



Leadership conference stresses unity

This year's NYSUT Fall Regional Conference was held in Corning, New York. Michele Wild, Donna Lamb, Linda Deforest, Bob Morse, and I were on hand to listen to a host of speakers and attend various informative workshops. We also had an opportunity to network with other union representatives from the around the Syracuse region.

Lee Cutler, NYSUT's secretary/treasurer, spoke of the need to get all members registered to vote. Voting is our voice and our biggest strength as a union. We need to elect people in political offices and on school boards who support public education. Lee also spoke adamantly about NYSUT's support of the Occupy Wall Street Movement and the need to elect people who will stand with the middle class against the Wall Street greed!

In unity there is strength and Lee encourages every member to volunteer at least two hours this year to work with their associations to create unity and help fight this anti-education movement sweeping over our country.

The NYSUT workshops focused on APPR, teacher advocacy, bargaining health insurance, new building representatives, experienced building representatives, and the local president's workshop. There were also mini sessions that included school finance 101, how unions organize, and NYSUT member benefits.

The APPR workshop dealt with virtually every aspect of the new teacher evaluations. † All of the recent clarifications and lawsuits from NYSED on APPR were discussed. The workshop suggested several new strategies for developing and implementing our new APPR.

The mini workshops also provided additional relevant information. The organizing labor workshop outlined the procedures and strategies used when initially organizing a labor group or when incorporating new labor groups into an existing union. School finance 101 reiterated some fundamental money matters that all organizations need

to be aware of.

During the weekend, the FTA was also presented with a "Glass Apple" for our support of last year's VOTE-COPE campaign. The FTA was the fifth highest donating local out of 81 locals. Awesome! Thanks again for your assistance in this important endeavor.

Finally, the FTA again did its part in assisting disaster relief for NYSUT members in need! The FTA, along with many other local teacher unions, brought gift baskets that were raffled off. Some of the raffled gifts

included an I-pad, I-touch, Home Depot and Wegman's gift certificates, and the FTA basket of cheer. The raffle netted over \$3300.00. We have all returned to Fulton with a better knowledge of how to serve the members of the Fulton Teachers' Association. Thanks again for giving us the opportunity to learn new skills, network with colleagues and strategize ways to strengthen our union!

Dave Derouchie

FTA President

"Voting is our voice and our biggest strength as a union. We need to elect people in political offices and on school boards who support public education."

Parents are a key to success

In recent years, we've been treated to reams of op-ed articles about how we need better teachers in our public schools and, if only the teachers' unions would go away, our kids would score like Singapore's on the big international tests. There is no question that a great teacher can make a huge difference in a student's achievement, and we need to recruit, train and reward more such teachers. But here is what some new studies are also showing: We need better parents. Parents more focused on their children's education can also make a huge difference in a student's achievement.

How do we know? Every three years, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, or O.E.C.D., conducts exams as part of the Program for International Student Assessment, or PISA, which tests 15-year-olds in the world's leading industrialized nations on their reading comprehension and ability to use what they've learned in math and science to solve real problems; the most important skills for succeeding in college and life. America's 15-year-olds have not been distinguishing themselves in the PISA exams compared with students in Singapore, Finland and Shanghai.

To better understand why some students thrive taking the PISA tests and others do not, Andreas Schleicher, who oversees the exams for the O.E.C.D., was encouraged by the O.E.C.D. countries to look beyond the classrooms. So starting with four countries in 2006, and then adding 14 more in 2009, the PISA team went to the parents of 5,000 students and interviewed them "about how they raised their kids and then compared that with the test results" for each of those years, Schleicher explained to me. Two weeks ago, the PISA team published the three main findings of its study:

Fifteen-year-old students whose parents often read books with them during their first year of primary school show markedly higher scores in PISA 2009 than students whose parents read with them infrequently or not at all. The performance advantage among students whose parents read to them in their early school years is evident regardless of the family's socioeconomic background. Parents' engagement with their 15-year-olds is strongly

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You and your vote...every one counts!

By *Pat Kush*
Oswego County Teachers President

Whoever says that my vote doesn't count" is just giving a poor excuse for not exercising their most important democratic power. It is the people exercising their right to vote that makes a democracy. Just look at what happened this past November in Ohio. Through the power of the vote people were able to make change possible; and score a victory for the middle class

The citizens of Ohio took back their state with a historic vote on Nov. 8 to repeal Senate Bill 5, which stripped public employees of their collective bargaining rights. The vote, which marked the first time that the collective bargaining rights of public employees were upheld on a statewide ballot, sent a clear message that Ohioans WOULD NOT sit idly by while politicians scapegoat hard-working public employees for an economic crisis they did not create.

"The repeal of Senate Bill 5 was a victory for every teacher who helps a struggling child, every firefighter who races into a burning building, every snowplow operator who ensures safe travel for others, and every community that relies on these vital public services," AFT president Randi Weingarten says. "Ohioans said loud and clear that they would not turn their backs on the people who watch theirs. The historic citizens' veto was a victory for all Ohioans, and for all Americans who care about democracy and fair play."

"Those who would dare try to strip collective bargaining rights away from hard-working citizens will now think twice," she adds. "Ohio voters made it clear to them that there is a price to pay for turning your back on the middle class." (November 8, 2011 *AFT Leader Net*)

The election victory resulted from an incredible grass-roots campaign. More than 10,000 volunteers collected 1.3 million signatures to place Issue 2 (Senate Bill 5) on the ballot, and then worked to make sure their families, friends and neighbors under-

stood what was at stake and voted. In the end the Senate Bill was defeated by 63% of the voters. This was a great example of the democratic process in action.

Next stop: Wisconsin and the recall of a governor.

" The citizens of Ohio took back their state with a historic vote on Nov. 8 to repeal Senate Bill 5, which stripped public employees of their collective bargaining rights."

An important (and often overlooked) Teacher Retirement System Benefit

If you or another NYSTRS member is seriously ill, or experiencing a potentially life threatening surgery or procedure, then taking care of the people who survive is a concern. Understanding the benefits available through the NYS Teacher's Retirement System is one part of securing the future for any beneficiaries you have.

Most of us are familiar with the Inservice Death Benefit available to system members. The basics are:

Tier 1: Generally equal to one-twelfth of your last 12 months of regular compensation for each year of service, to a maximum of three times your earnings. This is the basic benefit there are case by case variations.

Tier 2-5: Generally equal to one year's salary after a year of service, and it increases to a maximum of three years' salary after three or more years of service. After age 60 the benefit is reduced by 4% per year, up to a maximum reduction of 40% at age 70.

Here is where you may be able to secure a larger benefit for your beneficiary. If you have more than 10 years of NYS service you can file for a disability retirement benefit and select the Largest Lump Sum benefit payout. This has to be completed prior to death and can be submitted before going in for a surgical procedure or while experiencing a life threatening illness. The key is it must be submitted, postmarked, prior to the date of death. **IMPORTANT:** You are not completing the entire application, you would be submitting an incomplete application without a retirement date. This application can be withdrawn at anytime.

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**Please send submissions
for the next**

Bits & Pieces

to

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Please submit contributions to the editor at GRBHS or e-mail to: lsenecal@twcny.rr.com Views expressed in Bits & Pieces are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the FTA.

Contract Corner:

If only, if only, if only...

*Submitted by Terry Merritt
First Vice-President*

The economy is in a downward spiral! Riots are erupting across the country during Occupy Wall Street protests! Millionaires are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer! The world is in turmoi...and teachers are being scapegoated for many of these ills of our society.

Teacher pensions are being threatened, seniority rights are disappearing, and teachers are being held accountable for ensuring that all children reach unattainable benchmarks while unions are being dismantled! What is this country coming to? What is the solution?

Well...If only politicians would realize that teachers are not the bad guys! We did not cause this financial crisis, corporate greed

did, so stop trying to blame this crisis on the backs of middle-class Americans. We are hard-working, taxpaying, caring individuals who wake up every morning, dedicated to doing the best we can do to provide for our families, the students whom we serve, and

have severe disabilities, come from broken homes, live in filth and poverty, are violent, do not speak English, or simply do not value education. The new APPR Teacher Evaluation System is deeply demoralizing to educators. The difference teachers make on stu-

“We did not cause this financial crisis, corporate greed did, so stop trying to blame this crisis on the backs of middle-class Americans.”

our communities.

If only the New York State Education Department would realize that teachers are going above and beyond every day to educate ALL children including those students who

students' lives is much more than just the sum of their test scores!

If only parents would stop making excuses for their children and allow teachers to guide their children down the path to a better life. Parents need to let their children make choices, fail and accept the consequences for their actions.

Failure builds character, responsibility and teaches life lessons. Parents need to stop making excuses for why their children aren't succeeding and start focusing on finding solutions.

If only we could all realize that our students need all of us; educators, elected officials, community leaders, and parents working together and investing in our schools to truly build a better future for our children!

Remember: United We Stand Stronger!

FTA short takes for December

* Reminder - Retirement letters are due by December 31st for the \$18,000 notification payment. Any questions contact Terry or Dave.

* Thank you to all those who helped celebrate School Related Professionals Day on November 15.

* Mike Conners falls into the very elite group of coaches in New York State as he approaches his 500 career win on Wednesday. Great Job Mike!

* Our NYSUT/NEA grant will be concluding this spring! Check My Learning plan frequently for current free course offerings!

* American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Robert G. Porter Scholars Program

This program offers four 4-years, \$8,000 post-secondary scholarships to students who are dependents of AFT members, as well as 10 one-time \$1,000 grants to AFT members to assist with their continuing education. Deadline is March 31, 2012. Additional information is available at: www.aft.org/aftplus/scholarships

* AFT sponsored movie entitled *American Teacher* coming to a theatre near you!

* Do we pay our teachers appropriately for what they're worth to society? AFT President Randi Weingarten asked and answered that question in *US News and World Report*.

* National Education Association also sponsors a movie coming out shortly pertaining to a teacher leading school improvement entitled *Mitchell 20*. More information can be obtained at : <http://www.mitchell20.com/about/>

* Take a moment and set up an account on the New York State Teachers Retirement system. You just need your NYSTRS member number to set up the account. WWW.NYSTRS.org

* NYSUT Representative Assembly is April 25- 28 in Buffalo, NY.

* Don't forget to spend you flex money for 2011

Submitted by Dave Derouchie

Death benefit (from page 2)

Why do this?????? If you die you would be considered retired and your beneficiary would receive the Largest Lump Sum benefit plus 1/2 the In Service Death Benefit. (Retirees receive 50% of the Inservice Death Benefit in effect at retirement during the 1st year they are retired.)

Check your Member Profile (received in the mail recently?) to see how this would change the benefit for your beneficiaries. In my case my family would receive roughly \$70,000 more.

If you have any basic questions or are wondering what steps have to be taken feel free to ask me (Patrick Armet) or Paul Burdick. The best way to get your specific information is to call the NYSTRS at (800) 348-7298, Ext. 6010.

Parental involvement is a key ingredient

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associated with better performance in PISA. Schleicher explained to me that, “just asking your child how was their school day and showing genuine interest in the learning that they are doing can have the same impact as hours of private tutoring. It is something every parent can do, no matter what their education level or social background.”

For instance, the PISA study revealed that “students whose parents reported that they had read a book with their child ‘every day or almost every day’ or ‘once or twice a week’ during the first year of primary school have markedly higher scores in PISA 2009 than students whose parents reported that they had read a book with their child ‘never or almost never’ or only ‘once or twice a month.’ On average, the score difference is 25 points, the equivalent of well over half a school year.”

Yes, students from more well-to-do households are more likely to have more involved parents. “However,” the PISA team found, “even when comparing students of similar socioeconomic backgrounds, those students whose parents regularly read books to them when they were in the first year of primary school score 14 points higher, on average, than students whose parents did not.”

The kind of parental involvement matters, as well. “For example,” the PISA study noted, “on average, the score point difference in reading that is associated with parental involvement is largest when parents read a book with their child, when they talk about things they have done during the day, and when they tell stories to their children.” The score point difference is smallest when parental involvement takes the form of simply playing with their children.

These PISA findings were echoed in a recent study by the National School Boards Association’s Center for Public Education, and written up by the center’s director, Patte Barth, in the latest issue of *The American School Board Journal*.

The study, called “Back to School: How parent involvement affects student achievement,” found something “somewhat surprising,” wrote Barth: “Parent involvement can take many forms, but only a few of them relate to higher student performance. Of those that work, parental actions that support children’s learning at home are most

likely to have an impact on academic achievement at school.

“Monitoring homework; making sure children get to school; rewarding their efforts and talking up the idea of going to college. These parent actions are linked to better attendance, grades, test scores, and preparation for college,” Barth wrote. “The study found that getting parents involved with their children’s learning at home is a more powerful driver of achievement than parents attending P.T.A. and school board meetings,

volunteering in classrooms, participating in fund-raising, and showing up at back-to-school nights.”

To be sure, there is no substitute for a good teacher. There is nothing more valuable than great classroom instruction. But let’s stop putting the whole burden on teachers. We also need better parents. Better parents can make every teacher more effective.

By Thomas L. Friedman

(reprinted from *The New York Times*, Nov. 19, 2011)

“To be sure, there is no substitute for a good teacher. There is nothing more valuable than great classroom instruction. But let’s stop putting the whole burden on teachers. We also need better parents.”

That is what we do!

With the demands, expectations and stress levels all rising, we continue to do the right thing. Implementation of the Common Core Standards, learning a new grading system in record time, continued work for a new APPR and the everlasting and ongoing stress of doing more with less has a way of creating stress for many of us but ÖÖ.. that is what we do!

This year alone, the FTA has saved the District more than \$650,000! We started with a salary freeze this current year which saved the District more than \$324,000 along with the additional savings of social security and teacher retirement systems payments. The FTA has also agreed to use the NYSUT teacher evaluation rubric for our APPR which saved the District over \$240,000 as compared to using the Pearson rubric. The Pearson model is much more user friendly but cost prohibitive. The cost of training alone for this model exceeded \$250,000. The NYSUT rubric training, on the other hand, is less than \$10,000! The committee is currently looking at the 97 indicators included in the NYSUT rubric and assigning weight values that are fair and consistent across the board because...that is what we do.

Also, nothing says trial by fire (and adds yet another layer of stress) more than implementing the Common Core Standards this

coming winter and changing our teaching styles to correlate with the new teaching standards. Creating and implementing the new ELA and math instructional units by February has been quite a chore in itself. The units have been selected and work is well underway, even though the assessments of the Common Core Standards will not begin until next year.

The officers and I certainly hope that the District and the Board of Education recognize the hard work, dedication, and financial decisions the FTA has made to help move the District forward and help us to become compliant with the new NYS regulations. We pride ourselves on creating a positive, yet rigorous, learning environment for our students, while staying on top of the numerous new state initiatives. Needless to say, it’s been hectic and everyone’s plate is overflowing this school year, but we are all doing our best to meet the needs of our students and the ever-changing requirements from New York State because that is what we do!

By Dave Derouchie

Happy Holidays