

All-Staff Meeting
Thursday, March 24, 2005

Joan introduced Michael Vaden-Kiernan, SEDL's new director of research. Michael comes to SEDL from the CDM Group based in Washington, DC.

Wes announced three service awards. There were two five-year awards: Joe Parker and Petra Ramirez. Joe and Petra were out, so their awards will be presented at the next staff service award meeting. Wes gave Victor Rodriguez his ten-year service award.

Building Update

Wes said that negotiations continue for a piece of property where SEDL would like to build a facility. In December, SEDL forwarded a letter of intent to the developer, who has yet to sign it. The developer has raised three obstacles in moving forward: (1) a mechanism for ensuring the developer that once construction begins, the building would be finished, (2) the amount of land to be purchased and the building footprint on the purchased land, and (3) an exemption from the city concerning the timeline when the developer would need to begin to address certain infrastructure issues. Tentative solutions to these issues have been reached, and Wes expects that a contract can be signed within 60 days (without the need to advance a letter of intent). While Wes said he could not inform staff as to the location of the property at this point, he would do so as soon as he could.

Appropriations and Competitions Update

Chuck Russell and Wes visited six Congressional offices on Capitol Hill last week, including the offices of the four legislators in SEDL's primary region who serve on either of the two Appropriations Committees. The president's budget proposed a 1 percent cut in the education budget. However, the mood in Congress is to NOT cut education programs. The president's proposal recommended elimination of some 40 programs in order to fund some new programs, including a major high school reform effort. At this point, Congress seems unwilling to trade established programs for new ones, which is a hopeful sign that funding for the programs proposed for elimination, will be restored.

An acquisitions list from the Department of Education that names all programs to be competed during the fiscal year has been posted. The list shows new REL awards to be made on October 13, 2005 (even though current REL contracts continue to mid-December 2005). The listing empowers the Department to move forward with competition plans, including the release of an RFP, which Wes expects sometime this summer (May-July). The comprehensive assistance center RFP is slated to be released on May 2. He also noted a small group is meeting weekly in preparation for the upcoming competitions.

Health Insurance Update

SEDL will meet with the Romine Group, our insurance broker, tomorrow to see if there are any competitive bids against Guardian and Blue Cross/Blue Shield. Preliminary estimates of rate increases are 11% for Guardian and 17% for BCBS, with no changes in

benefits. Wes said that if these increases hold, SEDL would be able to cover them for employees; staff with dependents would see an increase in premiums for those dependents. Cyndi Herring reminded staff members that premiums are deducted from pay checks one month in advance, and as these would be effective on May 1, any higher premiums for dependents would be deducted from the April pay checks.