

VC ECHOES

An AFTCA and New York Teacher Award Winning Publication

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Angels on Assignment

United with the same mind and the same purpose, these five third grade teachers at Walden Elementary School accomplished much this past holiday season. With family-like cooperation, students and faculty were instructed to create one thousand cranes to decorate the school's holiday tree.



Since this past September 11, the color of confidence was blurred beyond belief, and these teachers felt this activity was a way to empower children and faculty to counter the sense of helplessness and powerlessness that the very thought of disaster brings. Our country's patriotic colors of red, white and blue were used to integrate our experience to show how we can still be at peace with our circumstances and to promote a more perfect unity of strength throughout our lives.

The symbol of the thousand cranes has been used to create a bright light of hope. This

representation of hope honors a young Japanese girl, named Sadako, who suffered from leukemia after the bombing of Hiroshima in 1945. She believed that if she could fold one thousand cranes, her wish to get well would be granted. Although Sadako never reached her goal, after her death her classmates finished enough cranes to make up the difference. Since that time, people have sent folded cranes into Hiroshima to honor Sadako's memory. The tradition of the cranes has spread worldwide symbolizing peace, goodwill, hope and celestial wisdom.

I would like to thank Vicki Vermilyea, Diane Bjork, Connie DeSantis, Marilyn Tyson and Barbara Wutch for being Walden's first responders in love and enlightenment.

~Jeanne Marie Flanagan,
Walden Elementary
School

One of the beauties of teaching is that there is no limit to one's growth as a teacher, just as there is no knowing beforehand how much your students can learn.
Herbert Kohl

New Attendance Regulations Approved

At its October meeting, the Board of Regents adopted new regulations governing school attendance policy. Significant aspects of the regulations include requirements that student attendance be taken on a period by period basis in grades 9 through 12 and in other "departmentalized schools" and that each district adopt a "Comprehensive Attendance Policy." The State Education Department recommends that districts involve teachers in developing the Comprehensive Attendance Policy. The new regulations require each district to define excused and unexcused absences and districts will now have the authority to distinguish between excused and unexcused absences when establishing a minimum standard of attendance for course credit.

A record of each pupil's presence, absence, tardiness, and early departure must be kept in a register of attendance. A register of attendance is any written or electronic record maintained for the purpose of recording the attendance, absence, tardiness, or early departure of a pupil. All entries in the register of attendance must be made either by a teacher, or by an employee designated by the school board. The following information for each pupil must be included: name; date of birth; full names of parent(s) or person(s) in parental relation; address where pupil resides; phone number where the parent(s) or persons(s) in parental relation may be contacted; date of the pupil's enrollment; and a record of the pupil's attendance on each day of scheduled instruction.

According to the regulations, "for pupils in non-departmentalized kindergarten through grade eight such pupil's presence or absence shall be recorded after the taking of attendance once per school day, provided that if pu-

pils in such schools are dismissed from school grounds during a lunch period, each such pupil's presence or absence shall also be recorded after the taking of attendance a second time upon the pupil's return from the lunch period each school day." For students in grades nine through twelve or in departmentalized schools at any grade level, each student's presence or absence must be recorded in each period of scheduled instruction.



NYSUT has urged SED to provide further clarification to define "departmentalized schools." Any absence for a school day or portion of must be recorded as excused or unexcused. In addition, when a student arrives late or departs early from scheduled instruction, such tardiness or early departure must be recorded as excused or unexcused. Each school district must include in their Comprehensive Attendance Policy a determination of which pupil absences, tardiness, and early departures will be excused and which will be considered unexcused. An illustrative list of excused and unexcused pupil absences and tardiness must be included in the policy.

Each district may establish a minimum standard of attendance to be eligible for course credit. The Comprehensive Attendance Policy must include a description of the policy regarding pupil attendance and the ability to receive course credit. Districts that establish a minimum standard of attendance to receive course credit will now have the authority to differentiate between excused and unexcused absences. Under these new regulations, districts may determine in their policy that a properly excused pupil absence, for which the pupil has performed any assigned make up work, shall not be counted as an absence

for the purpose of determining eligibility for course credit. The authority to differentiate between excused and unexcused absences in an attendance policy, with a minimum standard of attendance, is a significant change from past practices. Previously, numerous Commissioner's decisions have determined that a district may have a policy requiring a minimum amount of attendance for students to receive credit, but that such policy may not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. Beginning with the 2003-04 school year, the attendance records must be reviewed by the principal of every public school building and the individual designated by the school board to review pupil attendance records to initiate intervention strategies to improve attendance. Full implementation will take place at the start of the 2003-04 school year. However, each school district, BOCES, charter school, county vocational education board, and nonpublic school must adopt the Comprehensive Attendance Policy by June 30, 2002. In addition, at least one public hearing that provides for the participation of school personnel, parents, students, and other interested parties must be conducted prior to adopting the policy. The State Education Department (SED) has recommended that districts form a policy development team representing the school board, administrators, teachers, parents, and students to review the new regulations and to examine current attendance practices or policies. The regulations require that each teacher be provided with a copy of the policy as soon as practicable after adoption. In addition, new teachers must be provided with a copy of the policy upon their employment.

~NYSUT Briefing Bulletin

NYSUT Testimony: Governor's Education Aid "Freeze" Really A Cut

New York State United Teachers today submitted testimony to a state Legislature hearing urging lawmakers to invest in public schools instead of "putting the future on hold." The 460,000-member union said the proposed 2002-03 state budget is a threat to the progress made by New York's public schools in recent years. A copy of NYSUT's testimony is attached.

"The proposed budget freezes aid to education," said NYSUT Executive Vice President Alan B. Lubin. "But with inflation, enrollment growth and higher standards, the freeze is really a cut. How can we expect our kids to meet higher standards with less support?"

"Last year, the Legislature and the Regents estimated our schools needed more than a billion dollars more to help students meet the new standards," Lubin said. "The schools didn't get anywhere near that, and those needs are still there. We can't keep putting the future on hold."

NYSUT praised the governor for including seed funding for Teacher Centers, Teacher Support Aid and the Mentor-Teacher Internship Program to help address the teacher shortage and provide professional development for both new and experienced teachers. The un-

and experienced teachers. The union called on the Legislature to increase funding for the initiatives in the enacted budget, and for the Legislature to target any increase in education aid to poorer districts. NYSUT also expressed general support for the governor's "Flex Aid" proposal, but raised concern over certain elements that would hurt BOCES and special education programs.

NYSUT's testimony notes that last year's budget process was particularly damaging for schools in their efforts to help students meet the new standards.

"Four years of record state aid increases between 1997 and 2000 helped make that progress possible," NYSUT's testimony states. "Unfortunately, much of the additional capacity for students to meet higher standards that was built with the recent school aid increases now lies in jeopardy. The latest state budget was a disaster in too many respects. The overall aid increase was insufficient and the budget was resolved too late to enable districts to engage in coherent planning and decision making."

NYSUT also praised the governor for his creative use of prior year claims to help New York City and the other Big 5 school dis-

tricts. Lubin urged the Legislature to recognize the needs of the Big 5 and other urban districts, where students need more help to meet the higher standards. He called for the Legislature to again approve maintenance of effort requirements for the Big 5 to ensure that school aid money stays in the schools.

Lubin said NYSUT recognized the devastating September 11 attacks and current economic conditions are forcing New York to make some hard choices.

"The most important choice is to invest in our schools," Lubin said. "There's talk that in these tough times we can't afford to spend more on education. That's wrong. In these tough times, we can't afford not to invest in education. Without strong public schools, colleges and universities, New York will not have a strong economy. We're counting on the Legislature to help our schools and help our kids."

~ NYSUT Press Release



Public Higher Ed Key To Economic Recovery

The governor's executive budget proposal flat-lines the funding for the State University and City University of New York, which could cut the legs out from under the state's limping economy, said NYSUT leaders in testimony before the Legislature.

"At a time when we should be us-

ing SUNY, CUNY and our community colleges as the foundation of our economic rebuilding efforts, we seem to be going in the opposite direction," said Alan Lubin, NYSUT executive vice president.

"Public higher education institutions make critical contributions in public health and technology," he said.

"They provide our state with a well-

educated, trained and skilled work force. But without the right investment, those contributions won't be there. You can't get blood from a stone, and you can't rebuild the state's economy without a real investment in SUNY, CUNY and our community colleges."

~ NYSUT's The Bottom Line

TEACHERS URGED TO PARTICIPATE IN MIDDLE-SCHOOL FORUMS

The purpose of the series of forums is to review and discuss SED's proposed agenda to improve middle-level education and foster local discussion about ways to improve academic achievement and support the social and personal growth of students, SED says.



Because many sessions are scheduled during the day, NYSUT expressed concern to SED that teachers would not be able to attend, and that SED would be sending a message that it doesn't want teachers at the meeting.

Deputy Commissioner Jim Kadamus has indicated he will contact the chairpersons of these regional meetings to give them guidelines on contacting teacher leaders and encouraging their participation. He will also send a note to superintendents encouraging release time for middle school teachers to attend.

**Mid Hudson and Lower Hudson:
9 a.m. to 1 p.m., April 10,
Inn at Central Valley.**

AFT offers Porter Scholarships

AFT offers a four-year \$8000 scholarship to graduating HS seniors who are dependents of AFT members (*must have been an AFT member for at least one year*) and be planning a career in labor, education, health or government.

Applications are available through the AFT website, www.aft.org; porterscholars@aft.org or by writing to: Porter Scholarships Program, 555 New Jersey Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2079

AFL-CIO OFFERS SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

The State AFL-CIO will award a four-year scholarship to a 2002 graduating high school senior who intends to pursue a career in labor relations or a related field. The scholarship will be for \$2,000 a year for four consecutive years.

Applicants must have a parent or guardian who is a member of a union affiliated with the State AFL-CIO. *They must be accepted in a course of study in labor relations or a labor-related area such as history, economics, law, political science, sociology or journalism at an accredited institution of higher ed in the state.*

More information and applications are available from the AFL-CIO, 100 South Swan St., Albany, N.Y. 12210.

**Information and Applications for the VCTA Scholarships
will be published in the March issue of VC ECHOES.**

**Scholarships are open to VC Seniors and senior HS students
whose parents are VCTA members.**

For the Dignity of All

LABOR-RELIGION FAST TO FOCUS ON WORKING FAMILIES

Tuesday, March 5 at 8 p.m. until Thursday, March 7 at Noon
The New York State Labor-Religion Coalition's seventh annual 40-hour fast, scheduled for March 5-7, will focus on working families, and especially low-wage laborers.

Even families with two full-time, minimum-wage workers earn less than \$22,000 a year, said NYSUT President Tom Hobart, who co-chairs the coalition with Albany Roman Catholic Diocese Bishop Howard Hubbard. "Full-time workers and their families should not have to live in poverty," Hobart said.

To participate in this year's fast, "For the Dignity of All," activists are invited to Fast for one meal, Fast from dawn to dusk or Fast for the entire 40 hours

More information is available from the Coalition at 159 Wolf Road, Box 15008, Albany, N.Y. 12212-5008; (518) 459-5400, ext. 6294; or by e-mail, info@labor-religion.org.

AFT Says Bush's Tax Credit Really A Voucher Program

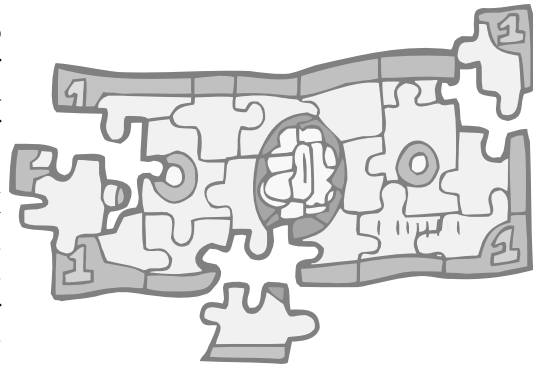
If you think private-school voucher programs are starting to fade away, think again.

The American Federation of Teachers, NYSUT's national affiliate, registered alarm and disappointment that President Bush's Feb. 4 budget proposal included tax credits of up to \$2,500 for private school tuition for children whose public schools are considered to be failing.

The proposed tax credit would cost taxpayers an estimated \$3.7 billion in lost revenue over five years. The Washington Post cites information from a senior administration official that the money also could be used for books, computers

and other equipment to set up a home school or for transportation to a private school or better public school.

"While we will continue to support many of the president's education policies, and welcome the increases for Title I and for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, we part company on the issue of school vouchers," said AFT President Sandra Feldman in a statement. Whether called tax credits or vouchers, they would undermine President Bush's goal of improving public schools that was at



the heart of the recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), she said.

~ NYSUT *The Bottom Line*

Tax cut gobbles surplus



The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office reports that President Bush's millionaire tax cut passed last year is the single biggest reason the nation's 10-year projected budget surplus of \$5.6 trillion has disintegrated to \$1.6 trillion. Bush recently announced that his fiscal year 2003 budget will include a \$106 billion deficit, the first since 1997. It follows the \$127 billion surplus Bush inherited when he took office.

Reaction by New York State United Teachers to Retirement of Regents Chancellor Carl Hayden

Carl Hayden will be remembered as a forceful leader who championed public schools and higher standards for students at a time when New York State needed such a determined, forceful leader.

"During his tenure as Regents' chancellor, Carl eloquently espoused the value and importance of setting higher expectations for children, and for providing the funding public schools need so that all children have an equal chance at meeting those higher expectations.

We especially appreciate his tireless advocacy for those children with the greatest needs and who must overcome the steepest hurdles in order to succeed in the classroom.



"Carl's retirement, although expected, leaves a legacy that will be difficult to match. The Regents will elect the next chancellor, and we are optimistic that Carl's successor will carry on as an accessible, vocal and effective guardian of public education in this state."

*Antonia Cortese,
First Vice President
NYSUT*

NYSUT Launched \$900,000 Pro-School Ad Campaign

New York State United Teachers today launched a statewide radio and television advertising campaign to remind New Yorkers of the need to strengthen the state's public schools. Radio ads ran in markets across the state from January 28 through February 17. The TV spots ran for 10 days, from February 6 through February 15. The total cost of the campaign will be approximately \$900,000.

"September 11 changed everything," said NYSUT Executive Vice President Alan B. Lubin. "But one simple truth remains: Better schools build a better economy and a better New York. If New York is going to rebuild, we have to make an investment in our future. That future begins with a better public education system."

Lubin said the current economic conditions are forcing New York to make some hard choices.

"The most important choice is to invest in our schools," Lubin said. "There's talk that in these tough times we can't afford to spend more on education. That's wrong. In these tough times, we can't afford not to invest in education. It's not a hard choice - it's the only choice. Without strong public schools, colleges and universities, New York will not have a strong economy."

The ads feature a cross section of New Yorkers, including schoolchildren, a firefighter, a real estate agent, a waitress, a teacher, a truck driver and a business executive, all stressing the message that "now more than ever" New York needs to invest in high quality public schools and colleges. In addition, the ads include a toll free number (1-877-255-9417) for New Yorkers to contact their legislators and the

governor to urge them to adequately fund education.



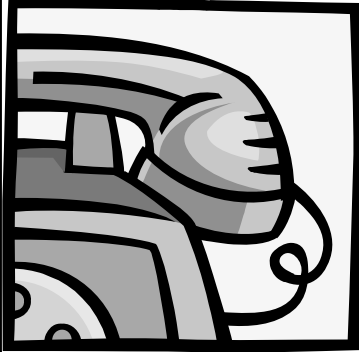
"There are new standards for New York State students," Lubin said. "And students need the programs and resources to meet those new standards. Just setting the bar higher doesn't mean the kids will automatically get over it. They need strong schools to reach the new goals."

Along with the advertising campaign, NYSUT is initiating an e-mail, letter-writing and fax campaign aimed at generating pro-education messages to the governor and state legislators.

NYSUT Press Release

Contact your New York State Legislator through the NYSUT website...
www.nysut.org

Setting up your Voice Mail...



Hello! You have reached the automated answering service of your school.

In order to assist you in connecting to the right staff member, please listen to all options before making a selection:

To lie about why your child is absent, Press 1.

To make excuses for why your child did not do his work, Press 2.

To complain about what we do, Press 3.

To cuss out staff members, Press 4.

To ask why you didn't get needed information that was already enclosed in your newsletter and several bulletins mailed to you, Press 5.

If you want us to raise your child, Press 6.

If you want to reach out and touch, slap or hit someone, Press 7.

To request another teacher for the third time this year, Press 8.

To complain about bus transportation, Press 9.

To complain about school lunches, Press 0.

If you realize this is the real world and your child must be accountable / responsible for his/her own behavior, class work, homework, and that it's not the teachers fault for your child's lack of effort...

Hang up and have a nice day!!

~ From the Internet

MCAULIFFE GRANTS FUND INNOVATIVE PROJECTS

Full-time elementary, middle and secondary teachers with at least eight years experience are encouraged to apply for the 2002-2003 Christa McAuliffe Fellowship Program.

The program, named for the teacher-astronaut who died on the Challenger space shuttle flight in 1986, provides funding for innovative educational projects that advance the knowledge of teachers and students.

Applications including a project proposal, supportive materials and recommendations must be received at the State Education Department by May 31. For information, including an application, contact Sanford Lake, New York State Education Department, Office of Teaching, Albany, N.Y. 12234; e-mail slake@mail.nysed.gov; or call (518) 474-4661.

Highlights of the January VCTA Executive Council Meeting

President's Report

Tim Brown will be looking for a chairperson of the next VCTA shirt sale. Members who did not deduct the \$2 coupon from the cost of their shirt will be refunded the money.

A thank you letter was received from NYFD, Rescue Co. 3. The VCTA sent a donation in honor of the memory of Don Regan, father of VCTA member Shane Regan, who lost his life in the 9/11 attack.

OUSDHP minutes were distributed.

The Retiree Mid-Hudson Bridges publication was distributed as were the Mid-Hudson Legislative Report, Hudson Valley Area Labor Federation, AFL-CIO Unity Newsletter.

A memo from Asst. Superintendent Mary Ann Wilson was distributed thanking all participants in the VC United Way drive. Although we have requested communication from the United Way directly, this is the only thank you we have received.

A letter from US Senator, Charles Schumer was distributed which encourages teachers to participate in "The Teacher Next Door Program".

Website: www.hud.gov/offices/hsg/sfh/reo/tnd.cfm.

A copy of the memo concerning the early retirement district incentive was distributed (for members 50-54). Tim Brown advised that members use the VCTA form letter to inform the District of the intention to retire, making sure to ask that health coverage be continued. He also advised any member planning to retire have the VCTA building rep./officers look over a letter before submitting.

BOE

John Bonagura reported that the District is considering a Jr. ROTC program.

Editor's Report

Patti Lunden requested articles for ECHOES.

Retiree Report

Kevin McFadden reported that he had heard a rumor that Middletown had "tinkered" with retiree health benefits. Discussion followed.

Grievance Committee:

Montgomery bus grievance is at Step

3. The VCTA addresses the BOE on January 28, 2002.

A HS grievance concerning due dates for grade reporting is at Step 2.

A grievance may be filed concerning the end-of-year schedule for the Elementary schools.

A motion was made to not sign the District's Shared Decision Making Document.

The VCTA Blood Drive will take place on February 28th in the back gym of the MS.

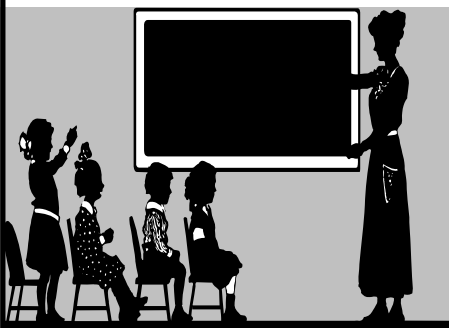
New Business

Discussion took place concerning the end of year Elementary Schools schedule. The time being given over two days is not equivalent to what has been given to teachers in the past to take care of end-of-year procedures.

The next VCTA Executive Council meeting took place on February 19th, with another meeting to take place on March 19th at 3:45 pm at the HS Professional Library.



'TEACHER' NEARS TOP OF CAREER WISH LIST



According to a recent poll conducted by Junior Achievement Interprise, teacher was the fourth most popular "ideal job" cited by American teen-agers. The top jobs were doctor (9.7%), businessperson (8.9%), athlete (7.5%) and teacher (6.6%). After that came entertainer, computer professional and lawyer. More than 77% of respondents said they would need a bachelor's or graduate degree to get their dream job.

Secretarially Yours . . .

Dottie Shafer Malley has been a resident of Cornwall and Montgomery all of her life. Dottie graduated from Valley Central High School in 1965. Dottie married Bill Malley and they have two children, Danny and Wendy, both graduated from Valley Central. Dottie is secretary and bookkeeper for the family business, which is Malley Trucking.

The Valley Central School District hired Dottie in 1976 as a food service worker. In 1981, she was promoted to secretary for Clare Ciardullo in the Middle School. In 1986 Dottie went to the High School Guidance Office and in 1993 worked for a brief time in Central Office. In 1994, Dottie was asked to be secretary in charge of

Night School. In 1997, when Norma Manning retired she was asked to be Account Clerk in the High School. Dottie plans to stay in this position until she retires.

Dottie has five grandchildren all who are either attending Valley Central currently, or have or will attend Valley Central. Michael Curatello graduated and Anthony Curatello is presently attending the high school. Her grandson, Eric is in the Middle School and her granddaughter, Cassie Stokes is in the Elementary School at the present time. Her grandson, Todd Stokes will be attending kindergarten this coming fall.

Dottie's expertise in all



these different jobs makes her a very faithful and loyal employee. We thank Dottie for her many years of service to our district.

~ Lucy Fox,

Secretarial Unit Representative

Mac Note #3



As I've said numerous times, our health benefits in retirement should be guaranteed by the state so that all teachers statewide would be assured of health benefits for the course of their lives. Presently, the guarantee by the state is for year-by-year. As active teachers grow older, this will be of great import for them as it is for us retirees. Ergo, write the governor or e-mail him as a simple message. (e.g. *Dear Governor Pataki; The health benefits for retired teachers (and all state employees) should be*

mandated and not on a year-to-year basis. Sign the bill! Sincerely,) Short, sweet and to the point. Do it today. It will be one less thing to worry about as you grow older.

Nobody asked me, but...

A couple of snippets that caught my eye:

From Carol Russo, principal of PS 31 in the Bronx: "The most crucial resource (*in Education*)- Job One for principals everywhere is competent teachers." "Standards will not work if we don't have the resources."

And from Sr. Gregory Horgan on her experiences in South Africa and Botswana: "We brought the power of teaching to the people. As teachers become better trained, children could better realize their own worth and ability. They developed confidence and assurance that was glorious to see.

Finally from Catherine Mendrzycki,

a long time teacher and central administrator: "(I) see effective staff development as crucial to the a profession that is struggling to find and keep enough good people. I was very lucky to have wonderful mentors and instructors when I was starting out. If we had the money..., my dream would be to have a full-time mentor in every school, someone who would be there for teachers as problems arise. (*I always love it when I read something that echoes my thoughts! There must be a certain arrogance there. As my sainted father observed, "If humility is a requisite for Heaven, the McFaddens are in trouble."*)

Amen...

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

Peace.

~ Kevin McFadden

Advertising Section

These ads will be seen by over 750 members of the VC Educational Community and their households. If you would like to advertise in the next issue of the VC ECHOES, contact Patti Lunden, 457-5899 for rates.

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VALID THROUGH 7/02

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

Valley Central Teachers' Association
1175 Rte. 17K
Montgomery, NY 12549
Tel./Fax: (845) 457-5899

President, Timothy Brown (HS)
Vice President, Jay Sussdorff (HS)
Vice President, Richard Steger (Walden)
Secretary, Laurie Hey (MS)
Treasurer, John Bonagura (EC)

Building Representatives

Berea: Carol DeMicco, Sara Ackerson,
Robin Scott

Maybrook: Donna Lloyd, Linda Siegel

East Coldenham: Rebecca Pace, Holly Bacon

Walden: Patty Joy, Randy Sutter,
Brenda Newman

Montgomery: Toni Sperry, Chris Brand

MS: Mary Bleau, Mary Goldberg, Dana DeMasi

Marc Sperry, Joe Collins, Mike Steele

Kathy Manning

HS: Heather Ford, Jane Hillis, Peter Meisel,

Glenn Eckert, Joe Fracalossi,

Jean McMahon, Bob Jurgens

Secretarial Representative: Lucy Fox (HS)

Paraprofessional Representative: Kathi Russo (Montg)

VC ECHOES Editor

Patricia Lunden, (HS)

Email: vcta@frontiernet.net

NYSUT

www.nysut.org

AFT

www.aft.org

AFL-CIO

www.aflcio.org

Mid-Hudson Teacher Center:

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<http://www.mhmc.dbooces.org>

Employee Assistance Program

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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 Patricia Lunden
at the HS by March 19, 2002.
Any articles submitted to the VC
Echoes will also be posted on the
VCTA Web page.

“The history of the labor movement needs to be taught in every school in this

land...America is a living testimonial to what free men and women organized in free

democratic trade unions can do to make a better life... We ought to be proud of it!”

~ VP Hubert H. Humphrey, Jr.

Mean What You Say....

S omeday, Alice, ...To the Moon!” , Ralph Cramden would threaten as he pounded his fist into his hand. Alice would smirk, not paying any attention to the idle threat and the show’s ending music would play as the episode closed. Like Alice, we knew that Ralph didn’t mean what he said because the next episode, there would be Alice annoying him again.

One of the first rules of discipline in teaching, parenting, or even training a dog is to mean what you say. Idle threats do not work. Real consequences must be laid out for real offenses and everyone concerned must be aware of them. As offenses escalate either in number or degree of intensity, so must the punishment otherwise the offender will be smirking in no time, knowing what he/she is getting away with.

The State Education Department has put in new attendance guidelines that all NYS schools must follow. (See page two of this issue.) Much of its regulations have been in place for years. The new piece of the regulation that will change things is that the status of an absence as excused or unexcused can factor into the attendance policy for a course determining whether

a student receives credit for a course despite the grade. Simply put, if a student’s absence is unexcused, he may not receive credit because the absence is either not recognized or the student never brought in an excuse. This will be a shock for some students. Any teacher who has ever requested “an attendance run” on a student will usually note the word “unexcused” several times. Students will have to be more conscientious about bringing in their excuses as well as being more conscience to be in class where they belong. This is a good change. It will mean more work on the part of the district, teachers will have yet more paperwork to do to keep track of the status of absences but ultimately the lesson taught is that good attendance should be the norm and not the exception, and a “day off” should not be taken lightly. I just wonder if the State is prepared to mean what it says.

Students who have too many unexcused absences will fail courses. Students who fail courses will have a hard time graduating. They may have to repeat courses, if not years of HS. They may give up, they may even drop out.

Will the State react in horror and shock to this consequence of the discipline they

are now requiring? The State cannot raise the standard on attendance and then penalize districts and administrators for the initial fail rates that may occur after this policy takes effect. So often the State will put into effect a sound policy intended to improve education and then not give it enough time to take. This policy goes into effect in the school year 2003-04 giving districts enough time to get their policies changed, and figure out how to implement the changes. However, a junior or senior HS student in 2003-04 who has had historically bad attendance will not be prepared for the change and will most likely be ill-effected. For the first few years the policy is in effect the State should expect a spike in failure rates and should prepare to educate the public as to why the spike occurred rather than water down the policy as has so often been the SED reaction in the past. I hope they are prepared to mean what they say or instead of telling students they will not receive credit for absences we might as well be telling them they had better improve their attendance, “or else... to the moon!”

~ Patti Lunden,
Editor