

members speak out

Minnesota School Employees Association

Carver Scott Educational Cooperative Para Support Staff

What a difference a year makes!

For some, it may be hard to fathom being an at-will para in this day and age, but just a year ago it was a reality for us at the Carver-Scott Educational Cooperative in Chaska, Minnesota. Since last year, we have been in the process of becoming a truly functioning unionized group. We had to make the hard decision of who would represent our unique group including: special education paraprofessionals, sign language assistants, assistant instructors, food service professionals, employment specialists and many more.

The choice became clear to us after MSEA Field Representative Lori Carlson came to present information about MSEA to our group. It boils down to MSEA is a union for members, run by members. By joining MSEA, we have a true voice in the direction of our Union.

From that day forward, Lori has been an advocate for our members, which helps foster group unity. This unity has brought about empowerment and ownership to each member's role at CSEC. Some may not have been in favor of representation, but it has brought about better working conditions, morale and the best interests for the students. We have had difficult times through the transition of program reductions and tight budgets, but the process has become fair for the employer and employee.

Before we had a union, seniority was considered only as years of service. Lori has represented matters of job classification grievances as well; her knowledge and expertise helped bring the right decisions to the table with the district.

We are pleased to be close to ratifying our first contract with MSEA as our exclusive representative. We started out with a small work agreement, we now have a living, breathing, legally binding document that all can be proud of. Although it has been difficult, when we need legal council, we jokingly refer to Lori Carlson as "Lawyer Lori." Working as a negotiation team, we have worked hard at creating a fair contract. And it has certainly been an education process for both parties. Working through the negotiation process has helped identify and heal old wounds that will bring about a brighter future for our organization. Although we are not quite finished with our contract work, it is very close to completion.

A healthy organization starts with good communication and I can proudly say that we communicate and advocate for what is just and right. I personally cannot thank MSEA enough for the good it has brought to CSEC!

35 CSEC employees voted to join MSEA in August 2009. In 2010, the unit has 41 members.

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