC places the cost at a more conservative \$322,000. As this news broke, a DSTC representative remarked to members of Disability Services, “We won’t be blackmailed,” suggesting that, somehow, these events were the result of some conspiracy on the part of the interpreter community to “price fix.”

The union was contacted and asked to get involved in this matter. Our first step was to call Jean Grove. She referenced the last market analysis in interpreter services, which showed that NHMCCD interpreter salaries were not out of line with other colleges in our area. She was, however, aware of what was happening in the district and was concerned. It didn’t take long for word to get out that the union was looking into this situation, and the union received calls from Dr. Nockie Zizelmann, Associate Vice-Chancellor in whose area these services fall, and Dr. Steve Head, Executive Vice-Chancellor for the district, both of whom were aware of the problem and were working on it. I was informed that an adjustment was being recommended for part-time salaries, the hourly rate in the fourth column in the chart above. However, this recommended change was for part-time salaries only. When I expressed alarm that the district was about to create an inequity for the full-time employees, I was told that the district was preparing to conduct another market analysis. Knowing that these surveys can sometimes take a while to complete, I pressed for a timeline and was assured that the administration would “fast track” it. This time the questions asked in the analysis included, “Are you able to hire and keep interpreters at current salaries?” The answer was no. HCC, for instance, had eight full-time vacancies posted this summer. Very quickly the union was informed that adjustments for full-time salaries would be made to the Executive Council.

The union is pleased to report that the proposed part-time salaries in the chart above were approved by the Executive Council on August 15. On September 14, the Executive Council approved the full-time salaries in the chart below and adjusted the job postings to reflect the changes. The salaries listed are beginning salaries in each range.

	<u>10.5 Month</u>	<u>12 Month</u>
<u>Level I interpreters</u>	\$30,300	\$34,629
<u>Level II interpreters</u>	\$36,300	\$41,485
<u>Levels III, IV, V interpreters</u>	\$48,480	\$48,480

For eight of the full-time interpreters, placement in the new salary ranges meant increases in salary, including the 5% raise all employees received, ranging from \$3,700 to \$11,000 annually. Their salaries now range from \$31,000 to \$43,000. Unfortunately, as sometimes happens when ranges are adjusted, one interpreter fell victim to the adjustment and received no increase in salary above the 5%.

A troubling aspect to this issue is that the district appeared slow to react. It appears that ample information was available to allow the district to address the problem in a more methodical manner than these hasty last minute changes made after some serious erosion had occurred in our employee ranks. Members of Disability Services have indicated that they perhaps should have been more aggressive in presenting concrete figures earlier. There is some acknowledgment from DSTC that they should have asked better questions. Equally troubling is the administration’s apparent reluctance to pay more heed to advice from professionals hired, in part, to keep them abreast of needs, changes, and so forth in their area.

Dr. Head insists that the response was not as slow as it appears. He acknowledges that in the Spring of 2004, sometime in February, the administration was aware that interpreter salaries were potentially going up in the college’s area, but there was nothing concrete at that point. Underscoring the district’s commitment to the program, he notes that as soon as the Executive Council



Interpreter Salaries (cont'd)

realized that things were going to break as they have, based on his recommendations, they set aside \$600,000 for Disability Services: “We didn’t have all the details worked out, but we made sure that the money would be there.” Dr. Head adds, “The bottom line is that our students’ needs have been met this semester.”

Sandi Patton, Director of District Disability Services, praises the district’s ultimate response, noting, “Once they moved on this issue, they moved dramatically. This is a remarkable success story. We will now have more consistency in Disability Services with better quality control. The college will benefit by our being able to offer services in the most cost effective manner. Interpreter staff will benefit by receiving more equitable salaries.”

The costs to make these adjustments in salary are not small. The adjustment for the full-timers, including the eight new positions, will cost approximately \$140,000. Without knowing the number of part-timers and their levels, it is not possible to determine the cost for adjusting part-time salaries. However, it appears these annual costs are substantially below what it would cost the district to contract out these services even for one semester. They also mean that the district is paying fair market value for these jobs. The union has also been informed that, since the changes were posted, one interpreter who left the district saw the job postings and expressed interest in returning, and inquiries are now coming in regarding both full and part-time positions. This one is headed in the right direction.

Alan Hall

Statewide Conference for the Association on Higher Education and Disabilities in Texas

NHMCCD District Disability Services is hosting the statewide conference for the Association on Higher Education and Disabilities in Texas (AHEAD in Texas) November 10 – 12, 2004 at Cy-Fair College. AHEAD in Texas provides professional development training related to working with students with disabilities. The conference is specifically geared towards those who work in the fields of higher education and rehabilitation and attracts educators and rehabilitation professionals from surrounding states, as well as across the state of Texas. The conference offers unique opportunities for networking and sharing ideas and resources. In addition to featuring special guest speakers and workshops on a variety of topics, the conference also hosts an exhibit hall, where state of the art developments in assistive technology and access are demonstrated.

This year’s preconference features attorney Jeanne Kincaid, who is considered to be one of the nation’s leading experts on higher education disability law. Ms. Kincaid will provide an update on current legal issues relevant to higher education law and disability services. Her presentation will be of special interest to college faculty, administration, and legal counsel, as she discusses the Office of Civil Rights’ current national initiatives and the impact that these initiatives have on higher education. Ms. Kincaid will also provide insight on issues related to transitional services.

Additionally, conference attendees can look forward to hearing other nationally renowned special guest speakers, such as John Evans from Washington State’s Division of Rehabilitation Services; Larry Johnson, who is recognized as one of Texas’ most dynamic speakers on issues related to disability; and Lex Friedan, of TIRR’s Independent Living Research Utilization (ILRU).

Attendees will also find variety of concurrent sessions available. Some of the sessions that might be of special interest to faculty include:

- *Project ADEPT: Accessible Distance Education for Postsecondary Teaching*
- *MAGpie: Captioning the Web*
- *An American with a disAbility:*
- *Update on Litigation and OCR Policy Letters Impacting the Postsecondary Environment*
- *Accommodate Distance Learning Students*
- *WebCT Accessibility*

For registration rates, information, and conference updates, contact Sandi Patton by email at sandi.patton@nhmccd.edu, or by phone at 281-618-5401, or check the AHEAD in Texas website at <http://tamu.edu/>.



Letters to the Editor

What a Long, Strange Trip It's Been (Or, Not All News is Bad)

I came to North Harris College in 1995 following rehabilitation from an accident that ended a sixteen-year career as a machinist. As I readied to graduate, and out of sheer necessity, I took a position in the Building Maintenance Department in September of 2001. The necessity was the support of my elderly parents and my youngest brother, who had recently been diagnosed with terminal colon cancer. After 11 months, I suffered another injury that caused pinched nerves in my neck, and I was put on medical leave-of-absence for five and a half months.

On November 5, 2002, at the behest of the Worker's Compensation Commission, I went to see and was examined by a Dr. Caines. The doctor's report suggested that, with my injury, I would be better suited for some kind of clerical or data-entry position. When I brought the doctor's letter to my union representative's office and asked if the union would support my moving into such a position, I was assured that not only would the union support this move, but that they had assisted in matters of this nature in the past. I felt reassured, but quietly expressed some doubts.

You see, I had been applying for full-time positions with NHMCCD in an office environment for some time prior and had not really gotten the response I had expected (four interviews from the thirty-some-odd applications I'd made). After all, I did graduate Summa Cum Laude from NHC with both Honors Scholar and Phi Theta Kappa designations on my degree. I had been an associate editor for the campus newspaper, the first president of the Student Leadership Council, an Ambassador, and active in many other activities concerning NHC, including a semester's internship in Congressman Kenneth Bentsen's office.

With the help of my union representative, Alan Hall, I learned first that my resume was not in a format that was preferred by the district office (I had previously taken my resume to Career Start/Job Center for revision). After my resume was reworked at district office, I then learned that my cover letters were not as district office would have them. Again, I was working from examples obtained through Career Start/Job Center. And again, district office willingly showed me exactly what they look for in a cover letter. I was also advised as to what level of position I should apply for.

In what seemed like no time at all, I began getting interviews for the positions that I applied for. Then, this past May, I interviewed for the position of Evening/Weekend Coordinator I at the Parkway Center. After a second interview with the Center's Director, I was offered this position, which I heartily accepted.

I began my tenure as the Evening/Weekend Coordinator I on June 1st, which proves the old adage that all good things come to those who wait. I know that many people were interested in seeing me succeed in my quest for a more physically suitable position within NHMCCD. I would like to take this opportunity to thank those who showed their support for me during my job search. In particular, I'd like to thank Alan Hall, David Sam, Pat Gray, Katie Hurter, and Leslie Murphy for their unwavering support and encouragement, with special thanks to Leslie for the Almond Joys, which, as everyone knows, makes any day go better.

Post Script: For most people, what happens to others around them is of little consequence or concern. In just my third week on the job as the Evening/Weekend Coordinator at the North Harris College Parkway Center, I helped a young man get his grades from the summer mini-mester. He was a full-time student at an area university and needed to pass the class he took here to maintain his class status, and was concerned as to whether or not he had passed. When I handed him his advising profile, which showed that he had indeed passed his class, his face lit up like a 100-watt light bulb. It was clear that I had made this young man's day, and as he strode proudly toward the building exit, ecstatic that he had done well enough to pass, I felt the hair on the back of my neck stand up and a chill run down my spine. I felt nearly as happy as he clearly was, and all I had done was print out his advising profile! I think I'm going to like this position.

Deidre Darnell
North Harris College

Adjunct Excellence

In the May 2004 edition of The Advocate, we recognized the recipients of the Adjunct Excellence Award from participating campuses. At press time, the NHC recipients had not been officially announced, so we would like to recognize them in this issue and extend to them our congratulations on being recognized for their excellence in the classroom. The NHC recipients are Barbara Elliott, Stephen Morrison, and Ray Dean Rittenhouse.



Letters to the Editor (cont'd)

Texas School Finance and the Alamo

The most important question facing Texans today is the one concerning the financing of our public schools. The future of the state depends on a well- educated work force. Almost all manufacturing and not a small number of white-collar jobs are going overseas. Education is job protection insurance for our children and grandchildren.

We have a situation now that is almost like the Alamo in reverse. Instead of drawing a line in the sand and dying, which is easy, we are faced with opening the church doors and embracing change, which is hard. In the 1830's Texans came from Kentucky and Tennessee and today they come from south of the border.

I believe that all residents of the state should be given access to a good education. A good start would be to teach every student beginning in the first grade to speak both Spanish and English. A bilingual workforce would be attractive to anyone relocating in Texas. Any investment to help Texans find jobs will be returned many times over in consumer spending and tax collections. Contrary to all the complaints about taxes, it is unemployment that hurts our state. Many people feel a loss of self when they lose a job and can't provide for their family. No one feels that way when they pay a penny extra in taxes.

The question is how are we going to pay for the schools we need. I suggest we draw a line in the sand and make the hard choice, a state income tax. This can easily be coupled with a reduction in the property tax that has traditionally funded our schools. The income tax I propose would be dedicated to education spending only and would only be a two-year tax. Each legislature would have to vote to renew the tax every two years and not be allowed to hide behind 'sin' taxes, pyramid schemes, and voodoo to fund our schools.

The income tax is a burden on those who are working, as it should be, since they are reaping the benefits of the educational system. It would not be a burden on those who are retired or have lost their jobs. If a Texan loses his or her job, income taxes would go down. A property tax does not go down when you're unemployed. An additional benefit of an income tax, as opposed to a sales tax increase, is an income tax is a deduction on federal returns.

I know this is not what most Texans want to hear. But you have to ask yourself which side of Travis's line would you be on?

Lee Topham
Kingwood College

Membership Eligibility Open to Staff

The AFT continues to be surprised to find staff members who are unaware that they are eligible for membership in the union. Our name is the American Federation of Teachers, but for years staff members have been eligible. Membership is open to full and part-time faculty and staff up through the dean level.

Please note the .50 monthly increase in the chart below.

Monthly AFT Dues	
Full-time Faculty	\$27.05
Full-time Professional Staff	\$23.50
Full-time Support Staff	\$19.90
Adjunct Faculty & Staff	\$10.00



Membership Has Its Benefits

The union encourages employees to join because they believe that college employees should have a voice in their professional lives. We don't encourage employees to join because they anticipate conflict or are already engaged in a conflict. In fact, if they are already embroiled in a situation, we are unable to help them. It is all too common for someone to approach the AFT and say something like, "I've been an employee for the district for several years, and I've just recognized the importance of joining." Typically, following that comment is "I'm in trouble and need help." I finally lost track of how many times in the last year I've had to say, "I'm sorry, but member benefits don't cover anything that pre-dates membership." The individuals to whom I had to say that were invited to join and provided some advice on how to proceed with their situation, but assistance ended there. Were they members, a host of benefits would have been available. The AFT provides its members with advice and guidance as well as representation in conflict resolution and grievances. We have our own local attorney and can seek legal advice and counsel for members. We maintain a local legal defense fund. In addition, membership dues include, at no extra charge, \$8 million in professional liability insurance for claims arising out of professional activities.

Most of our members don't join because they believe that they may need the AFT's help in a conflict. They join because they believe in the values of the AFT- that employees should be treated with dignity and respect, that employees should help each other, that employees should have a voice in their professional lives, that employees deserve fair pay and good working conditions, and that the district needs a system providing checks and balances. They join because they want to support an organization that helps others in so many ways. A nice benefit is that, if they do need help, it's there for them.

If you believe in these values and are not a member, now is the perfect time to join. The AFT advocated effectively for the raise employees received this year. The annual membership dues are a small percentage of the raise. If you believe in our values, take action now and join the AFT.

Alan Hall

CALL FOR ARTICLES

We invite all employees to send us their opinions, news, questions and so forth. The Advocate is a forum for information and free interchange of ideas. Send your articles to Dawn Baxley, Editor, MC, or e-mail: dawnb@nhmccd.edu, or submit to any of the other following officers:

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**Join the AFT
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