

VC ECHOES

Volume 13, Issue 1

Valley Central Teachers' Association

October, 2010

THEY'RE BACK!!!! SEE STORY PAGE 3



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

Valley Central Teachers' Association

1175 State Route 17K
Montgomery, NY 12549
Tel/Fax: (845) 457-5899

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Secretary, Scott Warner (HS) VM 7151
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Contribute to the December issue!

**Articles or
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should be sent to
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18 November, 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.

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

Making Strides Towards A World With More Birthdays!

The VCTA will be part of the NYSUT Team in the Making Strides Walk at Woodbury Commons on Sunday, October 17th.

To help make a difference you can:

- Buy a T-Shirt \$15
- Donate to the Walk
- Buy a Pink Ribbon Card
- Buy a LIVESTRONG Bracelet
- Participate in the VCTA Dressdown –Oct. 15th



T-shirt is brown with pink graphics

See your building coordinator for more info: Montg: Gail Nozell, Mayb: Donna Lloyd, Walden: Patty Joy, EC: Holly Bacon, Berea: Robin Scott, MS: Madeline Brooks, HS: Diane Ruggles, CO: Joan Babcock

They're Back! (Cover Story)

Remember the movie, Poltergeist, 1982? At first it just seemed a little strange...a canary died, things were moving around the house, the TV had a strange hold on the youngest child. As the plot progressed it becomes a bit more serious as the chairs at the table perform new stunts daily, eventually you watch a young college student pick his face apart and then you know you are in for the scariest ride of your life. The family loses their youngest to the beast within the house that exists on another spectral plane and they have to ban together to go and get her from the clutches of death. And in the end, they have been so shaken to the core that they can't relax because they are afraid the beast will be back.

Last year the educational community P-16 experienced a plot similar to this throughout the country. At first the rumors just seemed a little strange....after all, if there was money to bail out banks and the auto industry, why wouldn't there be money for education? The year progressed and Patterson slashed our budget and then at CABC we realized that we may just be in for the scariest ride of our lives. The process was unfamiliar and wrapped up in politics on the federal, state and local levels. For our youngest teachers who were on the bottom of seniority lists, it was sickening as they tossed through the valleys of the educational rollercoaster without seat belts. With mortgages, babies and college loans under wing, they had to endure being tossed to and fro wondering who would be called into the principal's office next. They received letters telling

them their positions had been abolished and sat through question and answer sessions sponsored by the VCTA and the District on unemployment and recall. Of the 27 teachers who received layoff letters, 20 were recalled to re-established and newly established positions. And as they return, the question that each of them have asked upon being pulled out of the clutches is, what is going to happen next year?

Some sequels are predictable, some aren't. Right now, this one isn't. We have been hearing rumors that next year is supposed to be worse than last year was, as unimaginable as that is to try and comprehend. The passage of the federal jobs bill was tough. It took about five attempts to get it through but just like the Freeling family in Poltergeist, the AFT and NEA never gave up the effort. Our youngest (least senior) teachers were in jeopardy.

Ultimately, the most vulnerable victims of last year's rollercoaster were our kids in the classrooms. But this family wasn't going to leave them behind. However, getting them from the clutches of death wasn't an easy task. The state

has finally allocated the money received from the federal jobs bill. It has been added to each districts 2010-2011 aid package. The VCTA leadership met with Central Office Administration throughout the summer to monitor and advocate for the return of positions. Now that we have lived through this nightmare once, we at least have an idea of what we may be facing and we will be relentless in holding on as we prepare to potentially ride another educational rollercoaster through hell again.

—Patti Lunden, VP, VCTA, HS



“Hey Sandy, Teaching Looks Good on You!”

One of East Coldenham’s finest, Sandy Carroll, was awarded the SUNY New Paltz Annual Deans’ Award for Excellence in Teaching. When someone mentions the name Sandy Carroll, you can’t help but think of the words “natural born teacher.” There are men and women who choose teaching as their career, go through the training involved, and become very good teachers. But then there are those individuals who were actually born to become teachers. Sandy is one of those people. If you are lucky enough to spend some time in her classroom, it is apparent within the first five minutes that you are going to learn something from this woman. Sandy has such a kind nature and a magical way of making the most monotonous topic come to life. The students in her class come to school with great anticipation for what the day might bring. Sandy is by far, a natural.

Sandy began her career teaching in a regular education class in the state of Alaska. There, she was beginning a journey to help young minds grow in a way many only wish they can achieve. From there, Sandy’s life brought her to the Washingtonville School District where she worked as a leave replacement in a special education class. During this time, she received her Masters in Special Education at Mount Saint Mary College and immediately knew that the special education population is where she wanted to focus her expertise. From there, she took a position in special education for the Valley Central School District, and made East Coldenham her home.

Sandy loved teaching the special education students and it wasn’t long before the staff and the families of the students that she has taught over the years, recognized her as a teacher that is all for the children. She has created lessons that have made the most struggling students achieve in a way most would never expect to see. Sandy never hesitates to take advantage of “teachable moments” and is quick to recognize when a student is in need.

Sandy seems to have the right mix of business and pleasure in her classroom which makes it a place where everyone (including her peers) would love to be! Sandy extends the same qualities to her peers.

Sandy mentors new teachers and veteran teachers alike. She is always available for her colleagues who often seek her out for her valued expertise. Any assignment that is given to Sandy, she not only accepts, but excels with that assignment. She always has the children’s best interests at heart. She is quick to acknowledge her students successes but is very humbled when she is acknowledged. Sandy has received numerous awards during her tenure here at East Coldenham.

You will often hear Sandy telling a student, “That looks good on you”, one of Sandy’s many magical ways of letting a student know that they are on the right track. To that end, it should be said that “teaching” looks good on Sandy. Sandy Carroll embodies the Valley Central School District’s slogan, “Putting Children First.”

—Respectfully submitted by Cathie Heil and Denise Pagliocca

Ch-Ch-Changes to APPR

Last spring a new law was passed that upped the ante on the entire evaluation process. It is to be phased in by the 2011-12 school year across the state unless there is APPR language in a contract that has yet to expire. We fall into the latter category. We will have to change our APPR language to be compatible with the APPR law in the next contract which leaves us in the enviable position of being able to take the next few years to explore the new requirements and our current practice. We will be looking at what we have and what others are implementing.

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Race to the Top (RTTT)

New York State was one of the winners of Race To The Top (RTTT) funding. Other winners of RTTT funding were the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Ohio and Rhode Island. Only Massachusetts scored higher in the application process than NYS. The award for NYS will be \$696,646,000. NYSUT's active involvement was instrumental in NYS's victory, but more importantly, NYSUT and AFT activism helped to tone down some of the more draconian components of this mandated federal legislation. Our state and national affiliates continue to play a major role in shaping the definition of excellence in education. By agreeing to sit at the table, teachers and teacher unions helped to frame the reform legislation rather than let politicians and non-educators frame it for us. All intelligent education constituents wish for a narrowing of the achievement gap, improved teacher quality, and improved practical principles of excellence from pre-K through higher education. What has not been agreed upon are the primary roadblocks to this type of progress. The trend seems to be to blame teacher unions and tenure for all of education's problems. However, the fact that strong union states with established due process rights consistently outperform right to work states seems to contradict these critics' claims.

New York's agreement to change the teacher evaluation process played a key role in NYS being awarded this federal grant. Most locals throughout the state were on board with this change; nevertheless, there remain many outspoken critics. The truth is that NYSUT leaders made a tough and, in my opinion, correct decision to make every effort to control our own destiny as educators in NYS. Our failure to win this grant during the first round was, in part, due to the fact that union leaders were not on board. This eventually led to effective discourse and negotiation between NYSUT leaders and the NYSED, culminating in an agreement that was fair, workable and also

helped other less politically influential states to resist some of the draconian and punitive measures that have been promoted by anti-union and anti-public education groups. The truth is that the US Education Department and the NYS Education Department have the authority to mandate changes to the evaluation process without teacher/union input and would have done so if we had not agreed to work collaboratively with them on the second round of RTTT applications. Knowing when to "hold" vs. "fold" is an important strategy in card playing, but there can be no victory or success if you do not enter the game. Although we did not achieve everything that was desired, discussion did result in compromises that are generally fair...a good result considering the USDE and NYSED, including the Board of Regents, did not have to invite us to the table and could have simply refused to deal us a hand when we did.

NYSUT President, Richard Iannuzzi worked hard to make this process as fair as humanly possible for his more than 600,000 members: "Working with the State Education Department, we advanced the principle that teacher evaluations must be fair and objective, and that while student test scores can play a role in evaluations, they should never be the sole factor. Clearly, the process set up by Secretary Duncan and the U.S. Department of Education recognized the wisdom of that approach, and the importance of having an evaluation system that advances effective teaching by requiring evaluations to focus on growth for all teachers." Both NYSUT and the AFT have been leaders in the education reform movement well before RTTT was conceived, promoting improvements to the teacher evaluation process to ensure that only quality teachers remain in classrooms. One ineffective teacher in a classroom is remembered by the entire community long after the effective ones have retired.

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Race to the Top (RTTT) (from pg 5)

This is unfair, but this is our reality. “NYSUT Vice President Maria Neira said, however, that the Race to the Top grant—which will be used to implement education reforms—will not, by itself, raise achievement. ‘An evaluation system that is good for students and fair to teachers is just one piece of the puzzle,’ she said. ‘In order to end the achievement gap and further improve public education, we need to press forward our efforts to ensure the small class sizes, strong curriculum, new assessments, quality professional development, fair funding and other supports that students and schools need.’”

The NYSED’s website spells out some of the specifics: “New York State’s Race to the Top application incorporates reforms enabled by legislation enacted earlier this year. The legislation: (1) establishes a new teacher and principal evaluation system that makes student achievement data a substantial component of how educators are assessed and supported; (2) raises New York’s charter school cap from 200 to 460 and enhances charter school accountability and transparency; (3) enables school districts to enter into contracts with Educational Partnership Organizations (the

term for non-profit Education Management Organizations in New York State) for the management of their persistently lowest-achieving schools and schools under registration review; and (4) appropriates \$20.4 million in capital funds to the State Education Department to implement its longitudinal data system.”

The VCTA and VCSD must now develop and agree upon a final scope of work, which will be due to the NYSED in 90 days. The NYSED has yet to publish the exact deadline/timeframe or what will be needed in the plan. NYSUT is currently preparing materials for use by locals, but ultimately the plan will have to be negotiated and must be in compliance with the state’s plan during the four years of the grant. I will keep you informed through the Executive Council as I learn more about our obligations through NYSUT.

—Tim Brown, VCTA President, HS

Sources:

- https://www.nysut.org/cps/rde/xchg/nysut/hs.xsl/nysutleader_15575.htm
- <http://www.oms.nysed.gov/press/NewYorkWinsNearly700MinRacetothetop-Competition.html>

Ch-Ch-Changes to APPR (from pg 4)

The new law requires that only 60% be based on observation of teaching while 20% be attached to student growth and 20% be attached to student achievement. The classroom observation piece has four classifications for conclusion: *highly effective*, *effective*, *developing* and *ineffective*. Highly effective and effective are satisfactory, while developing and ineffective are unsatisfactory. A new change in this new federally mandated education law states that any tenured teacher who receives 2 unsatisfactory observations in a row will be subject to 3020A hearing with expedited process. In other words, these new regulations have made it easier for administration to terminate an ineffective teacher or one who may not be developing fast enough. This law also provides more guidance for TIPS and insists that *developing* and *ineffective* teachers be provided with professional development to help them improve.

The APPR committee will be meeting to consider the new law and how the VCSD APPR plan will have to be changed to be in compliance. Various VCTA members and union officers will be a part of this committee.

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

Another opening, another show—no, not a line from Cole Porter, but the opening of school for 2010-2011. Welcome back, Valley Central! And a special welcome back to those active teachers who were excessed (how I hate that word!!) in June but called back during the course of the summer. And all the very best wishes to those excessed who have found employment in other districts. We will miss you. And finally a huge welcome for those teachers, administrators, and staff who are new to the Valley Central family. You join a district which has (for over 50 years) focused on the nurturing of young minds—and has been successful at it. Our graduates attest to that.

—Retiree Doings

The 28th annual retiree luncheon took place on Tuesday, September 14th at 12:30 pm. The luncheon was held at Spruce Lodge. Last year we had 80 retirees in attendance. I'll report back re: the luncheon in the next issue of ECHOES.

—Nobody asked me, but...

—I'm no longer even slightly amused by the shenanigans in Albany: incredibly late with a meaningful budget, postponed payments of state aid, unfunded mandates, etc. The brunt of all these things fall on local districts. Do more with less. And the rush to increase the number of charter schools which are not required to meet certain standards and which take funding from public schools. Shame on New York State.

—In the retiree issue in May, I was reflecting on the "R" word. This summer I have been thinking about two "L" words: longevity and loyalty. My hope is that folks will stay the course at Valley Central, growing stronger each year in their positions. My mind reflects on some of the giants who have spent 30 or more years in our classrooms, gyms, corridors and offices, enriching the lives and minds of our young people. I hesitate to list names for fear of overlooking someone. Loyalty shows itself in being positive in our relationships with our colleagues, in "having each other's back." It is a

two way street. It has always struck me that the teaching/learning process is a covenant: One hundred percent effort is required on the teacher's part and one hundred percent backing on the part of administration. A huge part of this is a strong mentoring program so that young teachers are allowed to grow in their work. Even in difficult economic times, time and funding must be provided to nurture and encourage those new in the field.

—Amen

As always, I remind the readers of this space that the outpourings of this column are my own and do not necessarily mirror the opinions of the State Education Department, the VCTA or NYSUT, the VC school district, etc.

I appreciate the fact that the VCTA provides this space for this retiree's bombast. Special thanks to Meghan Riley for editing this tumble of words.

Thanks for turning to the back pages. May this year be the best ever for VC and its people. It's a joy for me to be a part of your vocation. And of course, until next time, keep pushing back the barriers of ignorance in whatever venue life finds you. Peace.

—Mac, AKA Kevin McFadden,
Retiree Rep.

(And to our new retirees: Isn't it great not to set the alarm clock?! Enjoy!!)





VCTA FALL FEST 2010

DATE: OCTOBER 29

TIME: 3:30 PM

PLACE: OSIRIS

COUNTRY CLUB

COST:

\$12 MEMBER/RETIREE

\$25 NON-MEMBER

FOOD, FUN, PRIZES!!!

SEE YOU THERE

COMING SOON!

**ELECTION DAY
2010**

2 NOVEMBER

MAKE IT COUNT!

