

BOE Presentation—June 14, 2010

We would like to thank the BOE and CO administration for moving the official tenure date to June 15 for this year's recipients. This action demonstrates an understanding of the devastation that the current financial crisis has had upon our staff and their families. This will clarify to any future employer that this district had complete faith in these employees and that their current status as laid-off/unemployed workers is due to the current financial crisis and their placement on the seniority list. To my knowledge, this is the only BOE in our area that has had the foresight to act accordingly, demonstrating compassion and public frustration over the decisions that have been necessitated by circumstances that are essentially out of their hands. I would also like to note that many of our BOE and CO administrators are wearing the AFT's pink heart pins, demonstrating solidarity with our "pink hearts, not pink slips" campaign that we will speak about later.

We have come tonight to honor 11 retirees, 11 twenty-five year employees and the 24 teachers who just received tenure. These are wonderful milestones that deserve our attention and accolades. Unfortunately, 9 of those just tenured have lost their job or been reduced. On top of that, 1 secretary and 30 paraprofessionals have lost their jobs. Add the 9 additional teaching positions and the one administrative position not being replaced and the loss to the district this year, alone, is 72 jobs. Not in the last 25 years of education, that we just celebrated, have we seen anything like this.

The other day we had occasion to run into one of the most well respected teachers VC has ever known, Kevin McFadden. He asked with deep concern, "How is it going?" We told him, "Education is bad right now, Kevin." With furrowed brow he corrected us, "No, Education is never bad. What is HAPPENING to education—that's bad."

We are asked to do more and more with less and less support from our nation's and state's leadership. Standards remain high, yet there is less funding and more mandates. How did we achieve what we have to date in this 21st century knowing that Nintendo, the infamous video gaming company, spends twice as much in research and development as does the US Dept. of Education? (Fisch)

Some people might ask, "What is one year in education?" The answer is: From kindergarten through senior year, every year is crucial. The ironic thing in all this is that our economy stands to be weakened by the lack of support nationally for public education.

Here at VC cuts have not only been made in areas like art, physical education and music but also in Social Studies, English, Math and Foreign Language—Kindergarten through twelfth grade. Building administrators now scramble to add desks to classrooms that cannot fit them, and are heartsick talking about the elimination of electives and addition of study halls.

Right now, \$23 billion dollars is being considered by our federal legislators in the Education Jobs Fund bill. \$1.4 billion would be allocated to NY State. This is the exact amount that has been cut by the state. During the banking crisis, \$700 billion was given to the banks to stabilize the financial markets and the sectors of the economy that depend upon them. While any economic recovery at this point is fragile at best, how much more fragile is our future without an investment in children? Money spent on education is an investment in our country's long-term economic and democratic well-being. It pays dividends to all, not simply to some.

We know as educators that we are currently preparing students for jobs that don't exist, using technologies that have yet to be invented, in order to solve problems we don't even know are problems

yet (Fisch). The burden of responsibility, no matter what our role in education, is enormous. So, what can we do in this place—right here at Valley Central—to make a difference? We can speak up and speak out. And make our voices heard on the state and federal level. What difference can these little pink heart pins make? Not much unless we are willing to make our voices heard for the children of our schools, this district, this state, this country.

We stand before you tonight not only to celebrate the achievements of our colleagues, but also to pay deference to the 40 teaching positions, 30 paraprofessional positions and 1 secretarial position that have been lost through reductions, resignations and retirements. Although not part of our unit, we stand before you to express our sadness for the custodial cuts, tech cuts and 1 administrative cut. The reality is the Valley Central budget has always been lean—and these cuts sting to the bone.

We stand before you to implore you that should any money be restored by the federal or state governments that you dedicate that money to the restoration of positions that will keep children our central focus. This community supported our budget. They voted in support of a tax levy that you as a BOE chanced to propose. We remember how you wrestled with that decision. We have been hit harder than any of our neighboring districts because historically Valley Central educators have been called to be the best with far less. Keeping the tax levy low, and relying on the state has cost us dearly this year. For the teachers who have been reduced or excessed, this should be the foundation of their life-long careers at VC we have always had one thing—Valley Central has always had heart. These teachers do not want to leave. Some of them are our own graduates and there is no room for them to stay. They should be the foundation upon which the future VC is built...and tonight that foundation is weaker because of the hole left by their absence as you are forced to abolish their positions due to a lack of funding.

For every \$60,000 you receive or find leftover in the budget or fund balance, a teacher can be restored to a classroom in Valley Central. Right now, the average class size in Social Studies and English is set to be 33-36 students for next school year. If a Social Studies teacher and an English teacher are restored to the schedule, those class sizes will then drop to 30. That may be only 3-6 students per classroom, however, it would positively affect 120 students overall.

Our members are passing out cards from the AFT. On the website listed, PinkHeartsnotPinkSlips, you can call your federal legislators directly to let them know they need to pass the Education Jobs Fund Act to keep America's teachers in the classrooms. You can join us for an education march on Washington DC being organized by the American Federation of Teachers on September 26th to tell our nation's leaders that children lose when programs are cut and class sizes increase. Our children only get one shot at an education. It is not our children's fault they are in school during a devastating economic crisis. (NEA)

A national emergency requires immediate action...and this is clearly an emergency. Our fiscal year begins July 1st, so we cannot afford to wait. We need to contact our state legislators who need to prioritize education and find the money to fund our schools. Our state has yet to touch the rainy day fund. Just like this district has a fund balance which shows good financial planning, the state also has a rainy day fund. You can contact your legislators easily through the Political Action link at our website, www.vcta.net. You can tell our elected official that it is raining out. Instead of adding desks to classrooms, we wish to restore programs and effective class sizes for our children.

We must speak up and speak out to everyone who will listen to restore the cuts to our children. We hope that you will stand with us in unity to rebuild the foundation of education at Valley Central by doing everything in your power to return as many of the 72 jobs lost back to the classroom so that we can all continue to put children center everyday at Valley Central.