

VC ECHOES

Volume 15, Issue 1

Valley Central Teachers' Association

October 2012

ELECTION 2012: THE LESSER OF TWO EVILS



See Story Page 8

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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Contribute to the next issue!
Articles or
Contributions
should be sent to
Meghan Riley, HS, by
20 October 2012

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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.

The VCTA will sponsor a District-wide team for the Making Strides Against Breast Cancer Walk.



Date: Sunday October 21st 2012
Where: Woodbury Commons

Nancy Brother, HS, RN is our new coordinator!

Ramblings of a Frustrated Union President

Stupid Is As Stupid Does: How would you respond if it was discovered that a foreign country (e.g., North Korea or Iran) was secretly investing billions of dollars into the US for the purpose of making huge profits while simultaneously avoiding paying taxes to the American people by making their investments via a foreign country that existed for the sole purpose of economically depressing/terrorizing other nations for their own profit (e.g. Cayman Islands, Switzerland). The first truth is that foreign investors do this all the time. I do not find it surprising that foreign investors or foreign nations would rip off the American people for profit, especially since we surely do the same thing to them. However, I do find it appalling that this practice of ripping off the American people is not addressed by our elected officials. The second truth is that American businessmen do this to the American people more than foreign investors.

Closing the plethora of loopholes available to the wealthy will never happen as long as the wealthy have the funds and ingenuity to make the average American feel that is unpatriotic for huge profitable businesses to pay their fair share of taxes. Remember, taxes, particularly for the ultra rich are at an all-time low—based on some of the political rhetoric you would think taxes on this particular group were at an all-time high. There are, in fact, two distinct events taking place: 1) some corporations are utilizing unfair albeit legally legislated tax loopholes to ultimately “screw” the middle class; and 2) some corporations are illegally hiding investments in foreign banks to avoid paying legally legislated taxes while simultaneously lobbying elected officials to blame the middle class and unions for the deficit.

We are still the richest nation on Earth. Corporations are realizing record profits. It is claimed that these corporations are the “job creators”—so where are the investments that are creating all these so called jobs? “During

an interview with the *National Review's* Robert Costa, Romney said that offshore sub-companies in the Cayman Islands help foreign investors avoid paying taxes on investments in the United States. Bain Capital currently has

138 such sub-companies headquartered in the Cayman Islands.” Furthermore, “even a U.S. investor pretending to be a foreign investor, by using a Bermuda or Cayman Islands shell entity, can avoid U.S. tax this way...and we know that's going on. We know that U.S. investors are evading taxes by pretending to be foreigners.” (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/18/mitt-romney-cayman-islands_n_1683891.html). Perhaps those of us in the middle/working class deserve exactly what is happening to us for our passivity and stupidity, after all “stupid is as stupid does.”



Kamikaze Pilot: Before I start this section I would like to admit that I am not a fan of President Obama. Of course, I also have to admit that I have never liked any President in my lifetime, so maybe I'm the problem. Obama has been a disappointing education president and his unwillingness to march with union workers in Wisconsin after making the following promise is annoying: “And understand this: If American workers are being denied their right to organize and collectively bargain when I'm in the White House, I'll put on a comfortable pair of shoes myself. I'll walk on that picket line with you as president of the United States.” I am, however, confused about the vitriol directed at the President by some angry and emotional citizens when it comes to the economy. I know that a sinking ship is the most common analogy made about these circumstances but I prefer to use a crashing plane analogy instead. (cont'd pg 4)

Ramblings of a Frustrated Union President

Imagine you are on an 8 hour flight and your plane is crashing. The plane has had problems from the first hour of the flight but the pilot has ignored all of the plane's warning lights. The engines are failing and the plane is running out of gas. There are multiple fires and there is no airport or landing strip within reach of the remaining fuel reserves. It is discovered

that the pilot was ill prepared for his job: a religious fanatic smug in the belief that God is on his side; possibly brain damaged from too much alcohol and cocaine in his younger years; a college grade point average that would get most children a spanking in most affluent families (of course, the education system failed him—not his family and certainly not himself). With the current pilot incapable of landing the plane, a flight attendant asks for help from any passenger who might have some flying experience. Although your piloting experience is limited, you volunteer to help; of course, the only alternative would likely be death at the hands of your current Kamikaze pilot.

You sit in the pilot's seat and spend the next 30 minutes landing the plane the best you can. Your landing is not without injuries and casualties. After the landing, some passengers now blame you for the fires and lack of gas. Some accuse you of choosing a bad place to land despite the fact that experts say there were no safe places to land within reach of the fuel reserves remaining. Many have forgotten about the irresponsible pilot; all they remember

“For eight years we passively watched our leaders make bad and selfish decisions without proper challenge due to the ‘terror threat.’ It was like watching a movie or reading a book with an obvious ‘idiot plot.’ Now we are all angry because it can’t be fixed as quickly as we would like.”

is that you were at the helm when the plane crashed. It does not compute to them that everyone would have been lost if you had not stepped forward. No good deed goes unpunished and logic has no place in partisan politics. I wonder how many people visited factcheck.org to verify the truth of statements made at the RNC or DNC?

I blame Obama for many things. I believe that America's biggest loss in the last election took place with the defeat of Hillary Clinton in the primary. Nevertheless, blaming Obama for the economy is misguided and ignorant. For eight years we passively watched our leaders make bad and selfish decisions without proper challenge due to the “terror threat.” It was like watching a movie or reading a book with an obvious “idiot plot.” Now we are all angry because it can't be fixed as quickly as we would like. I wonder if Roosevelt or Churchill would be blamed for not

ending WWII in their first terms if they were dealing with today's populace?

It's The Teachers'/Unions' Fault: At the recent Republican National Convention many speakers blatantly blamed teachers and unions for America's education woes. Surprisingly, defying my expectations, the same blame game did not happen at the Democratic National Convention, despite many democrats being in line with many republicans with regard to this particular blame game. What happened to the data driven accountability that many of these lawmakers promote for everyone but themselves?

(Continued on page 5)

Ramblings of a Frustrated Union President

Strong union states have better results...so just what is organized labor guilty of? The truth is that this blame game is more about eliminating/reducing salary and other benefits than any concern about children. What both parties always fail to mention is that strong union states have historically done better than right-to-work states when it comes to educating our youth. Therefore, I remain confused as to the connection between failing schools and organized labor. Matthew DiCarlo, a senior fellow at the Albert Shanker Institute, has submitted multiple data driven reports regarding the education-union connection that debunks these politically motivated attacks on teachers' unions. Although DiCarlo is careful to not conclude, in the absence of conclusive empirical evidence, that teacher unions are ultimately responsible for better student achievement, it is clear that

teacher unions do not lead to lower standards and/or test scores. Following is Matthew DiCarlo's 2010 report (reprinted with permission) with links to subsequent reports published in 2011.

—Tim Brown, HS, Health, VCTA President

NOTE: To view other articles about the impact of unions on student performance read the following articles published by Matthew Di Carlo on the Shanker Blog:

- ⇒ <http://shankerblog.org/?p=1941>: *Revisiting The Effect Of Teachers' Unions On Student Test Scores*
- ⇒ <http://shankerblog.org/?p=3509>: *The Teachers' Union Hypothesis*

Performance-Enhancing Teacher Contracts?

For years, some people have been determined to blame teachers' unions for all that ails public education in America. This issue has been around a long time, but, given the tenor of the current debate, it seems to bear rehashing. According to this view, teachers unions negatively affect student achievement primarily through the mechanism of the collective bargaining agreement, or contract. These contracts are thought to include "harmful" provisions, such as seniority-based layoffs and unified salary schedules that give raises based on experience and education rather than performance.

But a fairly large proportion of public school teachers are not covered under legally binding contracts. In fact, there are some 10 states in which there are virtually no legally binding K-12 teacher contracts at all (there are none in AL, AZ, GA, MS, NC, SC, TX, and VA; there is only one district with a contract in LA, and two in AR). Districts in a few of these states

have entered into what are called "meet and confer" agreements about salary, benefits, and other working conditions, but administrators have the right to break these agreements at will. For all intents and purposes, these states are largely free of many of the alleged "negative union effects."

Here's a simple proposition: If teacher union contracts are the main problem, then we should expect to see at least somewhat higher achievement outcomes in the 10 states where there are basically no binding contracts.

So, let's take a quick look at how states with no contracts compare with the states that have them.

In states where there are binding contracts, there is some variation in coverage (the percentage of teachers covered under contracts). In most of them (34, plus Washington D.C.), districts are required to bargain with

(continued on page 6)

Performance-Enhancing Teacher Contracts?

unionized teachers, and coverage in these states is very high. There are a few other states in which contracts are binding once they're finished, but districts are not required to bargain (Louisiana also technically falls into this category, but since Katrina, there is only one contract in force). The results for these states are virtually identical to those for the bargaining states.

In the table below, using data from the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), I present average scale scores for states that currently have binding teacher contracts and those that don't. The averages are weighted by grade-level enrollment, and they include only public non-charter schools (since most charters in all states have no contracts).

Average 2009 NAEP Score By State Teacher Contract Laws

States with binding teacher contracts

4th grade: Math 240.0
Reading 220.7
8th grade: Math 282.1
Reading 263.7

States without binding teacher contracts

4th grade: Math 237.7
Reading 217.5
8th grade: Math 281.2
Reading 259.5

As the table shows, the states in which there are no teachers covered under binding agreements score lower than the states that have them. Moreover, even though they appear small, all but one of these (8th grade math) are rather large differences.

To give an idea of the size, I ranked each state (plus Washington D.C.) by order of its performance—its average score on each of the four NAEP exams—and then averaged the four ranks. The table below presents the average rank for the non-contract states.

Average Rank Across 4 NAEP Tests (Next to each state is its average rank)

Virginia..... 16.6
Texas..... 27.3
N. Carolina.. 27.5
Georgia.....36.8
Arkansas.....38.9
S. Carolina...38.9
Arizona.....43.3
Alabama.....45.5
Louisiana.....47.8
Mississippi...48.6

Out of these 10 states, only one (Virginia) has an average rank above the median, while four are in the bottom 10, and seven are in the bottom 15. These data make it very clear that states without binding teacher contracts are not doing better, and the majority are actually among the lowest performers in the nation.

In contrast, nine of the 10 states with the highest average ranks are high coverage states, including Massachusetts, which has the highest average score on all four tests.

If anything, it seems that the presence of teacher contracts in a state has a positive effect on achievement.

Now, some may object to this conclusion. They might argue that I can't possibly say that teacher contracts alone caused the higher scores in these states. They might say that there are dozens of other observed and unobserved factors that influence achievement, such as state laws, lack of resources, income, parents' education, and curriculum, and that these factors are responsible for the lower scores in the 10 non-contract states.

My response: Exactly.

By Matthew Di Carlo (reprinted with permission):
<http://shankerblog.org/?p=895>

Letter to Educators from Candidate Chris Eachus

Christopher W. Eachus
Candidate, New York State Senate 39th District
65 Clancy Avenue
New Windsor, New York 12553
Home: 845-561-8622
Cell: 845-527-4514
Email: cweachus@msn.com

Dear Fellow Educator,

I would like to thank you for this opportunity to communicate with you about a very important issue to all of us.

My name is Chris Eachus and I am the NYSUT endorsed candidate for the NYS Senate, 39th District. I am a classroom teacher and an Orange County Legislator, and have decided to take this very important and vital step for our students and our schools. After 36 years in the classroom, and still not able to retire, I have never felt so unrepresented and berated by our state representatives. This has got to stop!

As we attempt to write our courses to the Core Curriculum, decide what SLOs are and find appropriate pre- and post- assessments, there is an anxiety and nervousness rampant throughout our school districts. With the threat of additional financial cuts if we don't accomplish these tasks, while suffering with less money, larger class sizes, fewer staff and program cuts, it begs to ask why has it gotten to this point with education in New York State?

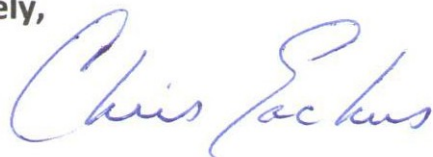
The answer is simple. We need to ask those in the classroom what is needed to do a better job of teaching and serving our students.

We need representatives in Albany who truly know what it is like in the classroom, who respect the schools, their staff and students, and who will stop gambling with our most precious resource, the education of our future.

Without educating our future properly there will be no economic recovery in New York State.

I am going to Albany to fight for us and our educational system. Please continue to support my run for the Senate and if you wish to assist in changing the direction of education in the state, contact me at (845)527-4514.

Sincerely,



Election 2012: The Lesser of Two Evils

There has been a recurring theme in politics over the past few election cycles: choosing the lesser of two evils. This year's presidential choices epitomize this theme. Our nation faces serious challenges and we are in desperate need of effective leadership. Though NYSUT, the AFT, and NEA have all endorsed incumbent Barack Obama, it is clear that this support is based not on enthusiastic backing for sound educational policies but on the principle of selecting the lesser of two evils.

Neither Barack Obama nor Republican candidate Mitt Romney proffer impressive or even mediocre programs for education. Both seem to have embraced the philosophy that

testing is more important than learning and that charter schools need to be expanded. The better choice in this Catch-22 is Barack Obama if you are focusing on education, health-care, and labor issues.

That said, I am painfully reminded of the prescient words of the inimitable Jerry Garcia: "Constantly choosing the lesser of two evils is still choosing evil." For educators and students in the know the words of Texas Guinan also seem apropos: "A politician is a fellow who will lay down your life for his country." Though not ideal, Obama is still the better choice for public education. —Meghan Riley, HS, Soc St

APPR: Standards and Elements



Members Take Note...

The standards and the elements that make up 60 points of our overall APPR score are weighted. By education law, over 50% of the weight had to be given to classroom observation. The Association and the District agreed that primarily Standard III and IV were the standards that could be assessed by classroom observation. Each standard is weighted as follows:

- **10% Standard 1: Knowledge of Students and Student Learning**
- **19% Standard II: Knowledge of Content and Instructional Planning**
- **30% Standard III: Instructional Practice**

- **21% Standard IV: Learning Environment**
- **10% Standard V: Assessment for Student Learning**
- **5% Standard VI: Professional Responsibilities and Collaboration**
- **5% Standard VII: Professional Growth**

Each element within the standard is also weighted and those percentages were also agreed to. The scores are weighted through an excel spreadsheet designed by our NYSUT LRS, Ken DeStefano, and then an overall evaluation score is attained. That score is then converted on a 60 point chart as the multiple measures portion of your APPR score.

—Patti Behr, MS, Art, VCTA VP

No Ordinary Job

The 2012-2013 school year is in full swing. Like every other teacher, I sit and wonder what the year ahead will hold.

This year with so many changes, like Common Core Standards, new anti-bullying legislation and the new evaluation procedures, anxiety levels are higher than ever before. Listening to many fellow teachers, the level of anxiety is far higher than the level of excitement. People outside the field of education will immediately think that the anxiety level is high because teachers are worried about getting fired. This is not the case.

The teachers I have talked with are worried that this year's students may not receive the same level and quality of education as the student they have had in the past. The rigor that most teachers hold their students to is beyond exceptional. This is why they are anxious.

There is a quote by Dan Millman that came to mind while listening to and talking with my colleagues:

"The time is now,
the place is here.
Stay in the present.

You can do nothing to change the past,
and the future will never come exactly as
you plan or hope for."

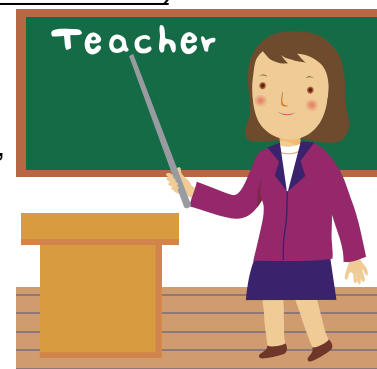
Please don't take this the wrong way. I'm not saying to forgo planning as I believe it is essential for successful teaching. What I do feel, however, is that we need to enter our buildings and remember that it is the now that our students will remember. It may not be the lesson we have planned. It may be those teachable moments that arise and we grab onto and go with, like a surfer riding the perfect wave. Those are the moments we don't want to miss. Though fac-

tors out of our control will continue to change and force us to change with them, do not let them take you away from the present.

There are also those moments that we see as ordinary or don't even notice at all at the time. These are often the moments your students will reflect on years later as important to them. They often start by saying "remember when ..."

and you have no clue, but as they talk about that moment you can see and hear how important it was for them. Those moments you took away from the "planned" lesson or the moment you took away from walking to the office to address a situation in the hall or a student who asked you if you had a minute. These are the moments that make a difference in the lives of children. These are what we often see as "ordinary/everyday" moments. There are no ordinary

moments in teaching because teaching is no ordinary job. Stay in the Present!!!



—Rich Steger, EC, Phys. Ed., VCTA VP

Spotlight on VC's Music Department!

Each year, the Valley Central Music Department provides music education that is critical to each student's understanding, appreciation, and growth as students and musicians. It is a proven fact that music participation enhances the learning abilities of students, and it has been seen time-and-time again that those students involved in music test better, succeed more in school, and have a higher level of confidence and social well-being; all of which contribute to being a functioning, positive, and vital part of society as a whole. Yet, in a time of higher standards, increased student testing, and new teacher evaluations being coerced on teachers by a governor and his constituents who have never set foot into a classroom, these opportunities for our students and the future of music education are continually being put at risk.

Here at Valley Central, while the music department continues to shine, cuts have been made as well, such as the elimination of the marching band at the high school and middle school and no bussing for students to all-county festivals. VCSD Music Teachers spend many hours outside of the school day & during the school day preparing students for music auditions and performances that enhance their students' musical ability. Listed below are some highlights from the 2011 – 2012 school year music program.

— October: we had 10 VCHS students participate as **Greater New York Wind Symphony Carmina Burana Chorus Members**.

—November: **Zone 9 Area All State Music Festival (Grades 10 – 12); Suffern HS**
VC students represented our district in *Mixed Chorus, Women's Choir, Area-All State Band, and even as a Conference All-State Alternate*.

—January:**O.C.M.E.A. Senior High All-County Festival; Warwick Valley H.S. Band Gr. 10-12**

—March: **NYS Band Directors' All-Honors JH & SH Bands: in Syracuse, NY**

O.C.M.E.A. Junior & Senior High All-County Jazz Band: Jazz All-County Gr. 9-12:

—April: **OCMEA Elementary All County Music Festival; Cornwall Central HS: Elementary All-County Chorus, Elementary All-County Band:**

VC State of the District Performance (4/24/2012): Chamber Choir

—May **OCMEA Jr. High All County Music Festival; Middletown Twin Towers : Junior High All-County Chorus, Junior High All-County Band, Junior High All-County Orchestra:**

NYSSMA Solo Festival; Sullivan–West H.S.

Music Showcase Festivals – Great Adventure (6 Flags), New Jersey (May 12, 2012):
VC took many honors including:

- HS Jazz: **Best Overall Instrumental Group**
- MS Mixed Concert Choir: **Grand Champion Award** – *Awarded to the vocal group with highest score.*
- MS Mixed Concert Choir: **Grand Sweepstakes Award** – *Awarded to the highest scoring ensemble at the Middle School level of **all** of the Spring 2012 Competition Festivals at 6 Flags, New Jersey.*

NYSSMA Solo Festival; Minisink HS

—June 10th **Barnes and Noble Fund-Raising Performance: VCHS and VCMS Jazz Bands: Raised over \$400 for music and supplies!**

—Brian Ackley, MS, Music, VCTA Bldg Rep

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

Another opening, another show—no, not a line from Cole Porter, but the opening of school for 2012-2013. 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 30th annual retiree luncheon took place on September 5th at 12:30 pm. The luncheon was held at Spruce Lodge. Last year we had 61 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!!)



Republican Assemblywoman Annie Rabbitt Endorsed by NYSUT

Assemblywoman Annie Rabbitt (Assembly District 97) risked everything to do the right thing. How often do we hear that about an elected official? Annie Rabbitt broke with the Republican Party and voted NO on the establishment of a new Tier 6, recognizing that the ink on Tier 5 wasn't even dry yet. Annie also voted NO on the Tax Cap, recognizing it for the semantics gimmick that it was/is. In retaliation for Annie's independent and ethical stand on these issues, the Republican Party chose to re-draw the lines on Annie's assembly district in such a way as to make her re-election bid more difficult.

During all of this in-party conflict, Annie Rabbitt continued to support public education by backing efforts to provide an \$805 million increase in State School Aid. This summer, Annie Rabbitt was unanimously endorsed by your local representatives at NYSUT's Endorsement Conference for standing up for what is right. Annie made a choice to educate the public rather than simply do what she was blindly told to do by her party. We need more elected officials like Annie Rabbit! We need officials that refuse to scapegoat public employees and education for problems created by Wall Street.

Other state and national candidates endorsed by NYSUT are listed below. These are candidates that have been deemed to be more supportive of education, health care and labor issues than their opponents.

New York State Assembly

- ♦ AD 97 **Ellen C. Jaffee**
- ♦ AD 98 **Annie G. Rabbitt**
- ♦ AD 99 **James Skoufis**
- ♦ AD 100 **Aileen Gunther**
- ♦ AD 103 **Kevin A. Cahill**
- ♦ AD 104 **Frank K. Skartados**
- ♦ AD 105 **Paul F. Curran**
- ♦ AD 106 **Didi Barrett**



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NYS Senate

- ♦ SD 39 **Christopher W. Eachus** (read Chris Eachus "Letter to Members" on page 7)

United States Congress

- ♦ CD 18 **Sean Patrick Maloney** (Sean is in a tight race with incumbent Nan Hayworth—Hayworth stands in opposition to NYSUT on virtually all issues regarding education, labor and health care.)

United States Senate

- ♦ **Kirsten Gillibrand**

US President

- ♦ **Barack Obama**