

SKYLINE VIEW

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1. Internet Usage

As the use of computers grow so does the hazards of the internet. Social internet sites like facebook and myspace are very popular. But as educators, we need to be aware of the pitfalls of these sites. Just about everyone has seen or been a part of these sites.

There is nothing wrong with being a member of a social networking site. However, you should not include students as friends. This appears inappropriate and can lead to problems in the future. You are an educator not a friend to your students. Anything you or your friends post can be read on your site. If you wouldn't want it printed in the newspaper then you shouldn't post it on your site. You may want to set your site to a private setting. This way students and parents won't be able to see your site. You should not have surveys with suggestive, explicit or drinking questions on your site.

Do not make comments about fellow educators, administrators, schools, school divisions, parents or students. This can lead to possible terminations. Your pics should be selected with care as not to lead someone to believe you are drinking alcohol or participating in lewd behavior. Words and pictures can mean two different things to two different people. Many school divisions, businesses and colleges are checking these sites to see what kind of applicant and person you are. I don't mean to scare people but just want you to be careful. I hope you find this information to be helpful.

2. Election Day

One of the freedoms we have as Americans is the right to vote. I would hope that on November 3rd you would exercise that right. Vote for the candidate of your choice. Sometimes folks feel they don't want to get involved but you need to make sure your vote is counted. Many people have died so you would have this right.

3. Health Care Related Benefits

NEA Member Benefits has added several health-care related programs in recent months. They can be found at <http://www.neamb.com/home/1048.htm>

These are in addition to the new Vision and Dental program, the Long-Term Care Insurance and the Medicare Supplement program.

And don't forget, that VEA members and family are eligible for discounts for in-home care through Comfort Keepers: <http://www.veanea.org/working-together/comfort-keepers.html>

Jenny Craig - NEA members and their eligible dependents can join Jenny Craig and receive a free 30-day program. Read more http://www.neamb.com/home/1208_950.htm>

NEA Vision and Prescription Savings Plan - NEA members can save from 5% to 50% off vision care and prescription drugs. Read more http://www.neamb.com/home/1208_947.htm>

NEA Hearing Aid Savings Plan - Exclusive member benefits include a free hearing screening, discounts on name-brand hearing aids, and a 2-year warranty at no additional charge. Read more http://www.neamb.com/home/1208_948.htm>

4. VRS Options Being Proposed (from Rob Jones, VEA Government Relations)

In the General Assembly Session ahead (January 2010), I expect that VRS retirement benefits will be the target of those who are looking for ways to reduce the costs of government in these difficult economic times.

The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) report that included the Virginia Retirement System (VRS) policy options was released in October of 2008 (<http://jlarc.state.va.us/inbrf/Inb378.htm>), but the General Assembly chose not to act on any of the options. Some speculate the upcoming elections may have been a factor in deferring consideration of the options.

Unaddressed in the current information is what happens to the ancillary benefits such as disability retirement and life insurance if some VRS members switch away from the current plan.

Robert Schultz, VRS Executive Director, has indicated that only recommendations R1 and R2 below would apply to vested VRS members (you are vested when you have five years of service). All other recommendations, if adopted, would apply to non-vested VRS members and new hires. None of the proposals would apply to those who are currently retired.

R1 - Impose an additional 2% employee contribution. This would be in addition to the 5% employee contribution now paid by your employer, who also pays the employer contribution. This 2% might be phased-in 0.5% at a time in years when raises are granted.

R2 - Change the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) on retirement benefits by capping the increase at 4% a year rather than the current 5%. FYI - if, for purposes of illustration,

you retroactively applied this change in the COLA to one who retired in 1978, the reduction in benefit would have been 6% over the first 10 years and 12% after 30 years in retirement. Note: The VRS Actuarial Report indicates that the average retirement age for teachers is 59.36 years.

R3 - Increase the minimum retirement age for non-vested and new hires from 50 to age 60. Note: One becomes vested in VRS after five years of service.

R4 - For new and non-vested employees, replace the Retiree Health Insurance Credit with Integral Part Trust (IPT) Accounts.

R5 - For new hires and non-vested employees, combine a defined-benefit (DB) and defined-contribution (DC) plan. The DB plan would have a lesser benefit than the current VRS benefit. Employees would contribute to both. The COLA would only be included in the DB plan. This plan would provide 85% of the benefit of the current plan (15% cut).

R6 - Require a Cash Balance Retirement Plan for new hires and non-vested employees. This is like a 401 (k) style defined-contribution plan, except for the fact that a 5% return is guaranteed even when the market falls. Employees contribute with an employer match that increases with years of experience. There is no COLA on benefits. Entire balance can be withdrawn when separating from service. This plan would provide 57% of the current benefit (43% cut).

R7 - Require a DC plan for new hires and non-vested employees. The matching contribution from the employer would increase with years of service. No COLA would be provided, and the entire balance could be withdrawn when separating from service. Only two states now have this. The plan would provide 52% of the benefit value of the current VRS plan (48% cut).

These options are not consistent with VEA's positions. As we await specific legislative proposals, we will need your help educating your colleagues regarding what looks like a battle ahead.

5. VEA Sparks Weekend

A totally free weekend at a popular Virginia ski resort or a resort on the ocean in Virginia Beach! This is an opportunity for school employees who have five or fewer years experience in the public schools and little or no experience with VEA-NEA. Participants learn skills and make connections with other members. The program is adapted to what you want and need. We survey each participant ahead of time and design the weekend around you.

There are two dates this will be held: February 26-28, 2010 at Wintergreen Resort near Charlottesville and April 30-May 2, 2010 at The Cavalier Hotel in Virginia Beach. You can check Sparks out on the VEA website, www.veanea.org and click on upcoming events. If you would like a brochure contact your local president or the UniServ office. Hurry, deadline is December 11, 2009.

6. Skyline UniServ/District 21 Information

Skyline UniServ/District 21

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