

Fort Osage teachers make it official: Umbrella group works

Since 1992, the teachers at Fort Osage R-1 have banded together to form an umbrella group that represents all teachers in the district. The group, known as the Community Educators Association, or CEA, presents salary and working-condition proposals to the school board.

“It has worked well for all groups,” says Floyd Hawkins, a teacher who has served on the umbrella group since its inception. Indeed, the district’s salary schedule is among the state’s best.

However, in the wake of the Missouri Supreme Court’s decision on bargaining, the school board adopted a new policy that threatened the existence of the umbrella group. The board said that an election should be held to determine an exclusive bargaining group.

MSTA/CTA members faced a tough decision. As the majority group in the district, should they attempt to become the exclusive representative? Doing nothing risked losing their voice because MNEA members in the district already were busy gathering signatures so its group could be on the ballot.

MSTA/CTA President Ellen Wright e-mailed MSTA members to solicit their feedback on the issue.

“My biggest thing was, I did not want to divide and conquer,” she says. “We needed to stay unified, and that way everybody had a say.”

Most members of the MSTA/CTA agreed with Wright that the CEA’s all-inclusive makeup had worked well for Fort Osage teachers.

To get the word out about the election, the MSTA/CTA group sprang into action, distributing fliers and talking one-on-one with teachers.

In the election, held in early January, CEA handily won the right to represent all teachers.

Wright has some advice for other MSTA/CTAs that may face similar circumstances: “Get your MSTA field rep involved,” she says. “Use the resources that you have.”