Election Day is TODAY!—Tuesday, November 7

Only a 1/4 of union members have voted so far! You have until 7 pm to drop off your ballot or vote in person. It’s critical that your voices are heard in the School Board Elections. Even if your district’s seat isn’t up for re-election, all registered voters can vote for an At-Large candidate. As educators, you are directly affected by what happens at the school board level and our students’ futures are at stake.

If you have not yet voted—Fill out your ballot and drop it off at a 24-Hour Ballot Drop-Off Box. Click here to find the closest Ballot Drop-Off Boxes. If can’t find your ballot, vote in person. Click here to find your local voter service and polling centers.

In Colorado, you can register to vote in person up to and including Election Day – TODAY, NOVEMBER 7 - at a voter service and polling center. Click here to find your local voter service and polling centers.

For those of you who have voted, make sure your friends and family have their votes count in the School Board Elections!

ProComp Bargaining Survey coming out today!

The ProComp Agreement expires in 55 days on December 31!

Look for the ProComp Bargaining Survey coming to your inbox today. We need your opinion before we start negotiating with the District!

Attend the first bargaining session on Thursday, November 16! We finally confirmed four dates to kickoff bargaining on ProComp 3.0 – November 16, November 30, December 7, and December 18. These sessions will take place at the Acoma Campus (1617 S. Acoma St) from 5 pm until roughly 9 pm and are open to the public. The DCTA and DPS bargaining teams are working to approve more dates, which we will send to you as soon as they are confirmed.
Pablo Benitez was a terrible student. Throughout his middle and high school years, he felt disconnected from his teachers and school. It didn’t seem like his teachers were trying to connect with students. As a result, Pablo’s school performance suffered – and he’s got the report card to prove it.

“I always used to share this with my students,” Pablo said of the 11th grade report card he displays on his website, milehighteacher.org, “so they could see that we can all succeed even when we have previously failed.”

The report card – riddled with low marks – serves as a stern reminder to Pablo of his past as well as of his mission. “This really motivated me to become a teacher,” he said. “I did not really try much in high school because I was bored. As a teacher, my goal is to create engaging and rigorous lessons for my students that are relevant to the real world.”

Pablo’s educational experience taught him something important: That teachers can make the critical difference in students’ lives. If Pablo’s students over the years are any indication, his efforts as a teacher are definitely paying off. An 8th grade history teacher for 15 years, Pablo achieved a remarkable teaching accomplishment: Students actually wanted to attend his history classes (and consequently rarely ditched them). And his student perception surveys routinely received high positive ratings.

“My biggest accomplishment as a history teacher was just making the class fun,” he said. “I’m pleased with that and I think it says a lot about who I am and my teaching.”

This year, Pablo has accepted an entirely new challenge. Now an ECE teacher at Stedman Elementary, Pablo admits making the transition from older students to those just getting started has involved a bit of a learning curve.

“Teaching ECE is a huge departure from what I have been accustomed to doing,” he said. “In 8th grade social studies, you are trying to help kids develop writing skills, selecting and citing textual evidence, determining main ideas from a reading. In ECE, the skill set you are trying to help your children develop is still academic but there is a bigger social component that is also included.”

For example, ECE teachers are trying to help kids problem solve and identify and address their emotions, Pablo said. “The work is different but so rewarding,” he said. “The challenge has served to rejuvenate my career. Teaching in ECE has been so refreshing. Plus the kids are adorable!”

Being a male ECE teacher is a departure from the norm, but Pablo doesn’t see gender as an issue in the early education environment. He has received tremendous support from fellow teachers at Stedman, as well as from his coaches and mentors in the ECE department.

“I think from the kids point of view it’s a non-issue,” he said. “For many of my students, I am their first teacher. They have not had other teachers before, male or female. These kids are just looking for a teacher that makes

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Building Representative Training

Last week Wednesday, DCTA hosted its first 2017-18 Representative Training of the year. With contract negotiations and all the excitement around bargaining, we pushed our training back a bit. Over 22 schools attended with over 25 attendees! It was great to see so many schools hosting teams of reps at the training. We all know that education is the key to success, so thank you to the representatives who were able to attend and build their knowledge of our union and contract! We covered 6 of the most critical contract areas: SLT, Evaluations (LEAP), Grievances, Work week/Planning time, Discipline, and Union Representation. We also covered how to organize your building. It was a great step for our first time reps as well as our returning representatives. We will host another training in the second half of the year. The more knowledge we have, the more we can achieve for our students. Watch for our next training to become more knowledgeable and active in your association to help build the schools our students deserve!

We are hearing there are a ton of discipline issues at your schools. If your school has discipline issues and we have not heard from you, contact us! We need to know!

Love education, but ready to move out of the classroom? Passionate about advocating for teachers and other education professionals? Willing to multi-task and work long hours? We have an opening for a Uniserv Staff Position. Please check out the job posting here.

DCTA Holiday Celebration!

You are cordially invited to attend our annual Winter Holiday Party where we get to celebrate YOU! Please come and share some time with friends old and new. The food is delicious every year, and the secret is out: we serve adult beverages. Join us on Tuesday, December 19 at 4:30 in the Columbine Room of the DCTA Office/CEA building (1500 Grant St). There’s plenty of free parking! Hope to see you there! Click here to RSVP so we know how much food to order.
Regional Open Houses

We are hosting regional open houses to make it more convenient for educators to remain up to date on everything happening with DCTA. All members and non-members are welcome to attend. Drop in to an open house near you to receive current information about your new contract, upcoming ProComp negotiations, etcetera from a Uniserv Director. Have your voice heard and join the conversation for what matters most for our students.

At the November 15 Regional Open House, starting at 5:00 pm we will talk to folks interested in EMAC (Ethnic Minority Advisory Committee). EMAC promotes awareness of ethnic minority issues and encourages the development of organizational strategies to address those issues. EMAC also supports the recruitment and retention of ethnic minority educators and promotes ethnic minority involvement at all levels of the organization.

GVR Beer Garden Open House
Wednesday, November 8, 3:45—6:00 pm
4995 Argonne St
Click here to RSVP

Café Chihuahua Open House
Wednesday, November 15, 3:45—6:00 pm
2250 S Federal Blvd
Click here to RSVP

Win a Burrito Party for your School!

Any school that gets 5 new members between October 17 and January 1, will receive a burrito party! The following schools are in the running so far:

Abe Lincoln HS
Beach Court Elementary
Denver Green School
Denver Montessori
DSISD
Farrell B Howell
Florida Pitt Waller
Green Valley Elementary
Hallett Academy
High Tech Elementary
John F Kennedy High School
McMeen
Northfield High School
Place Bridge Academy
South High School
Southmoor Elementary
Are you considering waiving your DPS Health Benefits?

Although it is not time for open enrollment for DPS health insurance, the District allows changes to be made on healthcare plans whenever there is a life event. An example of a life event would be taking advantage of the Affordable Care Act’s open enrollment period. During this time you can drop your DPS coverage to join your spouse’s plan or enroll in your own plan. Some of our members who have done this have been disappointed when they opted to change plans. Here are some things to consider so you can make an educated decision.

Things to consider:

- When you select alternate insurance from the health exchange, you will be paying with after-tax dollars (which means you will be foregoing a savings of 20 – 25% on insurance premiums had you selected a DPS before-tax plan).
- Look closely at what is covered in each plan. Make sure you are comparing apples to apples. Some plans may not be as comprehensive.
- If you waive DPS health benefits, you will get the $422.17 (for Full-Time employees) DPS contributes to your health plan, but if you do not get another form of healthcare coverage you may have to pay a fine when you file your taxes.
- If you are on FMLA leave and receiving your full pay, DPS will deduct your health

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(continued from page 5) insurance premium from your paycheck. If you are on FMLA but not receiving pay, DPS will bill you and you will maintain coverage as long as the bill is paid. If you are on leave that is not FMLA and you’re not being paid, you can get COBRA but no flex dollars.

◆ Your age is a consideration. If you go to the exchange, or to any individual healthcare plan, you will be charged more if you are older. Large companies, like DPS, spread the risk and do not factor age into your premiums. You will also pay more if you are a smoker or live outside the metro area.

There are two types of deductible medical plans, embedded and non-embedded. [A deductible is the amount you have to pay out-of-pocket before your health insurance coverage pays for covered benefits.] Under family coverage, an embedded deductible is the individual deductible for each covered person, embedded in the family deductible. Once each family member meets his or her embedded deductible, health insurance begins paying for covered services, regardless of whether the larger family deductible is met. With a non-embedded deductible, (also referred to as an aggregate deductible.) the total family deductible must be paid out-of-pocket before health insurance starts paying for the health care services incurred by any family member.

◆ With a non-embedded plan, there are just employee and family levels. If you are insuring only yourself, through one of the DPS 1300 deductible medical plans, be aware that if you are an expectant mother on a $1300 non-embedded plan, as soon as the baby is born you will have a family deductible that increases to $2600. By State law for fully insured medical plans, a newborn must go on the mother’s plan and is premium free for the first 30 days, but the deductible does increase to the family level for non-embedded plans.

◆ Out of pocket maximums: The most you have to pay for covered services in a plan year. After you spend this amount on deductibles, copayments, and coinsurance, your health plan pays 100% of the costs of covered benefits. The out-of-pocket limit doesn’t include your monthly premiums. It also doesn’t include anything you spend for services your plan doesn’t cover. The amount of out of pocket maximums vary by policy. So be sure you compare what yours would be with a DPS policy to what it would be on a non-DPS policy. Also note what constitutes a plan year. If you are already on your way to paying your maximum because the DPS plan year started in July, you may have to start over on new plan even though you were not on the DPS plan for 12 months.

Open Enrollment at connectforhealthco.com commenced November 1, 2017 and closes January 31, 2018. Any policy purchased through this process becomes effective either January 1, 2018 or February 1, 2018, depending upon when you enroll. If you purchase directly from an insurer, the coverage begins the first of the month after you enroll.

We hope this information helps our members with their healthcare decisions. For more information call HR Connect at 720-423-3900.
Pablo said some parents might have been surprised to see a man as their child’s ECE teacher, but that overall his move to ECE is just a sign of the times.

“Today we are encouraging young girls to explore careers in science, engineering, law, and politics because females are under-represented in those fields. Men are really underrepresented in ECE classrooms,” he said. “For me it is a privilege and honor to be doing this kind of work. I would encourage other male teachers to explore teaching opportunities in early childhood education.”

Pablo’s success with students is a reflection of the philosophy he brings to the classroom – and to life. Married with two children, he relishes the opportunities the teaching profession provides for him to explore Colorado and the world with his family. He chronicles his travels on his website, revealing the reason he works so hard during the school year.

“When I am not teaching I love to spend time with my family traveling. During the summer, we go on huge road trips across the country,” he said. “We love to go camping in the different national parks. Yellowstone is our favorite. Closer to home, we visit Rocky Mountain National Park for long day trips. I have seen a great deal of America but there are still places I want to visit like Alaska.”

Prior to coming to Colorado, Pablo taught in Miami, Florida. Like any long-time educator, he is passionately dedicated to the teaching profession. Also like any long-time educator, he’s been around long enough to find room for improvement. He worries that teachers are stretched too thin, and how that impacts students’ achievements (as well as teacher job satisfaction).

“Teachers need to be able to take care of themselves physically and emotionally in order to be really effective in the classroom,” he said. “But many teachers get burned out from the job and the demands of work and life. Teachers are expected to do many things that might not really improve student performance.”

A potential solution, Pablo suggested, is to provide better professional development opportunities for educators early in the school year, particularly in urban and diverse districts.

“Young teachers especially are thrown to the sharks and are expected to not only survive but perform well,” he said. “Many teachers leave the profession within three to five years. I think the reasons they leave are related to salary, workload, lack of meaningful training and support – and a lack of autonomy.”

There are many ways to teach students, he said, emphasizing that teachers must be allowed to infuse their lessons with personality and avoid a “cookie cutter” approach. Pablo also emphasized the need for more diversity in urban school districts like DPS.

“I think we serve something like 90,000 students and many of these students are students of color,” he said. “Students of color really need familiar faces in the classroom.”

Still, despite its many challenges, Pablo remains a strongly passionate advocate for the teaching profession.

“I love Colorado and I love teaching,” he said. “Living in Colorado and teaching allows me to live my life to the fullest. I feel that I am truly blessed and I try and give back to my community and country by teaching America’s youth.”