

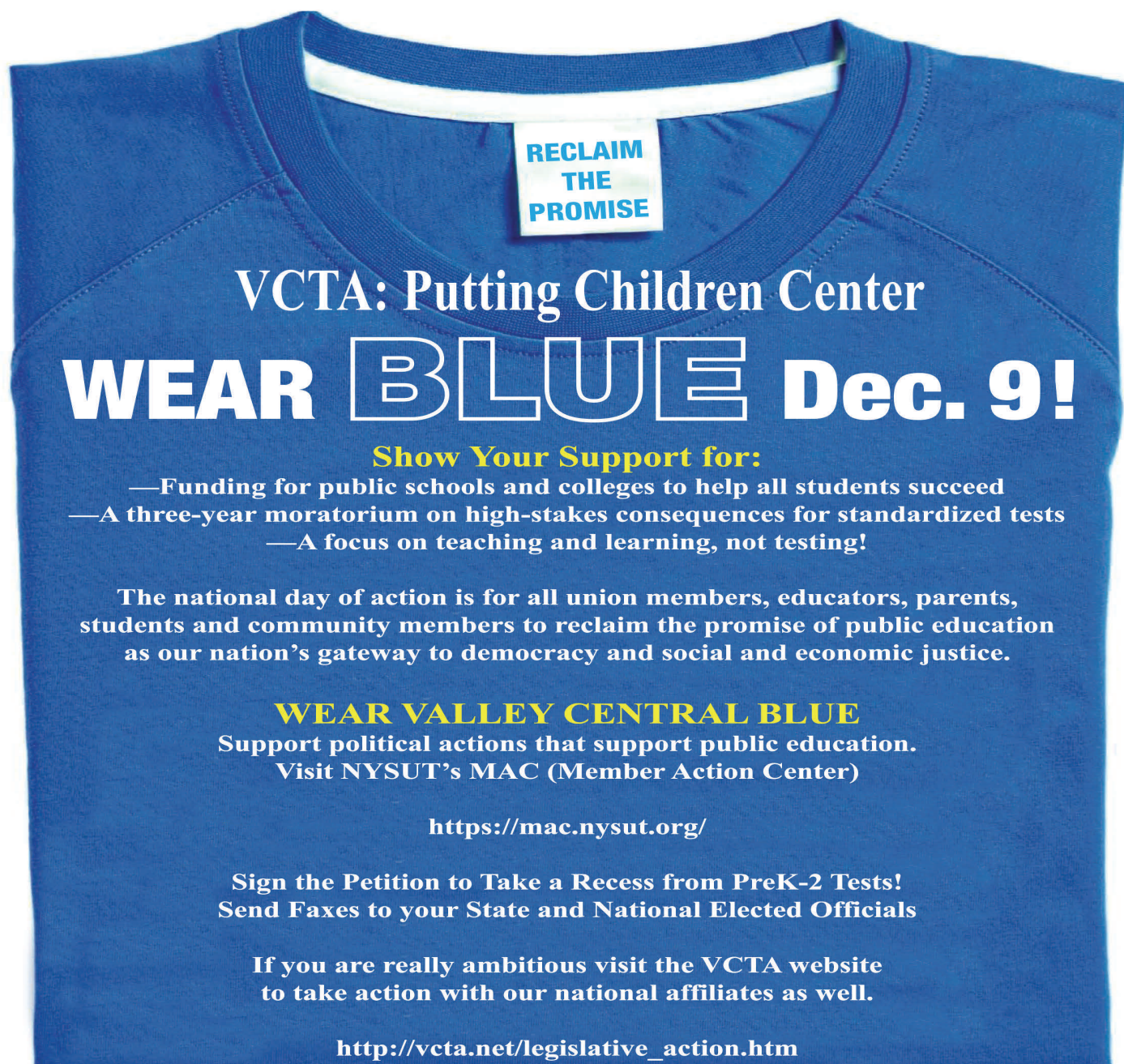
VC ECHOES

Volume 16, Issue 3

Valley Central Teachers' Association

December 2013

JOIN THE NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION TO
RECLAIM THE PROMISE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION



VCTA: Putting Children Center

WEAR BLUE Dec. 9!

Show Your Support for:

- Funding for public schools and colleges to help all students succeed
- A three-year moratorium on high-stakes consequences for standardized tests
- A focus on teaching and learning, not testing!

The national day of action is for all union members, educators, parents, students and community members to reclaim the promise of public education as our nation's gateway to democracy and social and economic justice.

WEAR VALLEY CENTRAL BLUE

Support political actions that support public education.
Visit NYSUT's MAC (Member Action Center)

<https://mac.nysut.org/>

Sign the Petition to Take a Recess from PreK-2 Tests!
Send Faxes to your State and National Elected Officials

If you are really ambitious visit the VCTA website
to take action with our national affiliates as well.

http://vcta.net/legislative_action.htm

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



Valley Central Teachers' Association

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President, Tim Brown (HS)
Vice Pres, Richard Steger (EC)
Vice Pres., Patti Behr (MS)
Secretary, Christine Mello (HS)
Treasurer, Patti Behr (MS)

Contribute to the next issue!
Articles or
Contributions
should be sent to
Meghan Rilley, HS, by
20 December 2013

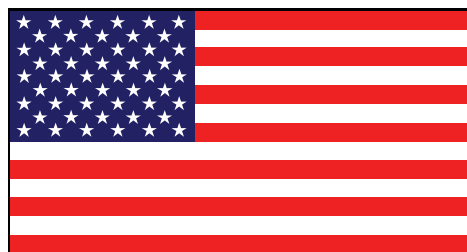
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• E. Coldenham: Pasquale Leo, Tiffani Garrison
• Montgomery: Gail Nozell, Susan Page, Randy Sutter
• Walden: Mary Ellen Raskopf, John Fisher,
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• High School: Steve Altman, Nancy Brother, Deborah McKenney, Antoinette Oakes, Henry Pizzonia, Mike Score, Melissa Verlin, Keith Sexton (A)
• 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.*

Buy Union Made in the USA This Holiday Season!

Support your union brothers and sisters around the USA by buying Union Made products. Visit NYSUT.ORG for a resource guide complete with a listing of reliable Union Made in the USA businesses. In these difficult economic times it is more important than ever to support Union working families around the country.



Support our local businesses!

Save money on gas and avoid the crazy crowds! Stop in to some of our local businesses and see just how much they have to offer. Keep the money in your own community and support those people who help to support you!

When Neutrality Represents Taking Sides

I recently read a *Time Magazine* (October 21, 2013) article titled “Unfair and Balanced: When Blaming Both Sides Isn’t Accurate News” authored by James Poniewozik. This article highlighted the pitfalls of insisting on neutrality when neutrality actually results in a distortion of the truth. Seemingly conscientious people often try to demonstrate diplomatic neutrality in their lives for the purpose of validating their impartiality to those who might otherwise accuse them of partiality. Distorting the truth in our personal lives can carry personal repercussions that inconvenience our lives at best or destroy friendships at worst—a sad state of affairs, but certainly not a national or global catastrophe.

On a political level, however, neutrality is enviable and desirable only when there is abundant gray area between opposing sides in a debate or battle over policy. The recent shutdown of the federal government is a perfect example of how neutrality can sometimes distort the truth. The blame for this shutdown that impacted the jobs and services of many Americans, while our elected officials continued to collect their paychecks, clearly falls at the feet of the Tea Party and their Republican colleagues who did not have the personal or political integrity to do what they were elected to do—the right thing.

My personal distaste for both parties has prevented me from registering in either and, therefore, prohibited my voting in primary elections. I believe factions of the Democratic Party would do the same thing given the “wrong” circumstances. In truth, I despise both parties as it is my belief that members of both parties would be willing to hurt the American people irrevocably if it helped their party to retain or regain power. My belief in this sad assessment of politics is supported by our two most recent shutdowns of the federal government—the first of which downgraded our economic standing in our newly proclaimed “global economy.”

Whether one likes or dislikes the Affordable Care Act—and there are certainly many reasons to be frustrated with President Obama’s

incompetent rollout of the ACA this fall—the ACA (Obama Care) was legally passed and even survived over forty challenges after-the-fact. For one party to shut down the federal government because it can’t always have its own way via the established political procedures (i.e. they can’t get the votes needed) demonstrates a complete lack of concern for both the American people and the procedures established to ensure functionality that serves the best interests of the American people.

In truth, there was no “corresponding threat or demand” on the part of the Democrats that would necessitate or even suggest that neutrality regarding the government shutdown was warranted by the press or the American people. Where will this end? Will shutdowns become a more common part of the dysfunctional political process? We already see how Governor Andrew Cuomo, with the approval of New York State’s dysfunctional legislature, was able to model the United States Congress’ sixty percent super majority with regard to school budget votes. This makes the task of funding public education nearly impossible when combined with decreases in state funding, punitive gap-elimination formulas and the loss of revenue from charter school expansion. It seems many elected officials wish to model only those practices and policies that ensure their retention of power as opposed to those practices and policies that benefit the American people. Nevertheless, after all that I have written, it is not our elected officials at which I cast the most blame—it is, in fact, the American people. In the words of Abraham Lincoln: “Elections belong to the people. It’s their decision. If they decide to turn their back on the fire and burn their behinds, then they will just have to sit on their blisters.”

—Tim Brown, VCTA President,
HS, Health

In the News...

State Aid: Despite an increase in state aid for schools from last year, NYS public schools are still \$100 million dollars behind 2008-09 state aid levels. In fact, state aid for NY's public schools was a whopping 34% of "total school expenditures in 2011-12—the lowest percentage since 1948-49" (NU; 11/13; p. 7). Yea!!! With support like this who needs saboteurs?

I'm Not Poor: The poverty line is calculated by multiplying the minimal annual food budget from 1959 by three (3). This poverty index does not account for "the cost of housing, fuel, transportation, child care or health care—all of which are rising more rapidly than the cost of basic foods" (NU; 11/13; p8). Na Na Na Na Na—told you I'm not poor. By the way...could I borrow a dollar so I can get some lunch?

It's About a Living Wage Stupid: Incomes of families making \$394,000 grew by 31% between 2009-12; everyone else's income grew by .4%—yes, there is a decimal point there. What could account for this economic Grand Canyon type gap? Union membership peaked at 28.3% in the 1950s and dropped to a mere 11.3% today with only 6.6% of private workers unionized (NU; 11/13; p. 9). Unfortunately, lack of representation generally equated to a loss of workers' rights, particularly when it came to salary and benefits.

Funding Gap: Wealthy districts (i.e. top 10%) spend \$35,690 per student. Poor districts spend \$19,823 (NU; 11/13; p16). Guess where VC falls? Based on what we spend per pupil we be poo—too poor to afford an "r." Yet we are in the top half of the county when property and income wealth is calculated by the SED—the criteria that is utilized to punish us with GEA (gap-elimination aid). This means that wealthy districts spend \$15,867 more per pupil than poor districts (\$35,690 - \$19,823 = \$15,867). So much for an equal playing field...



Regent Resumé: Did you know that "no educational qualifications are required to become a Regent. Rather, the Regents are elected by a joint session of the state Legislature" ((NU; 11/13; p 20). So let me get this straight—the Regents, the Commissioner, BOE members and elected officials need zero qualifications on their resumé to dictate education policy and mandates but teachers still need to increase the bar for teaching beyond a BA, beyond a MA, beyond 175 hours every five years, etc. Now, of course, Pearson just happens to have a new exam ready for a new mandate that would require teachers to pass a new Bar Exam. I wonder if they will pay us like attorneys as well. Personally, I would settle for just a portion of the deference attorneys receive.

—Tim Brown, VCTA President,
HS, Health

Christmas Wish List

Dear Santa—for the 12 days of Christmas I wish for:

1. a common core that is either common or actually addresses core learning—both would be nice;
2. professionals in the classroom to determine curriculum and instruction, not politicians or business interests like Pearson—oh crap... Pearson just developed another useless assessment—there will be a new test implemented immediately and Pearson stock just went up again;
3. Commissioner John King to get some real education experience in a real classroom before claiming expert status as an educational leader;
4. that we start to spend as much money on each child in school as we do each inmate in prison;
5. Governor Andrew Cuomo to finally have a real job that wasn't handed to him because of his family's wealth/connections. Of course, his latest job speaks to our gullibility as voters;
6. funded mandates; notice I did not say that all mandates are bad—just the unfunded part;
7. warp-drive or hyperspace ability so I can see the galaxy/universe while escaping the useless education policies/mandates that make it more difficult for teachers to do their jobs; it would also be nice to see if big business and elected officials on other planets are as bereft of a conscience as many of those on Earth. Maybe, on other planets, intelligence and ethical behavior are interdependent traits that work in harmony; hey—don't laugh, it's my damn wish list!
8. elected officials that promote and pass bills that are good for the entire electorate, not just good for some (e.g. party members, campaign contributors, rich people or big business) and certainly not to increase the elected officials' personal wealth such as the insider trading that was legal for so long in Congress;
9. future US Presidents who haven't cheated their way to the top via campaign abuses (sadly though—ethical candidates are generally underdogs—what does that say about us?). Perhaps I should just ask for presidents without a history of drug abuse, sex scandals or permanent sleeping arrangements with multi-billion dollar corporations—I know, I'm asking for too much again, aren't I?
10. Regents that are not in the pocket of Pearson; no wonder some Regents are so out of touch with reality—some of them obviously sleep, live and even work in the dark—if they would only turn the lights on at night they could would be able to see the face of their partners;
11. charter schools that have to follow the same rules as public schools...or...public schools that get to “not follow” the same rules that charters get to “not follow”;
12. thank you Santa for honoring my request from last year regarding making the US Senate understand basic math (i.e. 50% plus one equates to a majority). Those crazy people were obviously drinking too much Tea. Now, could I ask for the same level of arithmetic enlightenment in NYS?



—Tim Brown, VCTA President, HS, Health

NYSUT Analysis: Tax Cap Increases Inequality, Achievement Gap

ALBANY, N.Y. December 2, 2013 - The wealthiest 10 percent of New York school districts spend 80 percent more educating their students than the poorest 10 percent - a funding inequity that is aggravated by the state's property tax cap and widens the unacceptable achievement gap, a new analysis by New York State United Teachers showed today.

The wealthiest 10 percent of school districts spent an average of \$35,690 per student in 2012-13, compared to the \$19,823 per student spent educating the poorest 10 percent, even though the educational needs of students in poor communities tend to be much greater.

In addition, the so-called 2 percent tax cap levy enacted in 2011 allowed the wealthiest 10 percent of districts to raise an average of \$704 per student in 2012-13, more than six times the \$114 per student the tax cap permitted for the poorest 10 percent of school districts - all without seeking a super-majority vote to pierce the cap, the analysis showed. (See chart A below.)

Chart A:

2012-2013 Change in Tax Levy Decile by Combined Wealth Ratio	Change in Levy Per Pupil	Spending Per Pupil
Poorest Decile	\$114	\$19,823
2nd Decile	\$133	\$19,343
3rd Decile	\$206	\$19,241
8th Decile	\$523	\$22,510
9th Decile	\$614	\$26,066
Wealthiest Decile	\$704	\$35,690

"The way New York funds public education is already grossly inequitable, denying the poorest students with the greatest needs the rich array of programs and services they need for success - services more affluent students get every single day," said NYSUT President Richard C. Iannuzzi. "What the tax cap does, in essence, is to take this grotesque educational inequality and accelerate it even more."

Iannuzzi said funding inequality and the effects of poverty have a devastating impact on student achievement and graduation rates. He noted that roughly half of New York's 2.7 million schoolchildren are so poor they qualify for a free- or reduced-priced lunch. New York City has an estimated 50,000 homeless students, and many more homeless youngsters populate shelters and abandoned structures in small cities, the suburbs and rural communities across the state as well.

"Students who are furthest from reaching the state's higher standards and who are at the greatest risk of dropping out are very often from communities of color or families that live in poverty," Iannuzzi said. "Instead of investing more to help students in high-needs communities succeed, New York has done the opposite, creating a tax structure that widens the wealth gap and enacting an undemocratic tax cap that is worsening the achievement gap by making it impossible for poor school districts to ever catch up."

(continued on page 7)

NYSUT Analysis: Tax Cap Increases Inequality, Achievement Gap

NYSUT's analysis, submitted as part of the union's lawsuit seeking to have the tax cap declared unconstitutional, also compares student proficiency rates and per-pupil spending. In the highest-spending 10 percent of school districts, 49 percent of students reached proficiency targets on last April's English language arts test, while 45 percent were labeled proficient in math. Among the poorest 10 percent, however, just 21 percent reached proficiency in English language arts and 18 percent in math. (See chart B below.)

Chart B:

<i>Percent Proficient on 2013 Grades 3 -8 Math and ELA Exams Decile By CWR</i>	ELA Proficiency	Math Proficiency	Spending Per Pupil
1 (poorest)	21%	18%	\$19,823
2	25%	22%	\$19,343
3	28%	25%	\$19,241
4	29%	27%	\$20,114
5	31%	28%	\$19,360
6	32%	28%	\$20,345
7	39%	36%	\$21,092
8	40%	37%	\$22,510
9	43%	40%	\$26,066
10 (wealthiest)	49%	45%	\$35,690

"The poorest groups of districts have only about 20 percent of pupils scoring at a proficient level on state exams and spend approximately \$19,800 per student. On the other end of the spectrum, the wealthiest groups of districts have almost 50 percent of their pupils reaching the proficiency level and spend \$35,690 per student," the affidavit said. "The chasm between these numbers will only widen if lower performing districts continue to be deprived of local control over budgeting, particularly in light of the state's failure to meet its funding obligations."

Despite last year's state aid increase, state funding for public education remains about \$150 million less than in the 2008-09 school year, despite inflation and a Court of Appeals finding in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity case and resulting legislation that promised billions of dollars in new money for schools, especially those serving students with high needs.

Instead of meeting these obligations, however, the state cut funding to public schools. State support for public education in 2011-12 fell to 39.7 percent, its lowest level as a percentage of overall school funding since the 1993-94 school year, according to a January 2013 report by the State Education Department. State aid to New York's nearly 700 districts reached its zenith in 2001-02 at 48.6 percent of overall public education spending - a year in which property taxes accounted for 46.4 percent of overall school funding, compared to 55.1 percent in 2011-12.

NYSUT's suit against the property tax cap is scheduled to be heard in state Supreme Court in Albany County at 1:30 p.m. on Dec. 12.

—Taken from *nysut.org*

'Tis the Season!

**BUY
AMERICAN**



**BUY
UNION-MADE**