

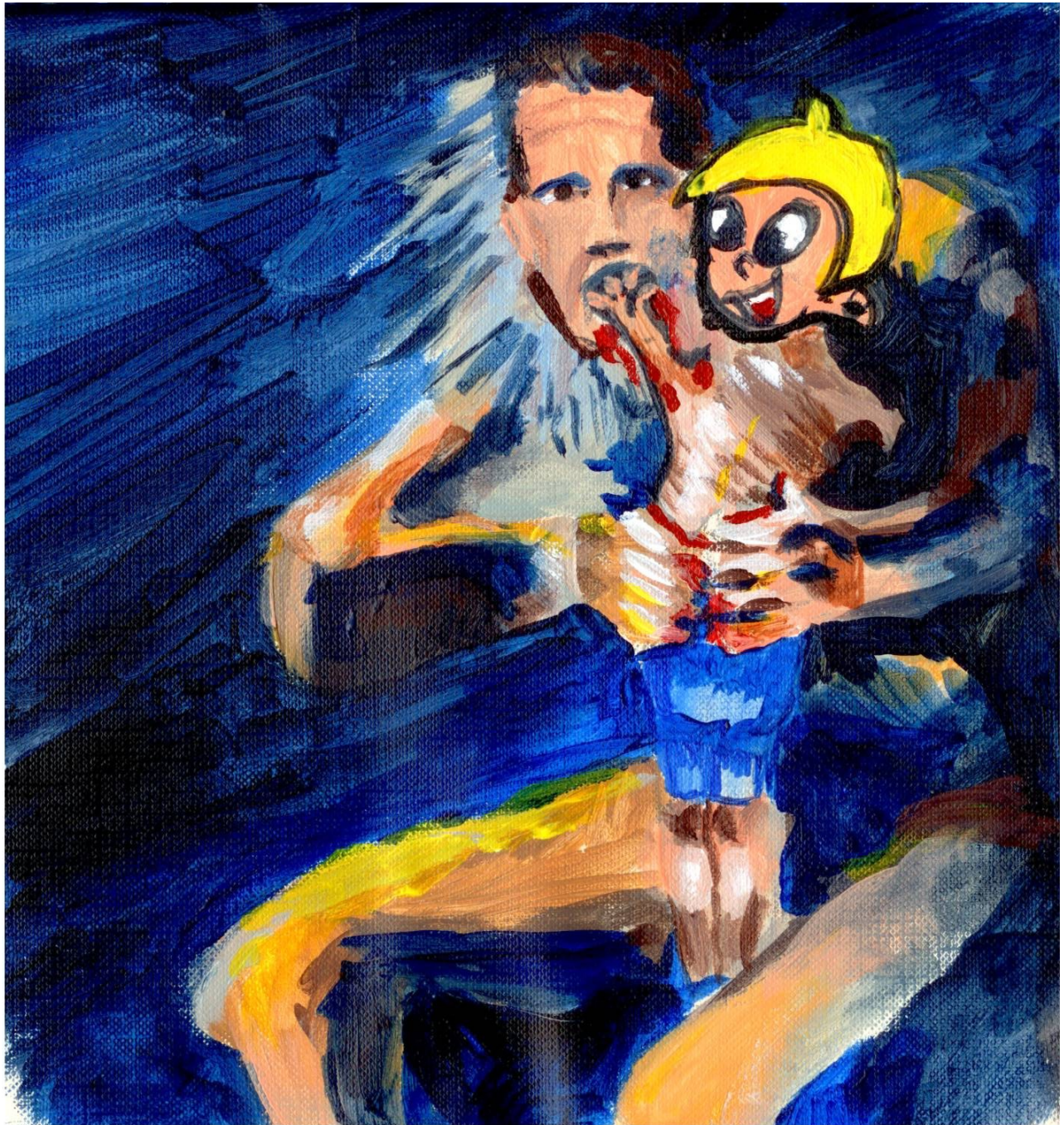
VC ECHOES

Volume 14, Issue 4

Valley Central Teachers' Association

May 2012

CUOMO DEVOURING NY'S STUDENTS FIRST



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



Volume 14, Issue 4
May 2012

Valley Central Teachers' Association

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In this issue:

Retirees	2
Cover Story	3
Nominees	4
Blood Drive	5
Cuomo Guilty	6
Walk on Water	7
Building in Mid-Flight	9
Ed policies?	10
NY ranks High	11

VCTA Officers:

President, Tim Brown (HS)
Vice Pres, Richard Steger (W)
Vice Pres., Patti Behr (HS)
Secretary, Christine Mello(HS)
Treasurer, Jennie Sexton (HS)

***Contribute to the next issue!
Articles or
Contributions
should be sent to
Meghan Riley, HS, by
12 June 2012***

Executive Council Building Representatives

•Berea: Lisa Daily, Robin Scott, Deborah Simons

•E. Coldenham: Sandy Carroll, Laura Casey

•Maybrook: Linda Draughn, Jeanne Cassel

•Montgomery: Gail Nozell, Andrea Turso, Susan Page

•Walden: Mary Ellen Raskopf, Susan Driscoll, Randy Sutter

•Middle School: Chris Arndt, Sonya Berger, Joe Collins, Derek DeVoe, Anne McKallen, Pat Weigel

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

•Secretarial Representative: JoAnn Cassisi (HS)

•Paraprofessional Representative: Kathy Lennon (W)

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.

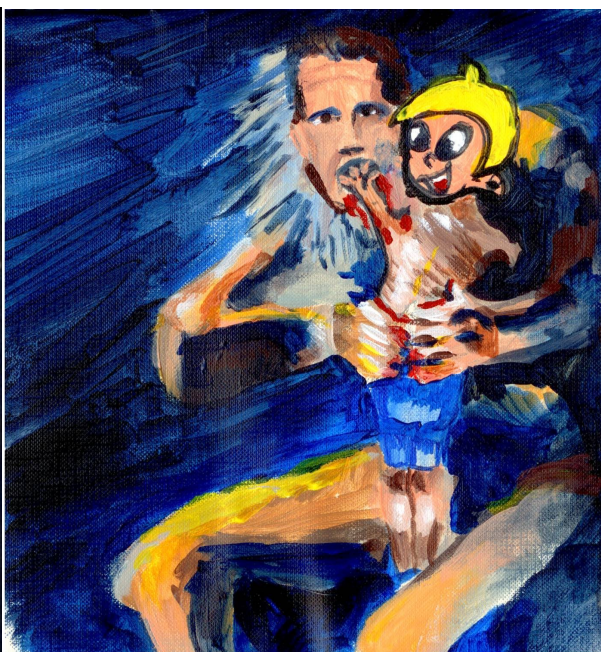
Good Friend Retiring This Year?

The Deadline for the Retiree Issue is 12 June 2012. Get your submissions in now!

Please send articles with a picture (jpg or hard copy which will be returned) to:

Meghan Riley at the High School or
mriley@vcmail.ouboces.org

About the Cover: Cuomo Devouring NY's Students



Far Left: Francisco de Goya's Original "Saturn Devouring his Son", Near left: Patti Behr's Cuomo Devouring NY's Students First

When I listened to the Governor's plan for education during this past winter, it became alarmingly clear that the children of NYS don't have a chance. Our schools are going to be devoured by tax levy limits, threats to state aid, and gap eliminations. I immediately thought of Francisco de Goya's painting "Saturn Devouring his Son." It is one in a series of paintings called the Black Paintings because of the darkness of their color palette and theme. It was 1819, de Goya was 73 and had survived two life threatening illnesses which left him deaf. He painted these works on the walls of his home (they were later transferred to canvas) They reflect the darkness of his interior life. In this particular work, he depicts the Roman myth about the Titan Chronos who feared that one of his sons would overthrow him and then ate each child as it was born to prevent it from happening. It is a gruesome and disturbing work which has been interpreted as signifying the inability to survive time or as representative of the political strife in civil war torn Spain.

Hearing Gov. Cuomo speak and proclaim himself the education governor while seeing his website NY's Students First and reading the rhetoric spewed by his spin doctors made me

think of how much harm Cuomo will be able to inflict on our next generation. The budget cuts that had to be made across the state in the last three years and in particular this year, are poised to cause damage that will take years to fix and for what price? As educators we know that much of what is being forced down our throats is not in the best interest of kids no matter what kind of spin his people put on it. It is hard to watch schools be slashed with budget cuts by the man who proclaims himself to be their lobbyist. I purposely chose to depict the child in my version as a cartoon character. It is simply too unbearable to make it a realistic looking child because the reality is so bleak for our children. When imagining their future, we'd like to picture success, a well-rounded education that helps them achieve their dreams. Cuomo has singlehandedly made it too hard to imagine what will be left for the Class of 2022 who today play carefree on Kindergarten playgrounds. In the cartoon the child is smiling because he has no clue that his future is being devoured. Too bad parents can't see the futures of their children are being devoured before their education begins.

—Patti Behr, HS, Art, VCTA VP

Montgomery's "Make A Difference" Nominees!!

Congratulations to Montgomery's own Gail Nozell and Melinda Sulzbach for each being nominated for the Richard Aderson "Make A Difference" Award!

Gail has been a Speech Pathologist at Montgomery Elementary for the past 19 years. She is also the recipient of the 2004 Orange County Youth Bureau Award for Outstanding School-based Professional. Gail plans and implements the Celebration of Capabilities Week at our school. She also coordinates the Wee-Deliver Postal Service as a way to encourage students to develop effective communication skills. Her Kindness Counts Campaign includes selling apparel to promote school spirit. It is through the Kindness Counts Campaign that Gail organizes the planting of bulbs which are delivered, along with a cheery note, to nursing homes as well as seniors, shut-ins, and those in the community that are in need of a thoughtful gesture. As if that wasn't enough, Mrs. Nozell also is the Student Council advisor and supervises the School Store. Along with the Student Council members, she has coordinated inspiring fundraisers for the Montgomery Food Pantry, Guide Dogs, and St. Jude's Children's Hospital.

Did I forget to mention that Mrs. Nozell also planted, and tends to, the school's courtyard? This courtyard honors former staff members, and Gail is out there watering the flowers from spring, through the long, hot summer, until fall.

Throughout the years, Gail has also served on the building's Instructional Support Team, Sunshine Committee, and the VCTA as a building representative. She coordinates the building's Kindergarten Screening, and taught Spectrum as well. When does the woman sleep?!

Melinda, our School Social Worker extraordinaire, has been in the district for nearly twenty-five years! When she was first hired, she was the only Social Worker in the

entire district. At that time, she was assigned to all 5 elementary schools.

In 2002, Melinda won the Student Assistance Counselor of the Year Award, from Orange County's Student Assistance Counselor's Association, in recognition of her outstanding commitment and service in the field of counseling. She also received a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition from Benjamin Gilman for her outstanding service to the community. In addition, Orange County Executive, Edward Diana, awarded her with a Certificate of Recognition for her fine accomplishments and dedication.

Melinda started Valley Central's Red Ribbon Week to help teach students about the importance of living healthy and staying drug-free. Melinda coordinates all Red Ribbon Week activities in our building which have included having over 500 students decorating brown paper grocery bags from Shop Rite so that they could be used by people in the community when they food shop during Red Ribbon Week. Melinda enthusiastically looks at each and every decorated bag so she can remember to compliment our outstanding artists!

Melinda coordinates Montgomery Elementary's Character Education program which includes daily announcements, written by herself or students. This program reinforces a positive character trait each month. She also is on a committee to help honor three students each month who demonstrate good character in the building and community alike.

For fifteen years, Melinda has also been a trainer and facilitator for our Peer Mediation program. This program helps train fourth and fifth graders to mediate disagreements between other children in our building and emphasizes that positive communication leads to conflict resolution.

Along with her regular counseling load, Melinda also conducts classroom meetings, and runs a variety of groups such as self-esteem and divorce (*continued on page 5*)

“Make A Difference” Nominees!! (from pg 4)

support groups. She has also supervised several graduate students pursuing their degrees in the field.

Throughout the years, Melinda has also served on the building's Instructional Support Team, Sunshine Committee, and was a VCTA building representative. More recently, as a member of Montgomery's Anti-Bullying Committee, Melinda helped develop a brochure regarding bullying which was distributed to parents at report card conferences. She has been on the building's Safety Team for years and has been appointed to attend district-wide meetings on safety and the Code of Conduct. Before schools developed their own teams, Melinda served on the district-wide Health and

Safety Team.

Clearly, these two women have dedicated themselves to making a difference in children's lives. They are active members of our faculty and outstanding role models. As nominees for the Richard Aderson “Make A Difference” Award, they were given starfish pins to represent the award's theme. Congratulations to these wonderful colleagues for all that they have accomplished at Valley Central!

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

Blood Drive Was a Great Success!!!

The VCTA hosted a Blood Drive on Wednesday, May 16th at the Montgomery Fire House. 63 donors arrived ready and willing to give blood. Unfortunately, not all that were willing were able to donate- but we did collect an amazing 59 pints of blood!!!!Everyone was in good spirits in anticipation of receiving their complimentary movie tickets or Mets tickets for helping out fellow community members. Tickets were provided by the blood center in appreciation of the VCTA's commitment to helping the community.

If you were unable to attend this blood drive, the Hudson Valley Blood Center holds blood drives almost daily in all parts of our region. You can check for local sites online at:

www.nybloodcenter.org

—Submitted by: Sonya Berger, MS

putting children center
vcta

 **New York**
Blood Center

Governor Cuomo is Guilty

The negative attacks on teachers and public education have been relentless. Governor Cuomo has consistently lied with the sole intent of furthering his political agenda. The corporate funded ads spewing lie after lie have invaded national prime time television on a daily basis. One of the speakers at the Representative Assembly demonstrated how the trend of attacking teachers and public schools through these purposeful sound bites lacks any semblance to truth whatsoever. He stated that sound bites **don't** win votes. They keep the positive votes at home because they create the feeling of being powerless. How often have you heard a conversation that starts or ends with, "There is **nothing** we can do?"

Bull...!!! There is always something we can do. We all have power in our voice and our actions. If a student was being neglected **NONE** of us would say "There is nothing we can do." Guess what? Every student enrolled in our schools today and in the near future is being neglected by Cuomo and any elected official who has chosen to back Cuomo's attacks on public education. Some might say neglect and thus abuse are strong words. They are accurate words.

CPS must have "some credible evidence" that the child has been harmed or is in imminent danger of being harmed as a result of the parent's failure to exercise a minimum degree of care with regard to the child in order to determine if a report of potential child abuse or maltreatment is "Indicated" (See §412(12) of the SSL and §1012 of the FCA).

I say replace the word "parent" in the above sentence with "Governor Cuomo". I believe that through his actions our children are in imminent danger of academic neglect. Don't get me wrong, the cowardly action of our legislators who voted in favor of the 2% TAX CAP that requires an unconstitutional "super majority vote" to pass any increase over 2% coupled with a failure to provide adequate funding for education in the state budget are guilty as well.

Our children will be denied the academic opportunities necessary to be successful and productive citizens. Make no mistake: our children are in imminent danger of not having the opportunity to receive needed academic skills. We are going to see increasing numbers of students with multiple study halls per day. Gone are the electives that, for many students, are the only reason they still attend school. Many students will not be able to receive the needed credits and/or courses required to graduate. Will a 5 year or 6 year high school experience become more prevalent in order to accommodate the needs of our abused and neglected students? Children in NYS and across this country can expect to have an educational experience that lacks both the quality and diversity that their parents received.

Governor Cuomo is guilty of a form of Educational Neglect of Mass Destruction. He is a predator that needs to be stopped from preying on the futures of our children. Those legislators that follow Cuomo and give him their "Yes" vote are just as guilty. Our children deserve the same opportunities we had and more—not LESS!!!! Don't allow the sound bites to silence your voice or stifle your actions. Every time you hear a sound bite—do something. Go to the NYSUT legislative action link and make your voice heard. Volunteer to make phone calls in November. Volunteer to knock on doors to help remove the abusive politicians. We are the **Professionals**. Speak the truth to anyone and everyone who will listen. Sound bites don't win votes, but our silence and inaction will—for those who continue to neglect our children.

—Rich Steger, EC, Phys Ed., VCTA VP

Walk on Water

The student population that public educators serve is diverse in a multitude of ways. It would have to be since public educational institutions are required to teach all children regardless of their genetic or environmental backgrounds. These eclectic origins bring through our doors each day children who are happy, content, secure and ready to learn. Many of these children, however, are also unhappy, malcontent, insecure and have no desire to learn. Educators are now required to have perfect results with limited resources and limited controlling interest in addressing the myriad of handicapping conditions that many of our students have inherited from a culture rife with substance abuse, child abuse and neglect, poverty with its multitude of overwhelming barriers to achievement and even privilege that, at times, can create attitudes of entitlement rather than a strong work ethic or even ethics, for that matter.

How is it that educators are held accountable for accomplishing what these students' parents were obviously incapable of or unwilling to accomplish? Students and their parents are given all of the rights with none of the responsibility for educational outcomes while educators are given all of the responsibility without being provided any of the rights to effect positive change regarding the predispositions that these needy and sometimes very broken children bring to school with them every day. This later seems to be left in the hands of politicians who actually think they understand children because they were once children themselves and, of course, also think they understand education because they once blessed the halls of a school in their younger days. Would I be permitted to make decisions for an accounting firm because I took business courses in high school and I have the experience of balancing my checkbook? Does society hold accountants responsible for their clients' financial problems? Are an individual's impulsive buying habits that result in credit card debt and home foreclosure the accountant's fault?



Only in the field of education are employees expected to work miracles on a daily basis. What professionals in the field of education are being asked to do is both insane and impossible—notice I didn't say "borders on..." Striving for a 100% success rate with students is both desirable and honorable. However, making that 100% benchmark a mandated policy for success demonstrates a complete lack of understanding regarding the diversity of the population we serve and, more likely, represents a Machiavellian desire to demean teachers and exploit public education for political gain (e.g. Andrew Cuomo who is drooling over the prospect of being President) and economic gain (e.g. Wall Street will gain control over a multi-trillion dollar retirement industry if Cuomo can dismantle public employee pensions). It would appear educators are being required to "walk on water" or be deemed ineffective. Unfortunately, we are not prophets or miracle workers. Would Jesus's teaching be considered ineffective because he did not convert all who listened to his message? In fact, I'm quite confident that he would not attain an effective or highly effective rating if he was being *(continued on pg 8)*

Walk on Water (continued from pg 7)

evaluated by the new testing rubric as mandated by RTTT and APPR.

Public schools are often sabotaged by a multitude of offenders: education gurus who want to be famous; politically correct activists who do not consider nor care about the impact of their policies on other students; mean spirited anti-public education and anti-union bullies; and, of course, politicians who sway with the prevailing winds of reelection and popularity. Schools are the perfect scapegoat for a multitude of frustrated citizens. This collaborative scapegoating often results in education policies and mandates that are counterintuitive and counterproductive. For example, schools are told to group heterogeneously (political correctness often being the motivator) despite research indicating that this is a less effective model. Schools and their employees are often blamed for the escalating costs of educating students while unfunded political mandates require local schools to provide services that were unheard of decades ago. In addition to being responsible for addressing and servicing every handicapping condition that many of our students are diagnosed with, schools are also required to intervene (as we should) with social issues such as bullying (both physical and social media bullying such as that seen on Facebook), depression and suicide, abuse and neglect, sexual harassment and rape, poverty and hunger (yet school lunch/breakfast programs are to be self-sufficient by federal guideline), substance abuse and teen pregnancy...and the list could go on.

Over the past few decades schools have evolved from educational institutions responsible for the academic achievement of those who wish to learn into surrogate parents, counselors, social workers, jailers, cops (SROs are necessary components of many schools, not because educators are failing to do their jobs, but because society's expectations of schools have changed), etc. Progress reports and report cards are now sent home eight times per year. Grades are posted in classrooms and even on the internet, yet parents' failures to keep abreast of their children's progress is

somehow the schools fault. Educators are required to complete failure accountings for each student that did not pass. In other words, the school must prove that it did everything humanly possible to work its magic in the life of a child who often receives no support from home. Educators gladly take on this challenge; educators live to make a difference in the lives of their students. At times, however, every educator must feel like a doctor who is charged with curing terminal cancer. For a doctor, lack of success results in the death of their patient; however, this is anticipated and the doctor is not generally blamed for this sad and heart-breaking result. Educators are charged daily with fixing terminally broken children/students physically, mentally, socially, intellectually and spiritually. I dream of a day when educators are afforded the same respect and understanding as failing doctors.

—Tim Brown, HS, Health,
VCTA President



Building an Airplane in Mid-Flight

Commissioner John King has described the imposed APPR process as “building an airplane while flying in midair”. Who would want to fly in such an airplane? It certainly isn’t the safest way to travel. And yet none of us had a choice to reject this ticket. We were given a one way ticket to get on the plane—with no emergency exit.

NYSUT has been criticized by some members and by critics outside the organization for being part of the negotiation of the APPR process. Some state that NYSUT has given up its principles by “caving” in on APPR. Those people seem to lack understanding of the political context in which this law was changed. You cannot separate principle from the context of history. APPR as written in the law is less about good teacher practices and more about a “gotcha” mentality that will remove the throngs of bad teachers plaguing schools that the media and hedge funds constantly sound bite about. It is based on faulty research. However, the reality is that whether we like it or not, APPR was going to be done to us because it was legislated by lawmakers who really didn’t understand what impact it would have on schools in its implementation. They were bullied by Governor Cuomo into passing the law. When Cuomo tried to bypass the parts of the law that he did not agree with, NYSUT sued. That lawsuit was settled last August. Then the SED appealed the ruling and in his state of the state address Cuomo bullied school districts into accelerating the process by tying it to funding. When NYSUT objected to the unfairness of this, negotiations were taking place and the governor hit a point where he would no longer make any more compromises and countered that he would just take his original APPR (the one defeated by the August ruling), and wrap it into the budget process knowing that legislators would pass the budget even with it in there. So NYSUT continued on the compromise path and was able to soften some of the harshness of what the governor proposed. Negotiations are seldom win-win or lose-lose; there isn’t usually a settlement until

both sides have given and taken.

As NYSUT VP Andy Palotta has said, “It is about being able to take it and come back another day to fight. You don’t get a say if you aren’t willing to sit at the table. That’s what a negotiation is. Two sides sitting at a table and trying to come, if not to agreement at least, to a position that each can live with if only for a moment so that we can both move forward.”

From the beginning of this process, educators from all levels have consistently given King the same message...you are doing this too fast and without enough guidance to the process. Lawsuits, court cases and negotiations have led to guidebook after updated guidebook with those trying to figure out how to navigate the process constantly having to re-check the latest update.

NYSUT has tried to help its members who are ruled by this process make sense of it and make it a tool for school improvement through the teaching process. NYSUT is aware that the heart of the APPR law is built upon faulty research and the governor, legislators and NYSED have chosen not to listen and at times, outright lie about teachers, schools and evaluation. NYSUT became a state vendor for the Rubric to be able to provide a rubric which is written expressly to the new NYS Teaching Standards to which we are all now accountable as compared to the other vendors whose rubrics broadly addressed all 38 states signed on to RTTT. Our rubric and evaluation system was written by practitioners in NYS classrooms on both the teacher and administrator side which is why the VCTA committee on APPR chose it. And NYSUT fought long and hard to protect our collective bargaining rights in this process so there is much that we are allowed to negotiate at the local level. After all, if you have to build an airplane mid-flight, don’t you at least want a pilot who knows what it is to fly a plane in the first place?

—Patti Behr, HS, Art, VCTA VP

Intelligent and Effective Educational Policies (not)

Tsunamis come in small groups; waves of power generated by geologic release miles beneath the ocean. Tsunamis do **no damage** at their **origin**. The destruction begins miles away; on the shore; where the people live. There are no safeguards from tsunamis. Humans can only salvage and cope and adapt to the changes.

Education in New York is still reeling from the graduation requirements tsunami implemented by Richard Mills. There is so much wrong with what he did that I cannot even begin to describe it. The damage has been pervasive, consistent and, like a huge wave driven onshore by a category 5 hurricane, it continues to build. Coupled with that, the No Child Left Behind is a series of tropical storms and tornadoes. One begins to consider moving away. Is the 9th district in New Orleans hiring?

And in this year we experience two new waves generated in that far-off and mysterious land of the Political Earthquake. In an effort to appease taxpayers, politicians must and do blame the teachers' unions for, well, everything. And in a mighty release of pent-up energy, the political earthquake generated the 'APPR' wave that now rolls on shore, creating confusing whirlpools and covering the land with debris. Roads are covered. ..signs destroyed. What comes next? How bad will this be? What does "recovery" look like?

The most tragic, to me, of the waves that wash over us overwhelming and nearly defeating our spirits, is one that should not be destructive at all. Common Core Standards that encourage literacy and mathematical competence for all students is a GREAT idea. While some rains fall gently and do good to the land and its people, CCS is like a torrential monsoon rain that continues to undermine already sodden slopes and swollen rivers. The people are already storm-weary, frightened and confused. CCS will be a negative because it is added to what has come before, on top of previous destructive acts.

The graduation requirements of New York State are at DIRECT ODDS with the CCS. I remember having students read and write AT LENGTH in my science classes. I had to STOP doing that when Mill's requirements kicked in because the students who I had to get TO AND THROUGH the regents exam ARE NOT academic kids. It doesn't matter what they might have been good at, we smashed that down in New York State. I cannot teach this lab class to **all students** and accomplish these three goals: 1. teach it as a REAL SCIENCE class; 2. get all kids to and through the Regents AND; 3. have time for them to read difficult and complex science literature and respond to it.

And my competency as a teacher depends on me doing these things?

What is so very distressing to every teacher I speak with is the damage this does to the kids. I won't get into that here. There's so much that's wrong. And if somewhere some policy maker is actually honest and cares about education, maybe that person will talk to the teachers and to the average kids. Maybe that person will visit schools in a quiet manner and see what happens. Maybe that person will learn that education is almost all heart and soul and, when you take away those, you've lost.

—Jean McMahon, HS, Science



New York Public High Schools Rank High

ALBANY, N.Y. May 22, 2012 - New York dominates yet another list of the nation's best public schools, accounting for more than 10 percent of America's best high schools - including City Honors School in Buffalo which was named the 11th best public high school in the United States, according to Newsweek and The Daily Beast. The City Honors ranking is part of a new [Newsweek/Daily Beast list naming the nation's top 1,000 public high schools](#). Statewide, 118 public high schools were named to the list.

Also finishing among the state's top 10 were: Bronxville (40); Jericho (41); Hunter College (44); Bronx High School of Science (50); Locust Valley (55); Great Neck South (56); Pittsford Sutherland (61); The Wheatley School in Old Westbury (62); and Stuyvesant (66).

Nationwide, New York was second only to California in the number of schools in the top 1,000. "The continued success of our public high schools is a direct result of the hard work by our outstanding teachers and other committed education professionals working in classrooms across New York state who dedicate themselves, day-in and day-out, to ensuring their students receive the best education possible," said NYSUT President Richard C. Iannuzzi. "The Newsweek/Daily Beast list affirms that our teachers are dedicated professionals who - despite having to contend with drastic cuts in funding and myriad challenges that have come as a result of the state's fiscal constraints - rise to the occasion time and again. It also underscores NYSUT's commitment to fighting cuts that would reverse this track record of excellence."

Reacting to the high City Honors ranking, Buffalo Teachers Federation President Philip Rumore said: "We congratulate and celebrate the success of City Honors, and we also celebrate the hard work of all of our teachers in Buffalo."

The strong showing in the Newsweek/ Daily Beast list comes on the heels of a U.S. News and World Report ranking published earlier this month that rated New York state's high schools

second best in the nation, California ranks first.

New York's public school system also was ranked third best nationwide in Education Week's annual "Quality Counts" report released in January, and CNBC issued a recent report showing that education in New York was tops in the nation in 2011 for what businesses need.

In compiling this latest list, Newsweek and The Daily Beast factored a wide range of criteria based on 2010-2011 data reported by more than 2,300 schools nationwide. Those criteria included a school's:

- Four-year on-time graduation rate
- Percentage of 2011 graduates accepted into college
- Percentage of students taking college-level courses and examinations such as AP
- Average SAT/ACT scores
- Average scores on tests such as AP College-level curricula offered to students

All 118 New York state public high schools making the Newsweek/Daily Beast list can be found here:

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2012/05/20/america-s-best-high-schools.html>

NYSUT, the state's largest union, represents more than 600,000 teachers, school-related professionals, academic and professional faculty in higher education, professionals in education and health care and retirees. NYSUT is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers, National Education Association and the AFL-CIO.

—Taken from NYSUT.org

Editor's note: Cuomo Wrong Again!



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heard on all the impor-
tant issues education
faces today!**



On Tuesday, June 5th, 2012 Wisconsin will decide whether or not to recall Governor Scott Walker. Walker is just the third governor in US history to face a recall election. The recall movement against him began when he effectively ended collective bargaining for public employees in his state. All eyes are on Wisconsin.