

MINUTES FROM OCTOBER'S GENERAL MEETING- Janet Zimmerman, Secretary

Sue Mascaro, Co-President, called the meeting to order at 12:08 pm. The meeting was held at The Meeting House in Columbia. 117 members registered for today's meeting, a sellout! Hats off to the Luncheon Committee.

General Business and Committee Updates

Approval of the May 14, 2024 minutes: The minutes were published in the September 2024 newsletter. There were no questions or corrections. **Sally Anne Cooper** made a motion to approve the minutes; **Susan Sellner** seconded the motion. The members voted and the minutes were approved.

Treasurer's Report: **Ellen Hill** reported the current balances: Checking = \$43,660.82; other interest-bearing checking (savings) = \$7,182.86; Scholarship = \$275.00.

Guest Speaker: Carey Wright, Maryland State Department of Education's (MSDE) Superintendent of Schools, addressed the group. Carey, a Maryland native, began her career in education in Prince George's County. She began her career in Howard County as a classroom teacher and then held several leadership positions including Principal, Instructional Facilitator, and Director of Special Education. Carey held leadership positions in Montgomery County and the District of Columbia. In Mississippi Carey was Superintendent of Schools. Upon retirement, Carey started a consulting firm. She was appointed Maryland's interim State Superintendent and ultimately MSDE's State Superintendent of Schools.

Carey discussed the decline in Maryland's proficiency scores in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math over the last decade, emphasizing the need to analyze this data and prioritize classroom support for teachers. She noted that the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) aims to support districts through collaboration and feedback. Maryland's Blueprint for Maryland's Future is in its third year, with room for adjustments if necessary. Drawing from Mississippi's improvement in literacy, Carey advocates for focusing on the science of reading, which Maryland will implement statewide in 2024-2025. Philanthropic organizations like Ibis Group and the Walton Foundation are assisting Maryland's educational efforts.

Additional topics included a federal grant, college and career readiness, updates to math and ELA standards, and the state's assessment and accountability system, with a task force expected to release results in December. Carey highlighted the importance of early childhood education and apprenticeship opportunities but noted a need for more business partnerships. Governor Moore and the State Board of Education are strongly supporting these initiatives.

Carey also addressed issues such as the teacher shortage, with 8,000 provisional teachers currently in Maryland, and the exploration of alternative certification pathways. She acknowledged the challenges in child care scholarships within the Blueprint, which currently fall short of meeting family needs.

Betty Weller, President Maryland Retired School Personnel Association (MRSPA):

HEART and MRSPA work together to protect two of our most important assets: pension and health benefits. Betty discussed the need to increase membership. Betty challenged members to reach out to potential new members and advocate that they join MRSPA as well as HEART.

Bylaws: Ronnie Bohn presented the major changes in the draft bylaws based on feedback from members. The bylaws now open with HEART's mission and purpose and include revised requirements for the Vice-President and President roles. A Luncheon Committee has been established, and the duties of several committees were clarified. Procedures were also set for future amendments to the bylaws. Cathy Smith made a motion to approve the revised bylaws, which Kaye Brooke seconded. Members voted to approve the changes. Taking HEART to nonprofit status is moving forward. If this happens, bylaws will need revisions. Many thanks to Sharon Kramer for working on the process.



MINUTES FROM OCTOBER'S GENERAL MEETING, CONT.

Recruitment and Retention: Susan Sellner shared joint membership (MRSPA and HEART) data to highlight our increase in memberships over time. Currently there are 611 joint memberships. This past year, Howard County had the highest increase in percentages in memberships in the State. As a joint member, we support the entire state. Susan reviewed steps taken to increase memberships including letters to new retirees, current members with a reminder to renew, and members who canceled. Susan's creativity has produced fun "swag" to promote the organizations. The recent HEART Happy Hour at Glory Days in Ellicott City was well attended. A Delaware Happy Hour is in the planning stages. Susan conducted drawings for August, September, and October birthdays. Recruitment will continue at upcoming in-house retirement seminars.

Serving the Community: HEART continues to sponsor *Comfort Cases*, the *Howard County Foodbank*, and the *Salvation Army* with donations. *Comfort Cases* provides a backpack with pajamas, a book, a stuffed animal, etc. when a child in foster care must change homes. In previous years a child might be given a black trash bag for their belongings for the move. If a member wishes to provide a cash donation, both organizations gladly accept a check or credit card payment at any time. Inform the organizations that your donation is on behalf of HEART. Jonathan Soloman graciously volunteered once again to take the donations to *Comfort Cases* in Rockville.

Socializing with HEART: Sue Mascaro announced the upcoming shows at **Toby's** include: *The Addams Family* (Nov. 7) and *The Sound of Music* on December 19. The upcoming performances at the **Strathmore** include *The Princess Bride in Concert* (January 3), *Dancing in the Street: The Music of Motown* (January 24), and *Simply the Best: The Music of Tina Turner* (February 21). Strathmore tickets are \$45.00. Contact Sue Mascaro via email scmascaro@gmail.com or cell (443-878-6883) for tickets and/or details for Toby's or the Strathmore.

Necrology: Marlyn Oatts, from the necrology committee, announced the passing of HEART members Joan Perry Simon, Sally K. Farrell, Roger Lee Volrath, and Howard Rohrer. Patti Neidig sends a sympathy card to the families of deceased members. When a member is ill, HEART provides a card to the member. Members are encouraged to have a Personal Data Form on file with HEART; a link to the form is available in the newsletter, on the website, or as a paper form upon request. Marlyn's email is moatts2000@yahoo.com.

Miscellaneous: Lisa Davis, Scholarship Chairperson, thanked her committee members. HEART scholarships are intended for a graduate of HCPSS currently enrolled in college, or a current HCPSS senior scheduled to graduate at the end of the school year. The student must plan to work in the field of education. (Demonstration of financial need will strengthen an application.) Scholarship application details will be shared late January 2025. Applications are due April 1, 2025. The electronic submission process has been successful and will continue (available in the newsletter and on our website; PDF available on the web). Members who submit a donation form online must mail a check or pay via Zelle. There will be a gift card drawing in January for members who make a donation. The Donor Form is available online. Today, \$300.00 was collected for scholarships. Dolores Castellito won \$150.00 in today's 50/50 drawing. When a HEART member passes, HEART honors the member by contributing a donation to the scholarship fund in the member's name.

Legislation and Benefits: Gene Streagle - Gene Streagle attended the 50th-year reunion at Atholton High School, where former students, now 68 years old, shared that they appreciated his care and dedication as a teacher. Reflecting on the long-term impact of educators, he emphasized the value of these connections. MRSPA provides a MRSPA brochure to all State legislators in order to provide information. The first item in the brochure is our defined benefits pension. We advocate for the schools. Every year the legislators want to write curriculum and we opposed that. There are spots on the eastern shore that do not have adequate internet connections. Long-term care as a tax write off never gets out of committee. We also support the Blueprint, decreased drug prices, and tax benefits.

The Benefits Advisory Committee will soon provide retirees with an annual benefits booklet. Members only need to return the form if they wish to change their benefits. Benefits will remain the same for 2025, with rates being finalized shortly. Howard County is noted for having the best health benefits in the State. Some counties provide no health benefits to retirees.