

VC ECHOES

An AFTCA Award Winning Publication

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From the President:

Vote Your Conscience, But Consider The Ramifications

As election day nears, VCTA members will be faced with one of the most important decisions and actions that any free member of a democratic society can be faced with: the election of the leaders of the most influential free nation in the world. It is important that all members of a free society take an active role in the election process. Many of us take this right for granted, forgetting the sacrifices that were made to ensure this democratic tradition of active involvement - a tradition still unrealized in many parts of the world.

I, along with other members of your VCTA leadership, encourage all VCTA members to vote your conscience with pride. Nevertheless, it

would be irresponsible of this leadership to ignore the impact that any election might have on the educational process and product. This said, I would like to highlight the endorsement process as outlined by NYSUT President Tom Hobart in the October 11, 2000 New York Teacher. "Our rigorous endorsement process ignores political affiliation, putting a premium on candidates from all parties—Democrat or Republican—who truly understand and support the concerns of our diverse membership. From our legislative department's careful monitoring of incumbents'



voting records to our NYSUT leaders' biennial endorsement conference, the endorsement test is the same: Which candidates—regardless of political affiliation, Democrat or Republican—understand the workplace issues and the health and safety concerns of our members and their (continued on pg. 3)

Few will have the greatness to bend history itself; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of these acts will be written the history of this generation.

~Robert F. Kennedy

Annual Professional Performance Review: Valley Central Adopts a Plan

This year teacher evaluation will be a little different, at least for tenured teachers. As part of a change in the Commissioner's regulations, all school districts

were required to have an Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) plan in place by the beginning of this school year. Basically, tenured teachers will now be evaluated by the tradi-

tional observation method of classroom visit only once every three in years. During the other two years of the cycle the teacher develops and carries out a plan for professional growth which may be individualized. (continued on pg. 10)

Educator's Tax Guide Offer, pg. 10



AFT members: Compare the candidates for president

Al Gore

George W. Bush

VOUCHERS

Al Gore has consistently opposed vouchers that weaken public schools: *"I will never support private school vouchers, which would drain public money away from public education."*

- Speech in Philadelphia, 7/5/00

VOUCHERS

George W. Bush supports vouchers that divert public tax dollars to private schools. He also favors converting Title I— which targets educational aid to the disadvantaged — into a voucher system.

-USA Today, 9/3/99

SCHOOL MODERNIZATION

Gore supports a federal initiative to help districts repair and modernize schools, and to build new schools.

-AFT QuEST speech on 7/10/99

SCHOOL MODERNIZATION

Bush opposes using federal funds to help local districts repair and modernize schools. *"I don't believe the federal government should be building classrooms across the country,"* Bush said.

-Speech in Wisconsin on 3/31/00

CLASS SIZE & REFORM

Gore fought hard to use federal funds to help local districts hire teachers so that class sizes can be reduced. He strongly backs high standards that are "not just a mandate to test" students. Gore favors better teacher training and other commonsense reforms.

-Speech in Chicago, 7/6/00



CLASS SIZE & REFORM

Despite his calls for high standards, Bush signed a Texas law allowing school districts to opt out of class size limits and other standards. A recent Rand study cited Texas as one of many states in which test scores have risen, although Bush was Texas' governor for only two of the seven years that Rand studied.

-Senate Bill 1 of 1995; Rand Report, 7/31/00

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Gore has proposed expanding Medicare to provide a national prescription drug plan. Gore's plan enables seniors to reduce their out-of-pocket prescription drug costs by 50%.

-Gannett News Service, 11/9/99

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Bush believes the best place for older Americans to turn for coverage is private insurance companies. For this reason, he has no plan to offer prescription drug benefits.

-www.georgewbush.com

PATIENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

Gore has helped lead the fight for the Patients' Bill of Rights, which gives patients the right to appeal if an HMO denies them or their children the treatment or specialist they need.

-Speech in Atlanta on 6/1/00

PATIENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

Bush opposed the national Patients' Bill of Rights. Instead, Bush supported a different plan that would have left 81% of Americans uncovered.

-CNN, 7/14/99



SOCIAL SECURITY

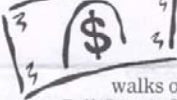
Gore has pledged to set aside 60% of the budget surplus to save Social Security. Gore opposes raising the age at which Americans can begin collecting their benefits.

-Des Moines Register, 4/4/99

SOCIAL SECURITY

Bush proposes "private" accounts that would end Social Security's guaranteed benefit. Instead, retirement benefits would rise or fall based on the stock market. Bush says he is open to raising the age when retirees can start collecting Social Security.

-Des Moines Register, 12/25/99



COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY

Gore believes a college education should be open to Americans from all walks of life. During the Clinton-Gore years, Pell Grants for needy students have risen 43%.

-U.S. Dept. of Education data, year 2000

COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY

As governor, Bush played down the issue. In 1998, Bush even told a reporter: *"Higher education is not a priority."* Since Bush was elected governor, the percentage of young people going on to college in Texas has risen only 0.1%.

-San Antonio Express-News, 3/22/00

GUN SAFETY

In March, a strong stand by Gore and the president led the nation's largest gunmaker to agree to provide "trigger locks" on each gun and to stop making guns that are fingerprint resistant. Gore believes gun shows should perform the same background checks that other gun dealers perform.

-ABC News, 3/17/00; Speech in Florida on 3/14/00

GUN SAFETY

Bush signed a law permitting Texans to carry concealed weapons in public places. Today, more than 203,000 Texans have "conceal" permits. Bush opposes expanding background checks to gun shows. Bush's vice-presidential running mate, Dick Cheney, *opposed* a bill in Congress to ban "terrorist guns" that can evade metal detectors.

-Washington Post, 3/16/00, House of Rep. votes, 1998



YOUR UNION VOICE

Gore strongly favors the right of education employees to elect a union to negotiate on their behalf. Gore opposes "paycheck deception" laws that limit your union's ability to fully represent you on legislative and political issues.

-Los Angeles Times, 10/14/99

YOUR UNION VOICE

Bush firmly *opposes* bargaining laws that give education employees the right to choose a union to negotiate for them. He supports "paycheck deception" laws that strictly limit your union's ability to represent you on legislative and political issues.

-Texas AFT Questionnaire, 1998; USA Today, 3/16/99



Printed by NYSUT

From the President:**Vote your conscience, but consider the Ramifications (continued from page one)**

families? The endorsement process is open and democratic (with a small "d"). And it doesn't occur in a vacuum. Along with organized labor in new York state and across the nation, we're moving forward together. . . The endorsement process is demanding and detail-driven. And it works. Consider all that was accomplished just in the last session of the state Legislature—the Safe Schools Act, a permanent Cost-of-Living

Adjustment for pensioners, a record state aid package for public schools and assistance to many financially troubled school districts. It couldn't have happened without your efforts, your contributions and most importantly your support of lawmakers who your NYSUT colleagues have agreed can best represent all of us."

One of the most common misconceptions among VCTA/NYSUT members is that organized labor and therefore, NYSUT, endorses Democrats exclusively. Nothing could be further from the truth. NYSUT, for example has endorsed eleven (11) Republican candidates and four (4) Democratic candidates for the Mid-Hudson Region's local races this year:

Congress: Benjamin Gilman (R), Larry Graham (D), Maurice Hinchey (D)

NY Senate: John Bonacic (R), Vincent Liebell, III (R), Bill Larkin (R), Steve Saland (R)

NY Assembly: Kevin Cahill (D), Nancy Calhoun (R), Jacob Gunther (D), Tom Kirwin (R), Patrick Manning (R), Joel Miller (R),

Howard Mills (R), Willis Stephens, Jr. (R)

Additionally, in the race for U.S. Senate and President, there are sharp contrasts between Hillary Clinton and Rick Lazio, and Al Gore and George Bush when it comes to the key issues of education, health care, and fair labor practices. For detailed summaries of these candidates positions, look in recent issues of the New York Teacher magazine.

Rick Lazio has recently run a television ad in which he promises to test teachers every five years to ensure they measure up. Perhaps Lazio is so unaware of New York education standards and policies that he doesn't know that all teachers must have a master's degree for permanent certification. Additionally, teachers are observed, evaluated, and professionally dissected by management and parents

yearly. New teachers will soon be required to participate in 175 hours of professional development every five years. The educational system itself is one of the most publicly evaluated institutions in America. I am certainly not afraid of one more inane test to demonstrate my worthiness to be in the classroom, but perhaps Rick Lazio would truly win the trust of voters by proposing a new bill that would require all politicians to be polygraphed every five years to ensure their truthfulness!

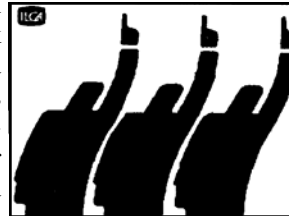
George Bush has been touting himself as the savior of the Texas education system and promises to do the same for the rest of the country. Mr. Bush, however, has conspicuously omitted some important pieces of information from his campaign speeches and sound bites.

First, the biggest educational gains realized in Texas took place between 1990 and 1996. George Bush, however, did not become governor

of Texas until 1994. Those gains were the result of policies championed by Bush's predecessor. Second, many of the improvements in student achievement touted by Bush are more than suspect. Although overall improvements on Texas state exams were realized, these same Texas students performed conspicuously worse on national exams. Is it possible George Bush and Richard Mills are having an intense e-mail affair? Finally, Bush has voiced his desire to silence the voice of teacher unions and, therefore, teacher political activism.

Regardless of your choice for president, US Senate, or the various New York state political offices, it is important that you actively involve yourself in the election process. Many of you will consider and weigh issues outside of the NYSUT endorsement criteria (i.e., education, labor, health). For example, gun control, abortion, military spending, taxes, foreign policy, etc. will heavily factor into voting decisions for many Americans. Whatever your priorities may be, I hope that you will continue to factor education, labor, and health into this decision. **Remember:** *There are no greater advocates for children and education than teachers and teacher unions.*

~ Tim Brown, President



One of the most common misconceptions... is that ... NYSUT endorses Democrats exclusively.

On Good Health and a Safe Environment: Update on the Bond Project

As part of the November 7th conference day, Dr. Nugent and Mr. Roden will bring us up-to-date on the bond projects with a building review of what will be done. This updated list includes items carried over from the original proposition and deletions and changes from that same list since it was revised and resubmitted. Any project of this magnitude is going to have glitches and raise concerns. Be patient and keep the long range goals in sight. If there are any concerns, you can speak to your principal and/or contact me. Scott Call is overseeing the total project, and I will be our liaison with you.

Summary of individual projects:

HS/ MS Projects Included:

- 16 additional classrooms (6 science, 3 regular, 4 BOCES rooms, 4 BOCES offices.
- 4 classes added to MS
- MS science room renovation
- Removal of asbestos /lighting in MS lobby area
- Modify MS cafeteria serving lines
- Cafeteria cooler
- Renovate HS chemistry lab
- Renovate boys' and girls' shower rooms
- Renovate boiler room (upstairs)
- Replace bleachers in main gym
- Expand and blacktop driveways

Any project of this magnitude is going to have glitches and raise concerns.

- Handicap lift-new

Projects not included:

- MS and HS cafeteria additions
- Additional gym station
- Awning/Shading for MS 2nd floor
- Renovate outside bleachers

Berea

- 8 classroom addition
- Additional parking area
- Reconstruct sidewalks
- Create playground space
- Add cafeteria serving line

- Handicap lift-new
- Renovate toilets-new
- Project Not Included
- 2nd floor addition for BOCES

Montgomery

- 12 classroom addition
- Gym expansion
- Renovate administration area
- Renovate boys' & girls' bathroom
- Revise parking areas
- Add to existing cafeteria
- Expand nurse's office-new

East Coldenham

- Window walls
- New exterior doors



- Serving line in cafeteria – new

Maybrook

- Additional road ways/parking
- Resurface playground areas
- Paint and lighting in gym areas

- Retaining wall for driveway
- Handicap entrance modifications

Walden

- Roof replacement
- Convert gym balcony to storage
- Renovate play area

Project Not Included

- Additional cafeteria serving line

General

- Upgrade electrical to accommodate technology
- Wire each room for technology

Again, thanks for your patience and look forward to the positive effects these items will bring to us and our students.

~ Jay Sussdorff
Vice- President

**The Annual
VCTA Fall Fest
was held on Friday, Octo-
ber 20th from
3:00 – 6:00 PM
at Stony Ford Country
Club.**

**Surrounded by
incredible views,
our newest members to
our retirees were able to
enjoy an afternoon getting
to know each other better.**



From the High School: Lori Nahow, Eliz Bassett, Antoinette Oakes, Julie Cole, Jenn Lynn, Penny Centers, Barbara Palmer, JoAnn Ryder, Eileen Purcell and Gail Blaine.



Waiting to Retire: John Solan; Newly Retired: Derek Taylor; Fully Retired: Joe Bayno!



From the Middle School: Kim Brosius, her son, Tyler and Tammy Coleman



From the High School: Beverly Risco, Martha Santos, Elaine Aponte, Angela Cologne And Bill McKreevy



From Montgomery: Kathleen Takvam, Toni Sperry, and Jane Dionne



VCTA Officers: Secretary Laurie Hey, Treasurer John Bonagura, Vice President Rich Steger, and President Tim Brown.

VCTA Fall Fest:

Winner of the Door Prize:
 Ron Hebbard – a \$30 gift certificate to Copperfield’s restaurant

Member of the VCTA hired the most years ago:
 Tom Kneiser, retired HS Math/Computer
 Hired in 1964

Building with the highest percentage of attendance:
 High School



From Berea: Pat Darney, Allen Takvam, Sara Ackerson, Joanne Daniels and Erin Davis



From Montgomery: Scott Brown, Lori Zengal and Mike Gonzalez



From East Coldenham: Ginger Ethier, John Bonagura, Donna Barletta, Pasquale Leo, and Bob Thompson

Commission Urges National Effort To Recruit Math, Science Teachers

A year-long study by a federal panel of educators, researchers, politicians, and business leaders has concluded that the United States must launch an all-out effort to recruit and retain talented math and science teacher, as it did during the space race a generation ago. The panel, headed by former astronaut and U.S. Senator John Glenn, says governments at all levels should contribute \$5 billion to start the professional-development programs needed to attract new, and keep current, teachers. The figure does not include the cost to school districts of pay raises for "scandalously underpaid" teachers, nor the cost of continuing the new programs the group proposes.

The report, "Before It's Too Late," recommends that:

*Each state assess what it needs to do to offer teachers the professional development necessary for teaching math and science;

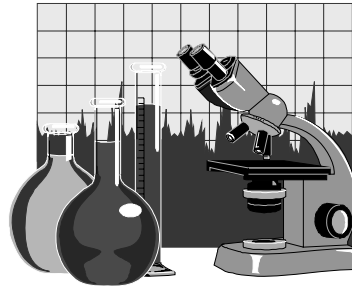
*The federal and state governments finance two-week summer institutes that enable teachers to supplement their knowledge of their subjects;

*Schools create "inquiry groups" that offer continual opportunities for teachers to sharpen their skills;

*Local school boards offer financial incentives for recent college graduates to choose teaching over jobs in

private industry, where math and science majors typically can earn twice as much as in teaching. Critics of the "Glenn Commission" report note that it does not make any recommendations concerning curriculum; that it relies too much on the existing system, instead of thinking "outside the box"; and that there is no indication of where the necessary money will come from to implement the recommendations.

~ *The Bottom Line*,
A NYSUT publication



Evening Parent Conferences are a contractual obligation.

*If you miss the evening Parent conferences,
the administration can require you to hold a make up session
for two and a half hours on another evening.*

Lazio Uses Private School To Make Advertisement Promising Support For Public Schools

There he is, talking about his support for public education surrounded by kids in a classroom.

U. S. Senate candidate Rick Lazio's latest TV ad. What's wrong with this picture?

The ad was filmed at a private religious school on Long Island. Voters should wonder if it's these kinds of schools - private and religious - Lazio means when he

says, "I think 95% of federal education money should go right here to the classroom, instead of being wasted on bureaucrats."

In any case, the ad serves to highlight a key policy difference between Lazio and the NYSUT-endorsed Senate candidate, Hillary Clinton: Lazio voted for vouchers as a Congressman and supports the use of public tax dollars for private and religious

schools. Clinton does not.

~
The Bottom Line



A NYSUT publication

Highlights of October VCTA Executive Council Meeting

Elementary teachers may leave at 3:30. (East Coldenham teachers at 3:40) We encourage staff to help out as necessary.

Split lunches are a violation of State Education Law. Tim Brown has sent a letter on behalf of the VCTA stating that teachers employed more than five hours per day are entitled to receive a minimum 30-minute, uninterrupted, duty-free time for lunch.

A side agreement has been signed outlining the provisions for Mrs. Linda Doty to serve as Academic Eligibility Advisor for the 2000-2001 school year in exchange for 2 duty-free periods. This agreement is non-precedent setting and will expire at the end of the current school year. Future advisors will be compensated at the appropriate stipend, according to the Extracurricular Activities Schedule- Appendix B of the Collective Bargaining Agreement. This agreement does not limit the right of the District to assign personnel outside the teachers' unit to this position.

When calling the sub caller regarding a conference day, please indicate the name of the conference.

If you have any questions regarding the NYS Teachers' Retirement System, please send them via interoffice mail to NYSTRS reps: Diana Shiner (Walden), John Solan (HS), or Kathy Takvam (Montgomery).

Coaching and Extracurricular pay schedules stipends are to be paid for the Fall Season on 11/9/00, the Winter Season on 3/16/01, and the Spring Season on 6/8/01 for those coaches who have selected the lump sum payment option.

Tim Brown stated that over 60 staff members are now utilizing payroll deduction for VOTE COPE. Hopefully, we can increase participation. A letter from Lou Cammarosano, Regional Campaign Coordinator recognized the contributions of the VCTA members. VOTE/COPE depends on our continued effort.

Forty members of AFL-CIO SEIU Local 200B were fired without cause and replaced by non-union workers.

Tim Brown requested that we keep in mind that whenever we see another local that needs support in some form, that we try to do whatever is in our power to support that group. Mike Steele represents the VCTA at the Mid-Hudson Central Labor Council. This is important, because when we have needed it, the union workers in our district have been very supportive.

Jane Dionne Personal Day Grievance was arbitrated on October 5, decision is pending. Katie Baloga Personal Day Grievance is scheduled for November 9, 2000. Laurie Hey Personal Day Grievance has been delayed pending a Clarkstown decision.

AIS is an important elementary-level issue. Tim Brown has sent a letter to Dr. Nugent questioning why AIS is a supervisory duty at the elementary level and a teaching assignment at the secondary level. The assignment to AIS is teaching and is replacing a previously assigned non-teaching supervisory duty at the elementary level. We believe that giving the AIS assignment to elementary teachers is a change in terms of employment and must be negotiated.

Jay Sussdorf reported that a teacher has been split between the Middle School and the High School teaching 7 or 8 periods a day, a violation of the bargaining agreement. With VCTA intervention, this teacher should be back to 6 teaching periods.

Master schedules from elementary schools do not list classroom teachers' class-by-class schedules, specials and duties. We do not know who has been given AIS, when these assignments are being given, or if these assignments are being disguised under some other name. We need to find out what teachers' specific classroom schedules are. Tim Brown requested that building reps take a look at their building's master schedule. We need to know when each teacher receives planning time, lunch,



Meet the Executive Council

Mary Bleau
Middle School Rep.
Foreign Language Teacher

Mary has been on Executive Council for six years. She is co-chairperson of the Grievance Committee, and she has served on two Action (Negotiation) Committees.

and what specific duties are being assigned. We plan to be vigilant so that the length of the school day and teacher work load are not being increased. When schedules change from month to month those changes should be forwarded to the VCTA.

The Times Herald Record is sponsoring an Adult Spelling Bee to raise money for the NIE. Building Reps have information

The VCTA will nominate Kathy Sahl for New York State Teacher of the Year.


Jay Sussdorff was elected to serve on the Board of the Benefit Trust.

If the health coverage buyout is taken that it does not affect dental and optical coverage.

It is necessary to remember to notify Central Office if your address changes, either as an active member or retired member.

When someone with coverage reaches the age of 65, the person buying coverage is no longer eligible for Medi-Choice, but only eligible for the 80-20 indemnity coverage. Kevin has asked Mr. Roden to bring this concern to Orange-Ulster.

(continued on page nine)



Cold and Flu Season is almost upon us...

When you call in to the sub caller because you will be out, whether you reach the machine or Mrs. Biggs, you need only say:

**“I will be out on (date).
This is a sick (or personal, death in family, critical illness, conference, field trip) day.
My name is (your name here)
and I teach at (your building).”**

You do not need to elaborate or provide personal details.

The number to call for a substitute is 567-1644.

If you are calling in for a conference day, please state the name of the conference you will be attending.

*It is the District's responsibility to obtain a substitute to cover your absence.
You do not need to feel compelled to, nor should you, come in on a day because the District does not have a sub for you.
It is assumed that if you are going to be absent, it is for a necessary reason.
Therefore, the day is not negotiable.*

Highlights of October VCTA Executive Council Meeting *(continued from page six)*

Dismay was expressed that the veterans who were going to get an enhancement in their pension, are the ones who would have to be in teaching service as of 1998, thus dismissing those who retired prior to that time. A similar situation exists for tier reinstatement. NYS Teacher stated that this bill was union-backed, but this didn't help those who have already retired.

It was reinforced that the Empire plan VCTA members have access to is not the same as the State Employee plan. You can choose new coverage each year in October. Retirees are not limited to INDECS. Empire offers Medicare coordination.

The Valley Central Federal Credit Union would like to attend next year's Health/TSA Fair so that new staff can be made aware of their services.

The driver's safety course that was offered three years ago will expire in March. Tim Brown will set up a course for January or February 2001.

There are concerns with the air quality and water in Montgomery due to the construction/renovation. Jay Sussdorf will contact Steve Puntar to check that OSHA requirements are being met.

There are problems in the High School

with photocopying, shortage of phones, etc. Tim Brown stated that Mr. Klein has tried to get a new copier for the building. This is a matter of district priorities. This problem also exists in other buildings as well.

Rich Steger reported that all new teachers have been assigned a "buddy", and commended the members of his committee for their efforts..

The next Executive Council meeting will be held November 14, 2000 at 3:45 PM at the VCHS Professional Library.

Regents Action Expected On Coaches

The State Board of Regents is expected to review certification changes for coaches at its Nov. 9-10 meeting.

NYSUT has been carefully monitoring this issue. NYSUT has urged the Regents to acknowledge the critical role of teaching within the coaching process and leave certifica-

tion issues alone. Currently, regulations give certified teachers an advantage in hiring over non-teacher candidates.

A proposal before the state's educational policy-making board would allow a non-teacher coach with three years of successful coaching experience to receive a permanent certification as a coach of that sport. NYSUT opposes the

proposal, saying the best coach is an educator at heart, a certified teacher.

~ The Bottom Line, A NYSUT publication



Annual Professional Performance Review *(continued from page one)*

and reflect the teacher's own objectives.

Besides classroom visitation, there are seven other means of assessment. Over the course of the three year cycle the teacher must show that eight NYS evaluation criteria have been met. At the beginning of each year, the teacher who is being evaluated by an alternate means of assessment meets with the building principal to mutually agree upon the assessment method. The teacher also decides what three criteria will be the goal

for that year's assessment giving a description of activities, outcomes and reasons. At the end of the year, the teacher evaluates what has been learned on a form that looks like a report card. The administrator evaluates the teacher on the same form and then it must be signed by both.

Treasurer John Bonagura, who served as a representative on the APPR committee along with Vice President Rich Steger, pointed out that the assessment method must be mutually agreed upon and that the teacher must sign the evaluation form. The

contract language provides that anything which is to become part of the teacher's permanent personnel record must be signed by the teacher before it can be filed. Also, teachers have the right to write a rebuttal to observations based on classroom visitation. They retain the right to write a rebuttal to assessments by alternate means.

If you have any questions or concerns about APPR, or your rights, contact John Bonagura or Rich Steger through your building representative.

~ Patti Lunden



Honoring Faye

Longtime Personnel Office Secretary,
Faye Goldstein will retire on December 31st.

A party to celebrate Faye's retirement will be held

On December 14th,

At Spruce Lodge from 4:00 – 6:00 PM.

Cost is \$20 and includes gift.

RSVP to Michele Thompson, Central Office at 457-3171

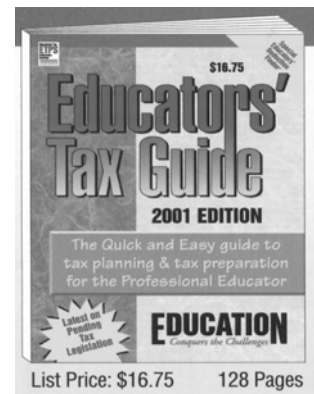
The 2001 Educator's Tax Guide is available through the VCTA.

This valuable resource usually lists at \$16.75

but can be bought for as low as \$1.99 (50+ orders) to \$3.99 (minimum 10 orders) through the VCTA and NYSUT.

Contents:

IRA's, Roth IRA's, Hope Scholarships, Lifetime Learning Tuition Tax Credit, Travel, Home Office, Professional deductions, benefits for educators, the latest tax laws, and the Educator's Deduction Finder ©



To purchase, fill out the form below and return it to the VCTA Union Office, c/o Laurie Hey, MS by November 30th.

.....

I would like to order an Educator's Tax Guide. I will pay for the Guide upon delivery.

NAME _____ BLDG _____

.....

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

Anticipatory Set (*I never thought I'd use that term again! This must be "Be kind to Madeline Hunter Week"*)

Actually, I wish I had a zippy introduction to whet your appetite, but I've just returned from several days with the beloved grandchildren and am happy to report that they are a lot more active than their grandfather!

Nobody asked me, but...

Thanksgiving once again makes me pause and reflect on how blessed I am in having had all of you as colleagues. My VC extended family and my own family have made me a fortunate person.

I am kept humble about the worth of my "literary" endeavors by the members of the VC Breakfast Club. I would share some quotes with you, but they would have to be censored!

Two of the most patient people in the world are Jennifer and Debbie at the 84 Diner who put up with the aforementioned members of the VCBC (*and they never forget Tony's Tabasco sauce.*)

For years we have hoped to see more young teachers on the VCTA Executive Council. This year we have many more. Welcome aboard and we thank you.

I had the opportunity to observe my granddaughter Meg's Pre-Kindergarten class. She has a wonderfully dynamic teacher named Phil Cleary, whose Pre-K team is equally dynamic. A great teacher and great paras make for a great class. I'm always really enthused to meet folks who truly make a difference in the classroom. Phil is also the vice-president of the Cicero-North Syracuse Educational Association, with whom I now swap newsletters.

An article in the Syracuse

Post Standard tells yet another horror story of a for-profit charter school that has already lost about 100 students, whose parents decided that the public school best served their kids. Giffen School in Albany experienced the same phenomenon several years ago. Taking money away from the public school does not appear to be a panacea. Teachers the trenches forewarned of this. Commissioner, are you listening yet?

My admiration for today's active teachers keeps growing as I see how they not only are expected to give a solid education to all students, but also to spend countless hours in preparing students for a seemingly endless parade of state exams. Add to this increased paper work, the "175 hours" soon to be required of in-service training. Is a teacher expected to work 23 hours a day? And then (*and this truly makes my sparse hair stand on end!*) some self-styled expert commentator on education will note that teachers only work from 8 to 3. If only they walked in our shoes for a day, that tune would surely change.

Notes from far-flung retiree outposts:

Bruce Seguin writes from Lake Champlain that he and Joan were on a trip when the luncheon was held, visiting a pen pal of 48 years and going to Ottawa for Joan's nursing school reunion. The large one keeps busy subbing at Northeastern Clinton Central School, volunteering with the fire department and rescue squad and running his ever-growing and always busy painting business.

A phone call from Jean Killin regarding some health insurance questions turned into a very pleasant phone reunion. As I've said before, she is one of my favorite people.

A date to remember:

December 14th, 4:00 to 6:00 PM at Spruce Lodge: A Retirement party for Faye Goldstein of the Personnel Office. Cash Bar, Hors d'oeuvres provided, etc. \$20 includes gift. Contact Michelle Thompson at Central Office, 457-3171.

Faye has been a great help to many of us in her many years in the Personnel Office. A very fine person, she will be missed. The retirees wish her many happy years of retirement.

That's all he wrote (See, there is justice!)

You continue to amaze me by turning to the back pages when you know what you will find there. Thanks and Happy Thanksgiving.

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

Peace.

~ Kevin McFadden

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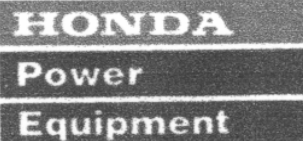
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*The VC Echoes is the official
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Teacher's Association – Local
3076 and is published regularly
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Article contributions or Letters to
the Editor for the next issue
should be sent to Patricia Lunden
at the HS by November 21, 2000.
Any articles submitted to the VC
Echoes will also be posted on the
VCTA Web page.*

Why do we have Wednesday, November 22 off when other districts have school?

Our “extra” day off at Thanksgiving break is the result of a side agreement signed a few years ago. Our contract states that the teachers cannot be “assigned” more than 187 days of school. Until challenged, the District administration, led by former superintendent Beverly Ouderkirk, interpreted this as teachers could not work more than 187 days and thus we usually had at least one snow day whether we needed it or not. The VCTA challenged this interpretation and the District eventually agreed with us that “assigned” meant that the calendar could not be longer than 187 days, regardless of snow days.

Each year when BOCES adopts its calendar, it is sent to the area school districts so that they can create and adopt their own calendar accordingly. In the past few years the BOCES calendar has run as high as 190 days. Central Office forwards a copy of the calendar to the VCTA Officers, who in turn seek advisement from the Executive Council to determine which “extra” days we will be off. This year’s BOCES calendar was 188 days which is why we have the extra day for Thanksgiving. We will not have an extra day at Winter Break or Memorial Day as we have in the past. Next year’s BOCES calendar has not yet been received.

Helping Students Become Responsible

There was a father who filled his photo albums each year with pictures of his children walking away. When asked why he had so many photos of his children waving goodbye, he would reply,

“Because that’s what children do, they walk away and it is my job to let go.”

I received a request from the Guidance Office to provide a parent with a weekly report of what was happening in my class in terms of topics covered, quizzes and homework. It is not such a strange request and often parents are advised to require weekly reports of their children when they are struggling. Normally, the student carries a form from teacher to teacher at the end of the week which is filled out and brought home. But this request was odd because it did not involve the student. Each of this child’s teachers are being asked to write down at

the beginning of the week what is being covered, send it to the guidance counselor and then the counselor will “make sure that the parent gets the information”. At first glance, it may appear to be a reasonable request from a concerned parent about a struggling student, perhaps new to the HS. But this student is a junior and not struggling as far as I can tell. It is not so much the request that bothers me (although I did wonder how I would ever complete all the paperwork were I to get more than a few requests such as this) but it is the fact that the student has been left out.

The parent is worried about the student, and gives another responsibility concerning their child to the counselor and each of the child’s teachers. But what responsibility has been given to the child? Is this the result of our quest for higher standards; school accountability, teacher accountability, parent accountability – where is the student

accountability? If the student doesn’t do something required to pass a course and subsequently fails that course, why is the teacher, school, parent held accountable first and the student second? If the horse won’t drink, even when having its head forced into the water, is it the fault of the person holding the horse’s head in the water? (Consider also that perhaps the horse is drowning– but that’s another column!)

While we are holding everyone but the student accountable for failing, are we considering the lesson being taught about responsibility and what the ramifications of that lesson will be for both the student and society down the road?

Yes, we need to have higher standards, but we also need to teach our children to walk away while we let go. ~ Patti Lunden