

VC ECHOES

Volume 11, Issue 4

Valley Central Teachers' Association

February, 2009

JUST SAY NO TO GOVERNOR'S CUTS!



Warning: Proposed Cuts Hazardous to Our Children's Futures (pg 4)

Picture from: http://alloveralbany.com/images/david_paterson_at_podium.jpg



Volume 11, Issue 4
February, 2009

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VC Echoes is a NYSUT and AFT Award-winning Publication!

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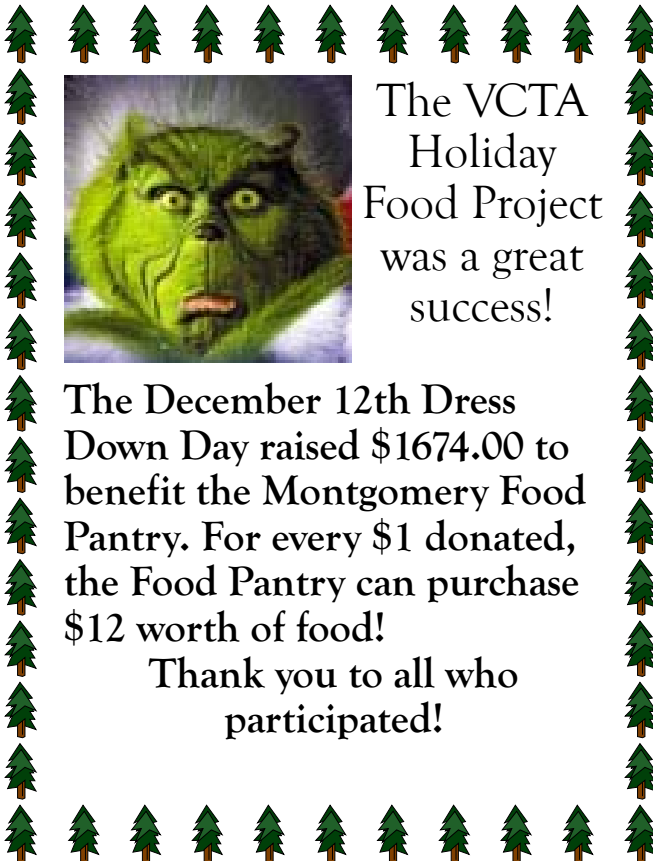
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Article contributions or Letters to the Editor should be sent to Meghan Rilley, HS, by 20 March, 2009

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The VC Echoes is the official publication of the Valley Central Teachers' Association—Local 3076—and is published regularly throughout the school year.
Any articles submitted to the VC Echoes will also be posted on the VCTA web site.



The VCTA
Holiday
Food Project
was a great
success!

The December 12th Dress
Down Day raised \$1674.00 to
benefit the Montgomery Food
Pantry. For every \$1 donated,
the Food Pantry can purchase
\$12 worth of food!

Thank you to all who
participated!

Anyone interested
in running for the
position of
NYSTRS Dele-
gate, please con-
tact Tim Brown
by February 27th.



Economic Realities

Many current teachers have never faced an economic crisis of this magnitude during their careers and, therefore, have never envisioned the potential pending layoffs that are being discussed throughout the state and throughout the nation. NYSUT is lobbying at both the federal and state levels for the necessary funding to carry out the educational directives for which we have been charged. It is, of course, reprehensible that federal and state officials permit mandates to impact education that must often be funded disproportionately through local revenues. For example, “NCLB is underfunded by \$71 billion [nationally], and in this economic downturn states will be hard-pressed to make up the difference” (NYT, 2/5/09, p. 8). Unfunded and underfunded mandates such as this have already caused an unfair hardship to local schools and our current economic woes are likely to make this scenario worse, impacting staffing and, therefore, programming options for our students.

A loss of staff will impact test results and discipline within all schools forced to make these difficult choices. Although I am disheartened by these potential problems, I am also confident that VCTA members and other unit staff members will act professionally and courageously regardless of any decisions that are made in the future. For example, various unit staff members are already investigating stop-gap measures to address the recent decision to eliminate summer school from the budget. This deleted student option will likely have a significant negative impact on VC’s graduation rate. The creation and elimination of positions is a District prerogative and has been a constant practice within education throughout the years based on student enrollment and curricular needs. The elimination of positions for the sole purpose of surviving an economic crisis, however, is disheartening because its purpose is contrary to the goals of education.

It is not my intent to specifically cast blame for our current situation, although I would certainly

like to toss a few small stones at irresponsible executives in air conditioned high-rises who seem to lack a superego or moral compass. Isn’t it great that our schools are NOT run with the irresponsible reckless abandon that many of these Fortune 500 and “wannabe” Fortune 500 companies are? Perhaps Wall Street companies should be as closely monitored and regulated as public education. To those who continue to contend that public schools should model the practices of private sector businesses, I ask: to what end? Public schools are, in fact, one the most monitored and regulated institutions in this country. Public schools can be proud of their accomplishments and will continue to evolve and improve without adapting cutthroat or corrupt business practices.

VC employees recognize that the District is not an employment agency and, like other businesses, school districts must, at times, make difficult choices while simultaneously lamenting the negative impact that these choices will have on teaching and learning. To date, the extent to which our funding will be cut is unknown. Programming and class size may be impacted. Reduced programming and increased class size will likely impact student behavior or discipline. Once again, the extent of this impact is yet to be determined. What does not have to be determined is the extent to which this staff will rise to the occasion and prevail. VCTA members will continue to do our very best; doing less is unacceptable and unimaginable.

NOTE: VOTE-COPE is our last-best hope for addressing these difficult economic times. If you have not signed up for payroll deduction, download our VOTE-COPE Payroll Deduction Form at: <http://vcta.net/votecope.htm>. Only VOTE-COPE funds can be utilized for political action. “We are trying to be heard in Washington on the federal stimulus package—and in Albany, where we are fighting to prevent historic cuts to public education and public higher education” (NYT, 2/5/09, p. 2).

–Tim Brown, VCTA President, HS

In the News...



*Brown Tackles
the Issues*

This issue's column focuses on current developments that affect teachers throughout New York State. In this installment of *In the News...*, VCTA President Tim Brown summarizes and comments on issues discussed in *New York Teacher* 1/22/09 and the *Times-Herald Record* 1/7/09.

Federal Stimulus Package: (www.nysut.com) NYSUT, AFT and NEA have lobbied tirelessly on behalf of a federal stimulus package that will help New Yorkers maintain essential services in education and health care. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, a first crucial step in creating and saving jobs and jumpstarting the economy, is the result of these efforts. The Education Stabilization Fund portion of this package requires that local educational agencies only use these funds for activities authorized under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act. This fund includes support for Special Education Title I grants to be provided through existing school aid funding formulas as also recommended by Senator Charles Schumer. According to US Congressman John Hall, these funds will be sent directly to school districts instead of being processed through state governors, preventing any possibility of governors creatively redistributing these funds for unintended purposes. New York's Governor, David Paterson, has proposed \$2.5 billion in cuts to education. It is hoped that this federal block grant and State Fiscal Relief will help prevent further reductions in spending on education. Valley Central's projected federal allocations of the education portion of these federal stimulus funds are outlined in the following chart.

The truth is that our feared economic woes are not set in stone. This proposed federal stimulus pack-

Estimated Federal Allocations to VCSD	
Title 1-A Increase (2009)	\$ 161,700
Construction (2009)	\$ 590,400
IDEA Increase (2009)	\$ 605,400
Total (2009)	\$ 1,357,500
Title 1-A Increase (2010)	\$ 161,700
IDEA Increase (2010)	\$ 697,000
Total (2010)	\$ 858,800
Total 2 Year Increase (2009 + 2010)	\$ 2,216,300

age, if approved, has the potential to provide needed relief to local taxpayers. There is, however, a potential catch. State political leaders could use any federally allocated funds as an excuse to water down any potential negotiations that will be taking place with regard to state's funding of public education. Let us hope that our leaders can grasp the concept that any decrease in funding should be paralleled with a decrease in burdensome mandates.

NYSUT's Economic Recommendations: (*NYT*, 1/22/09, pp. 6-7) NYSUT has made several recommendations for revenue appropria-

tions and cost savings during these trying economic times. These recommendations are summarized below:

1. Secure funding through the proposed federal stimulus package—projected revenue outlined in above chart).
2. Tap the state's Stabilization Fund (i.e., Rainy Day Fund)—projected revenue: \$1.2 billion.
3. Close loopholes in the state's bottle bill—projected revenue: \$200 million.
4. Reduce outsourcing of state work—projected revenue: \$100 million.
5. Permit bulk purchasing of prescription drugs—projected revenue: \$100 million.
6. Impose a temporary income tax surcharge on the wealthiest New Yorkers—projected revenue: \$2 - 7 billion.

(continued on page 5)

In the News... *(Cont'd from pg 4)*

The wealthiest New Yorkers have realized a 50% reduction in their personal income tax rate over the past 30 years (i.e., 15.375% to 6.85%). In fact, \$50,000 and \$500,000 wage earners are now taxed at the same percentage rate, which has reduced state revenues by over \$16 billion since 1994. Eighty percent of New Yorkers support a personal tax increase for \$1 million plus earners, while seventy three percent support this for \$500,000 plus earners.

Why Support the Employee Free Choice Act:

(NYT, 1/22/09, pp. 16) When workers organize “25% of employers fire at least one pro-union worker; 51 percent threaten to close a worksite if the union prevails; and, 91 percent force employees to attend one-on-one anti-union meetings with their supervisors.”

Union Women: (NYT, 1/22/09, pp. 31) Unionized women earn 11.2% more than non-union counterparts. Hourly unionized female employees earn about \$2 more per hour. Furthermore, unionized women are 26% more likely to have an “employer-provided pension plan” and are also more likely to have health insurance.

VCTA in the THR: Kudos to Dr. Hooley for correcting the tone of a recent *Times Herald Record* article (1/7/09) that inaccurately portrayed our District as having inappropriately handled funds. The truth is that the Administration and the BOE acted honestly and openly, discussing all of its actions in CABC meetings. External auditors agreed that the District’s actions were acceptable. After preapproval from external auditors, the BOE approved the establishment and funding of this reserve in open session. The state auditors primarily made recommendations and suggestions; furthermore, these state auditors indicated that the District was in very good shape. It would appear that the District’s external auditors and the state’s auditors disagree with regard to procedural concerns. From this point forward, I assume the District will follow the advice of the state auditors; however, I do not conclude that this necessarily indicates

that the external auditors were negligent or incorrect with their advice to the District. Sometimes there exist multiple routes by which one can arrive at a destination, but the one in the driver’s seat generally gets to choose the route. The state auditors are in the driver’s seat. Nevertheless, I view the District’s actions as responsibly prophetic in light of the current economic concerns. I applaud Central Office and the BOE for budgeting responsibly. Their foresight provided the funds necessary to keep our children safe and healthy. Endeavors such as repairing a building’s foundation to prevent mold problems from afflicting our smallest children are altruistic and to be commended. With regard to the potential for readers to misinterpret the January 7th *Times Herald Record* article, suffice it to say that accounting dynamics are inherently complex. Questions containing the words “can we” vs. “should we” will often necessitate different answers. The District “can” and “did” act in an appropriate, preapproved and open forum. Its actions did, in fact, put children center.—Tim Brown, HS

Wake Up... —Patti Lunden, VP, HS

The last few months have been no less than a bad dream. We are talking about cuts in education locally, statewide and federally that will devastate education unless they are executed with deep care. So far, that doesn’t appear to be the case. Where there should be a scalpel’s work, the cuts seem to be made with a machete—the governor’s proposal simply lopped an amount off the top of last year’s state aid amount without the appearance of thought or consideration for the devastation it might cause. We are still bound to mandates that have no funding, and we are expected to prepare children for a global economy and will be judged on how we do long after these cuts are forgotten.

Just this morning, the local news reported that four private catholic schools were applying to become charter schools to avoid closure. (cont’d pg 8)



Mark Your Calendar Now!

VCTA Spring Fling 2009:

Friday, 27 March 2009

3pm – 7 pm

Otterkill Country Club

See you there!

Reminder:

NYSHIP Switch ONLY

Enrollment period is:

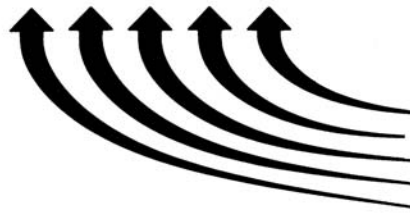
February 2, 2009 -

February 24, 2009

Form available on

www.vcta.net

ATTENTION!



All teachers

involved with

Grades 3-8 Testing

NYSUT's Efforts have

prompted the New York State Education Department and the Board of Regents to consider changes to the Testing Program. Your input is vital to the process and any future changes. Please go to

<http://www.forms2.nysed.gov/emsc/osa/Grades38TestingSurvey.cfm> to par-

ticipate in this important survey. Survey will only be available until 27 February 2009.



MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD!

To View or Not to View? Obama's Inauguration Controversy

About one week before President Obama's inauguration extravaganza, most teachers received an e-mail via their administrative team from Dr. Hooley. This e-mail advised the staff that the inauguration should not be shown during classes, taking up valuable instructional time at a crucial point in the year.

My initial reaction was admittedly juvenile. I, who had zero inclination to show the inauguration in class pre-email, now felt a burning desire to fire up the CNN on the appointed day in a fit of adolescent-inspired rebelliousness. In general, I think that we teachers are so used to ruling our little kingdoms that we forget that we have bosses. When we hear from them unexpectedly, we do not always welcome the input. After thinking about it, I came to my senses. My inner 15-year-old simmered down and I realized that I agreed with Dr. Hooley. After all, we had already had several snow days by that time and mid-terms were fast-approaching. I didn't have time to show the inauguration. As a history teacher, I certainly understood the historical significance of the event (perhaps that's what really got my dander up), but in this day and age it would be well-preserved in countless media outlets. Moreover, I teach Global Studies One and Two; it would be a stretch at best to make a case for me to show it in class.

In ensuing discussions with colleagues of all disciplines and age levels, it became clear that my initial reaction was not unique. Many teachers were frustrated over the e-mail and a few had even implied that the decision was somehow racially charged at worst or—at least—a gross intrusion on professional judgment. At the secondary level, there are courses whose curriculum arguably allows for viewing the inauguration. What really surprised me was the level of dissent among elementary teachers. Young children would certainly understand the idea that Obama is the new president, but could they possibly understand what his speech and the speeches of others meant? Other than being able to say later in life, "I was in Mrs. Mack's class when President

Obama was sworn in," would viewing the inauguration really enhance student learning and understanding at the elementary level?

Dr. Hooley's e-mail also stated that it was perfectly acceptable to record pertinent portions and show them in class at a later date. This is more than fair and, quite honestly, a much better use of instructional time at all levels. To turn on the television and leave it on all day long would have been a blatant waste of time and resources. This is the point that I believe Dr. Hooley was trying to make. Given the fact that I had already heard of plans to do just that on Inauguration day, the e-mail was not off the mark.

In the end, the high school administration put televisions in the cafeterias and main lobby so that interested students could watch without wasting instructional time. Classes for which this event was deemed curriculum-compatible in the judgment of the teacher were certainly permitted to turn the TV on during the inaugural address. This was in keeping with the spirit and intention of Dr. Hooley's message. To take much else from it is an overreaction.

In fact, thinking back, this was quite possibly the first communication in my entire tenure at Valley Central that dealt with instructional matters (outside of the Social Studies Curriculum Committee). That is refreshing when considering the majority of directives we receive from administration deal with paperwork, housekeeping, and other trivial issues that do little to enhance instruction and/or student achievement. This type of communication is beneficial and has the best interests of the students at heart, we should welcome it.

—Meghan Rilley, HS, Soc. St.

Men Who Teach

Recently I was asked by American Teacher, an AFT publication, to give my opinion on the impact of males in the teaching profession. As I looked back at the teachers I had K-12, I realized that only six were male. My fifth grade teacher was the only male teacher I had until I reached ninth grade.

When you take the time to evaluate the number of males in education, there are very few at the elementary level. There doesn't seem to be an abundance of males at the middle and high school levels either. Luckily, I was blessed with a list of fantastic teachers both male and female. I was also blessed with amazing male role models in my family. Unfortunately, there is a lack of positive male influences at home for too many of our children. Many fathers do not take part in their children's lives. This can be due to many factors: the need to work numerous jobs, divorce, drug/alcohol problems, prison confinements, and—yes—by choice. Even worse is the destructive influence of some males. Many children witness firsthand on a daily basis physically and emotionally abusive males.

Wake Up... (cont'd from page 5)

The thought that such applications would even be given consideration when public schools are being cut with such ferocity, continues to add insult to injury.

The question is when do we get to wake up from this bad dream? One of the efforts that NYSUT has proposed is a fair tax for all New Yorkers. Yes, the state's finances are in trouble. But Governor Patterson has only tried to deal with the budget by cutting funds to public schools, SUNY, CUNY and hospitals. He refuses to consider raising revenues through taxes. The fair tax initiative would create a progressive tax system. Currently, New Yorkers making \$250,000 are in the same tax bracket as those making \$40,000. Governor Patterson refuses to consider the tax system—he said last week this is not a time for imposing new taxes. Yet, consider these facts:

- Since 1972, NYS has cut the tax rate for the wealthiest residents in half.
- NY and California, both facing huge deficit budgets—have cut the tax rate for the wealthiest residents since the 1990's. By utilizing this system, NY has realized a loss of \$8 billion annually

The progressive fair tax system has overwhelming support across the state. It is time for the Governor to wake up and it is time for us to shake him awake. Sending a fax to our legislators telling them to support a fair tax system and restore the cuts to education takes as little time as turning off the alarm clock in the morning. The only way to wake up from this bad dream is to stand up and be heard while keeping our children center. Fax everyday. <http://www.nysut.org/cps/rde/xchg/nysut/hs.xml/contactelectedofficials.htm>

Children learn from their experiences. Often their only positive experiences with males come from interaction with the teachers in their buildings. Since there are so few male teachers, the impact of a male teacher is not limited to the classroom. Interactions in the hallway, cafeteria, playground, etc., have impacts that are priceless. The way a male teacher interacts with students and staff outside the classroom can change the way students think about how males should and can conduct themselves. If they can look up to males who are confident, strong, caring, and compassionate, students will have an experience that can make them question the daily reality of their home life.

If male and female students can see a male who respects others and themselves it can change the way they can expect to be treated by the males in their life and it can lead to change in the type of male they would like to be. I believe that the moments we spend interacting with others can be *further reaching* than the teachable moments we spend in the classroom.

Men who teach have far reaching impacts daily. How can we encourage more men to enter the profession of teaching? —*Rich Steger, VP Walden*

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

⇒Nobody asked me, but...

–It's much too cold to write at great length. I probably should just wish our active and retired members a very happy and prosperous 2009—and claim that my brain is frozen. (Many regular readers of this space will respond that this brain freeze has been present for many, many years!)

–Teachers have the most difficult job in the world, attempting to impart knowledge and engender wisdom to sometimes non-receptive ears and hearts and minds. This year will be even more difficult. The recession draws responses on the local, state, and national levels to “tighten” the fiscal belts—and this is understandable (even if it is just political “mouth honor” to some). However, a very convenient response by many is to cut spending on education—this from the geniuses in Washington and Albany who are always increasing “unfunded mandates.” Their grasp of reality is always a source of wonder to me. Make certain that you point this out to your elected officials.

–I have been a member of the VC family since 1964 as teacher, administrator, department chair, volunteer, union member, and gadfly, and we have never had any fat in our budget. We must let the citizens of our district know this – and perhaps join the Budget Advisory Committee (meetings in February and March).

–I continue to be amazed at the community involvement of so many of our active and retired teachers. The volunteer spirit is very much alive and well among the members of the VCTA. I'm sure that this is noted and appreciated by members of the community.

⇒ Amen

I continue to be stunned by the quickstep passage of time. My hope is that indeed there will be a change in the economic and social and political aspects of our

lives. Our care for one another and our vocation as “men and women for others” will hasten this change for the better. Socrates, that great teacher, sought truth; we who follow him must continue to embrace that truth. (Sorry for that pompous sounding sentence, but I mean it.)

Thanks for visiting the back pages. May 2009 be a great one for each of you and for all those who lives you touch. Until next time, keep pushing back the barriers of ignorance in whatever venue life finds you. Peace.

–Mac, AKA Kevin McFadden

Retiree Representative



Mac urges you to make your voices heard in Albany and Washington for our kids' sakes!

Time is Ticking Away!

Take Action Now

Visit www.nysut.org/budget

for the latest news on state budget advocacy. Send faxes to legislators and more!



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Go Red SM American Heart Association 
Learn and Live SM
for women



High School Members of the Valley Central Nutritional Staff Association wore red on Friday, February 6th in support of the American Heart Association's efforts to combat heart disease. (The VCNSA recently affiliated with NYSUT!)