

VC ECHOES

Volume 12, Issue 4

Valley Central Teachers' Association

February, 2010

LINDA KIRKPATRICK WINS DEAN'S AWARD

Putting
Children
Center



Putting
Children
Center

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

Valley Central Teachers' Association

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

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Articles or Letters to the Editor should be sent to Meghan Rilley, HS, by 20 March, 2010

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

Mark Your Calendars

12th Annual VCTA Blood Drive



- May 12th, 2010; 1-7pm; MS Library
- Contact Kathy Manning (MS) at ext. 6017 or kmanning@vcso.oubooces.org to register!

Spring Fling 2010

- March 19th, 2010; 3-7pm; Osiris Country Club
- \$12 active/retired members; \$23 guests
- Cash Bar; Raffle; Giveaways; DJ

Is Maybrook Closing After 80 Years???

The biggest conversation taking place in the district and community is the potential closing of Maybrook to save an estimated \$1.4 million to help close an estimated \$5 million budget deficit. Although I cannot say for certain what the end result of this consideration will be, I am concerned that once the “genie is out of the bottle” it is often hard to put it back. Money considerations aside, the negative consequences regarding the closing of Maybrook are:

1. It is a community school that just celebrated its 80 anniversary.
2. If closed it is unlikely to be reopened unless space needs make it necessary, many years down the line, if ever.

Although one could contend that these are emotional arguments, they are not unlike arguments that would be made if the government took away your home by invoking eminent domain law. Surely you could all live in another house...people move all the time...do memories and emotional attachments really mean all that much? Let's take your home away from you and see how you answer these questions.

The real reason this option is being considered is the \$1.4 million projected savings that closing Maybrook represents. This savings is based on eliminating staff and increasing class sizes in other buildings. Larger class sizes always translates into less individualized attention for students and a nightmare environment for staff that are already stretched thin due to testing mania and the many district initiatives that are currently being implemented.

During my first meeting with Maybrook staff, I was proud of their child-centered focus. Their questions and concerns were for their students and community. The truth is that most Maybrook staff are senior teachers who will likely displace younger staff in other buildings if this decision is made. Under one plan, Berea and Montgomery would receive the entire Maybrook student population, although this seemed to upset some parents who felt that an entire redistricting should be done in lieu of a closing. Although I do not believe that Maybrook is being singled out for any reason other than its size, it is difficult for a community of students and parents to not feel like second class citizens when their community school has been redistricted multiple times while other buildings have been virtually

untouched by these politically and emotionally charged relocations. NOTE: Another option that will likely be discussed at this year's budget meetings is the concept of grade level centers at specific buildings. This might permit the consolidation of classes, reaping financial savings similar to that of closing a building.

Maybrook staff and parents have asked for the support of staff and parents from other buildings regarding this issue. Although it is essential that we all keep an open mind in difficult financial times, the closing of an 80 year old community school must be a last resort, not an expedient option. District CABC (Citizens' Advisory Budget Committee) meetings will be held on the following dates at 7:00p.m in the MS Cafeteria:

- Monday, February 1
- Tuesday, February 16
- Monday, March 1
- Monday, March 15

Many community members and staff attended the February 1 meeting. Regardless of the outcome, citizens who support the concept of local community school buildings should demonstrate to the Maybrook community that we are truly one school community and the concerns and pains of one building are the concerns of every other building and village. During the next couple of months, VCTA officers will be evaluating the VCSD budget in consultation with NYSUT. Unfortunately, the VCTA is in the unenviable position of having to play catch up with regard to this. Central Office and building administration chose to keep VCTA officers in the dark regarding their potential plans for Maybrook, and it is much more difficult to effectively weigh in after the fact.

In the meantime, please contact your legislators. NYSUT has prewritten fax messages that can be sent directly to state and federal representatives. A link to these faxes can be found on the VCTA's Legislative Action page: http://vcta.net/legislative_action.htm. In addition to this, please send the Gap Elimination Aid letter to your New York State Senate and Assembly representatives (see page 11).

—Tim Brown, HS, VCTA President

Walden's Linda Kirkpatrick Receives Dean's Award for Excellence in Teaching

Last fall Linda Kirkpatrick, long-time, distinguished reading teacher at Walden Elementary School was honored for her dedication and commitment to educating children by the SUNY New Paltz School of Education. Mrs. Kirkpatrick's outstanding traits were noted by her colleague, Jessica Tsantes in her letter of recommendation to the Dean of New Paltz School of Education, Dr. Robert J. Michael. "...She is diligent, caring, respectful, and she passionately imparts her love of reading to her students. Her personality, work ethic, professionalism and leadership qualities afford her much deserved respect." Other colleagues, including Walden Principal, Mrs. Veronica Casillo who nominated her, several fellow reading teachers and such dignitaries as Dr. Hooley and Ms. Anne Susdorff, concurred. A former Walden P.T.O. president and parent of a former student said this about her son and Mrs. Kirkpatrick: "(He) enjoyed going to reading class with her. She made it interesting for him even though he had a disability.... Mrs. Kirkpatrick has been a dedicated, caring teacher and friend to many students and their families....Her love for teaching and the love of children can never be put into words."

Linda began her teaching career as a substitute teacher in 1981. In 1985, she joined the Valley Central Family as a reading specialist. She was trained in Reading Recovery during the 1993-94 school year. Through this early intervention program, she helps some of the lowest achieving students to find success in a vital area of education. Linda motivates, challenges, and inspires her students and is a true advocate for children, always looking for the positive, and encouraging students to reach for the stars.

Linda's enthusiasm for reading and her students never waivers and, in addition to her work with students, Mrs. Kirkpatrick is a role model and mentor for other teachers. She has been instrumental in presenting a large number of district in-service workshops dealing with literacy instruction, running records and reading strategies. Her door is always open and she shares her knowledge, ideas and materials.

She serves on Walden's IST (Instructional Support Team) and the first grade Data Team. She also coordinates several annual events at the school including the Jump Start Reading Program,



Parents as Reading Partners, Camp Read-a-Lot and the Summer Reading Program. Additionally, she established and facilitates a building Reading Committee, where teachers and support staff can share ideas and plan school-wide literacy programs and practices. She helped establish Walden's Book Room and oversees ordering of books and materials for the building. The "Book Share/Book Keep" donation program was initiated by Mrs. Kirkpatrick as well. Her enthusiasm, her innovativeness and her genuine concern for creating a love of learning are exemplary.

Her colleagues view her as a Master Teacher and say that she puts her heart into every aspect of her teaching. She brings parents and children together, provides tools for the success of each of her students and encourages a love of literature and reading in everyone she meets. In addition to her dedication to her profession, her commitment to the community is evident through her annual fundraising efforts for "The Walk" which supports Breast Cancer Awareness and Research.

A life-long learner herself, Linda earned her undergraduate degree from New Paltz in 1981. She obtained a Masters Degree from New Paltz University in 1984, and has since earned 60 credits beyond her Masters Degree. When the opportunity presents itself, Mrs. Kirkpatrick continues to enhance her skills and knowledge.

We applaud Mrs. Kirkpatrick for her achievement. It is certainly well-deserved!

—Jessica Tsantes and MaryEllen Raskopf-Kawauchi, Walden Elementary School

Terri Van Pelt Receives 2009 Aderson Award!

Montgomery Elementary Kindergarten teacher Terri Van Pelt is the 2009 Recipient of the Richard H. Aderson "Make A Difference" Award. The award is a living memorial to Richard Aderson, former Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Services and Personnel in the Valley Central School District who died in 1997. Criteria for the award, which is given to an employee in the Orange-Ulster BOCES system, includes demonstrating a genuine contribution to the field of education, and a humanistic concern for faculty, students, and all persons in education. Recipients of this honor also have a strong record of achievement of excellence. Lastly, nominees must be committed to "Making a Difference" in children's lives.

All nominees receive a starfish pin; derived from the starfish story about a man walking along the shoreline throwing starfish back into the sea. Although unable to throw all of the washed up starfish back into the ocean along the miles of beach, the man was able to "make a difference" ... one starfish at a time.

Terri's M.E.S. colleagues marvel at her caring and compassionate nature. As a Kindergarten teacher she makes a genuine contribution to education every single day. Terri initially made a name for herself in the Valley Central School District as a substitute teacher. In 1991 she was hired as a Special Education Teacher. In this capacity, she worked tirelessly with classified students, helping them meet their individualized academic goals in a part-time Special Education program. In September 1996, Terri's job became a combination of a half-day Special Education program and a half-day mainstream Kindergarten class. She juggled this challenging schedule with grace and professionalism. The following year Terri switched to the general education track, where she enjoys "reaching" more children as a mainstream Kindergarten teacher.

I had the pleasure of working with Richard Aderson in my capacity as a School Psychologist. Like Richard Aderson, Terri has a humanistic concern for her colleagues and students. She inspires and motivates both groups with her positive attitude and understanding nature. She is never too busy to lend an ear or a helping hand. Terri exhibits as much enthusiasm for her career as she does for raising her four beautiful daughters with her husband, Mike. She nurtures her students as if they



were her own children. She cares for, and cultivates them like the seeds and bulbs her classes have planted on our school grounds and in our "Kindergarten". It is no wonder that children "bloom" in Mrs. Van Pelt's classroom.

A guitar player, Terri enjoys incorporating music into her lessons. She uses music when teaching letters and rhymes. Her students learn many songs while she accompanies them on guitar. Believing so strongly in the importance of community service and the power of music, Terri volunteers her time for the Outreach Program at her church where she uses her music and teaching skills to work with handicapped adults. At school, she coordinates a Kindergarten visit to a local nursing home on Valentine's Day. For this traditional visit, the children sing songs to residents while Terri plays her guitar. This special visit enriches the lives of the children and the senior citizens and reinforces valuable lessons in caring and community service.

As a Master Teacher, Terri Van Pelt has helped to establish a strong record of achievement. She is loved and admired by her students and colleagues alike. It is such a privilege to work with an outstanding educator who inspires all those lives she touches with her compassion and enthusiasm. Terri was presented the "Make a Difference" award on Monday, February 8, 2010 prior to the Valley Central School District board meeting. A perpetual plaque, bearing her name and those of previous recipients, is hung in the administration building.

Montgomery Elementary is very proud of Terri Van Pelt! She is so deserving of this honor because she truly strives each day to "make a difference" in the lives of all those she touches.

*—Respectfully Submitted by Adrienne Hershfield,
Montgomery Elementary School Psychologist*

Mr. Al Schmidt Wins Local VFW Citizenship Award!

Congratulations to Al Schmidt for winning the VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award at the local level!

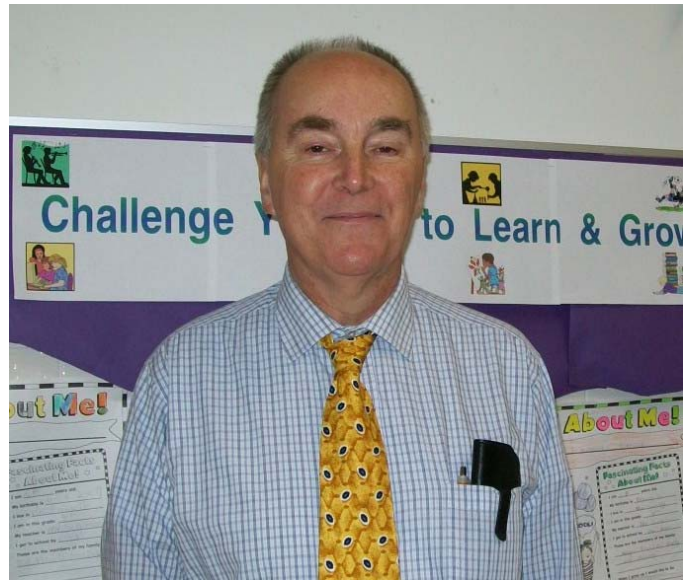
This award is sponsored by the VFW as a way to identify and recognize America's best educators who instill a sense of national pride in students. Promoting civic responsibility and patriotism are some of the values Mr. Schmidt practices in the classroom; thus, making him a prime candidate for this award.

Ms. Serratore, Montgomery Elementary School Principal, nominated Mr. Schmidt for this prestigious award. Ms. Serratore describes Al Schmidt as a dynamic, dedicated and talented teacher who truly makes a difference in the lives of his students.

Mr. Schmidt continually does an outstanding job of educating his students in the area of citizenship. A Vietnam War Veteran himself, Mr. Schmidt has continuously taught students the significance of Veteran's Day. In addition, Al has created and implemented an educational project which focuses on helping students understand the history of voting rights in America.

Did you know that Al Schmidt has been teaching for 37 years? You wouldn't think it has been that long as Al still greets each day with a smile and his enthusiasm overflows into the classroom. Al Schmidt brings his dedication and inspiring work ethic with him on a daily basis.

The local Maybrook VFW selected Al Schmidt as an outstanding teacher in grades K-5



for this award. The VFW Post will now advance Mr. Schmidt's nomination to the National Headquarters for consideration in the National Awards contest.

Whether Al Schmidt wins at the National Level or not, he is a winner! We here at V. C. are fortunate and proud to work with such a dedicated professional and a caring and passionate man. Both his colleagues and his students are so very lucky to call Mr. Al Schmidt one of our great citizens here at MES!!

Fondly submitted by,

—Melinda Sulzbach, School Social Worker

(With excerpts from Ms. Serratore's nomination)

The Value of Jargon and New Initiatives

Within education there always seems to be a new set of jargon that is crucial to success in the classroom. Without this new jargon, teachers would surely be lost and children would fail at unprecedented rates. What did we do before Harry Wong and Madeline Hunter corrected all of our incorrect patterns of behavior. How could Albert Einstein have possibly succeed in a world in which his teachers did not place a "do-now" on the chalk board religiously on a daily basis or practice the imperative task of handing papers in by passing them across the rows as opposed to the "regular" way (i.e., forward)? Breaking news story...new research indicates that children have become more isolated due to the "lateral hand in" method. This research indi-

cates that students are less likely to learn the names of their aft peers, leading to lower self-esteem on the part of these students who sit behind other students, developmentally delayed social skills and, consequently, de-evolved behavior patterns and progressively declining test scores. Lawsuits are pending! Schools may soon mandate that all students sit in a circle, square or rectangle, with their backs to the wall.

Of course I am just kidding. But given time, someone who wishes to write a book and prove that their methods of teaching are better and therefore the only correct method will inevitably criticize any methods that preceded them. The UFT (United Federation of Teachers), our New York City colleagues, have run some impressive ads on televi-

The Value of Jargon and New Initiatives (from pg 6)

sion lately that take a slap at the annoying tendency within education to periodically change the jargon. Changing educational jargon is too often a response to political correctness or is an attempt to give the appearance that education has finally found the magic pill that will make all children succeed regardless of any other mitigating factors. The truth is that there will always be mitigating factors and the most important weapon in our arsenal that can overcome these mitigating factors are the teachers that refuse to give up on their students. New jargon does not create success; in fact, sometimes new jargon confuses and delays progress, or in worst case scenarios, damages an entire generation of students by unduly distracting teachers from their primary responsibilities.

Most of you have probably heard of learning styles. I enjoy reading about them, studying them and trying to understand how they can be utilized to improve instruction. In fact, I find them interesting enough that I have learning styles categorized and defined on my school webpage. Nevertheless, I have always believed that their usefulness in a classroom setting is limited at best. Many of us have been told for years that it is the responsibility of teachers to understand each student's preferred learning style and create lessons that cater to each one of these students. This jargon and philosophy looked good on paper but was and is not practical in the classroom. New research seems to debunk the belief that teaching to learning styles is a more effective method of teaching and learning. In fact, it may be counter-productive. "For a given lesson, one instructional technique turns out to be optimal for all groups of students, even though students with certain learning styles may not love that technique" (David Glenn, *Customized Teaching Fails the Test*). How many students have been held back due to our jumping on this *bandwagon* when common sense told us that this did not make any practical sense for a classroom setting with 30 students? For those of you who may disagree with Glenn's findings—be patient. Learning style advocates will be sure to debunk Glenn's findings in the near future, once again leaving education in limbo.

This is not unlike the political correctness of heterogeneous grouping in schools. To date there has been no definitive research that indicates that the extreme forms of heterogeneous grouping or detracking that is being promoted in schools today is the optimally effective choice, yet we continue

down this path for a variety of politically correct reasons. De-tracking appears to have some merit when implemented with discretion and common sense and may have helped many of our more needy students. It has even helped to create a new standard of higher expectations for many of our lower achieving students. I question, however, the value of extreme de-tracking. While other nations are encouraging their brightest and most energetic students to achieve higher levels of educational enlightenment by means of more rigorous studies, separate and apart from the rest of the student population if necessary, the United States seems to be too heavily focused on minimal competency to the exclusion of excellence. If we wish to compete in a global economy we must provide opportunities for our brightest students to advance beyond minimal or standard competency. I would ask the same question I posed in the previous paragraph: How many students have been held back due to our jumping on this *bandwagon* when common sense told us that this did not always make practical sense for a classroom setting with 30 students, especially 30 students with very diverse proficiency levels?

Most educational jargon is tolerable and most educational initiatives have merit. It is the *all or nothing* attitude to these new initiatives that hurts education and students. Every initiative has pros and every initiative has cons. When discourse about the cons is stifled for political correctness, as it appears to have been with heterogeneous grouping, there will continue to be winners and losers, the very problem that de-tracking was supposed to fix. Whether it is sequential math or content based math, phonics or whole language, the *more is better* or *less is more* philosophy, silent sustained reading or reading aloud, someone will force upon us a new path without considering the practical impact this new path has upon student learning. In the end, teachers will save the day by working overtime to compensate for experimental initiatives because they care about their students. In the end, it is teachers who fret the most over lost generations due to these ill-conceived initiatives. In the end, good teachers will do a good job no matter what jargon or initiative is thrown at them. The latest jargon does not help one bit with what happens in classrooms. Yesterday's jargon...today's jargon...who cares...it's all going to change again anyway...let us teach!

—Tim Brown, HS

Internet, Texting & Email—What You Need to Know

Preface: This article originally appeared in the NY Teacher on March 26, 2009. It was titled "When 'myspace' impacts your space" and was written by Clarisse Butler Banks. With all of the recent online activity regarding the Valley Central school/community, it seems timely to reprint this for members. —Tim Brown

Do you use social networking sites like MySpace or Facebook to keep in touch with family, friends and students? Is your Xanga page an outlet for your creative side? Does it include fun photographs from vacations and weekend trips? Or do you prefer to blog about your life, or post poetry? Do you communicate with students via text messaging?

If you answered yes to any of these questions you may be jeopardizing your career and opening yourself to questions about your relationship with students. Gone are the days when life outside of work is private. With the popularity of social networking sites and online Web logs, the Internet is one of the first stops for potential employers — as well as students and parents.

Educators in several states, including New York, have learned that lesson the hard way. In several cases, local media outlets, working off lists of new teachers, found Web pages with provocative photos, admissions of drug and alcohol use, and often-graphic blog entries. Some of the reports have led educators to resign, or be fired or reprimanded.

A tenured central New York teacher was fired in connection with racy photographs and content posted on her Internet profile. A Hudson Valley teacher resigned after being duped into carrying on an online conversation, which included the topic of sex, with a student pretending to be someone else. In the Capital District, a teacher was suspended after rumors surfaced of inappropriate photos posted online. And in February, a Gloversville Middle School principal was suspended for three weeks without pay for sending objectionable e-mails to staff.

The problem is not limited to the Internet. While text messages have replaced e-mail for many in the tech-savvy set, cell phones now have photo and video capabilities and several educators have found themselves victims of secretly recorded videos that end up on YouTube.

With educators finding themselves in uncomfortable or even criminal situations, unions are trying to help. An article that exposed the online profiles of three educators led the Ohio Education Association to discourage all members from using MySpace or Face-

book. While NYSUT has not warned educators off such sites, the statewide union provides a brochure, *Protecting Yourself*, to members and offers a training session on Internet and e-mail safety. "Our intent is to educate our members," said NYSUT President Dick Iannuzzi, "We want to make sure educators — and all public employees — can make informed decisions about their cyber-activities with an understanding as to how they impact their professional lives."

In recent years, NYSUT local presidents have found it increasingly necessary to include a discussion about the Web in orientations for new educators. "We try very hard to tell people to be careful," said Eileen Foss, president of the Baldwinsville Teachers Association, who recommends new educators take down personal pages on social sites. "My advice to new teachers: If you have a MySpace page, you need to get rid of it," Foss said. "I also let them know if they do have a page, I can guarantee our tech guy has already seen it."

Many educators view the pages as a way to communicate with people of their choosing, mostly family and friends. Educators may also use the sites to communicate with their students, and to post homework assignments or class announcements. Foss and others are not trying to scare newcomers, but merely to reiterate the role educators play, especially considering that their reach goes beyond the classroom. "We're in a community where I tell members they are going to be the topic of dinner conversation," Foss said.

Selina Durio, president of the North Babylon Teachers Organization, stresses a similar message with members. "Our approach has always been to try to get newer educators to realize that what they do at home can affect their job," Durio said. "We have a very young staff and a large number of members who were raised in the neighborhood — about 30 percent. We're trying to get them to realize that students will see them outside of school and they will still look at them as their teachers."

Robert Reilly, a lawyer in NYSUT's Albany Office of General Counsel, notes that educators, fair or not, are held to a different standard. "Teachers are seen as role models in society and one of the qualifications of obtaining and maintaining your certification to teach is that you have good moral character," Reilly said. "So if you do something that reflects poorly on you as a role model at school and brings your moral character into question, you could be disciplined by your district and

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the State Education Department may have grounds to investigate revoking your certification." Behavior deemed "conduct unbecoming a teacher" could very well include information posted on a Web site. "Your character is an issue as an educator," Reilly noted.

NYSUT Labor Relations Specialists Chris Chandler and Nancy Phelps conduct trainings on Internet and e-mail safety. Chandler notes "more employers are doing Google searches and turning up things that people thought were innocuous, including teacher MySpace pages that walk the line between self-expression and inappropriate content. "I've been in situations where an educator has been disciplined when an administrator is contacted by a parent or someone in the community with a concern about something they've seen online," Chandler said. "When it comes to electronic correspondence, be careful what you put out there. Be aware that cyberspace is an open forum."

Protect yourself: Millions of Americans maintain online profiles, and a growing number are falling victim to online identity theft. In separate incidents, students in Colorado, Texas and Pennsylvania created fake MySpace pages in the names of educators, posting sexually explicit information and even alluding to inappropriate relationships with students. Hacking is not limited to personal profiles. With more schools encouraging teachers to post grades, materials and other information online, grade tampering is also increasing. According to the New York State Bar Association Journal, the average 13-year-old knows how to create and send falsified e-mail using someone else's e-mail address. In Baldwinville, a 14-year-old junior high school student was caught attempting to access his teacher's grading program. In 2007, eight Fayetteville-Manlius students were implicated in a grade-tampering scandal. Some tips for using technology safely:

- Limit cell phone communications with students to emergencies. The appearance of impropriety alone is enough to end a career.
- If you use an online program for grading/homework, make sure your password is not something obvious. Never share your password & change it often.
- Google yourself. Go to any online search engine and type in your name. You may be surprised at what comes up. Similar to monitoring your credit report, you must be vigilant.
- If you find a phony Web profile, notify the site administrator, your local union president and your school administrator. MySpace has a specific link for educators to report fraudulent profiles.
- Think about closing your online profile.

Proceed with Caution—If you feel deleting your Web page is unnecessary, consider making the following changes:

- Do not list students as your "friends." This blurs the lines between teacher and student. Remember, comments left on your page reflect on you. You may also be judged by information listed on your "friends" pages.
- Assume nothing online is ever confidential. You are still vulnerable to hacking and unwanted people accessing your page even if listed as private.
- Scrutinize every photo, blog entry and comment on your page. Do you really need a photo of yourself in a swimsuit from a college spring break? Educators — with and without tenure — have been suspended and terminated because of racy photos that surfaced online. Some photos have even made their way into classrooms without the teacher's knowledge or consent.
- Take ownership. A report from the Oregon Education Association found comments left by friends and students were most troublesome. Screen all comments before posting them to your page. And remember, people linking to other accounts from your page may find personal photos or information you don't want shared.
- Censor yourself. The Internet gives many people a sense of freedom to share their thoughts and opinions on just about every topic. Share only information you are comfortable with everyone — including administrators, colleagues, students and their parents — knowing.

Some tips on e-mail usage:

- Know your district's computer use policy.
- Districts can monitor not only your e-mail conversations, but also the Web sites you visit.
- Electronic transmissions can be a convenient way to communicate with parents and students, but it must be done in a professional way. If the contact "is too personal or frequent, it may look like there is an improper relationship forming."
- Once an e-mail is sent it cannot be retracted. Deleting it from your account will not delete it from the district's computer system.
- Avoid irony, sarcasm and humor; they rarely work well in an electronic transmission
- Remember to log off your account when finished. You are responsible for messages sent under your name, whether you are the author or not.
- Be sure to review and edit before sending — that includes double-checking your recipients.
- Never discuss student records via e-mail, especially those of students with IEPs. "What it comes down to is if you wouldn't post it on a bulletin board anywhere in the school then you probably should not put it in an e-mail."

Investing in America's Future

When the banking industry needed a hand, they were given a \$700 billion stimulus package. There was no competing for the money. Then there was the automobile industry bailout. The government invested \$21 billion in the future of America's automakers. Lately the nation's attention has been turned to schools.

Schools are not being handed any funds from the federal government, we must race to the top to get them. There is \$5 billion set aside for "targeted efforts to reform schools" and \$4 billion that has been designated to the "Race to the Top" grant. The first question that comes to mind is why only \$10 billion as compared to \$21 or \$700 billion to failing industries. Aren't our nation's children worth as much as the auto or banking industry? Additionally, why must schools compete for funds? And to add insult to injury, why are Title I grant funds being redirected?

Our nation's test scores are compared to those of countries that don't educate all of their children. An educational reality is that our affluent suburban students score just as well as students in Singapore, the world's leader in math scores; but our poor and minority students do not.

(www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vc1hgMI3uUk&feature=related) How does Race to the Top address this?—through competition. Our schools don't have time to play games to get funds. The largest mistake that educational reform has made in the last 20 years is to treat education like a business. Children are not a product to be measured. Progress can be measured on tests. But tests are nothing more than a snapshot and influenced by a multitude of variables. Standards have led us to NCLB which has led us to test-taking to ensure students are learning; which has led to debates and conversations about whether curriculum shapes tests or tests shape curriculum.

Race to the Top at first glance is not much different than standards-based curriculum. "RTTT is doing advance work for a tired, ineffective, punitive approach to education that has moved the country backwards, not forwards... Instead of asking states

and schools to keep running in better measured circles, federal officials should be providing leadership and direction on the two most significant issues affecting education today - persistent poverty and insufficient funding in all states." (<http://usliberals.about.com/b/2010/02/11/race-to-the-top-mandates-radical-education-reform-agenda.html>)

We don't need more years of teaching to the test, we need to prepare students to think. We can't do that if we are forced to run in circles at the national, state and local levels while trying to fund our schools. A simple Google search will reveal that we are facing a national funding crisis in education with most of the conversation being caught up in cutting programs and freezing teacher pay. The loss of teachers in the classroom and programs will set our students back exponentially. We know what the research and data say about class size, and the types of programs our students require to encourage their creativity, curiosity and ability to problem solve. Without innovative programs, they cannot ultimately acquire what is needed to be successful in the 21st century—the ability to think at higher levels.

We cannot afford to waste our time treating students like products on an assembly line—pouring "knowledge" in to test what is acquired in the short term. We need to make a long term investment in their future. We need to prioritize our funding as a nation. We found aid for Haiti which is facing a crisis of enormous proportion. Certainly we must find aid for our own educational crisis. Our students are our greatest resource and definitely worth our investment as a nation. Our politicians need to understand that this investment will pay off in the continued excellence of our country. We need them to trust educators as much as they trusted bankers and automakers. And we need them to invest in education that is forward thinking and globally oriented so that we can prepare our students for the 21st century, not the 20th.

—Patti Lunden, HS

NYSUT Secretary-Treasurer, Lee Cutler Visits VC

NYSUT Secretary-Treasurer, Lee Cutler, a native of the Hudson Valley, a Newburgh resident and a former Nanuet TA President visited Valley Central on January 7, 2010 to meet NYS Teacher of the Year Debbie Calvino. Lee was excited for the VCTA and the entire region for having gained this recognition. The Hudson Valley had

never had a Teacher of the Year recipient before Debbie achieved this honor. NYSUT ED14 Director Carla McLaud (also Pine Bush TA President), HS Principal Christian Ranaudo, and Superintendent Richard Hooley also joined Debbie and myself for a photo (see back page).

—Tim Brown

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

Greetings and a happy, healthy Twenty-Ten to all. Is it spring yet? The musings this time are brief. (What a break for the loyal readers (note the plural!!) of the epistles!!) The reasons for the brevity are two. The weather has been so cold that Mac's usual hot air has suffered frost bite. The second is that this scribe has been hibernating and the old grouch has seen his shadow. The flow of words is six weeks away. Good news: six weeks away. Bad news: flow of words.

—Nobody asked me, but...

—Every time there is a money crisis in the state or country, school tax is identified as the culprit. That really ticks me off. As a matter of fact, it is my present major prime peeve. The newspapers (especially the Times Herald Record) seem to rejoice in big banner headlines re: the need to cut positions and programs. Everybody seems to forget the sterling work done by teachers day in and day out.

—It is very important for teachers, administrators, and staff to have their voices heard. We must remind state and local movers and shakers that what we do is of paramount importance to the life and

future of our students. This is the covenant to which we are bound. Retired and active teachers have the opportunity to be heard at Budget Advisory meetings. If we are not able to attend these meetings, a letter of support for retaining as many positions as possible can be sent to our school board. It is also a good idea to urge your assemblymen and state senators to approve a budget that is responsive to the needs of our students statewide. A letter to the governor may also help.

—I know that the teachers, staff, and administrators will continue to work especially hard to serve the needs of Valley Central's kids in this very difficult school year.

—Amen

Spring will come. It is my hope that there will be also a re-birth of recognition for the work of education. Until next time, keep pushing back the barriers of ignorance in whatever venue life finds you. Peace.

—Mac



Gap Elimination Aid Letter—Contact Your Elected Officials

The Valley Central School District is scheduled to lose \$3.6 million dollars in state aid for the 2010-2011 school year, primarily due to the governor's new gap elimination aid formula that unfairly punishes school districts that have been the most fiscally responsible throughout the years. In addition to the NYSUT faxes, we ask that all employees and community members send this letter to each of their NYS Senate and Assembly representatives. This letter can be viewed and downloaded on our website: www.vcta.net. Links to the VCTA's "Legislative Action" page are set up on our home page. In addition to this letter, please visit the NYSUT Legislative Action Center by selecting the appropriate links from the VCTA site. **NYSUT.org makes it easy!** It even provides a page that lists representatives by zip code.

Is it time for a financial tune-up?

Have you ever asked yourself these questions?

- Should I refinance my mortgage?
- Am I saving enough for my children's education?
- What is the best way to reduce my debt?
- Is my 403(b) retirement account invested properly?

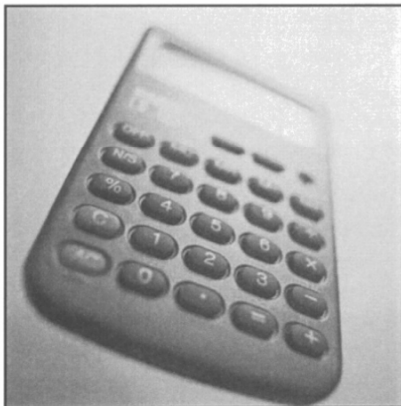
If yes, you could benefit by enrolling in the Financial Counseling Program recently endorsed by NYSUT Member Benefits Corporation.

For an annual fee, you'll get unbiased, objective advice from financial professionals who do not sell any financial products. The Financial Counseling Program is provided by Stacey Braun Associates, Inc., an investment advisory company.

Its certified financial planners and registered investment advisors provide fee-based professional financial counseling; they receive no commissions from mutual funds, brokerage firms, insurance companies or any other third party.

The Full-Service Financial Counseling Program includes several features. You can consult with a planner or advisor toll-free for up to six hours per year. If a planner or advisor is not available when you call, you can schedule a phone consultation at a time convenient for you.

You can request no-cost written summaries and reports on a variety of financial issues. You can receive assistance in choosing a 403(b) retirement savings program provider available



through your employer, as well as assistance on reviewing your 403(b) investment selections.

You'll gain access to Stacey Braun's password-protected Web site, which is chock-full of tips, narratives, market data, quotes, charts, news, calculators, an interactive financial planner, useful Web site links and more. There's even an e-mail helpdesk where you can get answers to basic financial questions within 24 hours.

If Stacey Braun holds an educational workshop in your area, the admission fee will be waived if you wish to attend. Also, you can request an in-person consultation with a Stacey Braun planner at a mutually agreed-upon location. This service is limited to 90 minutes and carries an additional fee.

If you only desire advice regarding 403(b) retirement savings programs, the **403(b) Limited Financial Counseling Program** is available at a reduced price. This option includes toll-free phone consultations to discuss 403(b) programs only (six-hour limit) and assistance in selecting a 403(b) program provider available through your employer, as well as assistance with investment allocation of 403(b) assets. Web site access, e-mail helpdesk and in-person consultations are not included in the limited plan.

For information on this and other programs, visit www.memberbenefits.nysut.org, call us at **800-626-8101** weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., or use the **Contact** feature on our Web site.



The Stacey Braun Associates, Inc. Financial Counseling Program is a NYSUT Member Benefits Corporation (Member Benefits)-endorsed program. Under an agreement with Stacey Braun, Member Benefits has an expense reimbursement/endorsement arrangement of 10% of annual participation fees received plus \$9 per direct bill participant. All such payments to Member Benefits are used solely to defray the costs of administering its various programs and, where appropriate, to enhance them. Member Benefits acts as your advocate; please contact Member Benefits at 800-626-8101 if you experience a problem with any endorsed program.

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Jan/Feb '10



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NYSUT Secretary-Treasurer, Lee Cutler Visits VC

(Carla McLaud, NYSUT ED14 Director; Tim Brown, VCTA President; Christian Ranaudo, VCHS Principal; Debra Calvino, NYS Teacher of the Year; Richard Hooley, Superintendent; Lee Cutler)



Maybrook Elementary—(Story on page 3)

