

VC ECHOES

Volume 12, Issue 5

Valley Central Teachers' Association

June, 2010

2009-2010 YEAR IN REVIEW



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



Volume 12, Issue 5
Spring, 2010

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of the Valley Central Teachers' Associa-
tion—Local 3076—and is published
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articles submitted to the VC Echoes will
also be posted on the VCTA web site.*

Edition Prologue: This may be the single most difficult year that VC has ever faced with regard to funding, programming and staffing needs for the upcoming school year resulting from difficult decisions/outcomes due to education cost shifting and the outright withholding of education funds. During the 2010-11 school year, some of our students will miss out on important opportunities and class sizes will increase making individualized attention more difficult to provide. Federal and State elected officials have pulled the rug out from under public education and are focusing on Charter School funding, despite the fact that 80% of Charter Schools do worse than public schools...and I am quite confident that the other 20% would be in the same boat if they were not exempt from the same mandates that public schools must comply with. Forty-three VC positions were lost this year and many of our colleagues are out of work with bills to pay and mouths to feed. We must not forget their plight, or the impact that this will have on the future of our children. In light of this harsh reality, it seems somewhat insensitive to continue with business as usual, but continue we must. There are battles to fight and win, members to be acknowledged and honored, and adjustments that must be made to do our jobs in a climate that seems to want public education to fail so that hedge funds can control the American education system. With the added weight of these additional burdens, it is important that we not lose hope. Instead, I ask that members NOT wait complacently for a miracle to happen...miracles are usually a product of the diligent efforts of the rank and file...sometimes fate needs a helping hand from us!

—Tim Brown, VCTA President

Linda Draughn Wins Award

The family of Maybrook Elementary School is so proud of our second grade teacher, Linda Draughn. She is one of the recipients of the local VFW's National Citizenship Education Award. Linda was nominated for this award by our principal, Anne Sussdorff. When the rest of us learned that Linda was being recognized by the local VFW Post, it was no surprise.

Not only is Linda an outstanding classroom teacher in all areas, she instills love of country and patriotism in her students as well. She accomplishes this in so many ways: teaching her class about patriotic celebrations and holidays, such as Veterans' Day and Memorial Day, developing their awareness of patriotic symbols, famous Americans, and how democracy works in America. She teaches her students the importance of citizenship and an appreciation for those who have served our country.

Linda's classes send valentines to veterans in Castle Point Hospital, and they write letters to servicemen overseas. She has also participated in our school's letter writing campaign supporting the creation of a Purple Heart stamp. Every year Linda does a special Flag Day project with her class. If anyone ever has a question about flag etiquette, we all know Linda is the person to ask.

On a personal level, Linda helped to create The National Human Rights Committee for

POWs and MIAs. She served as this group's treasurer, and fought for the return of Vietnam soldiers. She was also involved with The Friends of the Vietnam Wall, an organization dedicated to offering the healing quality of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and preserving its significance in our history.

Linda has accomplished so much, yet she is so modest about what she does. She is an inspiration and truly deserves this recognition. Linda was honored, along with Al Schmidt of Montgomery Elementary School, on January 17, 2010. Maybrook Elementary also wishes Al the best as he continues to the next level.

—Donna Lloyd, Building Rep, Maybrook



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Double Honors for Maybrook's Connie Griffin!

I had the pleasure and honor of congratulating Nurse Constance Griffin, Maybrook Elementary, last year. At that time she was chosen by The New York State Association of School Nurses to represent them as a Director on the National Association of School Nurses. She was installed on January 31, 2009, in Washington, DC.

Now I have the pleasure and the honor of congratulating Nurse Connie for being awarded the Asset Builder/Outstanding School Based Professional Award. Connie's award will be presented to her at a luncheon on June 4, 2010, by the Orange County Youth Bureau.

Connie demonstrates outstanding accomplishments in the categories of Asset Building and Positive Youth Development, Mobilization, and Inspiration. Connie deserves this honor and we at Maybrook are all very proud of her!! I am extra proud to have her as a friend!

—Linda Draughn, Building Rep, Maybrook

Maybrook is very proud to announce that our very own Nurse Constance Griffin has been chosen by the New York State Association of School Nurses to receive the Award for Excellence in School Nursing for Zone 5, New York State. This zone includes Sullivan, Ulster, Dutchess, Rockland, and Orange Counties. She will be receiving her award at the November Conference.

Connie was required to meet the following criteria:

- Currently practicing as a full-time school nurse
- Must be a member of NYSASN for the current and preceding two years (three consecutive years)
- Completed application form and biography
- Nomination by self, colleague or administrator

Anne Sussdorff, Principal of Maybrook Elementary, nominated Connie for this very deserved award. Last year, Connie was chosen by the NYS Association of School Nurses to repre-

sent them as a Director on the National Association of School Nurses. She was installed on January 31, 2009 in Washington, DC.

Connie is expected to "advance the well-being, academic success and lifelong achievement and health of students."

Connie spends every minute demonstrating these attributes. She works tirelessly both during the school day and after the school day. At school, Connie helps our families by providing clothes, food, and toys for those in need. She helps families through individual issues and addresses their needs by helping them locate resources for assistance. There isn't a student in the school that has been denied the extra hug or just a 'listening moment' from Nurse Connie! (She also treats all staff members the same!)

Besides being a member of the NYSASN, Connie is a part of the Orange County Medical Corps, Critical Incident Stress Management Team, District Emergency Management Institute, and National Incident Management System, Maybrook Elementary Safety Committee, and is a trainer for CPR and First Aid. Connie makes sure that everyone is informed of District and Maybrook Elementary Fundraisers to help others. She also serves on Maybrook Elementary's Sunshine Committee.

Connie brings sunshine into every life she touches. I am extremely proud to congratulate Constance Griffin for the New York State Award for Excellence in School Nursing. Valley Central School District is so fortunate to have such a valuable Nurse. We at Maybrook couldn't be prouder!!! We love our very own Nurse Connie!

—Linda Draughn, Building Rep, Maybrook



Committee of 100

Lobbying in Albany for funding and equity was more complicated than ever on Tuesday, May 11. Charter schools, furloughs and a lack of funding for education were at the top of the list of items to discuss with elected officials. The governor's furlough scheme impacts all state workers except, of course, those that work close to the governor and the politicians themselves. In fact, Governor Patterson raised the salary of his staff after making some cuts, claiming that the remaining staff would need to be compensated for the extra work load required by these layoffs—so much for leadership by example.

Charter schools continue to be a thorn in the side of those in favor of equity and fairness. Charters are exempt from the same audits that public schools must adhere to despite the fact that they are over 90% funded by tax dollars, half of which are stolen from the local districts in which they are located. Charter schools also choose their students, select which grades they will service and expel students that do not measure up to their standards, sending them right back to the public schools from which they came. Two attempts to *test the water* in Newburgh were for the potential opening of K-2 Charter Centers. How altruistic! Teach students at grades in which there is no accountability, do a bad job and send them back to the public school in time for ELA and Math Exams so Charters can shift the blame.

The most devastating loss to public education in NYS is the governor's \$1.4 billion cut in aid. Combine this loss of aid with the NYS Senate's approval of a tax cap and contingency rules that could result in negative numbers and we have a combined formula for disaster. The NYS Senate has been playing legislative games lately by voting YES on both a Tax Cap and Charter School expansion, with the full expectation that the NYS Assembly will not approve these bills. Essentially, these YES votes allow the Senate to look politically correct to certain constituents while behind the scenes professing that these bills are a bad idea. What happens

when the Assembly caves to political pressure as well? Whatever happened to standing on principle or standing for what you truly believe in? Albany is currently being controlled by NYC representatives and the needs of the whole state seem to be taking a back seat to party and regional politics.

Committee of 100 lobbying is important to our success; however, there are many misperceptions regarding the power and influence of union lobbying. For example, only 2.7% of political contributions come from organized labor while 71% come from corporations. A recent court decision that recognized corporations as people and will essentially place politicians in the hands of big business. Corporations may utilize the profits of their business dealings to influence elected officials, whereas labor unions must organize VOTE-COPE campaigns to collect the funds that will be utilized for lobbying efforts. Union dues may not be used for political action; therefore, organized labor's political action money comes from the rank and file membership's individual and voluntary contributions to VOTE-COPE.

--Tim Brown, HS, VCTA President

The Task Before Us

Fair or not, for whatever reason, our next batch of students is at a disadvantage. They will not have the same options and opportunities available to those who came before them. This is through no fault of their own, or due to any lack of effort and caring from Central Office. It is the cruel truth being thrust upon all of us by our incompetent and ineffective political leaders who blatantly refuse to do their jobs.

Though there is nothing we can do to combat the lame ducks in Albany until November, there is a lot that we can do to help soften the blow to our students. Simply put: we have to be better.

(continued on page 11)

Music in Our Schools

Each year, March is Music in Our Schools Month, a month that is set aside for music advocacy in the public schools. I cannot help but to feel obligated to stress how detrimental it would be for the band and chorus programs to be cut at the elementary level. Valley Central, which prides itself on one of the lowest per-pupil expenditures in the region, advocates for making teaching "student centered." One may ask what student centered means. My take is that it means having the goal of a student's education being centered to benefit that individual student. With over 5,100 students in the district, one may wonder how it is not overwhelming for our 921 staff members to know what each student needs. Nonetheless, the teachers, paraprofessionals, and staff at V.C. continuously aim for "student centered" teaching by working with each student to the best of his or her capacity. It sometimes takes an extra effort by a teacher to find the right buttons to push to find what a student is successful at. Many students begin finding their niche at the elementary level, and sometimes, that right button is in music.

In February's American Teacher's Magazine, the importance of music education was featured. Looking at its aesthetic value, music is many times the motivation for a student to get up for school each day. Many students are not athletically talented or may not be an A-student or even a B-student, either. But, the integration of music in a child's everyday education not only gives him or her a sense of accomplishment and joy in their life, but also a positive outlet that carries over into the classroom.

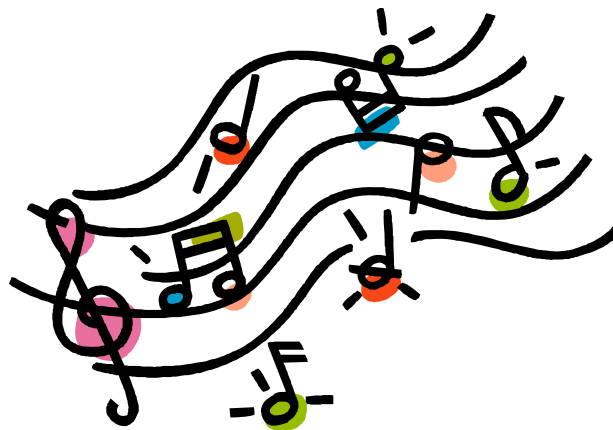
According to a recent CAE study, it has been shown through "data" that the correlation between students' success and how much op-

portunities are given to participate in music are relevant. It has been shown time-and-time again that music has not only a positive impact on brain development, but also in successful test scoring, study habits, and an overall interest in school. Likewise, as stated in the February American Teacher's Magazine, students become tenacious, team-orientated problem solvers who are confident and able to think creatively. Music provides an opportunity for students to engage in a creative and emotional

outlet that supports academic learning, as music involves listening, questioning, creating, performing, and reflecting; all of which incorporate the development of a whole child.

Specifically, band, as well as chorus, encourages cross curricular education. As a band director, my students in the 4th and 5th grade band are exposed to

many areas of cross-curricular education, such as math. I spent a portion of a recent band lesson teaching my 4th graders fractions; making a pie on the board, and breaking it down into halves, quarters, and eighths, so they would understand the breakdown of note lengths. Likewise, students in band are also taught to clap and count these rhythms at the same time, incorporating kinesthetic skills. I have in each of my three years, had at least one student who has had OT/PT services and has, from participating in band, and further developed their hand/eye coordination and motor skills. As well as working on kinesthetic skills, students are taught in band the science of sound waves on not only a wind instrument, but also knowing how the vibrations of sound affects the snares on a snare drum. Likewise, while many would think of a band lesson as only playing an instrument, opportunities arise each week for students to learn about music history and read about it, (*cont'd on page 7*)



Music in Our Schools (from page 6)

as they are learning and phonetically sounding out new words.

In recent years, Valley Central has sent, through audition, students at the 4th – 6th grade level to elementary all-county. This is no small feat, as many of the students that make it from other districts are taking private lessons from the beginning. Likewise, students in recent years have participated in NYSSMA solo competition with much success, scoring a rating of Outstanding or Excellent on Level I – III solos (Level III solos entail an upper level of musicality at the elementary level, which includes knowing 7 scales by memory). But even for the students who do not participate in NYSSMA or All-County, Valley Central has a now 32 year tradition of holding a 5th grade All-District Concert in which 200 students from the 5 elementary schools come together in early June to perform a combined band and chorus concert, which includes a grand finale of a combined piece with all the band and chorus students together. This concert is the pinnacle of the elementary music program and a benchmark that proves not only the authenticity of the program, but a pure sign of unity in the community.

Talks about next year's budget proposals included the possibility of cutting the elementary band and chorus programs, even moving chorus to an after-school "activity." This is all being brought forth despite there being a strong support in cross-curricular education for having band and chorus at the elementary level. While our data teams are busy focusing on meeting the needs for Valley Central's "district goals" (Student Achievement, Knowledgeable and Dedicated Staff, Safe-Innovative Environment, and Partnership with Community), data shows that the elimination of the elementary band and chorus program is a step backwards in these four district goals. Data has also shown that when music (and arts) drives a school district's curriculum and scheduling, more students benefit from partaking in a strong music educational experience.



Furthermore, cutting the elementary band program and chorus programs would not only erase these opportunities for our students, but would also be detrimental to the middle school and high school program, as well, diminishing the level of musical performance, in addition to eliminating the opportunity for music appreciation at the elementary level. There are many sacrifices that will be made over the next few years, due to the sad state of New York. An even more sad state of affairs is the potential elimination of a music program that has a life-long positive effect on hundreds of students each year. —*Brian Ackley, Music, Maybrook*

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In the News...

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 4/1/10 and The Edge April 2010.



*Brown
Tackles
the
Issues*

NYS Budget—Where It's At Now: Both the Governor and the Senate teamed up in their like-mindedness to cut \$1.7 billion from the NYS education budget (\$1.4 billion of this is K-12 finding). At VC and across the state this could still translate into reductions in AP and other advanced courses, the elimination of summer, after-school and evening school programs and, of course, larger class sizes at every grade level. The NYS Assembly, however, passed a resolution to restore \$600 million of these proposed cuts. The NYS Senate also passed a school tax-cap plan which seems to be a double slap in face to New York's public schools. It would appear that the Senate is willing to pull the rug out from under its public schools at the same time that the feds are acting in kind, while simultaneously passing a bill that would dry up the final source of public school funding on a local level. By the way—this is all taking place at a time when the NYS Senate increased its own budget by \$3 million—hypocrisy and self-servitude at its finest. The Senate is playing with fire on the tax cap. Some Senators have stated that they do not think it is a good idea but need to support it for political reasons, believing that the Assembly will not approve it. They demonstrated this same spineless behavior last year and the Assembly did in fact vote against the tax-cap. Eventually, however, this could backfire and the Assembly could also cave to political correctness. The words "tax-cap" are inflammatory in the same way that "no child left behind" were inflammatory. Of course there must be limits to taxation, but that does not mean that funding for public services can or should be

eliminated or butchered for political expedience. New York State is currently funding education at \$4.2 billion below what was promised as a result of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity court decision. Maybe one day the Senate will actually practice what it preaches and demands of its constituents.

There's a Better Choice for New York:

(www.abetterchoiceforny.org) This site is sponsored by New Yorkers for Fiscal Fairness and this link has been added to our Legislative Action and VOTE-COPE pages. One suggestion involves a 1% tax on anyone making over \$1 million per year. I personally volunteer to pay this tax is someone would graciously increase my salary to level. This could raise over \$1 billion per year. A second suggestion is "temporarily reducing the stock transfer tax rebate from 100% to 80% so the finance sector helps to state through the current economic downturn which was caused in part by the excesses of many Wall Street firms." This could raise \$3.2 billion in revenue each year. Of course, large firms that have more tax write-offs and loop-holes than all of the "regular" tax payers combined will whine and complain that they cannot afford this. After all, according to a new Supreme Court decision, large companies are people, too.

Where is the Federal Support?: President Obama seems to be approaching public education funding with a perform-or-punish ideology. The problem is that his vision for a new Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is "a fundamental and devastating shift away from ESEA's core mission—ensuring educational equity for all children." Obama's recent Race To The Top (RTTT) grants also model this philosophy. Having poor kids, who are already at a disadvantage educationally compared to their more (continued on page 9)

In the News...

affluent counterparts, compete for funding and ultimately lose this funding if they do not perform well enough seems counterintuitive, shortsighted and somewhat elitist. Let's punish these students by taking away what few opportunities they may have!

And let's ensure that no teachers will want to work with these children because statistical failure translates into unemployment. If a republican president were making policy decisions like this the democrats would challenge these decisions as fundamentally biased. Both democrats and republicans must still do their job and fight for equity and fairness in education policy and fund-

ing. In the meantime, it looks like too many democrats, who normally champion educational issues, are giving Obama a free pass.

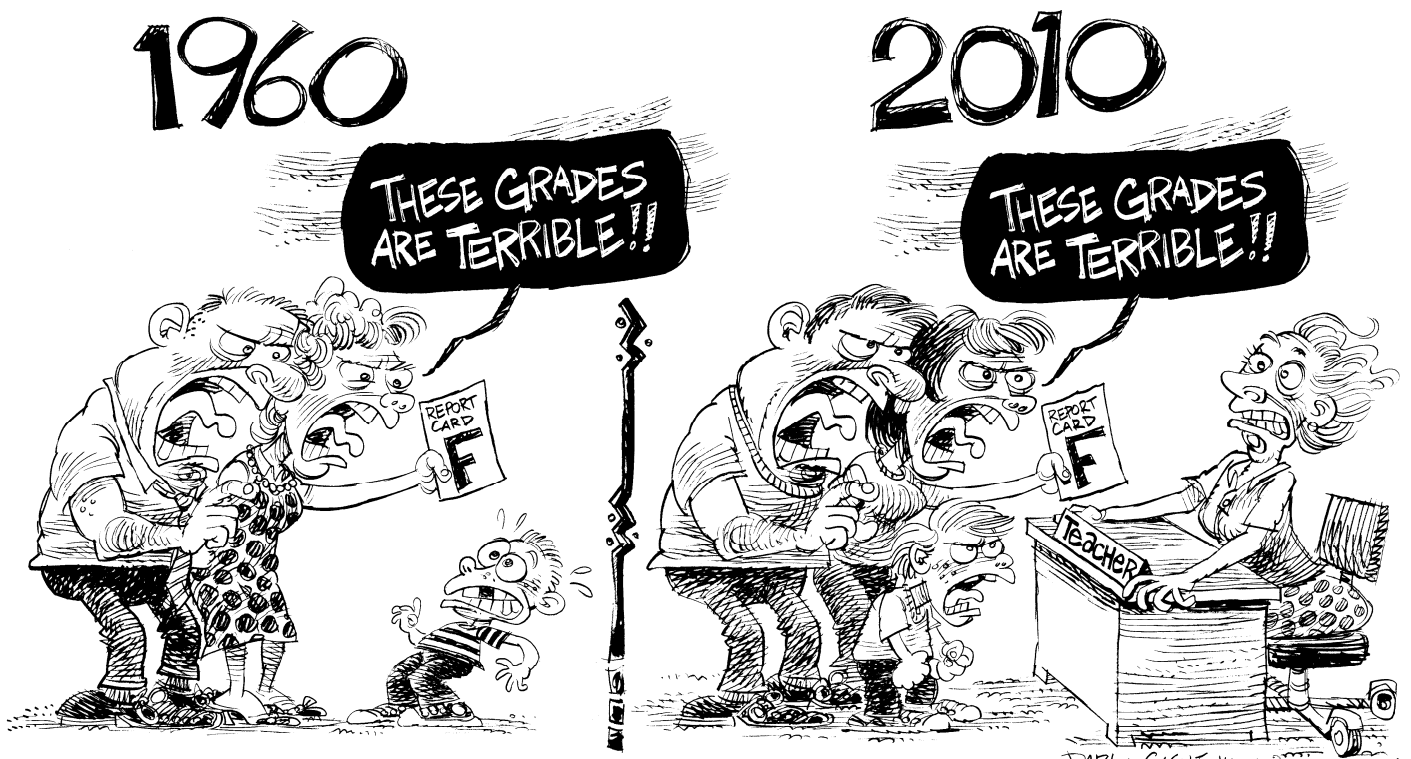
Financial Counseling Program: NYSUT has negotiated with an investment advisory company to provide NYSUT members with financial counseling. Information and links can be located on our Investment Companies page: http://www.vcta.net/investment_companies.htm.



Just For Fun!



Cartoon By Daryl Cagle, from www.cagle.com, the most popular Web site for Social Studies teachers in the world. Great site sent to me by Liz Papesca, HS, Foreign Language. Check it out!



DARYL CAGLE MSNB.COM THANKS U21!

VCTA Does its Part for the Good of the VC Community

On Thursday, April 8th the VCTA held a general membership meeting to discuss and vote upon a special order of business. Members voted 151 to 10 to forego the remaining stipend for the additional hours scheduled for the final two ATF days. In keeping with NYSUT advice, details regarding this special order of business were not discussed until the meeting took place. Incorrect information or distorted facts regarding the correct topic are generally believed to be more harmful than rumors or gossip about the wrong topic.

This proactive move on the part of the VCTA to support the school budget could provide the district with an additional \$130,000. Each member's \$300 contribution to the district is approximately three times greater than what the average home owner will pay when the difference is calculated between a four percent and six percent tax levy. Moreover, approximately 50% of VC employees live in the district, many of them teacher unit members who will still need to pay their own personal taxes without any aid/relief.

On top of this most recent concession, the VCTA has worked collaboratively with the district in recent years in other areas that have realized a financial savings for the district. During the 2008-09 school year, the VCTA and District mutually agreed to provide another

health insurance option for members (i.e., NY-SHIP). The addition of this new insurance option has saved the district an estimated \$100,000. Furthermore, just this year the district and Association negotiated new "employer contribution" language for the incentive and sick day buy back at retirement that will save the district approximately \$20,000 this year alone.

I am proud of the membership for so overwhelmingly passing this special order of business—for their ability to look to the future. This does not mean that those who may disagree with the outcome of this vote are incorrect. Members often look at the world differently, sometimes having valid arguments and concerns from multiple perspectives. True strength and success are not measured by a lack of conflict, but by whether we can remain unified and strong while being confronted with difficult decisions. There are no guarantees that our efforts will be completely appreciated nor understood by all. However, on April 8th, the VCTA membership made a selfless organizational decision to benefit and support the VC community during a difficult and uncertain time.

—Tim Brown, VCTA President, HS



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Increments: What, Why & How

Whenver the economy gets tight there seems to be inevitable attacks on the salary structure of public employees, particularly with regard to increments. Most of these attacks are based on a misunderstanding of the nature or purpose of increments. In a fact-finders report written by Labor Arbitrator Martin Scheinman in the 1990s, Scheinman clarified what increments are, why increments exist and how increments function. I would like to summarize his findings in the hopes that VCTA members will have a better understanding of this generally misunderstood practice.

An increment (step) system is actually a form of deferred compensation. For example, teacher unit members at VC must work well over twenty years to reach the maximum rate of pay, whereas private sector employees generally reach their maximum rate of pay after only a few years of service. Increment systems actually provide employers with financial relief from the necessity of paying employees a top wage during their earlier years of employment.

An increment represents an employee's annual payment, required by law/contract, "for having not been originally hired at the job rate." Increments, of course, do have a cost. This is implicit in the salary adjustments that take

place with continued years of service. There is a cost to the employer for moving employees "from one step to the next." However, if the cost of increment/step movement is to be calculated, so too must the cost savings of those who are retiring/leaving be calculated. "In most instances, that savings—commonly called breakage—equals the cost of the aggregate of the increment payments." Each year employees leave for a variety of reasons. If twenty employees retire, twenty new employees can be hired at the lowest increment/step, starting this deferred compensation process over again.

Furthermore, because many employees do not remain with an employer for thirty years or more, the employer is actually advantaged by the increment system, having never reached higher levels of payment for those employees who leave before retirement. If all new employees were "hired at the job rate," this employer savings would be lost. Therefore, calculating the average salary as negotiated on an increment system and paying all employees this average salary every year would effectively eliminate the cost savings of the increment system to the employer.

—Tim Brown, HS

The Task Before Us (continued from page 5)

We have to work harder, with full dedication every single day. This is no easy task considering many of us will have more students than ever before. Students will be more difficult to motivate as they already feel disillusioned with the cuts. Huge class sizes will do nothing to ameliorate the situation. We must look past these obstacles as much as possible and focus on only the factors we are able to control.

We are the ones who spend the time with these kids and understand what they need. We know how to get them to where they need to be. We are the ones who have to try our best to make it up to them. They have been let down by the system. We can't let them down, too. In the words of the inimitable Yoda, "Do or do not. There is no try." It will not be easy, but if we stick together and work collaboratively with our school community, it can be done. We have to continue to be the strongest advocates for children and education so that their voices are heard over the empty shouting in Albany.

—Meghan Riley, HS, Social Studies

A Steep Learning Curve

Ask a colleague to sum up this year in one word and you will get answers like 'difficult', 'stressful', 'sad', and 'frustrating'. The stress is almost palpable as you walk through the hallways of Valley Central Schools. This tension has nothing to do with the classroom or the curriculum, but rather is centered on the disaster that looms ahead for New York's public education system.

Bashers of public education are nothing new. They live in close quarters with us all. Many teachers have had the experience of sitting at a social gathering and hearing friends and family alike rail against public education. Many know what it feels like to bite their lip and finally to smile coyly as someone new to the groups asks "What do you do?" shortly after having ranted about how horrible and lazy teachers are. Teachers are used to being scapegoats. However, this year (and next, we're told) public education has been assaulted.

As the state legislators and the governor squabble over who gets to cut what and how much, teachers have been quietly and patiently awaiting their pink slips. What has made this much more difficult is the district's handling of the budget cuts regarding personnel. This has been the single largest source of employee stress and frustration. Other districts, like Minisink Valley, told faculty and staff that their jobs would be cut months ago. That is true transparency in the process. Yes, their budget failed. However, the people understood the implications of what the cuts would mean for students. The community should see exactly what positions will be cut and how it will affect education before they ever step into a voting booth. Unfortunately, the community was too consumed by the possibility of restructuring the elementary buildings to fully comprehend the reductions and their impact. If this issue comes up again next year, will the district be "the boy who cried wolf?" What will happen to our elementary schools then?

There is no handbook written about how

to handle the difficult situation plaguing the district. Our central office administrators are in no enviable position having to make these decisions. Clearly, these are not issues that districts frequently face. All of that being said, waiting until May 24th and June 1st to inform people that they would no longer have a place at Valley Central in September sent a very clear message to faculty and staff: you are not valued. Most jobs available on OLAS closed the week prior to the layoffs. Jobs are few and far between in a good year, particularly in areas such as Social Studies and English where applicants abound. Should anyone at the bottom of the list have been looking? Yes. However, cuts did not stop at the bottom.

Generally, our Central Office Administration provides sound, solid leadership. The decision to wait that long almost certainly came from the top. It was the wrong one. Building principals were put in a very difficult situation. They were not at liberty to give information even if they had it. This had to be stressful, even before you consider the lasting effects it could have on their buildings. The perceived lack of respect indicated by the delay is the oft-cited reason for teacher stress and frustration, much of which will inevitably fall on building level administrators.

Unfortunately, we may have to deal with similar (or worse) issues next year. Hopefully, the steep learning curve that accompanied the process will be gentler next year. If the message received (whether intended or not) continues to be: you are not valued, then when times improve we will lose many talented teachers (and administrators) in addition to those we are losing now.

—*Meghan Riley, HS, Social Studies*

A Retiree Perspective on Restructuring

As a Valley Central resident and teacher of over 30 years, I have been following the events pertaining to the proposal of the budget for the 2010-2011 school year. I have been very disheartened and have to make this statement.

For years, Valley Central worked to develop a united identity. I was here for the celebration of Maybrook Elementary's 80th birthday, and the anniversary of the centralization of the District. Now, in just a short time, Valley Central is being divided into separate entities through proposals of restructuring. This is causing friction that is like the separation before a divorce!

Instead, all Elementary Schools, the Middle School, and the High School should be a united front of ALL employees, of ALL PTOs and PTAs, and ALL VC taxpayers and vote to save the District. Lead your Board of Education and Administration to doing what is best for ALL students of VC.

Restructuring will NOT help the students or the united identity of Valley Central. Therefore, it is not an option that should be considered at this time. It is only succeeding in creating discord. It is also a plan that is too short term. If any restructuring NEEDS to be considered, it should be looked at over a two year period, as it is a long-term decision and should be CAREFULLY organized and implemented. Then it needs to be a LAST resort.

As a last resort, the plan with the most room for future growth, as schools return to capacity again, (as they always have before), would be a Grade 5 Center in Berea. The students could be dropped off with the Middle School bus run, therefore not substantially increasing transportation costs. The students could receive more appropriate preparation for the major transition to Middle School. That transition has always been difficult for many students from every Elementary building.

However, I stress again, restructuring is not in the best interests of the students! Plan E is the best restructuring option. However, it should not say: a "Negative" result would be "all 5.2 million in reductions will come from the March 1st reduction list." This would have sounded like a 'scare tactic' years ago. I hope not so, today! This can be avoided with two plans:

1. More money should be used from the Reserve Fund which has had a healthy growth for few years. This can be used to help have at least a two year plan until time improves the situation, OR until restructuring NEEDS to be done. It gives time for that good planning. The Plan E proposal states a Negative is: "Postpones possible restructuring decisions." This should be a Positive. Valley Central is trying to change too much too quickly, which would leave devastating results to the students. Besides, you may learn that the restructuring that was done so quickly WASN'T even needed after all.
2. The NYS GAP Reduction decided that VC residents are capable of paying a higher percentage in taxes and that is why VC lost so much aid. NO ONE wants to pay higher taxes! However, I would suggest an increase of about 7% instead of 5%. The average increase per taxpayer would be as follows: If you assessment is \$100,000, your increase would be approximately \$30.00 a YEAR, \$200,000 would be \$60.00 a year, and \$300,000 would be about \$90.00 a year.

The students are the future of America. We were educated and not it is their turn to receive the best education they can get. The State's standards change constantly, expecting students to learn more and earlier. Small class size is important so these students receive individual attention. This needs to begin in Kindergarten to give them a strong foundation. Then when they reach High School they can become well-rounded and participate in activities to prepare them for college.

I recommend the Board of Education and Administration think long and hard, maybe about two years, before ANY drastic changes such as restructuring proposals are implemented. Keep Valley Central School District a home where families work together for the good of the children.

—Dorothy Sutcliffe, Retired Valley Central Teacher

Editor's Note: The Board of Education seems to agree with Mrs. Sutcliffe and voted to use Plan E. Undoubtedly, this issue will come up again next year.

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

Greetings! The snow is finally melted in the backyard at McFaddenville, some brave robins are looking around for careless worms, the squirrels are trying to figure out where the final supply of nuts went, kids are counting the days until the end of the school year. In the words of the immortal Vonnegut, "and so it goes."

The newspapers are full of less-than-joyous news at this time when I would prefer happy news. However, the news does tend to get me fired up, ticked off, and ready to say once again—

—Nobody asked me, but...

—Every time I hear about the new five year plan to solve all education problems I feel very depressed. I figure I've encounter some ten to fifteen so-called five year plans, most of which are the work of the ivory tower folks who have not been in a real-life classroom in years. (Some have never been in a real-life classroom!!) This, of course, does not stop them from top-down mandates. The most recent to inspire my ire is RTTT, the race to the top. The best thing about it is the title. After that, it is all downhill.

The missing ingredient in these plans is us. The Education elite needs classroom lifers to straighten things out. Some ten years ago I was a candidate for the New York State Board of Regents. During my interview I shared these thoughts with the interviewing panel (2 assem-

blymen and one state senator). Needless to say, I was not appointed to the Board of Regents.

—I continue to be saddened at the loss of programs and positions throughout the state due to governments' ineptitude. As I have said before, teaching is a difficult vocation and this year's uncertainty makes it much more difficult.

—Amen

It is spring, and time for Mac to shed the crabby tone. I am always encouraged in meeting many of our graduates who have become solid and successful citizens. Their number is legion. Also the dedication that I see in so many young teachers brings joy to this old guy's heart. Good work is being done in so many classrooms, and that is what really counts. Until next time, keep pushing back the barriers of ignorance in whatever venue life finds you. Peace.

—Mac



Make Mac Proud!

Support both the Keep Our Educators Working Act (S. 3206) and the Local Jobs for America Act (H.R. 4812). Visit the site below to send a letter to your senators and representatives:

<http://www.unionvoice.org/campaign/teacherjobs042210>

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

—Random Thoughts from a Random Mind...

—A sure sign of my growing older is the fact that the length of these columns this year has been greatly diminished. The old Voice of the Vikings, the Mouth of Montgomery is slowing down as far as bombast goes! What a blessing for you loyal readers.

—This has been a very tough year for schools and for school folks: diminished state aid, rumors of layoffs, layoffs, some folks who have no idea of what teachers do mouthing off against all teachers, a state which gives schools and school people "mouth honor" and unfunded mandates. And in the midst of all this, you (VC's teachers, administrators, and staff) have continued to do what has been done here for so many years. You have given your all to nurture the lives and education of those young folks entrusted to your care. You are men and women for others and you deserve to be commended.

—Information about the 28th annual Retiree Luncheon will be sent out to all retirees (every unit) at the end of July. The present plan calls for the luncheon to be held at Spruce Lodge on Wednesday, September 8th. This is our traditional date, coinciding usually with the first day of classes. Get your arms in good shape to raise a glass to the procession of big yellow buses!

—My sightings and conversations with our retired members remind me of the quality of the

men and women who have made VC a quality school district over the course of so many years. Although this may seem like McFadden "bushiva," I consider myself blessed to have been a part of Valley Central.

—Thanks to VCTA and its officers for including Retirees in the association; to Meghan Riley for her patience with this scribe who uses neither typewriter nor computer (you knew I was a dinosaur!); to Arline Friedman for joining me on the Executive Committee; to Orin Segall for his continued help with retiree matters; to the lads who continue to meet each Wednesday morning and who keep me real, and to Mrs. Calabash wherever you are.

Thanks a lot for turning to the back pages. It continues to be a pleasure for me to meet with you through the column. You all are in my thoughts that you continue to be happy and healthy. May the wind be always at your back. Keep pushing back the barriers of ignorance in whatever venue life finds you. Peace.

—Kevin McFadden,
Retiree Representative

PS—And a very special welcome to the new VC retirees! —Mac



Save the Date



Date & Location: Sunday, October 17, 2010 at Woodbury Commons (5K non-competitive walk)
Registration: 7:30 a.m. — 9:00 a.m. (<http://MakingStrides.acsEvents.org/HudsonValley>)

BOE Presentation Regarding Layoffs

We would like to thank the BOE and CO administration for moving the official tenure date to June 15 for this year's recipients. This action demonstrates an understanding of the devastation that the current financial crisis has had upon our staff and their families. This will clarify to any future employer that this district had complete faith in these employees and that their current status as laid-off/unemployed workers is due to the current financial crisis and their placement on the seniority list. To my knowledge, this is the only BOE in our area that has had the foresight to act accordingly, demonstrating compassion and public frustration over the decisions that have been necessitated by circumstances that are essentially out of their hands. I would also like to note that many of our BOE and CO administrators are wearing the AFT's pink heart pins, demonstrating solidarity with our "pink hearts, not pink slips" campaign that we will speak about later.

We have come tonight to honor 11 retirees, 11 twenty-five year employees and the 24 teachers who just received tenure. These are wonderful milestones that deserve our attention and accolades. Unfortunately, 9 of those just tenured have lost their job or been reduced. On top of that, 1 secretary and 30 paraprofessionals have lost their jobs. Add the 9 additional teaching positions and the one administrative position not being replaced and the loss to the district this year, alone, is 72 jobs. Not in the last 25 years of education, that we just celebrated, have we seen anything like this.

The other day we had occasion to run into one of the most well respected teachers VC has ever known, Kevin McFadden. He asked with deep concern, "How is it going?" We told him, "Education is bad right now, Kevin." With furrowed brow he corrected us, "No, Education is never bad. What is HAPPENING to education—that's bad."

We are asked to do more and more with less and less support from our nation's and state's leadership. Standards remain high, yet there is less funding and more mandates.

How did we achieve what we have to date in this 21st century knowing that Nintendo, the infamous video gaming company, spends twice as much in research and development as does the US Dept. of Education? (Fisch)

Some people might ask, "What is one year in education?" The answer is: From kindergarten through senior year, every year is crucial. The ironic thing in all this is that our economy stands to be weakened by the lack of support nationally for public education.

Here at VC cuts have not only been made in areas like art, physical education and music but also in Social Studies, English, Math and Foreign Language—Kindergarten through twelfth grade. Building administrators now scramble to add desks to classrooms that cannot fit them, and are heartsick talking about the elimination of electives and addition of study halls.

Right now, \$23 billion dollars is being considered by our federal legislators in the Education Jobs Fund bill. \$1.4 billion would be allocated to NY State. This is the exact amount that has been cut by the state. During the banking crisis, \$700 billion was given to the banks to stabilize the financial markets and the sectors of the economy that depend upon them. While any economic recovery at this point is fragile at best, how much more fragile is our future without an investment in children? Money spent on education is an investment in our country's long-term economic and democratic well-being. It pays dividends to all, not simply to some.

We know as educators that we are currently preparing students for jobs that don't exist, using technologies that have yet to be invented, in order to solve problems we don't even know are problems yet (Fisch). The burden of responsibility, no matter what our role in education, is enormous. So, what can we do in this place—right here at Valley Central—to make a difference? We can speak up and speak out. And make *(continued on page 16)* our voices heard on the state and federal level. What difference can these little pink heart pins

BOE Presentation (from page 16)

make? Not much unless we are willing to make our voices heard for the children of our schools, this district, this state, this country.

We stand before you tonight not only to celebrate the achievements of our colleagues, but also to pay deference to the 40 teaching positions, 30 paraprofessional positions and 1 secretarial position that have been lost through reductions, resignations and retirements. Although not part of our unit, we stand before you to express our sadness for the custodial cuts, tech cuts and 1 administrative cut. The reality is the Valley Central budget has always been lean—and these cuts sting to the bone.

We stand before you to implore you that should any money be restored by the federal or state governments that you dedicate that money to the restoration of positions that will keep children our central focus. This community supported our budget. They voted in support of a tax levy that you as a BOE chanced to propose. We remember how you wrestled with that decision. We have been hit harder than any of our neighboring districts because historically Valley Central educators have been called to be the best with far less. Keeping the tax levy low, and relying on the state has cost us dearly this year. For the teachers who have been reduced or excessed, this should be the foundation of their life-long careers at VC we have always had one thing—Valley Central has always had heart. These teachers do not want to leave. Some of them are our own graduates and there is no room for them to stay. They should be the foundation upon which the future VC is built...and tonight that foundation is weaker because of the hole left by their absence as you are forced to abolish their positions due to a lack of funding.

For every \$60,000 you receive or find leftover in the budget or fund balance, a teacher can be restored to a classroom in Valley Central. Right now, the average class size in Social Studies and English is set to be 33-36 students for next school year. If a Social Studies teacher and an English teacher are re-

stored to the schedule, those class sizes will then drop to 30. That may be only 3-6 students per classroom, however, it would positively affect 120 students overall.

Our members are passing out cards from the AFT. On the website listed, PinkHeartsnotPinkSlips, you can call your federal legislators directly to let them know they need to pass the Education Jobs Fund Act to keep America's teachers in the classrooms. You can join us for an education march on Washington DC being organized by the American Federation of Teachers on September 26th to tell our nation's leaders that children lose when programs are cut and class sizes increase. Our children only get one shot at an education. It is not our children's fault they are in school during a devastating economic crisis. (NEA)

A national emergency requires immediate action...and this is clearly an emergency. Our fiscal year begins July 1st, so we cannot afford to wait. We need to contact our state legislators who need to prioritize education and find the money to fund our schools. Our state has yet to touch the rainy day fund. Just like this district has a fund balance which shows good financial planning, the state also has a rainy day fund. You can contact your legislators easily through the Political Action link at our website, www.vcta.net. You can tell our elected official that it is raining out. Instead of adding desks to classrooms, we wish to restore programs and effective class sizes for our children.

We must speak up and speak out to everyone who will listen to restore the cuts to our children. We hope that you will stand with us in unity to rebuild the foundation of education at Valley Central by doing everything in your power to return as many of the 72 jobs lost back to the classroom so that we can all continue to put children center everyday at Valley Central.

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