

VC ECHOES

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Millennium Resolutions from the State of Education (whispered wishes seldom voiced out loud)

WHEREAS, the New York State Legislature has traditionally shown a total disregard for the impact of educational mandates on local taxpayers, therefore be it
RESOLVED that the New York State Legislature agrees to put an end to unfunded and underfunded educational mandates.

WHEREAS, Commissioner Mills and members of the New York State Board of Regents have been born and bred in the Delta Quadrant of the Milky Way, therefore be it
RESOLVED that these same life forms will seek the Earthly experience and knowledge necessary to develop logical and pragmatic educational policies.

WHEREAS, Superintendents have historically defined shared decision-making as "I will make the decision and share it with you at my earliest convenience" therefore be it
RESOLVED that Superintendents throughout the State affirm the value of staff input into educational decisions. This resolution and newly defined view of shared decision-making was unanimously adopted and praised as a meritorious and innovative idea. One recently appointed BOCES Superintendent, however, believed the illusion of shared decision-making was preferable to the real thing.

WHEREAS, Administrators throughout the State have historically quaked in their shoes when disgruntled students with vocal or influential parents, tax-pacs, political correctness groupies, anti-public education groups, etc. complain or promote their personal agendas, therefore be it
RESOLVED that Administrators throughout the State have committed themselves to supporting and defending their teaching staffs against unsubstantiated complaints and attacks.

WHEREAS, Boards of Education have engaged in the practice of micromanaging school districts to promote their own agendas, therefore be it
RESOLVED that at a special meeting of the New York State Boards Association, Board representatives throughout the State accepted the possibility that they may not be educational experts and have, therefore, resolve to focus on policy decisions and cease micromanaging their managers.

WHEREAS, political correctness and monetary considerations have been motivating factors in development and enactment of special education law, policies, and practices, therefore be it
RESOLVED that political correctness and monetary considerations will take a back seat to the pragmatic educational practices that are necessary to effectively educate all children. In fact, special education interest groups and committees have agreed to fully and realistically consider the impact that inclusion has on regular education.

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Millenium Resolutions (continued from page one)

WHEREAS, the lack of parental support and involvement in the educational process has led to deterioration and safe and orderly schools, therefore be it RE-SOLVED that parents have agreed to follow their children's educational progress. Parents throughout the State have also agreed to send their children to school well fed, well rested, well behaved and prepared to learn. The words respect and responsibility were also discussed but eventually dismissed as foreign concepts that might hinder their children's freedom of expression and individuality.

WHEREAS, teachers have a long standing tradition of behaving worse than chronically suspended students when attending faculty meetings, workshops, etc., therefore be it RE-SOLVED that at a special meeting called by NYSUT, teachers throughout the State have agreed to improve their audience etiquette, thus ending this embarrassing hypocrisy.

~ Tim Brown

Donna Stout Nominated for School Nurse of the Year



Montgomery Elementary Nurse,
Donna Stout

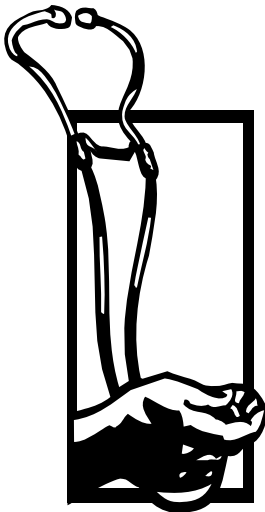
Congratulations to Donna Stout, Montgomery Elementary's School Nurse, who has been nominated for the School Nurse of the Year awarded by the New York State

Association of School Nurses. Donna, who has been working at Valley Central for ten years, has also worked at Maybrook Elementary. Donna always seems to have her "finger on the pulse" of the school. She has met the qualifications for standards of care and professional performance. Aside from her busy daily routine, Donna single-handedly coordinates holiday food baskets for Thanksgiving and Christmas, facilitates an educational program for asthmatic children, and is a valuable member of our Child Study Team.

The Montgomery Elementary School staff is consistently impressed with her professionalism, ethics, collegiality, and thorough follow-up. The winner will be announced on School Nurses' Day in January.

~ Adrienne Hershfield
and Melissa Sulzbach, Montgomery

Editor's Note: Kathy Manning, MS and Connie Griffin, Maybrook are also nominated. Good luck to all.



Emergency Response at the Middle School

Since 1996, The Middle School has had an Emergency Response Team. The Emergency Response Team is made up of thirty five

staff members – teachers, nurses, administrators, guidance counselors, psychologists, student assistance counselors, secretaries, custodians and paraprofessionals. These members have volunteered to assist the School Nurse in a medical crisis.

The first-aiders (made up of 14 teachers) keep their First Aid and CPR training up to date. They also have training in crisis intervention. The team has participated in a num-

ber of practice drills and hope to have a simulated drill using Mobile Life Support this year.

Mike Presutti and Kathy Manning, RN, developed the team and thank the entire Middle School for their support.

~ Kathy Manning, RN
Middle School

Preventing Violence in our Schools

I attended a Health and Safety Workshop sponsored by our NY-SUT Regional Office on November 16, 1999. This workshop focused on improving discipline and preventing violence in our schools. The presenter, Elizabeth Vignaux, is a NYSUT expert in this area who shares her expertise with state, regional and local units. The presentation was divided into two areas - statistics and trends and putting together a plan.

Many interesting statistics were provided, including the fact that although we are told by governmental agencies that crimes of all kinds have been decreasing, in reality, school violence (primarily assaults) has increased by almost 400% since 1960. Additionally, these violent acts happen most frequently during lunch and at dismissal times. What are these crimes? In the school setting, theft, fist fights, bullying and shoving matches are the most common, but abuse (physical and verbal) and use of weapons are certainly not unheard of nor limited to any specific group or area.

... in reality, school violence (primarily assaults) has increased by almost 400% since 1960"

What are some of the risk factors for school discipline problems? The most frequently mentioned areas include unclear rules which are inconsistently enforced by an inactive administration. That does not preclude staff members who don't know the rules, are inconsistent with their responses to negative student behavior, harbor punitive attitudes or are lacking in training. Neither does it pardon students who do not believe in the value of rules or who do not value the need for an education in a safe setting. Certainly, that attitude brings parents/family into the equation as far as their views toward learning in a nurturing educational environment. So, where does that leave districts in regard to developing a school safety plan, assuming they recognize the problem and the need to address it? All of the groups involved in the school must be educated and join together to form a plan that will be both sensitive to and effective in dealing with safety. This would include students, parents, business, administration, faculty, staff and most certainly the local union/



association. From an Association perspective, there are things that can be done from a cooperative stance, rather than an adversarial one. Tracking the types of disruptive behavior and the "perpetrators" from kindergarten is key to dealing with solutions. This can be done by the administration but can also be investigated by the Association firsthand so that both groups are on the same page. Rather than be solely focused on salary/health issues in contracts, language can be agreed upon to give policies backbone.

(continued on page fourteen)

Arbitrator Decides for the District on Health and Comparability

The District and the Association have held different views on the issue of comparability and health insurance since the contract was settled in September 1998. After all the members of the teachers' bargaining unit with dual coverage had their plans reviewed by the District and the Association's insurance experts there were three members who felt that their plans were not comparable to the District's coverage and wished to keep the District's coverage.

The Association grieved on be-

half of the members and on September 22, 1999 our labor relations specialist presented the argument that some points of coverage were clearly not comparable to the District's plan. The Arbitrator stated that in comparing one plan to another, both plans had to be considered on a holistic basis rather than on point by point comparison. The Arbitrator also decided that the buyout figure had to be used in determining comparability as well. This decision is most disappointing as our position was that the

buyout was a compensation for the loss of a benefit. This arbitration is not only binding for our Association but for others throughout the state as well.

Although the Arbitrator's decision was certainly disappointing for the three members who were directly affected, and for the Association as a whole, it has provided a direction in future comparisons of plans.

~ Patti Lunden

A Night of Sharing . . . A Weekend of Memories

A very powerful and some might even say “magical” thing happened for 23 students from Valley Central High School, who chose to participate in a Peer Leadership retreat weekend. They didn’t spend their Saturday night at the mall or the movies, not a sporting event or party. No these 23 students spent their Saturday night in a cabin, in front of a glowing fire place just talking about their joys, their sorrows, their fears, and their lives. These students chose to drop the “masks” they often wear in school. They took the risk of opening themselves to peers they may not usually hang out with. They chose to confront teenage angst in the 90’s, to share life experiences, and for one night they didn’t feel alone.

On Friday, October 29, 1999, twenty three students and four staff members (Frank Jordan, Nancy Brother, Jim Hession and Christina Wynn) at Valley Central High School set out on a journey, an adventure one could say, to the Sharpe Reservation Centers Camp Mariah. The participants were a cross section of the student body representing the different “cliques” in the school. Some were chosen through a survey, some were chosen by staff members, others volunteered. Some of the students didn’t know each other, some may not have even liked each other. The bus ride reflected their anxieties. It was rather quiet, some students wondering what they had gotten themselves into. Others talked quietly with friends they knew. Only a few students who had participated in previous encounters knew the powerful experience that lay ahead.

The leadership weekend consisted of a fairly structured agenda with room to “juggle” activities as necessary. The camp was a perfect setting. A serene lake in the woods made it nice to be out of school and away from everyday life. Students began

the weekend with a series of ice breakers and then were introduced to facilitative listening skills. Students engaged in activities that allowed them to reflect upon their lives, and break down barriers between them as they shared the “pictures of their lives”.

The weekend was a mixed bag of information on important teenage topics, trust building activities, team building and bridge building. A mixture of lecture, guest speakers, videos and active participation was used for topics such as violence awareness/prevention, empathy/ bullying, suicide and abusive relationships. The goals were to tool the Peer Leaders with the knowledge to prevent, intervene, and take active roles in the school. Students were given training on each topic and were asked to brainstorm ways that they could make a difference in school. All agreed that the topics were of vital importance back at school, and some pretty great ideas were generated for future activities.

“ Students engaged in activities that allowed them to reflect upon their lives, and break down barriers ...

The most heartwarming experience students encountered was a bridge building activity which consisted simply of answering questions and listening to others. The questions were not ordinary ones however. They would reach into the deep emotions of some, the hearts and souls of others. They were questions which asked students to talk about their fears, their sorrows, their darkest days, how it felt to be judged, their happiest days, the best gift they ever received, their greatest accomplishments, what they felt they could give to others, and other such powerful questions which elicited heart felt responses. One after another students shared their responses. Some spoke about losing friends and family members to cancer, suicide,



Peer Leader Advisors: Frank Jordan, Nancy Brother and Jim Hession

car accidents and the East Coldenham tragedy. They spoke of fears, of death, further loss, and failure. They spoke of family problems, alcoholism, poverty. They spoke about anger and hurt when being judged. They spoke about growing up in the 90’s, good and bad. They spoke for nearly three hours; they offered each other hands and hugs, sympathetic ears and a better understanding that they were all different but mostly the same.

Suddenly there was a realization that these 23 students from Valley Central were aged beyond their years. Although the group was together for only 36 hours they shared a bond which made it seem like forever. The group took a vow to make a difference in their own lives, the lives of their friends and peers, the vow to never forget the bond built. They will gather throughout the year to share the weekend’s memories, and to make a difference.

The Peer Leadership retreat weekend was not only a powerful experience for the students who attended. It was also nice to have the chance to talk with colleagues (friends) with no time constraints and get to know them better outside of the school setting. I would highly recommend this experience to anyone who should have the chance. It is a great way to build a stronger student/teacher understanding and relationship.

~ Frank Jordan, HS

On Good Health and a Safe Environment

With all the talk about Millennium babies, this is probably a good time to explore the topic of pregnancy leave.

Q. Who can help me with my letter of notification?

A: The Association has a form letter that you can use to draft your letter to notify the District of your pregnancy and leave. Ask your Building Rep. for it. You must notify the District at least two months before the leave begins, although you can tell them earlier.

Q. How much of my accumulated sick time can I use to cover my absence due to pregnancy and delivery?

A: You can use your accumulated unused sick time for any time during your pregnancy that your doctor finds you unable to work. You can also use your sick time to cover the 6-8 weeks following delivery that you stay home to recover. (These weeks are counted by calendar date not by school days, days off and snow days do not count against your sick time). You do need to provide a note to Personnel for extended period of time (over 5 days). If your doctor wants you to leave work before delivery, you simply need a note from your doctor to cover the time up to delivery and then another following delivery. If you leave on your Estimated Date of Delivery but don't deliver until two weeks after, you can use your sick time to cover that time, since your doctor has provided a note. The 6-8 weeks follows the actual delivery date, not the estimated date of delivery. If there are complications and you have run out of sick time before the end of the 6-8 week period after delivery, you can utilize Article 22, C "Additional Compensation for Sickness" which states the following:

"Beginning with the *fourth year of service*, a teacher who shall have used his total accumulative sick leave *shall be paid the difference between his salary and that of the substitute* in cases of extended period of illness for a period not to exceed one year beyond the exhaustion of all accumulated sick time." p.13

Q. What is Child Care Leave and how is it different from sick time?

A. If you choose not to return to work following the 6-8 week period after the delivery of your child you can utilize child care leave. Child care leave is unpaid time. Your pay is prorated. You get paid for amount of time you actually work and have sick time to cover. You may use up to two years. The leave would begin following the last day of sick time coverage. If you had initially only take a year and then wished to extend the leave for another year, you must make a written request at least two months before the initial leave ends. (i.e. if your leave is to end June 30th you would need to submit the request to the Superintendent by April 30th). Article 22, H, pg. 13.

Q. What is Family Medical Leave?

A: Family Medical Leave (FMLA) is the result of a federal act that provides for 12 calendar weeks of continuous medical coverage during a period of leave. The law allows for the FMLA to run concurrently with sick time. So when you start your sick time, your FMLA will start also. If you start your sick time with delivery and have 6 weeks of sick time after delivery, you would still have six weeks of FMLA time at the beginning of your child care leave. If you were to go out earlier than your delivery date, the FMLA would begin at that time and run for



twelve calendar weeks from that date. If the District provides the coverage for your family, then after the FMLA period you will need to pay for your insurance. You pay for the plan you have elected, (OUSDHP, MVP, Empire, GHI). You will pay the District monthly until the end of your leave. Since your leave ends on June 30th, the District will pick up the insurance for July and August preceding the school year that you return. If you take the Buy-out, you receive a prorated portion of the Buy-out according to your FMLA coverage.

Q. If I am non-tenured, how will my leave affect my position?

A: You receive tenure based on three working years (30 months) rather than calendar years from your date of hire, so it will take longer for you to gain tenure by calendar. However, pregnancy and leave are not reasons for dismissal. If fact, were you to lose your job based on those grounds, you would be advised to file a lawsuit for discrimination.

If you have any further questions, please contact the Patti Lunden at the HS or Union Office, 457-5899.

If you have any topics you would like to see covered or questions you would like answered on health and environment, please submit them to Patti Lunden, Editor at the HS. Until next time, may you enjoy good health and a safe environment!

For the latest information and directories on Health plans:

OUSDHP: www.ousdhp.com

(Medichoice: www.Medichoice.com)

Empire: www.empirehealthcare.com

MVP: www.mvphealthplan.com

GHI: www.ghi.com

Governor Pataki signs Tier Reinstatement Measure but Vetoes Tier Equity Bill

Gov. Pataki signed a bill that will allow reinstatement for members of the NYS and NYC Employee Retirement Systems. A similar bill was signed last year affecting thousands of NYSUT's teaching professionals. This bill will similarly affect thousands of NYSUT's School Related Personnel.

This law provides that any member who left employment to raise a family, only to return and be placed in an inferior tier, can now seek reinstatement in the tier in which they were originally hired. It also allows them to gain a refund of previously bought back credit.

The Retirement Systems will be notifying eligible members soon of the steps they need to take to gain reinstatement.

Although Pataki did the right thing in signing the Reinstatement Bill, he let down many teachers by vetoing legislation that would have equalized the reductions for retirement prior to age 62 among the retirement tiers. Presently, the penalties for retiring before age 62 in Tiers III/IV are much more severe than those levied on members of Tier II who do the same thing. This bill would have eliminated the discrepancy. Gov. Pataki explained that he felt the measure

“a permanent and open early retirement incentive, contrary to sound pension and management policy”. He also noted that NYC Mayor Giuliani was afraid that this legislation would encourage a “large number of employee retirements”.

~ NYSUT Dept. of Legislation

Editor's Note: There will be a Employees Retirement System Financial Planning Seminar, Tier 3/4 members on April 14th in Fishkill. To enroll: Call Ron Revelle, 457-4143.

Creating Tier Equity

As soon as one joins the NYSTRS, one feels a slap in the face when finding out about the tier system and its inequities. The three teacher members of the NYSTRS Board, Sheila J. Salenger, Joseph P. McLaughlin and Michael Corn are working to create tier equity. A knowledge of what Tiers III/IV (III was created in 1976, IV in 1983) and the changes that NYSUT has been able to accomplish will highlight the strides already made. In **1983**, Tier III members faced a 50% offset in retirement, this was changed when Tier IV was created which eliminated the SS offset and permits Tier III members to select Tier IV benefits at retirement. Tiers III/IV could not retire at age 55/30 years without facing pension reductions, in **1985** that was changed so that now at 55/30 Tiers III/IV receive full retirement. Until **1986**, III/IV did not have equal death benefits, allowing member contribution to be returned as part of the benefit and providing life insurance.

In **1986**, all members with less than 10 years credit lost their retirement membership if they were out of the system for more than 5 years, now as long as a member has 20 days of service in one school every 7 years they retain membership. Until 1988, Tiers III/IV had to pay federal tax on their three percent contribution, now the tax is deferred. Up to **1989**, Tiers III/

IV had to select or change no later than the day before retirement. Now selection/change can be made up until the last day of the month in which retirement is effective. In **1989**, Tier IV members won the right to withdraw their accumulated contributions and interest once they were no longer employed with a participating employer of NYSTRS, provided they were credited with less than 10 years service. In **1990**, Tier III/IV members gained the ability to retire at 55 with less than 30 years with a reduction in retirement allowance. Also in **1990**, Tiers III/IV were given the right to borrow from their 3% mandatory contribution. In **1991**, Tiers II,III/IV became able to claim part-time or substitute teaching before joining the retirement system (statute existed 91-93), In **1992**, Tiers III/IV were afforded the same “pop-up” options at retirement that Tiers I and II had. In **1993**, Tiers II, III/IV gained transfer rights to transfer from one NYS Retirement system to another if they had missed the original 7 year period (from 93-96). In **1995**, III/IV were afforded the option of selecting a lump sum death benefit for a beneficiary when the retired member died. In **1996** the 30 day waiting period between application and the onset of retirement for service or disability retirement was waived. In **1997**, the 1991 legislation was reopened for one

year. In **1998** Tier IV members had to attain 25 years of service to be credited with 2% per year, now they only need attain 20 years of service for 2% per year. In **1999**, members of Tier I and II who had lost membership and were enrolled as Tier III or IV when returning to service were allowed to regain their original status.

The unfinished agenda of the teacher members of the NYSTRS board includes creating one system of retirement benefits for all, eliminating the 3% contribution, gaining comprehensive veteran's service credit, establishing a permanent COLA (cost of living adjustment) and guaranteeing health insurance for all current and future retirees. This agenda can only be achieved by persuading the NYS Legislature to “do the right thing”. This takes money which, by law, cannot come from our dues. You can contribute money to this cause by contributing to VOTE-COPE (our drive is in the Spring) and by writing to your legislators on a regular basis.

~ Patti Lunden

NYSTRS... A Delegate's View

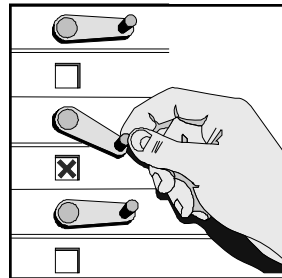
If you were a teacher delegate to the NYSTRS you might be thinking while traveling toward Albany to attend the New York State Teachers' Retirement System Annual Delegates' Meeting that you were going to see or possibly talk with the board members that "control" our retirement money. Being a delegate you might even think that you could talk to a staff or board member about changing a Law or Tier regulation. Well, you would be wrong!

That was made clear at the first seminar I attended, which was on the Latest New Legislation. The NYSTRS takes no position, makes no decisions, does not govern what happens to your money or what your retirement will be. The NYSTRS's purpose is to administer the fund from which public school teachers and administrators receive retirement benefits. Benefits are statutory and paid in accordance with the laws enacted by the Legis-

lature.

I could spend time talking about the seminars I attended, but you can read about those in the SOURCE. What I will talk about is the question I asked the three teacher-board members and countless staff members. **"What is the best way to influence change in the current laws governing the Retirement System?"** Each of them gave a similar answer— through NYSUT and the Vote Cope campaign. Vote Cope is NYSUT's legislative and political action campaign which collects voluntary financial contributions. One use of the money is to support lobbying and one of the efforts being made on our behalf by NYSUT's lobbyists is to push for needed changes in the Laws governing the Teachers' Retirement System.

I realize that many people are skeptics when it comes to politics



and politicians. However, it is extremely important for us to have our own political niche. Your voluntary financial contributions to Vote Cope support NYSUT's legislative and political action efforts and therefore gives the three teacher-board members of the TRS political clout. **Vote Cope, supporting NYSUT's letter writing campaign and voting for supporters of education are the best ways to get some of the changes we all want in the Laws governing the Teachers' Retirement System.**

~ John Solan,
Retirement Delegate

NYSTRS Convention Highlights

On November 14 and 15, Kathy Takvam, John Solan and I attended the NYSTRS Convention representing the VCTA and Valley Central.

- ☞ Joe McLaughlin, teacher member was re-elected. He, along with NYSTRS Exec. Dir. George Phillip, has been appointed to Gov. Pataki's Public Employee Retirement Task Force to study pension plans.
- ☞ The Annual Member statement coming this month has been customized for each member. In the very near future it will contain personalized info.
- ☞ Divorce can drastically affect your pension! Call to take advantage of the TRS legal expertise before a DRO is finalized. Your attorney should send a draft of the proposed

DRO to the system so the TRS can determine if they can administer it.

- ☞ Note the name of your DESIGNATED BENEFICIARY as of 12/1/99 on your statement and make any changes immediately! *Forms can be downloaded from the TRS website.*
- ☞ Check out the TRS website: www.nystrs.albany.ny.us
- ☞ In case of serious illness or injury, be sure to use the TRS as the definitive source of disability info. Filing a Service Retirement Form could mean a death benefit 2-3 x that of a regular one.
- ☞ Protect your retirement years by taking full advantage of 403b plans, annuities, mutual fund investing, etc. Preparing for a comfortable retirement should start in

the beginning of one's career, not at the end of it.

- ☞ For answers to any questions regarding your specific situation, call TRS at 1-800-348-7298 or 1-800-356-3128.
- ☞ Be sure your SS info is correct. Call 1-800-772-1213 and ask for Form SSA 7004 for a listing of FICA taxes which determines the SS benefit. This should be done every three years.
- ☞ Support VOTE COPE to continue the process of tier equalization.
- ☞ Part of the current NYSUT legislation package is a bill that would allow all tiers to use a 5-year Final Average Salary.

~ Sally Grodin,
Retirement Delegate

Damn those powerful unions!

By George Ehring, in the Canadian labor publication "Our Times"

It amazes me sometimes to hear people say they think unions have too much power. You hear it all the time, at least I do, even from ordinary working people. "What are they thinking?" I wonder. So I try to be polite, because I am getting older and grayer and I must be mellowing.

"Do you mean," I ask, "that the balance of power between workers and government, has become too strong?"

"Well, uh, I don't know," they say.

"You mean," I point out helpfully, "the corporations have become so weak that they've lost the power to fire their workers whenever they want, lay them off, or move their companies anywhere in the world where the labor or taxes are cheaper and there aren't so many pesky regulations?"

"Well, no, not exactly."

"You mean, then, that the workers have been able to force the bosses to pay them so much that they're practically earning as much as the boss, and that's not fair?" I ask.

"Uh, no."

"Then, maybe it's that the workers have bargained for so much time off that the companies can hardly find anyone to keep the place going?"

"Not really."

"Is it because the workers have become so powerful that they can force the boss to pay women as much as they pay men? You have a problem with that?"

They are shaking their heads at this one.

"Wait," I say, "maybe it's that the workers have become so powerful that they can force the boss to hire minority workers, you know, immigrants. That's it, isn't it?"

This one is often met with an embarrassed silence.

I shift gears. "Maybe the workers have become so powerful that they've been able to force government to pass laws protecting their rights, is that it? No? Then, it must be that they have forced governments to pass laws making it really easy to organize new workplaces. No? Okay, maybe it's that they've made governments pass though health and safety laws, enforced by armies of inspectors, so that practically no one is being injured on the job anymore. Is that it?"

"Nope."

At this point, still struggling to figure out what they mean when they say unions are too powerful, I launch into a bit of labor history.

"You mean, like the times when workers demanded a 40-hour week and went on strike all over the place to gain it, which is why you have the weekend off, is that it?"

"Uh, uh."

"I know now," I say, and maybe not quite so mellow anymore. "It must be that you think every worker ought to have to go one-on-one against the boss. That would be a more equal balance of power, wouldn't it? Workers shouldn't have the right to act collectively, should they? That's not really fair to the boss, is it? One worker, one corporation. That's only right, eh?"

Usually by now, they begin to backtrack.

But in the back of their minds, they are still thinking about the time the teachers went on strike, and they had to scramble to find someone to look after the kids during the day. Darned inconvenient. They might be remembering when the postal workers went on strike a few years ago, and they couldn't mail their aunt's birthday card. Annoying. And, oh yeah, they saw something on TV about that big General Motors strike not too long ago, and they even heard that their brother-in-law's neighbor didn't get his car on time. (So what if they hadn't had a raise in a million years, and the government was firing about a third of them. They were always overpaid, anyway, weren't they?) Well, it was kind of touch-and-go there whether they'd get their passport renewed on time for that overseas holiday.

Unions! It's obvious. They're too damn powerful.

Rules for Teachers 1872-Teachers will fill lamps, clean chimneys and trim wicks daily-Each teacher will bring a bucket of water and scuttle of coal for each day's sessions-make your pens carefully: you may whittle nibs for individual pens of pupils- Men teachers may take one evening a week for courting purposes if they attend church regularly - After 10 hours in school, the teachers spend the remaining time reading the Bible or other good books- Women teachers who marry or engage in unseemly conduct will be dismissed-Each teacher should lay aside from each pay a goodly sum of his earnings for his benefit for his declining years so that he won't be a burden on society- Any teacher who smokes, uses liquor in any form, frequents pool or public halls, or gets shaved in a barber shop will give good reason to suspect his worth, intentions, integrity, and honesty - The teacher who performs his labors faithfully and without fault five years will be given an increase of 25 cents per week in his salary providing the BOE approves. *Posted by Winifred Nordquist, NYC Principal* **Rules for Teachers 1923** - Do not get married. This contract becomes null and void immediately if the teacher gets married- Do not keep company with men - Be home between the hours of 8 pm and 6 am unless in attendance at a school function- Do not loiter downtown in ice cream stores - Do not leave town at any time without permission of the chairman of the board- Do not smoke cigarettes. This contract becomes null and void immediately if the teacher is found smoking- Do not drink beer, wine or whiskey. This contract becomes null and void if found drinking beer, wine or whiskey- Do not get into a carriage or automobile with any man except your brother or father- Do not dress in bright colors - Do not dye your hair - Do not wear dresses more than 2 inches above your ankle- Wear at least two petticoats - Keep the school room neat and clean - Sweep the floor at least one daily - Scrub the floor at least once weekly with soap and hot water - Clean the blackboards at least once daily

On Being Assimilated by the Socioeducational Ameoba or A Negative Ode to Entitlement, “Eduspeak” and Political Correctness – Musings of a Long Timer...

I got really scared recently, well into the twenty-eighth year Valley Central. Heck, I’m not opposed to change, if it is students we dedicate our efforts to. After all these years, I ing with my students and trying to transfer my love of learn- least some small way, a glorious feeling and pursuit. They much, and the great majority of them want to learn and re- What scares, frustrates and occasionally angers me is the ety has of the public education system. On one hand, we are and cure a myriad of societal ills that are not truly the respon- that of parents, family and community, while at the same or most of those same ills. No, the system isn’t perfect but was based on the democratic principal that every child has a this was not to be an elitist system denying large portions of tunity to that end. Do schools in other countries achieve better re- what cost to the general populace? The problem with our system, at right to an education does not guarantee a commitment to it by the If we are being held accountable for our teaching (and we should should be held just as accountable, for education begins at home and happens in school. The nineties will be remembered (by me) as the decade of entitlement and irresponsibility. “I can do what I want, when I want, how I want, but I am not taking the responsibility for it, nor would I want it done to me.” To make matters worse, people cloak this attitude of entitlement in a veil of political correctness. That term makes me nauseated!! Whatever happened to tact, wisdom and compassion? Why do we feel it necessary to couch our language, our communication skills, in terms that hide what we really mean or what we really should be saying? Are we all so brainwashed, “therapized”, afraid of the truth, afraid of the consequences of our words and actions on others and our- tion, as well as technology explo- services, etc., we posely muddying found its way into ernment, to the vidual school spokespeople of their personal Why are we con- the selfish needs a law suit for frank and intelligent discussion? Why has education become politics to the degree I see? Why do so many individuals and groups claim to have the interests of the child at heart, when it is quite obvious that they have no clue as to what those interests are and no real desire to serve them?

... some huge, amorphous beast is attempting to pull me into its maw, chew me up, swallow me, digest and assimilate me and regurgitate me as an educational action figure with no uniqueness, singularity or identity of my own...



of my tenure in education here at really in the best interest of the still find the stimulation of work- ing to every one of them, in at really haven’t changed all that spect the system we work in. hypocritical view that our soci- supposed to diagnose, address sibility of the school system but time taking the blame for many what is? American education right to an education and that the population an equal oppor- sults? In some cases, yes, but at least as I perceive it, is that a child or the family of that child. be), then students and parents is merely enhanced by what

elves that we have become inefficient in our communica- our productivity? What’s the point of the communications sion, if in using our cell phones, pagers, beepers, internet aren’t really saying anything of any importance or are pur- our own attempts at real communication? This disease has the educational system at every level, from the federal gov- state government, to the local school districts, to the indi- buildings, to the separate classrooms. Why should the business, special interests, and groups and individuals with agendas be the purveyors of what an education should be? stantly eroding the system and the rights of the majority for of the individual? Why must we point the finger and toss in spite, when many situations could be remedied with some

Are you as tired and baffled by what I call “eduspeak” as I am? Why the need for enigmatic, silly or euphemistic labels? Why recycle the same ideas with new catch words? Do you think we don’t recognize this? All these new standards and assessments- are they personally motivated and manipulated, or will they make our students better equipped citizens of the twenty-first century? I’ve always been a strong believer in what one of my colleagues refers to as teaching moments - that time when the lesson opens itself up for an unexpected discussion, detour or journey that has so much value as a learning tool and which students don’t even recognize as such, because it is a natural extension of the topic. When I have to map my lessons and focus so much time and effort on test training, how many of these special experiences are going to be missed? Does teaching/training for tests instill a love of learning-

(continued on page 12)

VCTA Executive Council Highlights

November Meeting: Nov. 16, 1999

Anyone who would like to submit resolutions for the NYSUT Representative Assembly (RA) should contact their building representative. Resolutions are due by Feb. 4, 2000.

The VCTA reps to the RA will be Tim Brown, Jay Sussdorff, Rich Steger and Patti Lunden. The President is automatically the first delegate according to our constitution, and Tim Brown proposed that any other officers be automatically made the second, third, fourth and fifth delegate constitutionally: an election for delegates would then be required only if an officer could not go. This proposed change to the constitution will be put to election by the general membership in the Spring.

Tim Brown will be attending the Committee of 100 on March 13th and 14th, 2000.

Please submit ideas for the webpage, especially suggestions for links that members would like to have on the webpage to Tim Brown.

John Bonagura is heading the Professional Development Plan Committee for the VCTA.

Rich Steger will be heading the VCTA portion of the Annual Professional Performance Review Committee and Contractual Evaluation.

Tim Brown discussed a new position being created by the District, a district wide web master.

Information on the rearrangement of a 12-1-1 situation is being sent to Albany to be sure that the District is in compliance with state regulations.

*We are still awaiting the Arbitrator's decision on the Health Arbitration. *see Dec. mtg summary

Tim Brown is hopeful that a side agreement will be reached with CO on the Newman grievance.

Several charter applications have been confirmed, others are still pending.

Laurie Miccio, a Montgomery para who lives in EC has won the Hudson/Catskill Central Labor Council of NY Community Service award.

A Vote-Cope letter will be distributed to those who signed up for payroll deduction.

Tim Brown clarified why he sent out the memo concerning name tags.

The copy machine is unable to handle our copy needs especially the newsletter.

A digital camera was purchased for use in the newsletter.

Funds have been requested for the Yonkers teachers who went on strike through the Westchester Teacher Assistance Fund.

The evening parent conference is a contractual obligation, the District has the right to demand that if absent a teacher make up the evening.

When a law suit was brought against the District concerning the Summer Reading Program, the Commissioner's decision was disappointing.

The tentative calendar for next year has been forwarded to the Association.

The Paraprofessional reps submitted a FOIL request asking for the letters that were written by teachers but not read at the Board meeting.

The District and the Paras currently disagree over some intent in language that was negotiated.

Joan Grippo requested that the Paraprofessional Representative and Paraprofessional Negotiator salaries be reconsidered and increased.

Tier 3 and 4 members who take the health buy-out should check that the 3% contribution is not taken out for the retirement system.

The NYSTRS suggests that the state retirement incentive be considered in salary negotiations.

COLA (Cost of Living Allowance) postcards will be sent to legislators.

The Social Committee has been investigating places for the retirement party and has been developing a concept for a VCTA Community Day.

The HS department chairs are concerned about AIS (Academic Intervention Services) and its impact on courses.

4th and 5th grade teachers were asked to a CO meeting to coordinate novels at an after school meeting (3:45). The importance of professional development during school hours will be discussed with CO.

A survey for new teachers on Health Insurance and comparability was distributed.

When a sewer smell was being investigated, asbestos was found and the teachers at Walden are concerned about the air quality. There was an air quality problem in the HS near the copy room. There is a urine smell in Montgomery. Tim Brown suggested following the chain of command as outlined by Jay Sussdorff. If all else fails, then the Health Dept. is an option.

The VCTA is sponsoring a Weight Watchers program so that the program can be held in the buildings.

A moment of silence was held for Nellie Brower, retired HS Librarian and dedicated VCTA Executive Council member, who passed away on October 19, 1999.

Highlights continue on page 11

VCTA Executive Council Highlights (continued)



VP Jay Sussdorff, and Pres. Tim Brown with the MS Building Reps.

December Meeting: December 21, 1999

Tim Brown recognized Jim Lignori (HS) who had come to the meeting as a public participant. Jim Lignori reported that he has frequently been asked to cover classes during his hall duty. Mr. Lignori feels that students are being shortchanged since classes are not being covered.

A VC Desktop article was printed about Laurie Miccio.

Revisions to Part 200 of the Commissioner's Regulations can be found on the web: <http://web.nysed.gov/vesid/pubpage.html>

Resolutions for RA are due by Feb. 4, 2000 at NYSUT headquarters.

The Professional Development Plan Team members from the Association are: John Bonagura, Rich Steger, Jane Hillis, Laurie Hey, Mary Bleau, Ruth Ann Giattino, Evan Panagiotopolous.

The annual Professional Performance Review Committee members are John Bonagura, Rich Steger and Pam Dixon.

The East Coldenham situation concerning the rearrangement of classified students was discussed with Central Office. The situation has been corrected in art.

Concerning the Health Arbitration, the Arbitrator decided for the District's position.

The Marc Newman grievance has been settled before it went to Arbitration.

A motion was made that the Association lease a Toshiba 3580 Digital Copy Machine for 4 years.

A motion was made to request donations for the Yonkers Teachers who went on strike over educational issues.

Anyone waiting on Charter/ Club approval should call Tim Brown to check on status.

Tim Brown explained that a mistake was made in the paydate side agreement. Central Office agrees with us there is a sentence that does not seem to make sense, but

is reluctant to correct and clarify the agreement.

A letter was shared from the Dept. of Health concerning the Walden Elementary School and the sewer pipe break. It stated that the plans for providing a permanent solution to the problem appeared to be reasonable.

The final School Calendar for 2000-01 was adopted by the Board on Dec. 13th. The day before Thanksgiving will be a vacation day.

The HS Guidance staff has been unilaterally scheduled a longer workday and work year without their consent, without compensation, and without the knowledge of the VCTA Executive Council. Effective July 1, 2000 the VCTA will enforce the language of the collective bargaining agreement as set forth in Articles XIII, XIV, XV.

Thirty charter schools were compared with public schools and were found unable to compare in terms of the 4th and 8th grade tests and on the Regents.

Tim Brown distributed a political survey from the Mid-Hudson Labor Council that he would like all building staff to fill out.

John Bonagura and Tim Brown have been discussing financial safeguards

Tim Brown discussed protocol about contacting officers. Members should contact representatives, officers rather than have family members contact for them.

Petitions for anyone wanting to run for Association office is April 1.

The Math Curriculum was approved by the BOE on Nov. 22. A New Board member has been appointed. There will be a half day Conference day on Jan. 28th and a full day on March 24th.

Articles submitted to the ECHOES must be signed unless being published in "Creative Corner". The editor must know the identity of the author.

Having an advertising section in the ECH-

OES will be explored.

An audit of the Benefit Trust was just completed by Nugent Hasseler.

Those teachers who completed the Health Survey indicated that they were made aware of the issues concerning comparability.

NYSUT has started a new service called Legislative Alert.

EC has been informed by the Health Dept. that their water is okay.

Kathy Takvam reported that someone from the Health Department did come to Montgomery. Jay Sussdorff said that he will follow up the situation.

\$10 was unanimously suggested as the out of pocket cost for the VCTA Retirement Party.

Special Education goals need to be more specific. Teachers should be able to have input on the makeup of some classes.

The OUSDHP Plan Document has been completed and is being distributed to Districts. OUSDHP District members must have a termination plan in place as directed by the State.

PCS, the prescription provider for OUSDHP, have been calling members asking for permission to switch their prescription from a brand name to a generic.

For more specific information, check the minutes of the meetings posted in your building.

On Being Assimilated by the Socioeducational Amoeba or a Negative Ode to Entitlement, “Eduspeak” and Political Correctness – Musings of a Long-Timer....(continued from page 9)

a passion for knowledge? Is it really necessary for so many students to work so many hours in the pursuit of material possessions or “partying” money, while less and less time and thought is given to schoolwork? Is society really so dysfunctional that larger and larger numbers of students are classified and need special attention at great cost, perhaps to the detriment of regular and accelerated programs? Or in many cases are parents trying to get their kids into these programs because it relieves them of their responsibilities and makes schools the scapegoats? Money isn’t the cure for every educational ill, but does it make sense to set forth mandates that local districts can only try to meet by raising school taxes again and again? Are any of these programs really thought through for the long haul, or are they serving selfish motives or putting up a front of accommodation to the banshee wails of business and the society at large?

I consider myself an optimist in most facets of life. I love my job, my students, my colleagues. I wouldn’t choose to do anything else with my career. I believe most students and parents understand the value of an education and make a reasonable commitment to that goal. I know my colleagues are dedicated and compassionate human beings. If I know or believe in all these things, then why do I feel as if some huge, amorphous beast is attempting to pull me into its maw, chew me up, swallow me, digest and assimilate me, and regurgitate me as an educational action figure with no uniqueness or singularity or identity of my own, just spouting or espousing all the “right” ideas and methods? That is why I felt scared and why, I guess, I needed to get this off my chest in cathartic form. Thanks for listening to/putting up with my ramblings. Come to think of it, I might just be getting old and cantankerous-you think?!

~ Jay Sussdorff

Thinking of Retiring?

Anyone who has ten years credited service in the NYSTRS and is considering retiring at the end of this school year (before June 30, 2000) in their first year of eligibility in accordance with the rules and regulations of the NYSTRS without incurring a penalty (percentage reduction in benefits) should make that decision and inform Central Office by March 1, 2000 so that they are assured that they will receive the retirement incentive package. The package includes an incentive of \$16,500 paid in two installments,

one in the last month of the fiscal year during which the teacher worked and the second in the month of the following fiscal year. (June/July 2000). The teacher also receives an additional increment, equal to the increment of the step of the salary schedule at which he/she retires. Additionally, the teacher can receive \$40 a day for each unused sick day to a maximum of 200 days. If you are considering retirement, make an appointment to speak to NYSTRS, and contact your building rep. for a copy of the VCTA retire-

ment form letter to help you indrafting your own letter.

At this time the District and Association is working on, but has not finalized a side agreement that would include an Early Retirement Incentive, in addition to the contractual Retirement Incentive, for those who may wish to retire before age 55.

~ Patti Lunden



Mac’s Musings....(from the Retiree side)

Season’s Greetings . .

. This tumble of words is being written on December 20, 1999 – between Thanksgiving and Christmas, at the end of Hanukkah, the start of Kwanza, just ahead of Ramadan, at the time of the winter solstice, a time that Dylan Thomas referred to as “close and holy darkness” which gave him peace. It is at this festive/reflective time of year that I tote things up and recognize how blessed I am in my

own family and in my extended VC family. Thanks.

Nobody asked me, but...

I was gladdened by the wonderful piece, “Coming Home,” by Patti Behr Lunden in the November 22 issue of the Echoes. It is indeed a special recognition of all VC teachers that so many of our former students have returned to the district to teach. It is a tribute to these former students-now-teachers, that they feel the importance and value of the

teaching profession at the place of their learning roots.

In my five years of supervising student teachers at the Mount, I also ran into very many former VC students now teaching in districts throughout the area: Newburgh, Pine Bush, Warwick, Florida, Minisink, Arlington, Wappingers,

(continued on page 13)

Mac's Musings...(continued from page 12)

Wallkill, Fallsburg, Clarkstown, Cornwall, Washingtonville, etc. My meetings (informal and formal) with alumni also have led to discovering former VC kids far and wide: a principal and several teachers in New Jersey, a high school principal in Kansas City, a student assistance counselor in Seattle, an elementary principal in Albany and several teachers in the Albany area, a teacher-mentor in South Africa and a former teacher in Gabon. Valley Central is certainly a cradle of teachers. In addition, many of our graduates are in the ranks of School Related Personnel: cafeteria workers, paras, secretaries and custodians – all doing terrific work. My hope is that all have the strength and openness to continue the work of the teaching – learning process. It is so important.

A recent conversation with Joe McLaughlin of Harrison reminded me of the quality of our NYSUT endorsed teacher-members of the TRS Retirement Board: Joe, Mike Corn, Sheila Salenger; and Josephine Davenport, the retired teacher member. All work hard as advocates and watchdogs for us.

Gayle Gridley's article in the November 22 issue reminds all of us that inequities continue to exist in the Tier system for retirement. These inequities exist as a result of

acts of the Legislature. Therefore, as Gayle suggested, a concerted effort by all of us, active and retired, is necessary to convince legislators that the tier system must be abolished. Write, e-mail, call your legislators and the speaker, the senate majority leader, and the "education" governor (oops!, there goes that cynicism again!) Remind them that we teach and we vote.

Along the same lines, I have received two responses from retired teachers (one in Virginia, one in Syracuse) to my letter in NY TEACHER regarding the *discrimination* towards retirees in the tier reinstatement program. (I could wax cynical again here, but will not.)

VCTA will sponsor resolutions at the NYSUT Delegate Assembly in 2000 regarding:

- 1) abolishing the Tier system so that active teachers will receive Tier I benefits on retirement, and
- 2) allowing should-be-eligible retirees to be reinstated to Tier I. Our hope is that the legislature will make law of these resolutions.

Thanks, Nellie

I was away at the time of Nellie Brower's death and would like to second Jim Lignori's words of praise in the Nov. 22 issue of Ech-

oes. Nellie, I always felt, was a very integral part of the high school English department, sharing with us her knowledge and expertise. She was selfless with her time and helped so many of our "scholars" with the dreaded research paper. She was a good friend to me, and I shall miss her. Thanks, Nellie.

A great party

A. J. Cimorelli, his teachers, and staff members threw a wonderful birthday party for Berea Elementary's 30th birthday in November. Special praise to Carol DeMicco, VCTA board member, for coordinating the event with Tony. Founding principal and old friend Dee Reiser was honored and served as principal-for-the-day. Many former and retired Berea teachers returned for the festivities. A good time was had by all.

As always, I welcome your letters:
6 JESSUP STR., WALDEN, NY 12586

**Until next time, keep pushing back the barriers of ignorance in whatever venue life finds you!
PEACE!**

~ Kevin McFadden

Would you like an Educators' Tax Guide 2000 Edition to help you with your taxes?

It is a quick and easy guide to tax planning and tax preparation and can answer your questions about IRAs and Roth IRAs, Hope Scholarships, Lifetime Learning Tuition Tax Credit, Deducting Travel, Home Office and Related Professional Expenses, and contains hundreds of tax saving tips and special benefits for educators.

If 50 or more people respond, the cost for this 136 page guide is \$1.95, if only 10 people respond the cost is still only \$3.95. (It lists for \$16.75) If you would be interested send form to the VCTA Office c/o Tim Brown, HS by January 31st.

NAME _____

BUILDING _____

The State of the State Message and the Executive Budget Proposal

In his State of the State message, Gov. George Pataki said, "...we must set the highest standards for student success, and settle for nothing less. We must expect every student to succeed and provide them with every opportunity to do so." Pataki proposed his "Teachers of Tomorrow" plan, a five point plan, to achieve this goal. Briefly stated the plan is similar to the Marshall Plan proposed by US Senator, Charles Schumer although Pataki proposes allowing talent in a subject to be substituted for skill in teaching. It seems the governor believes any artist, musician, journalist, or scientist who is successful in the field would naturally be a successful teacher. The governor also continues

to promote charter schools which "place the responsibility for good education where it belongs: not on a remote and rigid bureaucracy, but rather on teachers and staff who can work as a team and who are accountable to parents and the public". Gov. Pataki proudly touted the success of his STAR program and is now proposing that local school budget increases be set at "reasonable limits" unless 2/3 of the local taxpayers vote to approve it.

George Pataki has presented his Executive Budget which despite his stated concern for education, provides



no funding for Teacher Resource and Computer Training Center, no resources for Mentor Intern programs and insufficient general support for the public supports. The Governor also proposed a 20% cut in BOCES funding and eliminating Teacher Support Aid in the large cities.

Nor does the budget support a permanent COLA or revisit the issue of Tier Equity.

If Governor Pataki truly believes in his professed commitment to education, he has a strange way of showing it. It is not too early to start lobbying efforts on the budget, the governor's email is: gov.pataki@chamber.state.ny.us

The Wal-Mart / Voucher Connection

Going to Wal-Mart, Loew's or Sam's Club to shop usually means being able to find some good prices on a few products. It also means supporting a company that is anti-union. And it also means contributing money to vouchers and the privatization of schools movement.

John Walton, Wal-Mart heir, uses his money to push vouchers (and back George W. Bush for President). He serves on the board of directors of two organizations

leading the movement to funnel public school funds into private hands: CEO America and the Children's Scholarship Fund. Both groups push to put "public money into private hands" and

were given more than \$50 million dollars by Walton to get them started. Walton has a business interest in charter schools as he is the founder of School Futures

If you spend money at Wal-Mart, Loew's or Sam's you may be helping to fuel the charter school movement.

Research Foundation, a nonprofit group that manages charter schools in Calif. He is also the director of Education Alternatives Inc., a for profit corporation managing both charter and public schools which was unsuccessful in Baltimore and Hartford, CT. John Walton also founded the American Education Reform Foundation which spearheaded an effort to get the voucher initiatives in '93, '96, and '98 on the voting ballot in California.

~ Patti Lunden

Preventing Violence in our Schools *(continued from page three)*

There are many facets of developing a school safety plan after auditing the situation. What are the strengths of the existing plan? What are the weaknesses and how should we create objectives based on them? What kind of timetable should be set? Who should be responsible for identifying and working on these weak areas? Is there training involved (and when and where and should personnel be paid)? There are many more questions that can be asked, but rather than go on indefinitely, let me just say that this is

an area of much concern for us all, given the evolution of schools into their present form and the violent acts which seem to rear their ugly heads in all areas of our country on a more and more regular and random basis.

If you would like to see the packet of information I received at this workshop or discuss it with me or even bring it back to your building to show to your colleagues and administrators, please drop me a line or call the union telephone, 457-5899 and leave a mes-

sage. I'll be taking my findings to our cabinet meetings with Central Office in the next few months to see where we are in the scheme of things.

~ Jay Sussdorff

Contacting your Legislators

NYS Senate

Vincent Leibell, III – 37th SD (R)
SE Business Ctr. Suite 301,
Brewster, NY 10509
(914)279-3773 F: (914)279-7156

Joseph Holland – 38th SD (R)
150 Airport Executive Park
Nanuet, NY 10954
(914)425-3261 F:(914)425-2959

William Larkin, Jr. – 39th SD (R)
1093 Little Britain Rd.
New Windsor, NY 12553
(914)567-1270 F:(914)567-1276

John Bonacic – 40th SD (R)
297 Main Str.
New Paltz, NY 12561
(914)255-9656 F: (914)426-6948

Stephen Saland – 41st SD
22 IBM Rd. Kand. Bldg.
Poughkeepsie, NY 12561
(914)463-0840 F: (914)463-3438

NYS Assembly

Willis H. Stephens, Jr. – 91st AD (R)
110 Old Rt. 9
Carmel, NY 10512
(914)225-5038 F: (914)225-5160

Nancy Calhoun – 94th AD (R)
Stewart Airport, 2011 D St.
New Windsor, NY 12553
(914)564-1330 F:(914)564-1347

Howard Mills, III – 95th AD (R)
41 High Street
Goshen, NY 10940
(914)291-3531 F: (914)291-0992

Thomas Kirwan – 96th AD (R)
122 S. Plank Rd.
Newburgh, NY 12550
(914) 562-0888 F: (914) 561-5218

Joel M. Miller – 97th AD
22 IBM Rd. Kand. Bldg. S-104
Poughkeepsie, NY 12601
(914)463-1635 F: (914)463-1638
Jacob Gunther, III –98th AD (D)
20 Anawana Lake Rd.

Monticello, NY 12701
(914)794-5807 F: (914)794-5910

Patrick Manning – 99th AD
585 Rt. 376
Hopewell Jct., NY 12533
(914) 221-3400 F:(914)221-1131

Kevin Cahill – 101st AD
1 Albany Ave.
Kingston, NY 12401
(914)338-9610 F: (914)338-9590

NYS Governor

George Pataki (R)
Executive Chamber, State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224
(518)474-7516 F: (518) 473-7669
gov.pataki@chamber.state.ny.us

If you're like most people, you make New Year's resolutions only to break them soon after. NYSUT Member Benefits challenges all NYSUT members to make and keep one resolution: I resolve to draw up (or update) my will.

The importance of having a will to protect your loved ones and your wishes cannot be stressed enough. This is especially true if you have children under the age of 18 or if you have dependents with special needs. A will allows you to name a legal guardian for your children. It also ensures that your estate will be distributed according to your desires. Without a valid will, these very important, personal decisions are made by the state.

The NYSUT Legal Service Plan is a convenient vehicle to help you meet this challenge. It provides one simple will or update, free. A simple will provides for the proceeds of one's estate to be distributed to specifically named beneficiary (ies), with an alternate distribution plan in the event the primary beneficiary predeceases the writer of the will. With a simple will, proceeds are to be distributed outright with no conditions attached.



Placing a condition on a bequest requires a trust, which can be obtained from the Legal Plan for a fee.

The plan also gives you access to unlimited, toll-free legal advice from plan attorneys. These attorneys will make phone calls and write third-party correspondence, at no charge, to resolve your personal legal situations before they become major problems. In addition, when you enroll in this plan, you receive two coupons for free, hour-long consultations with a plan attorney.

Is there a real estate transaction coming up in your near future? Do you have any traffic violations? You can receive legal assistance on a variety of personal legal matters when you enroll in the Legal Service Plan. If the matter can't be resolved over the phone or with a letter, you will be referred to a plan attorney in your area who abides by the Legal Plan's discounted rates. Optional riders for

Elder Law services and for business protection can be added to your legal plan coverage.

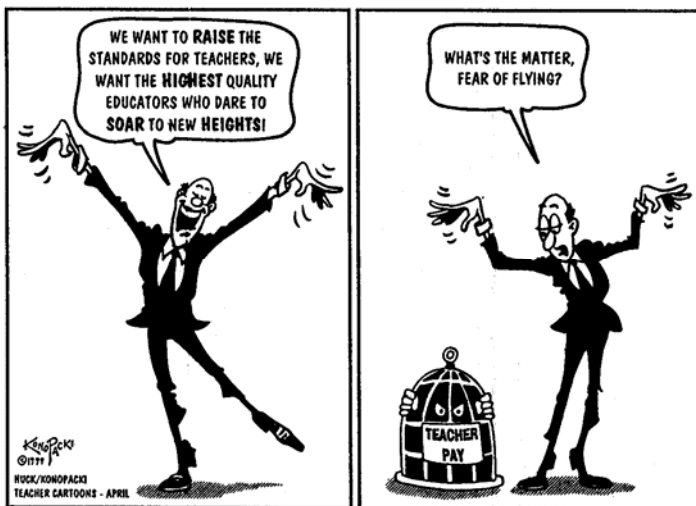
Don't put it off any longer! Make your will now. Enroll in the NYSUT Legal Service Plan and use it to help you, or do it another way, but just do it! The peace of mind you'll have once you have taken care of your loved ones is worth any unpleasantness associated with making up your

A Feeble Fable for the Worst of Times

Look to the Horizon. Bombs fall from the sky.

Once upon a time in the present a
 VERY KNOWLEDGEABLE man
 was called upon to invoke his prescient powers and
 discern the GREAT truth which would make all people
 equal in ability and talent.
 Though the manner of the magic he so pursued is secret,
 he, through a series of decisive (divisive) decrees
 did establish a binding and irrevocable program by which
 equality of all and for all would be established.
 "It is so obviously a solution,"
 sighed the sorely tried hero,
 "that I cannot fathom your need for me to develop this.
 Inasmuch as it obvious
 that all people can and should be of the same

design and attainments,
 we will impose the same taxes on all.
 These new taxes,
 set at the median level,
 shall be determined as due payment beginning this
 year.
 In this way, I will prove that all those
 commonly referred to as 'poor' do, indeed,
 possess the resources previously denied them".
 And through the science of smoke and mirrors,
 The merlin Mills made his escape.
 ~ Jean McMahon, HS



**It is greater work
 to educate a child,
 in the true and larger
 sense of the word,
 than to rule a state.**

~ William Ellery Channing

The 90's have certainly been a decade of economic prosperity in America, yet despite this, per pupil expenditure and teacher salary have remained stagnant while student enrollment has increased dramatically.

In 1997-98, per pupil spending was \$6174 while in 1998-99 spending was \$6252, which when adjusted for inflation is a 0.5% decline in spending.

During the 1990's teacher salaries increased only 1.9% when adjusted for inflation lagging far behind salaries in other professions.

~ From *Rankings and Estimates: Rankings of the State 1999 and Estimates of School Statistics, 2000*. Published by the NEA.

And on the 8th day...

On the 6th day, God created men and women. On the 7th day, he rested. Not so much to recuperate but rather to prepare himself for the work he was going to do on the next day. For it was on the 8th day that God created the First Teacher.

The Teacher, though taken from among men and women, had several significant modifications. In general, God made the Teacher more durable than other men and women.

The Teacher was made to arise at a very early hour and to go to bed no earlier than 11:00 p.m. – with no rest in between. The Teacher had to be able to withstand being locked up in an airtight classroom with twenty-two angels on a rainy Monday. And the Teacher had to be fit to correct term papers over spring break, and attend countless, seemingly endless meetings. The Teacher not only had to be able to do 80 hours worth of work in one day, but also had to continue to smile and maintain a good attitude while working.

Yes, God made the Teacher tough...but gentle too. The Teacher was equipped with soft hands to wipe away the tears of the neglected and lonely student...of those of the seven year old girl who doesn't have a mom.

And into the Teacher, God poured a generous amount of patience. Patience when a student asks to repeat the directions the teacher has just repeated three times. Patience when the kids forget their lunch money for the fourth day in a row. Patience when one-third of the class fails the test; patience when the text books haven't arrived yet, and the semester begins tomorrow.

And God gave the Teacher a heart slightly bigger than the average human heart. For the Teacher's heart had to be big enough to love the kid who screams, the kid who runs out of the classroom at the end of the year without so much as a "good-bye", let alone "thank you".

And lastly, God gave the Teacher an abundant supply of faith. For God

knew that the Teacher would always be believing. Believing that the kids would someday learn to spell...believing that Friday would come...believing that every parent would show up for the conference day...believing that each child would be successful at the end of the year.

When God finished creating the Teacher, he stepped back and admired the work of his hands. And God saw that the Teacher was good. Very good! And God smiled, for when he looked at the Teacher, he saw the future. He knew that the future is in the hands of the Teachers.

And because God loves Teachers so much, on the 9th day God created "snow days".

~ submitted by Erin Davis, Berea

... It has always seemed strange to me that in our endless discussions about education so little stress is ever laid on the pleasure of becoming an educated person, the enormous interest it adds to life. To be able to be caught into the world of thought—that is to be educated.”
~ Edith Hamilton

Loan Reduction or Deferral

If you are fulfilling a service obligation as part of the Paul Douglas Teacher Scholarship Program or had no outstanding FFEL Program loan on July 1, 1987 but did have an outstanding FFEL Program loan on July 1, 1993 you may be able to defer a Federal Stafford or Federal Supplemental loan anytime during the life of the loan for up to three years or you may be able to reduce the length of your service requirement if you are a Paul Douglas scholar.

To qualify for this deduction or referral, you must be teaching full-time in one of the US Dept. of Education approved shortage areas for the 1999-2000 school year:

Those areas are:

Bilingual Education (Elem./Sec.)	Sec-
Secondary Mathematics	Secondary
Sciences: Biology, Chemistry, Earth Science, Physics	Second Lan-
guage (Elem./Sec.)	Special Ed.
(Elem./Sec.): Teachers of Children w/Disabilities, Teachers of Blind/ Partially	Teachers Speech
Sighted Children, Teachers of Deaf/Hearing Handicapped,	TESOL
and Hearing Handicapped	Teachers of
Family and Consumer Science (Elem./Sec.)	Technology Edu-
cation	

If you think you qualify, contact Higher Ed. Services Corp. @ 518-473-1575



There are no greater advocates for children and education than teachers and teacher unions.

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NYSUT

www.nysut.org

Mid-Hudson Teacher Center

(914) 255-2885

<http://www.mhdc.dcboces.org>

Employee Assistance Program

1-800-962-7487

Visit us on the Web!

www.frontiernet.net/

~vcta

The VC Echoes is the official publication of the Valley Central Teacher's Association – Local 3076 and is published regularly throughout the school year.

Article Contributions or Letters to the Editor for the next issue should be sent to Patti Lunden at the HS by February 22, 2000.

Any articles submitted to the VC Echoes will also be posted on the VCTA Web page.

Personnel Files

Material which is derogatory to a teacher's conduct, service, character or personality may not be placed in a personnel file unless the teacher has had an opportunity to review the material and acknowledge the same material by affixing his/her signature on the copy being filed. That signature only indicates that the material has been reviewed and is not to be construed as an agreement with the material. In fact, the teacher has the right to comment in writing concerning the material and those comments must be attached to the file. If the material originates from a parent, the teacher has the right to meet with the parent in the presence of an administrator.

The teacher also has the right to examine the personnel file after making a reasonable request in the presence of the teacher's designated representative and the Superintendent or designee. However, the teacher cannot examine confidential letters of recommendation and communications prior to the date of hire. The teacher may also reproduce any material being examined at his/her own expense.

Article XI, Collective Bargaining Agreement



Reaching the Stars...

When an artist creates a work of art he/she has a vision of the finished product before he/she begins. As the work develops it is important to focus attention on the many areas of the work rather than concentrating on just one area lest that area become disproportionate to the whole. If the educational canvas is considered as a work of art in progress, are we focusing enough attention to all areas?

Certainly anyone involved in education in the past five to six years has noticed that one area of concern which has been given seemingly the most attention is Special Education. In this district, as well as other districts across the state, Special Education teachers seem to be the majority of new teachers hired; certainly Special Education is the majority area where new positions are being

created. Of course, this is good for those students but are we focusing the same amount of attention on our regular education students? Are their class sizes being considered with the same concern, their needs being given as much attention? What about our gifted and talented students, are there as many teachers/ programs to meet their needs? Certainly not when gifted/ talented programs are considered extra curricular and budget dispensable. Surely any genius or gifted and talented child is self motivated. Or is that what we delude ourselves to believe because that child doesn't need directions repeated more than once or always meets our expectations? Certainly there are the higher standards which were written to challenge even the brightest students to be considered. But when those standards are combined with heterogeneous grouping, are the brightest children being best served? When the idea comes down from the ivory tower and is put into practice (in the reality of a classroom which contains the brightest, the overachiever,

the average, the under-achiever, and the special needs child) are we reaching them all and if we are, at what level, especially when the added pressure of a zero tolerance for failure is factored in to the overall composition? Can the material to be taught be presented in such a way that meets the needs of all the children in one classroom at their own level? Or do the levels meet in the middle with the lower levels reaching a high standard while the higher levels remain static or actually settle for achieving at a lower level than their potential dictates?

We stand poised on the edge of the 21st century encouraging children to reach for the stars. Are we reaching those stars ourselves?

~ Patti Lunden