



# THE ADVOCATE

May 2005



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## Salary Issues Continue to be Critical

Slashing of community college funding by the state has had a dramatic effect on NHMCCD and its employees for the last two years. The college district cut budgets, froze hiring, and reduced staff through attrition. In May of 2003, the cost of employees' health benefits increased dramatically with increased co-pays, new deductibles, and reduced coverage. Add to that increases in educational expenses for our children, coupled with dramatic increases in gasoline and other energy prices, and one can easily see that our employees have taken a huge financial hit. Two years ago, the union demonstrated that employees needed a 4% salary increase for 03/04 just to stay even. Instead, the Board of Trustees approved a one-time stipend of \$750 that was not added to base salary and was inadequate to address the dramatic increase in the cost of living.

In Spring 04, the AFT predicted more dramatic increases coming for the 04/05 academic year and strongly advocated that the Board must address the salary issue. We were able to demonstrate that by Spring 04, an 8% increase would be necessary to get employees back even with where we were in May 03. For 04/05, the Board approved a 5% adjustment with a \$1,500 minimum. The AFT applauded this minimum because 5% of some lower salaries would be woefully inadequate to ease the plight of custodial, grounds, and lower paid clerical employees. The minimum allowed some employees to receive a 9% raise. However, the majority of district employees received 5%, leaving them 3% behind where they were in May 03.

As we look to 05/06, the district and its employees continue to face financial challenges. One challenge the district faces is funding employee health insurance. The legislature has cut its contribution to health insurance by

shifting the burden to the district and employees. The Legislative Budget Board has proposed an additional 38% reduction in state funding of community college group health insurance. Other challenges include needs arising from campus growth, forty new posted faculty positions, and significant utility rate increases. There are also district-wide initiatives and issues, including workforce programs, marketing/recruiting, employee training/development, international education, and student success. In addition, we must not overlook the need for a pay increase for adjunct faculty and part-time staff. In the face of these demands, the District will receive approximately \$17M in new state money in the next biennium. However, because the District received \$8M in start up funds for CFC, the net increase will actually be \$9M, \$4.5 M in new money each year of the next biennium. The district is unsure of where to turn for additional revenue. Possible sources include increases in tuition/fees, enrollment growth, a property tax increase, and increases in assessed property values. All of these sources may need to be tapped.

In 05/06, district employees face additional increases in the cost of living. The University of Texas recently announced a 4.7% tuition increase, the University of Houston announced a 5% increase, and other colleges are likely to follow. Gasoline has hit an all-time high with some predictions of \$2.50 per gallon by summer. Health care continues to challenge us, as well. The AFT is aware of instances of employees being unable to afford or struggling to fill important prescriptions. One of our members wrote recently about the high cost and low coverage of dental insurance. He paid \$542 in family dental coverage in 2004. His spouse needed a crown, at a cost of \$600. The dental plan approved payment of \$51. The spouse had



## Salary Issues Continue To Be Critical (cont'd.)

to wait until the employee could raise the cash.

What can be done? First, the district and the union are working with the legislature to increase state funding of health benefits. This improvement would be significant because that is a non-taxable benefit to employees. However, salaries must also be addressed by the district. The Consumer Price Index for the Houston area from March 04 to March 05 is 5.9%. That means most employees who were 3% behind, as indicated in paragraph two, are now 8.9 % behind. In addition, since January of 05, the CPI for Houston has been growing approximately .5% each month, and, if it continues on this path, the 8.9% will continue to grow. The problem continues to be critical for lower paid employees. While some of them did receive a 9% increase last year, the current salary for some custodians is \$16,447. Many employees in grounds or Clerk I positions earn \$17,000. Staff Assistants earn \$25,000. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Poverty Guidelines set the poverty level for a family of four at \$19,350. A number of employees are below that line, and many hover just above it.

The district has a number of options to which it can turn to ease the financial burdens confronting it. Most district employees have only one source to which they can turn--the district. According to DSTC figures, each 1% of salary increase for next year will cost \$775,000. Since this budget mess started, NHMCCD employees have lost ground by 8.9%. To just get us back even with May 2003 will cost \$6,897,500. That is not an insignificant figure. The administration and Board are likely to balk, claiming that is a lot of money. They are exactly right. It is a lot of money. It is exactly what employees have lost since May 03. The AFT did not expect to make up all the ground last year, and we didn't. However, 5% was a step in the right direction. The administration and Board must again take bold steps to live up to Dr. Pickelman's commitment to employees that they should not lose ground financially.

Alan Hall

## Administrative Compensation Packages

The following chart reflects the current compensation packages for upper administration.

### Chancellor

Salary	\$187,782
Compensation for completion of prior year goals	\$10,000
Deferred Compensation, performance-based	15%
Auto Allowance	\$1000/month
Business Expense Stipend	\$1000/month

### Presidents, Vice Chancellors, and Executive Vice Chancellor

Salary	\$123,472
Deferred Compensation, performance-based	10%
Auto Allowance	\$800/month
Business Expense Stipend	\$600/month



## An Issue of Evaluations

The AFT has been following an issue at Cy-Fair College involving a change in contract status for an employee. This faculty member could have gone to a continuing contract this year; however, administration chose to extend another one-year contract instead. This decision, we are told, was not based on any particular information in the faculty member's file.

We think it fair to assume that any contract decisions would be based at least partially on formal evaluations since the policy manual indicates that they are used to gather information specifically for that purpose. Had evaluations been complete and on file for this employee, we would certainly consider the contract decision based on fair and equitable standards. However, this employee did not receive a formal evaluation in the first or even second year at Cy-Fair. In fact, though this employee did receive informal feedback on performance, the first evaluation in the employee's file is dated just a few weeks before the certified letter that notes the change in contract status and had not been formally completed before the letter actually arrived.

Any employee placed in this situation might consider it unfair. After all, without a formal evaluation noting problems and indicating goals for development, how are we to know what issues are crucial to our success? Faculty in our district come from a variety of backgrounds, from corporate leadership to other academic institutions to self-employment, and it is naïve to expect that all of us understand the requirements and nuances of our jobs from the beginning. We often want and, indeed, *require* formal feedback to be successful, especially as new faculty members, since so very little of our work is directly supervised, and since we hardly ever get to see what our colleagues are doing. Informal feedback – brief meetings with supervisors, e-mailed suggestions, and the like – are no substitute for real, written evaluations in such cases where we actually need to improve. Formal evaluations set clear goals for success that both faculty and administration understand; that's why policy requires them annually for new faculty. The policy is both reasonable and fair, for faculty and administration alike.

Of course, then, this faculty member considered it unfair not to be given a two-year contract and asked the AFT to help evaluate the situation. We suggested an Administrative Review based on the fact that the lack of formal evaluations was clearly "unjust and inequitable treatment" by policy standards. The result of this review, however, startled us: it stated that the faculty member had, in fact, been treated the same as faculty peers, receiving the same feedback they did, which was informal but, it seems, considered adequate under the circumstances. The AFT does not agree. Though we do not know what feedback other faculty members at Cy-Fair received in their first years, we know that faculty members

starting their employment at other campuses in the district receive formal evaluations in the first three years of employment. These evaluations outline successes as well as problems and set up clear goals for improvement. If district policy calls for this kind of formal feedback, how can it be anything *but* unjust and inequitable that at least one faculty member at Cy-Fair did not receive it?

Before we condemn the administration for being thoughtless in this regard, however, let's consider the situation in which Cy-Fair found itself as it opened its doors in 2002. A single dean oversaw 10 new faculty and dozens of new employees, all of whom had to be formally evaluated. In addition, the Cy-Fair administration, with the help of faculty, began the process of hiring what they hoped would be 100 new faculty for the Barker-Cypress campus, due to open in 2003. At least 240 classes took place at the Fairbanks Center in the first semester alone, and any problems with classrooms, technology, space, and the like fell to the administrators to handle. To be honest, what the administrators at Cy-Fair managed to achieve in that first year is a miracle, especially considering the drastic state budget cuts our district faced. Is it reasonable to expect that administration could do everything perfectly in that first year, from hiring to assessment to evaluations? Absolutely not. In fact, one could argue that it was quite unrealistic for upper administration to place such a burden on a single dean. *Everyone* who worked at Cy-Fair in its first year did all they could (and a great deal more than that) to ensure that the college opened smoothly, kept running, and was prepared for the Barker-Cypress campus opening the following year. What they achieved is astounding, and the college is thriving because of their commitment. At the same time, though, it is *also* unfair to expect that any single faculty member could know precisely what to do to succeed without formal feedback. After all, faculty members at Cy-Fair, like everyone else, were adjusting to new rules, ideologies, and expectations. Administrators, no doubt, had to let some things slide just to keep going; faculty, also no doubt, had to do the same.

It seems at least, then, "unfair and inequitable" that administrators should expect all faculty in those first two years to be successful without formal evaluations. If we allow latitude for administrators, who were indeed under tremendous pressure, we should allow the same for faculty members. The AFT, therefore, does not understand how administrators at Cy-Fair can consider informal feedback sufficient or fair in this case, and we hope that they will reconsider their position and at least make a note of this inequitable treatment in the faculty member's official records. We are all, after all, working toward the same ideal; we should work toward it together.

Sandra Elliott



## At Last, a Fair Decision for NHC Custodians

In August of 2001, a group of custodians at NHC were forced from a 3:30 p.m.-12:00 midnight shift to a 6:00 p.m.-2:30 a.m. shift because administrators determined that classroom accessibility at the later time slot would lead to greater productivity. In practice, the shift change caused an upheaval in the personal lives of these custodians and made their jobs more difficult and dangerous. Their personal security was jeopardized since they were required to work in large, empty campus buildings until the early morning. Driving home also became a safety concern because the conclusion of their shift coincided with the closing time of bars. Summertime presented further challenges since administrators determined that it would be more efficient to turn off the air conditioning at midnight. To appreciate this last point, think of the difficulty of sleeping in Houston during July and August without air conditioning. Now imagine that you have to do manual labor at those hours while wearing a uniform of smock and pants. While the new shift afforded greater classroom accessibility, its benefits were clearly outweighed by the difficulties it created.

The college administration had not given enough forethought to anticipate the effect this decision would have on morale. Moreover, the administration overlooked an additional cause for decreased productivity: as the number of buildings on campus grew and adequate additional staff were not hired, the custodial workforce was, in effect, continually downsized. The union immediately took up the fight and began what would turn out to be nearly four years of discussions. Involved on behalf of the custodians were Georgia Carmichael, Steve King, Jack Dixon, Nick Oweyssi, and Alan Hall. During the course of our discussions, it was disappointing to see one college administrator after another irrationally defend an incompetent and inhumane decision. And we were appalled to hear one top level administrator remark that the custodians are treated like children only when they deserve to be and witness another shake his finger at the custodians in admonishment.

The union worked patiently and obstinately for what was right. We advocated in good faith for concessions that would mitigate the situation. For example, we were able to get the administration to agree to keep the air conditioning on until the end of the late shift. We were able to get some custodians moved to an earlier shift while they attended school, and we also reached an agreement that would allow custodians who participated in college functions during the day to complete their shift after the function instead of having to return at 6:00 p.m. We began to lose faith, however, once we were not delivered a promised document that would reflect the agreements we had reached with Dr. Sam in a series of meetings. After much persistence and prodding on our part, we were presented with what we were told were two parts from a five part document of guidelines for the custodians and their supervisors. The two documents by themselves revealed that some important points from our agreement with Dr. Sam were going to be left out or worded in such vague terms that custodial supervisors could interpret the guidelines any way they chose. We confronted the administration about their broken promises, and we were told that the college does not engage in collective bargaining. It is true that it is illegal for state employees to bargain collectively or strike, but that law should not protect administrators from honoring their word. Further, the lack of collective bargaining power does not exempt administrators from treating employees fairly.

When the shift change was proposed about four years ago, the union immediately asked NHC administrators if Human Resources at DSTC had been informed of the idea. We were told that district HR had approved it. Then, two months ago, an interesting event occurred. The union learned that as the shift change was being considered four years ago, district HR informed NHC administration that custodians should be moved to a later shift only on a voluntary basis and that it would not support forcing custodians to move to a later shift. While not illegal to do so, HR believed such a change was unethical, and NHMCCD should not treat employees that way; therefore, HR would not support it. Armed with this new bit of information, we questioned Dr. Sam and Steve Megregian. Neither administrator recalled that conversation with HR. As the union began preparing to file a grievance on the entire matter, we continued discussions with DSTC and solutions began to emerge. In less than a week, Dr. Sam held a meeting with all evening custodians to offer the option of returning to the afternoon shift that they had originally been hired to work. Even though he enticed them by writing on the whiteboard that they would receive \$781 in differential pay for staying on the late shift and \$0 for returning to the afternoon shift, half of the custodians didn't take the bait. They chose to return to the afternoon shift on the spot. In fact, because of the union's efforts, from now on differential pay will be given to all district employees who are scheduled to work past midnight. The \$781, Dr. Sam tried to explain, is an estimate based on a 4% increase to the average annual custodial salary. The explanation and the mathematical reality that the increase would work out on average to less than \$4 per day may have been lost on some of the custodians because they were busy embracing one another and weeping with joy for getting some of their dignity back.

The struggle has been long and difficult, but seeing the right thing done has made this struggle worthwhile.

Nick Oweyssi, Jack Dixon, and Alan Hall



## Adjunct Pay Increase

As NHMCCD deals with the financial challenges with which it is now confronted, adjunct salaries must not be overlooked. Adjuncts, on whom the district relies to a significant extent, have not received a raise for the past two years. The current rate at \$34/contact hour for a 48 hour course equals \$1,632 per course. To adjust the rate to \$36/hour would equal \$1,728/ course. Such a change would place NHMCCD 9th in the state in adjunct salaries next year, assuming other colleges don't increase adjunct salaries. If other colleges do make adjustments, the district will fall below that level. NHMCCD is currently 14th in the state. The cost to move from \$34 to \$36/hour will be \$750,000. The AFT was hoping for a raise that adjuncts could really feel, something significant like \$2,000/course. Five community colleges in the state pay adjuncts \$2,000 to \$2,200 per course. The administration has pointed out that such a move would cost \$1.4M. The union understands that much change is not likely for next year. However, the district should begin making significant strides toward that goal. A district like NHMCCD should not be in 9th place or below in any category in the state.

Alan Hall

## Political Action

Clearly from other articles in this edition, community college funding is in a difficult state. A popular theme in the legislature is cutting proper taxes and reducing state spending. Unfortunately, these goals have drastic consequences for public education and its employees. In order to avoid increasing taxes, the state in 02/03 cut community college funding and benefits to employees. They are now considering another 38% cut in state funding of community college group health insurance. When running for re-election, some of these politicians will campaign on having reduced spending and cut taxes. The truth is that they will have shirked their responsibility by forcing funding down to the lowest possible lever--sometimes on the backs of employees who earn \$16,000 per year. They should be ashamed of themselves. The truth is many of them are proud of what they have done. How do they get away with it? The answer is that public employees, including community college employees, are not nearly politically active enough. Until state officials get a clear message that their behavior is not acceptable, they will continue to get away with it.

The union routinely sends out updates on legislative issues, both state and national, with instructions on how to express an opinion should employees have one. Via email the union can not advocate a particular position; all we can do is inform employees that issues are out there. Many of our members and some non-members have responded by using the websites of our state affiliate, the Texas Federation of Teachers, and our national affiliate, the American Federation of Teachers, to contact state and nationally elected officials via email. Others have used the union provided 800 telephone number. Many more employees need to participate. Legislators do pay attention to the volume of contacts they receive on topics. Most of them keep a ledger to track public opinion on various issues. Some good legislation survived and some bad legislation has been killed through these contacts. Community college employees need to let legislators know how they feel about cuts in state funding, reductions in health insurance, poor dental coverage, and inadequate salaries. Often public employees are politically apathetic or disinterested and don't get involved. However, legislators do hear plenty from people who favor the cuts we have experienced. Until education employees wake up, legislators won't change. Why should they?

Alan Hall

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 Eligibility

Membership in the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) is open to full and part-time faculty and staff up through the dean level. If you would like to join or find out more information about membership, please contact any of the officers listed on page 8 of this newsletter, or check out our online information and application at [www.aft-nhmccd.org](http://www.aft-nhmccd.org).





# Faculty and Staff Excellence

The Employee Federation of NHMCCD would like to recognize this year's Faculty and Staff Excellence Award winners. Congratulations to each of you.

## Minnie Stevens Piper Award

Rebecca Tate, Tomball College

### Faculty Excellence

NHC	Kingwood	Tomball	Montgomery	Cy-Fair
Jack Dixon	Lisa Bryant	Dave Bary	Gordon Carruth	Buck Buchanan
Melanie Hilburn	Link Hullar	Claudia Davis	Dana Morales	John Burghduff
Pradeep Lele	Donna Monteferante	Alanna Tynes	Kendra Woods	Sandra Harvey
Theresa McGinley				

### Staff Excellence

NHC	Kingwood	Tomball	Montgomery	Cy-Fair	DSTC
Jeanne Dibble	Torres Badger	Connie Garrick (Willowchase Ctr)	Bryan Dolan	Rhonda Holstien	David Kaczynski
Sheila Johnson	Robyn McNichol	Deborah Houston	Ellen Plude	Julie Hutchinson	Jim Mathews
Wyshunda Lewis	Laura Yates	Christine Salmon	Dennis Thibodaux	Ragini Shah (Fairbanks Ctr)	Grace Sauseda
Catherine Woods					

## AFT END OF YEAR CELEBRATION

All union members and non-members  
are invited to celebrate the end of another semester

Friday, May 6  
4:00 P.M. – 7:00 P.M.

Free food & one free drink  
Location: Willie's Grill  
(Cypresswood @ SH 249; 19770 Tomball Parkway )  
(Northeast of intersection)  
(Willie's Grill 281-477-6300)

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5/05

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## Campus Updates

### NORTH HARRIS COLLEGE

The union helped a member with an ADA accommodation and is currently working with another on a hostile work environment complaint. We also successfully mediated a departmental conflict and finally reached a satisfactory resolution in the custodial shift change decision (see article).

Nick Oweyssi

### KINGWOOD COLLEGE

We are proud of the Faculty and Staff Excellence Award winners at Kingwood. Laura Yates is the AFT staff-VP at Kingwood, and we would like to give an extra pat on the back to Laura. Things have been quiet since the last *Advocate*, and we are looking forward to the end of semester celebration.

Rich Almstedt

### TOMBALL COLLEGE

Well, it is that time of the semester again, that place in time where it makes no difference whether one is finished or not, the end has arrived. And as usual with the end times there is always a little tribulation causing a few waves. Fortunately, all those involved in trying to stay afloat seem amenable to calming the waters. There are scheduling issues that cause one to ask who was at the helm when they were assigned, but eventually the captain of the ship stepped in and was willing to correct the problem and set the sails into smoother winds. Likewise, there is the occasional "who is listening to my messages and why," but once again those brave souls who must make the decisions as to how the sails are set finally got the lines secured and the sails set into the wind. Naturally, it seems as it is always a northwesterly wind, which is a great place to head in a world full of knowledge and future dreams. Till next time, keep the sails full and the dreams alive.

Stewards Log Year 20,

Richard Becker

### CY-FAIR COLLEGE

We have had some good success in the custodial area; our members report that their jobs are more comfortable than earlier in the semester. Though we have not followed up this month, we will do so before the end of the semester to ensure that all promises made in previous meetings are kept as we move forward. We are glad to see some improvements and encourage anyone who has suggestions to please let us know.

### CY-FAIR COLLEGE cont'd

Three other issues are still standing, including two involving annual reviews. One of these matters has been resolved officially, but the resolution is one with which the AFT disagrees. You will find an article in this *Advocate* about it. In the second case, we are still gathering information and expect to follow up within the next month. The final standing issue, which we noted last month, has not yet been resolved. Though clarifications about the role of supervisors and coordinators have been offered, we feel that there is still some fundamental miscommunication between the parties involved. The AFT has urged the parties to set up meetings to resolve these miscommunications as early as possible to hopefully diffuse problems and avoid potential future conflict.

As we move into the summer, remember that you can still contact me! I will be checking my email and voicemail periodically, so I won't be out of touch. As members, you have the right to contact me before attending a meeting, writing a response, or signing a document: let me know if I can help you!

Sandra Elliott

### MONTGOMERY COLLEGE

The AFT wants to congratulate the Staff Excellence Award winners, Dennis Thibodaux, Ellen Plude, and Brian Dolan, as well as the Faculty Excellence Award winners, Gordon Caruth, Kendra Woods, and Dana Morales. Great job everyone! Don't forget the AFT's "Take a Break" day is on Wednesday, May 11<sup>th</sup> from 11:00-2:00 in the Blue Star Café. Come by, say Hi, and get a drink and a snack to help get you through the end of the semester. As reported last month, the AFT is representing members in meetings with deans and administration on a variety of concerns, including a dean and faculty member issue, a faculty and staff members and police dept. issue, and a staff and administration issue. We have brought one issue to a close to the member's satisfaction. If you have concerns, don't hesitate to contact me: Julie Alber x7241.

Julie Alber



## 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:

Alan Hall, President	North Harris College	ACAD 217-G	ext.5544
Velma Trammell	North Harris College	WNSP 174	ext. 5612
Nick Oweyssi	North Harris College	ACAD 221-A	ext. 5547
Bob Locander	North Harris College	ACAD 270	ext. 5592
Allen Vogt	North Harris College	ACAD 264-C	ext. 5583
Vivian Brecher	North Harris College	LIBR 114	ext. 5403
Rich Almstedt	Kingwood College	FTC 100-G	ext. 1656
Laura Yates	Kingwood College	SFA 113-D	ext. 1414
Richard Becker	Tomball College	E-271-D	ext. 1835
Julie Alber	Montgomery College	SSC 205-A	ext. 7241
Sandra Elliott	Cy-Fair College	HSC-200-K	ext. 5256



**Join the AFT  
Call Alan Hall  
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