

Action Line

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Tips for all employees

Learn to read your paycheck and check it every month.

- Were you paid for any additional hours?
- Are the accumulated sick leave and yearly sick leave totals correct?
- Do you have extra-curricular contracts?

Know your placement on the salary schedule and why.

- It's your responsibility and liability. If you are found to owe money, you do have to pay.
- Experience and credits count to increase your pay.

Learn about and track your contracted financial benefits.

- Accumulated leave.
- Sick leave.
- Class size remedies.
- Extra days (for kindergarten, librarians, counselors, etc.)

Learn about contracted benefits and use them.

- Health insurance (Premera or Kaiser).
- Mandatory insurance (vision, dental, audio, LTD, and life).

Know the length of your workday and work expectations.

- Duty-free lunch means what it says.
- Planning time is for everyone.
- Start and end times (especially for part-time employees).
- Using annual and sick leave: What are the restrictions on usage?

Know your particular certification rules and requirements.

- Do you need continuing credits or clock hours?
- Deadlines matter – they could affect your ability to teach!

Know the rules of your hiring condition.

- Do you have a continuing contract?
- Provisional?
- Non-continuing, one year only?
- Do you understand the distinctions?

Plan NOW for retirement.

- New employees have 90 days to choose between Plans 2 and 3.
- Look at investments beyond the state plan.
- Develop a goal and strategies to get there.
- Use the [Department of Retirement Systems](#) and [other retirement tools](#).

Introduce yourself to your building rep.

- Get a second opinion on a concern or issue.
- Your profession extends beyond the classroom – ask what's going on.
- You have a right to representation.

Keep a file for your professional status at home.

- Employment contract.
- Time cards for extra time worked.
- Pay warrants.
- Observation & evaluation materials.

Executive Board

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VEA minority event

On November 15, VEA will host its 7th annual gathering of minority members and building reps. In addition to socializing, members will learn about opportunities within VEA and WEA to enhance their careers and involvement in the association. Minority members who do not receive their invitations by November 10 should contact the VEA office.

Grievance is not a four-letter word

Grievance – just the sound of that word causes apprehension to many members. But a grievance is not a bad thing. It's simply a formal complaint process to correct a specific circumstance or situation. Don't be afraid to file a grievance.

Grievance provisions simply provide a process to resolve issues where a member, group of members, or VEA feels that specific rights under the Comprehensive Professional Agreement (CPA) have been violated. Our CPA has steps for the grievance process. The final step is binding arbitration.

Each step allows for an ever-increasing line of authority for the district administration to hear the problem and make a decision. It is always the hope that through the grievance process the parties are able to reach a resolution that is mutually agreeable.

Arbitrations are reserved for the most serious violations that are not resolved. Arbitrations can establish how contract language will be interpreted and applied to all employees in the future. Grievances do not automatically proceed to arbitration. The VEA Executive Board decides whether to take a grievance to arbitration.

November is Native American Heritage month

What started at the turn of the century as an effort to gain a day of recognition for the significant contributions the first Americans made to the establishment and growth of the United States, has resulted in an entire month being designated for that purpose. Go to the [NEA website](#) for classroom ideas.

Free speech for teachers?

Do teachers have the same rights to free speech as the rest of the country? Not really.

In general, school employees can be disciplined for off-duty conduct if the district can show that the conduct had an adverse impact on the school or the teacher's ability to teach. Over the last few years, this general rule has had the support of a growing number of court decisions.

Personal web blogs such as Facebook or MySpace are providing opportunities for many teachers to test the boundaries between free speech and common sense.

Don't school employees have the right, on their own time, to blog about their private lives without fear of losing their jobs? Not if the blog includes sexually explicit or other inappropriate content and could be viewed by students. Teachers have been terminated because they posted their drinking habits, sexual practices, sexually explicit pictures and/or videos, or have used their blog to carry on inappropriate relationships with students.

VEA advises that you don't post anything that you don't want the entire community to see. This community includes your students, their parents, and their attorneys!

Failure to supervise puts you in danger

It's important to understand that proper supervision of students is a professional responsibility required by the state's Code of Professional Conduct. While it's not always possible to watch every single student in your class 100% of the time, teachers and other school employees are expected to exercise good judgment in ensuring that students are not left unsupervised.

Here are some tips to make sure your students are safe as well as to help prevent you from being charged with a breach of the state's code of conduct:

- Try to be in visual contact with your class as much as possible, especially when you step out of the room to meet with an individual student or other staff member.
- If you need to leave the room to run to the office or use the restroom, be sure you've contacted another nearby staff member who will watch your class in your absence.
- If you teach subject areas such as lab sciences, tech/industrial arts, physical education, or any other area in which student safety is of greater concern than in a regular classroom, keep in mind that the standards of supervision are higher for you.
- If you send students out of the classroom to work on projects, be sure they are clear as to your expectations for their behavior. Try to only send students who have demonstrated to you that they will behave responsibly. Be aware of equipment or other situations that might tempt students to get into trouble or cause them physical harm.
- When your students are on the Internet, it is important to monitor the websites they access. While the district does have a filtering system in place, some students circumvent the system or otherwise wind up on websites that are inappropriate.
- If the physical environment of your classroom or the existence of other factors causes you to feel that you are unable to adequately supervise your students, it's important to meet with your building principal to resolve these concerns as soon as possible. Document your concerns in writing to your building administrator and keep a copy for yourself. If you need help with this process, let the VEA office know.

Following these guidelines will likely prevent any problems from happening, but if you find yourself faced with an accusation that you have failed to properly supervise your class, especially if a student injury is involved, contact the VEA office immediately (695-3397).

Have a happy Thanksgiving



Calendar items



November 1
Rep Council
5:00, Gaiser

November 7
Executive Board
5:00, VEA office

November 8
Postmark county
election ballots

November 11
Veterans Day

November 15
VEA minority
event & social

November 23-25
Thanksgiving
break

December 6
Rep Council
5:00, Gaiser

December 12
Executive Board
5:00, VEA office

Dec. 19-Jan. 2
Winter break

January 3
Rep Council
5:00, Gaiser

January 9
Executive Board
5:00, VEA office

Should you buy your sick leave back?

Every January, if you have accumulated more than 60 days (480 hours) of sick leave, you have the option to cash out up to 12 days of sick leave at 25 percent of your current daily rate of pay. The question often arises, should I convert sick leave to cash or should I continue to accumulate my sick leave? Here are some items to consider in answering this question.

1. How many total days do you have? You never know when a catastrophic illness or injury will strike. Sick leave is best used to replace your salary if you or a family member become sick or disabled, since it is a one-to-one benefit, rather than only 25 percent of its value. If you cash out all your extra sick leave, it is possible that you might not have enough to cover the days you need.

2. If you have over the maximum accumulation allowed of 180 days, you are eligible to contribute to a VEBA III account (see article below) to pay for qualified medical expenses, including medical insurance premiums, when you retire.

3. VEBA money is tax-free. If you cash out sick leave, it is subject to tax at your current rate, whereas VEBA is not taxed, even when you use it.

4. Cashing out in January will be at your current rate of pay, whereas waiting until a later date will most likely be at a considerably higher rate of pay.

In addition, ask yourself these questions. How healthy are you? What is your family and personal health history? Do you really need the money now?

And remember, if you plan to move or work in another Washington school district, your sick leave is transferable to the new district (within 30 days of your hire date).

As always, call the VEA office if you would like more information.

What is VEBA?

VEBA (Voluntary Employee Benefits Association) is a plan whereby eligible teachers may convert their unused sick leave days into a non-taxable account.

When employees retire, they can cash out up to 180 days on a one-for-four basis and put that money in a tax-free VEBA account to pay for medical expenses after retirement.

The advantage to converting sick leave days to a VEBA account is that the **money is not taxed**, as it is if it is cashed out. The funds in the member's account may be accessed to pay out-of-pocket costs for items such as insurance premiums, co-pays, deductibles, medications, and many other health related expenses.

VEA recommends that teachers build up their sick leave balances, rather than cashing them out, so that they have a tax-free fund to help with post-retirement medical expenses.

VEBA meeting & balloting scheduled

A meeting to explain the VEBA plan will be held at the VEA office on Wednesday, November 30, at 4:30 p.m. Teachers who are eligible to vote include those who will have accumulated 180 days of sick leave as of January 1, 2012, and/or those who are eligible to retire. Letters and ballots will be sent to eligible teachers at their schools. If you believe you should be included in either of these groups, but have not received the information by November 16, please call the VEA office.

The meeting is open to any interested member. Many teachers have expressed the wish that they had learned about VEBA prior to retirement. They have told us that they would have accumulated more sick leave days rather than cashing them out if they had known and understood about the VEBA program. This meeting is a great opportunity to get answers to your sick leave questions.