

VC ECHOES

Volume 14, Issue 3

Valley Central Teachers' Association

January 2012

NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFIED: AMY VANZANTEN!!!



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



Volume 14, Issue 3
January 2012

Valley Central Teachers' Association

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In this issue:

Financial Workshop	2
Congrats Amy Van Zanten!	3
Nancy Brother	4
Dear Governor	5
Debra Calvino	6
Fix Education	7
Time	8
State of the State	10
Tier 6	11
It's Good to be the King!	14

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Contribute to the next issue!
Articles or
Contributions
should be sent to
Meghan Rilley, HS, by
16 February 2012

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•High School: Nancy Brother, Deborah McKenney, Antoinette Oakes, Melissa Verlin, Scott Warner
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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.

Financial Planning Puzzle Workshop

(approx 2 hrs)- The twists and turns of the economy have clarified more than ever the need for a financial plan; unfortunately, for many people, beginning a financial plan remains a daunting task. This two-hour workshop outlines the process from beginning to end, covering the five key areas of financial planning: cash management, risk management, savings, retirement and estate planning. You may not have all the answers you need by the end of the session, but you'll know the questions you need to be asking, which will put you well on the way to successful financial management.

When: April 19th

Time: 4:00 pm

Where: HS Professional Library

RSVP: Chris Arndt, MS at carndt@vcmail.ouboces.org

Amy Van Zanten Earns National Board Certification

Amy Van Zanten, fifth grade CTM teacher at Berea, recently earned National Board Certification, the teaching profession's highest level. She was one of 165 New York teachers earning the credential this year.

Amy has taught at Berea for 12 years, all in fifth grade. She has also worked as a new teacher trainer and Spectrum teacher at Valley Central. She previously trained as a Literacy Leader for the district and is now training as a Literacy Coordinator. As if that weren't enough, Amy is currently a teacher consultant for the Hudson Valley Writing Project. She often presents Saturday Seminars sponsored by the group at OUBOCES in New Paltz. Additionally, she is a teacher representative for George Mason University, contributing articles to their website, Teachinghistory.com. She is skilled in many aspects of technology, and shares these skills with her students, incorporating the Smart Board, iPad, iPod and other applications into her classroom curriculum.

Why or how would someone so busy decide to take on the challenge of National Board Certification? "I am always seeking new academic challenges, and the mere size of this one drew me to it," Amy said. She went on to say that she spent many nights and weekends during the past two years writing papers, editing videotapes of her teaching, and compiling data to present to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. In addition, Amy had to travel to White Plains to complete six ½ hour online tests. Each test required her to take an assigned topic, design a curriculum, and submit it online within the ½ hour framework.

Is it worth it? The basic cost of certification is \$2500. The Albert Shanker grant, administered through NYSED will cover the cost. As part of our contract, teachers who become nationally certified receive a salary increase of \$3,000. Studies have shown that the teaching practices of NBC teachers has a measurable positive impact on student learning.

How has this process changed Amy's teaching? "I reflect more often and more deeply on my teaching. I think I have a better grasp of where I want my students' learning to go and I can better visualize the end result I'm trying to achieve. I have a broader view of the whole learning process." While it requires many hours of hard work and study, Amy would highly recommend the process of national certification.

—Lisa Daily, Berea

Interested in pursuing National Board Certification?

Candidate Eligibility Criteria

Albert Shanker Grant Candidates (This would cover the cost)

- currently teaching in a public school
- hold tenure
- graduate of an accredited college or university
- valid State teaching certificate

National Board Certification Candidates

- completed a baccalaureate degree
- at least three years teaching experience
- valid state teaching credential or, teaching in a State approved school

<http://www.nbpts.org/>

Congratulations, Nancy!

Nancy Brother was honored in the fall as a recipient of the Mid-Hudson School Study Council Award for Excellence for support staff. To those that have worked with Nancy it is not surprising that she would be chosen for such a high honor. Her breadth of knowledge, patience, calm demeanor, and organizational skills make her a natural leader and valued colleague who stands out as an example of excellence. Nancy is the school nurse at Valley Central High School and is known district-wide for her dedication to students and her responsibilities as a health care provider in the schools. Beyond her responsibilities as the high school nurse Nancy is also the district coordinator for the school nurses, co-advisor of the student group Vikings Against Substance Abuse, facilitator of a girls group coordinated with Planned Parenthood, and a Team Leader for the County Wide School Crisis Team. In addition to her RN, and recent Master's degree in Nursing, Nancy also completed the credential for Substance Abuse Counselor.

Nancy is truly an example of putting students "center." This is apparent in her office where student needs are paramount. She is aware of all the students that need special medical attention and their needs are cared for with confidence and ease. In addition to physical needs the students know they can trust Mrs. Brother to help them with their emotional needs as well. She is a person that the students know



they can trust and who will talk to them about difficult issues. Nancy's advice is sought by students, staff, and parents alike as they know that she will provide them with assistance in any way she can or be able to direct them to services within the community. Nancy sets an example for others to strive for in terms of professionalism and dedication. I feel fortunate to be part of the high school team and work with Nancy; she is a colleague that I rely on and continually learn from.

Respectfully Submitted by Christine Mello, HS

Friday, February 3rd is National Wear Red Day

This year's event will be held in memory of Dorothy Murphy, MS paraprofessional who passed away unexpectedly in December. On this day, we encourage you to wear red and donate \$5 to the American Heart Association. The school nurse will collect in each building.

Dear Governor Cuomo,

I listened today to much of your State of the State address on my commute home from my work as a public high school teacher.

Your sarcasm regarding educational lobbyists offended and angered me. Then I was confused as you pleaded for the 1 out of 6 children in this state who are hungry. How can you manipulate children's plight so completely in the context of a single speech? Where, Governor, do you think those hungry children go every day? They go to school.

You clearly claimed that NYS public schools are a shameful waste of taxpayer money, and that all groups that work in education lobby with only their own best interests at heart. I need to tell you what happens in my school. Needy, confused children come in the doors-about 1600 of them-searching for a safe, warm place. Those whose families can meet their basic needs have a chance of learning, because when I walk through the halls, I see classrooms led by dedicated teachers engaging them, encouraging them, and patiently supporting them every day. But, when things go wrong in those children's lives, they aren't really there, in those seats in the classroom, listening and learning. They are, many of them, in trouble—be it with poor home lives, experimenting with drugs, and hanging out on the streets. Parents are working long hours and still perhaps are unable to feed them, supervise them, or check their school progress. And there we are, school staff members from bus drivers to teachers to administrators, running head-on into these children every minute, trying to educate them. Do you think this is easy work?

I can tell you without any doubt that every staff person in my building reaches out every day to children whose lives lack so much that they are losing their way. Our resources are so limited that a handful of people address huge, time-consuming issues that are ruining children's lives. Because of cuts in funding schools are losing staff that support children in a myriad of ways. Our class sizes now push 30

students into a room, with some teachers seeing almost 150 students a day! We have one less guidance counselor, no social worker, and two psychologists who handle hundreds of special education students and many, many other students whose lives fall into crisis. Besides cutting staff, our district saves money by no longer mailing progress reports and report cards home; these are hand-delivered home by the students, which is obviously ineffective. But it saves money! The building in which I teach has such a poor, outdated heating system that we throw open windows in our grossly overheated rooms- which has been a "solution" for years- because there is no money to fix it. These examples are only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the crisis in public education funding. And still, you heap the blame for students' lack of success on school staff. It's downright insulting.

How can we improve all of this? You say the panacea is to evaluate teachers based on their students' performance, and that unions only block your idea of progress. But what about those hungry kids? What about the families and children in crisis? Who is on the front line of all of this? All public school staff members across New York State. And your speech denigrated us.

Because of attitudes such as yours, people are losing faith in schools, and fingers get pointed right at those of us who are dedicated to helping kids. "The School" is to blame. I know some parents believe that the people who work the hardest to understand and help kids-blame "The School". YOU are placing blame on "The School". This is an easy way out. You are refusing to look at the complexity of the issues children face, and the true magnitude of how to address them.

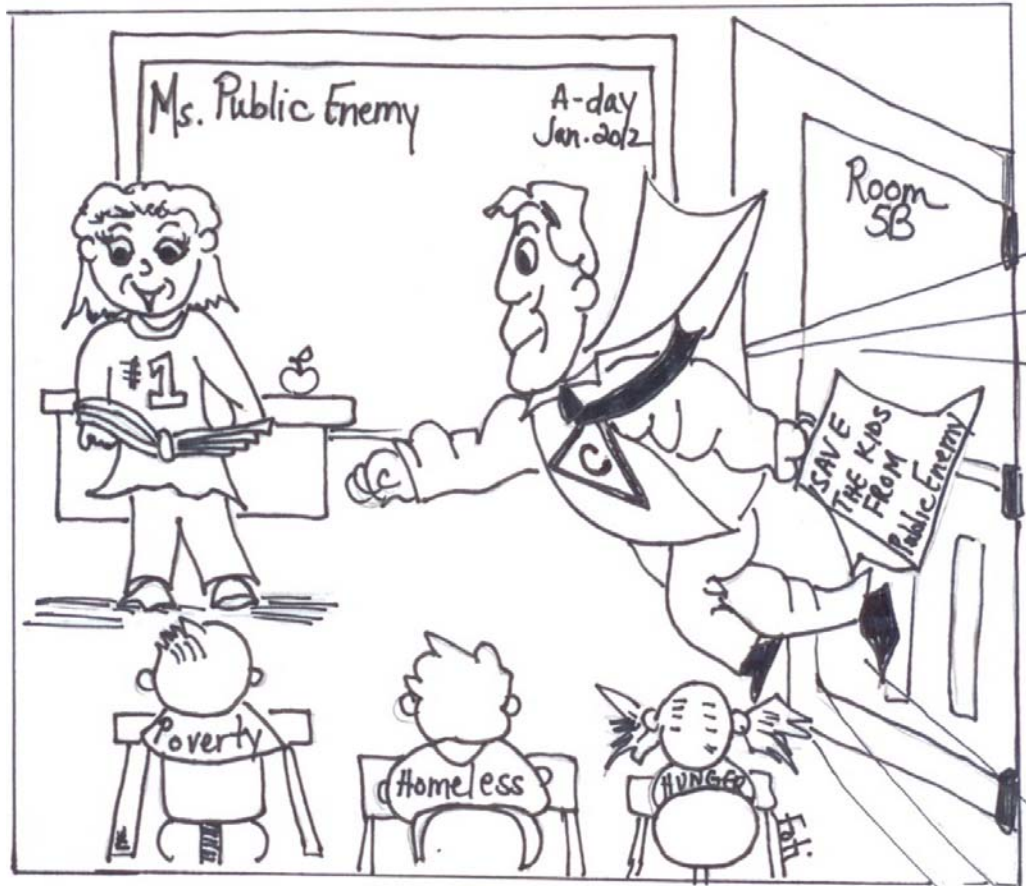
So, I, and many others, who work for the betterment of children's lives, will exercise our right to vote, and not listen to you, Cuomo, the self-appointed "lobbyist" for children, in the next election.

(continued on page 6)

Dear Governor Cuomo, (from page 5)

And we will continue to serve children with fewer staff, more stress, and more strain. Governor, the only place other than a voting booth that all Americans have a right to be is....public schools. Regardless of money, or race, or disability, every child who bears the weight of society's problems walks into schools across the state every day. We are going to be there for them. Don't claim that you will lobby for them. It seems that you will be too busy placing blame and saving money.

—Carolyn P. Vest, HS, Science



Super Cuomo chooses scapegoating over attacking the real problems.

Calvino Joining AFT's CCSS Team

The American Federation of Teachers has invited Debra Calvino to join its Common Core State Standards Teacher Work Team. Mrs. Calvino will work with the high school math committee. The CCSS Work Team will guide the AFT's advocacy efforts toward ensuring that teachers are involved in all aspects of the implementation of the Common Core Standards.

Debra will participate in several meetings throughout the school year and summer, the first of which takes place February 3-6 2011. The writers of the CCSS and spokespersons for each of the leading assessment companies, PARCC and Smarter Balanced, will speak to the CCSS Work Team members.

The AFT's attempts to guarantee that

teacher voices are heard began in mid 2009. As a result, teachers were instrumental in revising the standards to their current form. This work has been lauded by the National Governors Association, the Council of Chief State School Officers, as well as the writers themselves.

In fall 2010, AFT created a committee to formulate recommendations for the introduction of the standards, the Ad Hoc Committee on Standards Rollout. This committee developed 38 recommendations intended to facilitate the implementation of the standards.

This new team will continue that important work to ensure the "continued meaningful involvement and input of teachers in the rollout of the standards." —Meghan Riley, HS, Soc St

How to Fix Education

There seems to always be talk about the cost of education, specifically with regard to employee salary and benefits as they relate to the overall budget. In a business that does not produce a product for sale on the market, what else should one expect (salary, benefits, building repair, heat, text books, computers, etc.)? Is it surprising that these costs are paramount? Yet this comes as a shock to some voters every year. Thank goodness, I have a solution...

Let's treat our children/students like commodities on the stock market...after all, aren't we being asked to model all of the wonderfully effective characteristics of successful businesses (i.e., Wall Street). Dang it...here's hoping we don't crash and cause an economic crisis. Hmm...how do we accomplish this? I know...we must obviously sell our children/students on the open market upon graduation to the highest bidder. No more free ride. Microsoft doesn't create programs and give them away for nothing, why should we? I mean, we are expected to model business, correct? Successful students will bring a lot of income to local communities. Businesses and colleges must pay for our best products. Oh no...what if China is willing to bid higher? China could obtain smart kids without the need to pay decent salaries and benefits. Oh crap...will China outbid us at auction, once again stealing American products. Maybe these kids will need a union...

But what about the products that don't turn out so great? What do we do with them? Well, Microsoft would certainly scrap a bad or ineffective program. Remember, we must treat children/students like businesses would treat their products...like Mitt Romney treats his employees and businesses. First, let's fire all of the children who do not measure up or are too expensive to educate. This will eliminate many low income families and, of course, virtually all special needs children. Second, let's eliminate any programs that are too costly and don't address the "basic" three Rs. Extras are a waste of money. We should not spend extra money on Reading Recovery or Literacy Collaborative just because some kids need more

support than others. Parents can pay on their own to help their needy kids. No more electives like health—bad health choices are not the school's problem...let the parents and other community agencies deal with this...maybe the result will be a need for more corrections officers and private practice counselors, helping us on the road to employment recovery...but at least it won't be the school's fault. Oh...I forgot, without an education, they won't be able to afford health insurance and, therefore, counseling...oh well...so goes. No more need for home and career skills either...hell, all of our kids are going to be doctors and lawyers anyway...they will be able to hire nannies and chefs to cook for them. And what about this science crap. Do you realize that public education actually teaches evolution...what a Godless bunch of morons. The elimination of science will save a ton of money and certainly put us back on the path to moral decency. Questioning the validity and authenticity of religion is just not appropriate...well, let me clarify...you can't question my religion...I don't care about other people's religion because they are obviously wrong.

We try to make education a complex issue when the solution is really quite simple—treat education like a business:

1. spend as little as possible (consider the cost vs. the gain);
2. work with only the best material—throw the rest away otherwise consumers will think your product is inferior;
3. sell your product on the open market to the highest bidder—get whatever the market will pay (indentured servitude worked just fine for our forefathers or was that slavery?);
4. ignore this humanitarian crap and stop looking to the future of America—screw America...it's about business profits;
5. consider online learning...who needs real teachers and human contact time...besides, once we privatize education we can outsource it to China and India and save more money.

—Tim Brown, HS, Health, VCTA Pres.

Time

There never seems to be enough of it and we always seem to be out of it. As a friend said to me on New Year's Eve—maybe this is the year that we see if the Mayans were right. My initial thought was at least we wouldn't have to deal with APPR if they were! But really, APPR is only the surface of the challenges we face in education.

It seems as the demands upon our time have just exploded this year. Common Core Standards require a lot of new work and collaboration. Actually, Commissioner John King spells out that his expectation is that teachers are given time to collaborate on CCS together so that they can be fully implemented in 2012-2013. It seems like we could be given everyday in the school year to work on this and it wouldn't be enough time.

APPR is another time consuming endeavor given to us by Commissioner John King. With little direction from the state on how to implement what is required of APPR, we are being pressured from SED to fully implement plans by 2012. If not, Commissioner King is pulling funding from schools in need. Does that make sense? Punish principals and teachers and children because they lack the time and direction to implement an exhaustive change to the evaluation system.

To add insult to injury, King doesn't punish himself for missing deadlines. In Sept. 2011, the field guidance document explained that the state would come up with a SGP (Student Growth Percentile) for teachers with state assessments that would comprise 20% of the total 100% teacher score. In November a SED guidance document was released on Student Learning Objectives (SLO's) in which it is apparent that the SGP has been abandoned and once again the brunt of the work is being shrugged off by SED and passed down to the local districts. The document ignores much of what is in the APPR regulation and suggests that SLO's must be used for the state assessment and Local Measures portion, upping the percent it will impact teacher evaluation from

20% to 40%. SLO's make the work required by CCS look like child's play. If you haven't done so yet take the time to check into SLO's (you can use ENGAGENY) as we will be the architect of what they are and they affect most of us.

Of course, getting a budget passed with the new legislation will require a huge investment of time. And the stakes are high. Districts are supposed to try to figure out what they are willing to risk. It is expected that a 2% levy cap will cause deep and painful cuts in districts around the state. And this new budget system is going nowhere anytime soon as it only sunsets once rent control disappears—and by the way, in case you were wondering, NYC schools are not subject to the law.

Luckily for Dr. King, he has the time to come up with new initiatives and his latest is promoting regional school districts. Think in terms of county wide school districts like in Maryland and Virginia. He sees this as the answer to dealing with NYS school taxes. If you take the time to step out of your world a bit, you start to see the makings of a wider plan. Make APPR impossible for any district to carry out, have budget after budget fail, and keep everyone too busy employing the CCS and it won't be too hard to undo the NYS public school system brick by brick and rebuild it to King's vision. Take the time to look up from your work and breathe. And then start to see what is going on in education. Must reads for educators: *The World is Flat* by Thomas Friedman; *The Death and the Life of American Public Education* by Diane Ravitch. They will scare you more than the thought of the Mayan's being right and show you the direction public education needs to take which is not the direction that Dr. King is taking us.

In the 27 years I have been in education many things have come and gone, but never have so many initiatives been thrown onto the table at once as in the past years. Listen to the talk amongst educators when contemplating

(cont'd on page 9)

Time (continued from page 8)

the changes, it usually begins with, “How long until you can retire?” or “How long will this last?”

The answer to both those questions seems to be the same, “Too long.”

California went through changes like this. Check out what happened—it has nearly ruined their system of education. The time has come for educators to decide if they will stand up and make their voices heard about what is best for education or just wait out the changes being dictated by a man who spent the majority of his educational career as an educator in charter schools.

The intention of this article is not to make you scared or upset you. It is to tell you what is going on all around us while we spend our time trying to do what we do best—educate kids. That goal seems to have been lost by Dr. King in his Race to the Top, to change the public education system that has successfully educated millions of NYS children over the years. Many of whom were college and career ready. Change takes time, and time is not something we are being afforded nor are we being listened to. If you haven’t taken the time to keep up with what is occurring in education on the local, state and federal levels, it is high time that you do so. The future of our profession, and more importantly the future of millions of NYS kids depends on you.

—Patti Behr, HS, Art, VCTA VP

Sources:

- http://www.nysut.org/cps/rde/xchg/nysut/hs.xsl/mediareleases_17354.htm
- <http://www.lohud.com/article/20111207/NEWS02/112070322/Education-Commissioner-John-King>
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- <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/28/nyregion/new-york-state-schools-may-lose-aid-over-teacher-evaluations.html>
- <http://www.oms.nysed.gov/press/BORElectsJohnKingCOE.html>



Contact Your Elected Officials:

Visit www.nysut.org and select Legislative Action Center. From there you can fax and/or look up names and phone numbers for your legislators by zip code.

Cuomo's State of the State Blames Teachers

Governor Cuomo's State of the State Address has some glaring pieces of misinformation. I assume that the primary motivating factor for this "aspiring" Presidential hopeful is his need to continue to scapegoat teachers to rally a base of voters around his message of hate. I would like to point out two specific propaganda pieces that he mentioned at the end of his speech. First, he blamed NYSUT for the delay with APPR getting finalized throughout the state, with specific reference to the lawsuit filed by NYSUT. This is a blatant lie. The lawsuit is over. NYSUT won! The SED was wrong. It is the SED's appeal (with Cuomo's apparent blessing) that is holding up the process. Commissioner King and the SED violated state law, got their hands slapped by the courts and are now filing a "frivolous" appeal which is slowing up the process by creating uncertainty. It is Governor Cuomo's and Commissioner King's "sour grapes" that are delaying the process; the King and his Jester are unhappy. *"In speaking about implementation of the teacher evaluation law, Cuomo issued an ultimatum, threatening to impose his own process if NYSUT and SED cannot reach agreement on evaluation language in 30 days. The next few days will be critical as NYSUT presses SED to correct its regulations that the state Supreme Court found were in violation of the law."*

A second piece of manipulative homily delivered by Cuomo was his accusation that the teachers' union could cost the state approximately one billion dollars due to the delay in APPR compliance. This is misleading. It is the union's initiative that brought this federal money to NYS to begin with. NYSUT President Richard Ianuzzi encouraged local presidents to work collaboratively with their superintendents and sign the Race To the Top (RTT) documents in the hopes of winning this aid. This was a successful initiative and NYS was deemed to be well ahead of other states with regard to the APPR process. This process was negotiated and acted upon by the state legislature. It is now Governor Cuomo

and Commissioner King that are placing NYS in jeopardy of not receiving this funding after Superintendents and Union Presidents worked collaboratively to win this grant.

"Gov. Cuomo rolled out as highest priority in his budget speech the need to reform the so-called education bureaucracy, a catch-all term he repeats endlessly when he lumps together the State Education Department and NYSUT. His budget was a combination of (little) carrots and (big) sticks. He said he would deliver on his promised restoration of education funds, but then announced restorations would be dependent on districts completing their teacher evaluation plans in a one-year drop-dead time frame. Although he said education restorations would total 4 percent, his budget actually carves out \$250 million of that amount for grants that would be awarded competitively. This approach creates 'an uncertainty that districts cannot afford.' Cuomo's budget, meanwhile, remains essentially flat for public higher education — despite laudatory words for the engine that drives New York's economy."

Cuomo [also] outlined a second attempt at a Tier 6 proposal that is far worse than even last year's failed plan. Just two years after New York state instituted a Tier 5, Cuomo is pushing for another downgrade of pension benefits. And while a Tier 6 would apply only to future employees, it would also undercut the stability of the current pension system, by siphoning off thousands of new hires into a Defined Contribution plan that would do nothing to support the health of pension funding. State AFL-CIO President Mario Cilento made the point as well: 'We disagree with the contention that the current defined benefit pension is unsustainable. What is unsustainable is a society where each generation of middle class worker retires with less financial security than the one before.'"

—Tim Brown, HS, Health, VCTA Pres.

How Tier 6 Affects All of Us

Part of Governor Cuomo's plan for brightening NYS's economic future includes a huge change in the public pension system of the state that would affect all state (including NYC) pension plans including our NYSTRS and NYSERS that covers all school employees. Like most of his speech, Cuomo threw out this proposal in gilded packaging, spinning on the tips of his fingers to sound like the simple solution to budget woes. He emphasized an \$89 billion dollar savings (**OVER 30 YEARS** – I've added emphasis because Cuomo didn't) from the simple creation of a Tier VI. Probably most public employees heard this and thought, "Whew, at least it isn't me....". No, it's all those new kids who will be scrambling to take our jobs. You know the jobs that are so much fun lately with assessment after assessment to ensure our accountability so that we are all counting the years until we can retire. Hate to be a party pooper, but when you take off the gilded packaging from the gift our Governor is offering the future, you realize it is nothing but another stink-filled pile of dung not only for our future colleagues but for all of us active and retired who are still breathing. Here's why:

First consider the Governor's proposal:

- ⇒ New members can choose between a defined benefit plan (the current system) or a defined contribution plan (401-(k)). Do they want the defined benefit plan (what we have) which would give them a solid pension based upon the number of years worked multiplied by the pension factor at retirement, OR, do they want the defined contribution plan which will give them their contribution and their employer's contribution to invest in a 401(K) plan?

IF they want the defined benefit plan:

- ⇒ All Tier 6 employees must contribute on a sliding scale basis:
 - ⇒ Up to 35,000 in wages = 4% TRS (ERS = up to 32,000)



- ⇒ Up 35,001 to 69,000 = 5% TRS (ERS = 32,001 to 63,000)
- ⇒ 69,000 + = 6% TRS (ERS = 63,000+)
- ⇒ They have to contribute for life.
- ⇒ They cannot retire until age 65. (*Want to try that on for size? TRS: Add 8 more years to the number of years until you could retire or ERS : add 3 more years*) No exceptions. No early retirement incentives, ever. This includes other public employees like cops and firemen.
- ⇒ Not only do they have to make their contribution, but any time that the employer's rate of contribution exceeds 7%, they have to pay half the difference. (*Next year the rate is expected to be 11.5% which means our friends in Tier 6 would have to pay an additional 2.25% toward contributions—imagine how fast this alone will eat up any contractual salary increases*) Now in all fairness, if the rate falls below 4%, they will be given half the difference of the rate to the 4%. (*In the last 30 years, the rate was below 4% for eight years between 1996 and 2004.*)
- ⇒ Any salary that exceeds the governor's salary would not be subject to pension contribution.
- ⇒ (*Governor's salary is currently \$179,000*)
- ⇒ Pension factor of 1.67% (*as compared to our current 2%*)
- ⇒ IF you had a FAS of \$120,000 x 2% for 30 years : your pension = \$72,000
- ⇒ FAS of \$120,000 x 1.67% for 30 years: your pension = \$60,120 (*cont'd on pg 12*)

How Tier 6 Affects All of Us (from page 11)

- ⇒ If you lived for 30 years after retirement that is a loss of \$360,000 of income
- ⇒ By the way, you have a 5 year FAS for pension calculation which means it is harder for the Tier 6 person to get an FAS of \$120,000 than for a Tier 4 member
- ⇒ Salary increases past 8% will not be counted toward pension
- ⇒ Buying prior service will cost two times as much as it costs a Tier 4 member.
- ⇒ A tier 6 member could only purchase up to one year for military service.

OR

A tier 6 member could choose the Defined Contribution option (401-k)

- ⇒ The 401(k) accounts would be managed by the Retirement system.
- ⇒ Employers would contribute 4% and match any employee contributions up to 3%.
- ⇒ Member is vested in 1 year.
- ⇒ There is a death benefit up to three years' salary after three years of membership.
- ⇒ They have a 30 day period to join either, but then the decision is irrevocable.

So spin back the clock to when you were 22 and making decisions about retirement. Given those choices, which one would you choose? And, just how does it affect those of us who are already working?

A Tier 6 is bad for everyone, because our retirement of tomorrow is dependent up on both the contribution of employees working once we retire and the fund balance. If the contribution of employees working is significantly decreased because they opt for a defined contribution where they are able to invest their own money, the fund balance is tapped and used and then what we thought was a guaranteed benefit for all of us is actually not because of a lack of funding. Cuomo artfully makes it sound like he has a firm understanding and grasp of the state of pension

funds and that they are all broken and costing the state way too much. The truth of the matter is NYSTRS is one of the most secure, stable, and well-funded retirement systems in the industry, with assets of about \$90 billion (as of 6/30/11). In twenty years we have gone from 195,000 active members to 280,000 and currently have 146,000 retired members collecting benefits that total an annual payroll of \$5.6 billion. Of course Cuomo is not a financial expert. He is a politician and a damn good one. He makes you believe what he says is true even when it is not.

What Cuomo said in his state of the state address is not supported by the state's financial expert, NYS Comptroller Tom DiNapoli. Di Napoli addressed the National Public Pension Fund in Washington last week. DiNapoli stated, "The solution to dismantle current defined benefit plans long term is not a solution, in fact [it] could create more challenges and costs down the road." In fact, according to DiNapoli individual savings plans actually cost 46% more than defined benefit plans. And the rate of return on defined benefit plans is sufficiently higher than the rate of return from individual savings accounts. DiNapoli went on to clarify that it is, in fact, much less.

He stated that "83 cents of every dollar in benefits paid to New York retirees have come from investment returns, not employee employer contributions;" and NYS has benefited from these investment returns since 77% of NY retirees continue to live in the state and contribute to the economy through spending and taxes.

Like most good politicians, Cuomo's memory is very short. He forgets that two years ago unions worked collaboratively to deliver \$35 billion in savings to taxpayers by forming a new Tier V. As NYSUT Executive Vice President Andrew Pallotta sees it, Tier VI "would endanger" (cont'd on pg 13)

How Tier 6 Affects All of Us (from page 12)

the current workforce, as well as the pensions of retired public employees, by diverting or reducing contributions to state retirement funds."

"Enough is enough," Pallotta said. "Current and future public employees – just like all workers in the private sector – should have a measure of retirement security. This plan does the opposite." A Tier VI does not happen because Andrew Cuomo says it should. It must be legislated. It is therefore, imperative for the future of all state pensions that we all contact our Governor and state legislatures through the AFL-CIO action line at 877-255-9417 and tell them NO to a Tier VI.

—Patti Behr, HS, Art, VCTA VP

Sources:

http://www.nysut.org/cps/rde/xchg/nysut/hs.xsl/mediareleases_17387.htm

<http://www.nystrs.org/main/library/ADM/NYSTRS90.pdf>

https://www.nysut.org/cps/rde/xchg/nysut/hs.xsl/legislationleader_17392.htm

<http://blog.timesunion.com/capitol/archives/107821/dinapoli-warns-against-effort-to-dismantle-pensions/>

"A Tier 6 is bad for everyone, because our retirement of tomorrow is dependent up on both the contribution of employees working once we retire and the fund balance. If the contribution of employees working is significantly decreased because they opt for a defined contribution where they are able to invest their own money, the fund balance is tapped and used and then what we thought was a guaranteed benefit for all of us is actually not because of a lack of funding."

FACT SHEET:

- The New York State Teachers Retirement System is fully funded, and has been recognized as one of the best-managed retirement systems in the nation.
- From 1997 to 2003, school districts paid 1.5 percent of payroll or less into NYSTRS, at a time when teachers contributed 3 percent.
- The New York State Teachers Retirement System paid out \$5 billion in benefits in 2009; more than \$4 billion to retirees living and spending money in New York state.

It's Good to be the King!

On January 17th, Governor Andrew Cuomo released his proposed budget and in his speech harangued teachers and teachers' unions as being enemies of progress. Prior to this, the self-proclaimed "lobbyist for all students" promised to form a committee to re-evaluate public education in New York State, while in the same breath vowing to whittle down the burdensome educational bureaucracy (but that is neither here nor there). Later that day, Commissioner of Education John B. King, Jr. issued his press release praising and "welcoming" Mr. Cuomo's "leadership" on the issue of teacher and principal evaluations.

Dr. King went on to praise the Governor's call for NYSUT to "end its lawsuit and his plan to link additional state aid to local bargaining on evaluations" as "positive steps toward resolving evaluation negotiations across the State." Frankly, for NYSUT the lawsuit is over. NYSUT won because Dr. King and the Board of Regents broke state law. The only reason the lawsuit is continuing is because of the state's appeal. Rather than dropping its appeal, the state is threatening to withhold funding; a measure which John King has already enacted by suspending School Improvement Grants earmarked for some of the state's poorest districts. These tactics are reprehensible and show that Cuomo and the Commissioner are at best akin to toddlers in tantrum mode and at worst big bullies (thank you, Mr. Frac for the apt analogy!).

Cuomo, I haven't done the research on yet, but in the case of Commissioner King this attitude is not surprising. The man became commissioner at the ripe old age of 36 after three years of teaching experience and several years as a Managing Director/**co-founder** of charter schools. Yes, you read that correctly *three* years. Did I mention that two of those years were in a Massachusetts Charter School and the third in San Juan, Puerto Rico?

Admittedly, Dr. King is a well-educated man. He graduated magna cum laude from Harvard College, has a J.D. from Yale Law School (Dubya got a Master's from Harvard and Bachelor's from Yale, just saying), an M.A. in Social Studies education, and an Ed. D. from Columbia Teachers College. Impressive to be certain. A man who should lead the state's **public** school system? No. This is a clear conflict of interest.

As such, it is not surprising to hear Cuomo speak of "re-evaluating" the public school system. It is not entirely apparent to me which of these men is truly the leader, but clearly each parrots everything the other says which belies the larger agenda.

Given his background in charter schools, it is also not surprising that Dr. King feels that he is not subject to the pesky laws of New York State and will not hesitate to cut off funding that will further burden the schools. He will have charter schools waiting to take on the public school "victims." At his recent forum in Sullivan County, the Commish expressed his desire to investigate regional schools or county-wide school districts, modeled after Maryland and Virginia. Not surprisingly, Cuomo later mentioned the same idea.

Dr. King is lauded for his charter school leadership. As managing director for Uncommon Schools in New York (which also has schools in New Jersey, and Massachusetts) he was celebrated for the fact that 98% of the schools' students scored at Level 3 or 4 on the NYS math assessments. What is not mentioned is the fact that most of the Uncommon Schools house few grade levels, do not administer all state assessments, and have excellent student to teacher ratios. In fact, Uncommon Schools, according to its web site, has only one high school in New York which currently enrolls 155 students. The student to teacher ratio in that school is 8 to 1. (*cont'd on pg 15*)

It's Good to be the King! (cont'd on pg 15)

Currently that school serves grades 9-11, so there is conveniently no graduation rate. Next year, the Uncommon Charter High School *plans* to enroll 400 and add 12th grade. The elementary schools generally seem to serve more students, but still the largest student to teacher ratio I could find was 14 to 1. There was no data on average class size.

Commissioner King would better serve the students of New York State by employing some of his charter school benefits within the public system. A student to teacher ratio of 8 to 1 would go a long way toward ensuring that students have the best possible learning environments particularly in districts like VC where, for example, the student to teacher ratio in my department (high school social studies) for this year's freshman class is 30 to 1. Hiring more educators to teach our students would lower this ratio and improve educational opportunities for all students.

Teachers in Uncommon Charter High School teach 3-4 classes per day and have 1-2 prep periods per day. Once a week, students leave at least 2 hours early and the faculty has 2-3 hours of professional development time. These initiatives seem to work for Uncommon Schools. Why is Commissioner King not pursuing similar practices and policies for New York State Public Schools that have proven successful in his charter schools?

Uncommon Schools is aptly named because charter schools in general do not outperform public schools. In fact, most underperform, despite the fact that they have better student to teacher ratios, do not administer the same number of state assessments, can reject students and have smaller special education populations. Again, from the data on the Uncommon Schools website, the highest special education population I could find was 9%. At Valley Central, as of December 2011, special education students comprise 17.5% of the student body. This will affect assessment results.

Commissioner King has an obvious conflict of interest with regard to his being the head

of the NYS public school system while his interests clearly lie with charter schools. Additionally, his failure to introduce any meaningful changes to the system that would support and champion students and teachers, along with his bully-like tactics of withholding funding demonstrate his inability to lead or even collaboratively work with others. More importantly, he lacks credibility with regard to the state's most important initiative tied to Race to the Top. The Common Core State Standards have been adopted and are to be fully implemented in the 2013-14 school year throughout the state. These new "national" standards focus on shifts in instructional delivery by teachers.

Additionally, if you have read through the approved rubrics for teacher evaluation based on the NYS Teaching Standards then you probably already know that they also emphasize changes in instructional delivery. How can this task be in the hands of a man who himself taught for 3 years in charter schools? Technically, he may not have ever received tenure. This is a serious credibility issue. The argument that the Common Core Standards are based on research is a hollow one (Whole Language Reading instruction was based on research, too) as research tends to accompany all initiatives.

Add to this the fact that the earliest stages of the "rollout" have notably lacked clear answers to administrators' questions, meaningful professional development, and any attempt to align existing curriculum for Science, Social Studies and the "Technical Subjects" to the standards. This lack of "highly effective" performance from the Commissioner is a disservice to the teachers and administrators of New York State, but more importantly, will prove disastrous for students in the years to come.

For his part, King has the easiest out when the real chaos begins: "I was young and inexperienced." The real culprits here are the Board of Regents who elected him to be Commissioner, knowing his lack of experience. I begin to feel sorry for King when thinking about the fact that he is their fall guy. —*Meghan Rilley*

First photos: Cuomo/King's Newest Education Initiative: Daily Bloodletting for Teachers!



Thank You to Sonya Berger!! Sonya coordinated this year's VCTA Blood Drive! Also, thank you to all VCTA members and community members who participated in this important event.