

## VC ECHOES

Volume 17, Issue 1

Valley Central Teachers' Association

September 2014

### WELCOME TO VALLEY CENTRAL (PG 10)





## Valley Central Teachers' Association

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

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### VCTA Officers:

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**  
**24 September 2014**

### Executive Council Building Representatives

•Berea: Amy Doce, Dawn Rubino, Robin Scott  
•E. Coldenham: Pasquale Leo, Tiffani Garrison  
•Montgomery: Gail Nozell, Susan Page, Randy Sutter  
•Walden: John Fisher, MaryEllen Raskopf, Erin Uszenski  
•Middle School: Sonya Berger, Joe Collins, Derek DeVoe, Paul Dederick, Cathi Heil, Anne McKallen, Frank DiPasqua (A)

•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.*

# See You at BILLY JOE's!

- Friday, September 26
- Friday, October 24
- Friday, November 21
- Friday, December 12
- Friday, January 23

- Friday, February 20
- Friday, March 20
- Friday, April 24
- Friday, May 29
- Friday, June 19



## **Elementary Library Education (from BOE Meeting)**

**T**hank you for letting me represent the VCTA teachers, secretaries and paraprofessionals on behalf of the elementary students of Valley Central.

Parents may see our elementary students assigned one day of "Library" in their weekly special schedules this year. But without a librarian in that library weekly, to educate those children, they are being dropped off to a paraprofessional who will provide a study hall environment for the students. Study hall typically is a time for students to work independently with a teacher available to help them. In the elementary setting this is typically during recess time and is not comprised of an entire class at once.

Imagine one paraprofessional trying to work with 25-30 children who may be reading independently or working on folder work from the classroom over a 40 minute period. Sounds like a study hall if you think about it. When each library had a librarian the para helped with checking out the books and keeping an eye on everyone while the librarian planned and delivered a 40 minute period of instruction. Classroom teachers know that some children struggle with independent reading with a teacher to help them. Imagine the frustration level of those students when a teacher is unavailable and the paraprofessional is tasked with helping kids check out books while keeping an eye on everyone. This sounds like a recipe for frustration for both the student and for the paraprofessional. So even though the schedule will say "Library"—in reality, it is just study hall; or really, it may be just a place where students will sit once a week for forty minutes waiting for their teacher to return.

While one librarian was restored to the elementary level, she will be in charge of all four elementary libraries. She is charged with getting the libraries in order, assessing and responding to the needs of each building, and trying to provide lessons for all of our elementary students. Last year when ADAM graciously provided for one certified art teacher to provide at least one lesson to all of our elementary students it took her nearly one third of a school year to do so—

and all she did was provide the lesson; she was not charged with organizing and cleaning up the rooms after no one had been in charge of them—she did not have to assess needs and order supplies for each building—and it still took her one third of the year to teach one art lesson to all the kids in the district. Our students will probably get about the same from our certified librarian this year. Of the 39 weeks that they have specials they will have 39 art lessons, 39 music lessons, 78 PE lessons and 1 library lesson. Our elementary students lost a full year of library instruction this past year, and for all intents and purposes, they will lose again this year.

Considering that some statistics place childhood poverty rates as high as 25% the librarian is even more important for our kids. In a class of 28 students—7 of those kids may not even have a book at home. Allow me to do a little math for you... 1,749 elementary kids in our district—437 of them may live in poverty if that 25% statistic holds true. What difference does a librarian make? The librarian helps kids fall in love with books and learning. The librarian helps students find a book that is appropriate for their level. The librarian helps students learn how to research—on computers that they may not have access to at home. Learning is key for all students, but to those 437 students, learning may provide the way to overcome poverty. Can we really afford to have another year without librarians in each elementary school?

Howard Howe said, "What a school thinks about its library is a measure of what it feels about education." We know that Valley Central is a district committed to giving students the best education possible. When the Board was making restorations in April for the 2014-15 school year it was without a clear idea of where the finances of the district would be. But now it is August and we know that we did not need to utilize the \$2 million that had been reserved from the fund balance. In addition, our unassigned fund balance is still (*cont'd* 4)

## Elementary Library Education

funded near the 4% allowable limit as none of that was needed in the 2013-14 school year. On June 9<sup>th</sup> the BOE was informed that it appeared there would be as much as \$2.7 million more in excess because we had more revenue than we did expenses during the past year. And then on July 28<sup>th</sup> the Board was informed that there was an unexpected \$100,000 profit from the cafeteria program- and by the way- kudos to our cafeteria team, Eleanor and all the workers. for that achievement.

In April, Mrs. Crist was particularly concerned that students were not getting enough

library education and said that she wanted that to be considered as the financial picture became clearer. Well, the financial picture is clearer now—please consider finding a way to give all of our 1,749 elementary students—39 weeks of library education instead of 39 weeks of library study hall.

—Patti Behr, VP, VCTA

*Presented to BOE at its August 18th meeting*

### — [ Where it stands now ] —

*The BOE did not choose to add any more librarians at this time. Our one elementary librarian has been directed to teach every student once a week in each of her four buildings—10 lessons.*

### **All VCTA Executive Council meetings are general membership meetings.**

- Tuesday, September 9
- Tuesday, October 14
- Tuesday, November 18
- Tuesday, December 9
- Tuesday, January 13
- Tuesday, February 10
- Tuesday, March 10
- Tuesday, April 14
- Tuesday, May 5
- Tuesday, June 9\*

The Executive Council meets at the HS Professional Library on the above dates.

\*The June meeting will be held at a location to TBD. It is followed by a dinner to honor retirees. Members are welcome to join the dinner, at cost. Please contact Chris Mello if you are interested in attending for more information.

## **“They Send Us the Best That They Have”**

**E**ach year that I return to the classroom after summer vacation, I recall the advice from two educators.

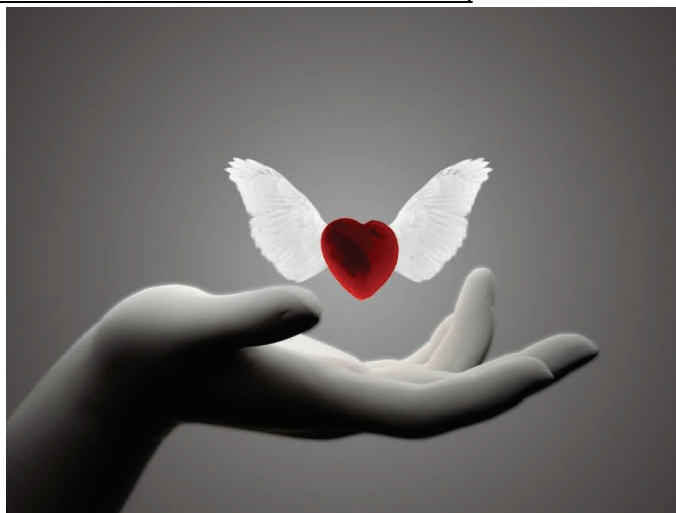
One was my cooperating teacher when I student taught back in 1984. I was working on a study on teacher burn-out, hot topic of the day back then, and asked her how to avoid it. Lynn was in her thirtieth year teaching when I asked that question. She told me it came down to three things—love your kids, feed them and have fun with them. She literally would feed them—she baked cakes for them or brought them snacks. In feeding them she built community in the classroom. She joked with them, and encouraged them to have fun in class and out of class. She would encourage them to participate in school activities and she encouraged them to get together outside of school. And she loved them. She cared about them and she saw them for what they are—kids. She treated each one individually, and cared about what they were learning, and what was going on in their lives. So I have tried to do that for each of my thirty years and it has saved me from burning out because each year is different and unique just as each kid is different and unique.

The other advice I recall is from Jim Coonan who was VC superintendent when I was first hired here. He always wove “they send us the best that they have—they don’t keep the better ones home” into his opening day speech. Sometimes it is easy to get lost in the maze of demands on teachers lately—data this and data that; but no matter what the data analyzes it doesn’t measure where that kid will end up. And when we are lost in that maze, we lose sight of what is really important—each kid.

My experience in education has been

# **got grit?**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H14bBuluwB8>

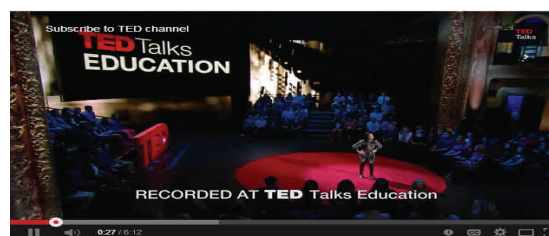


tinanguyen90.blogspot.com

that intelligence generally catches up. Kids who weren’t great at reading, writing and arithmetic somehow turn out okay—and actually are usually pretty good at something else. Kids that learn to overcome failure actually learn how to succeed. It shouldn’t be about measuring how smart a student is or how much he/she has absorbed but it should be about teaching them how to learn from their mistakes. It is the kid that can pull him/herself together and try again who is prepared to succeed in life.

If we recognize that while every student will not be great at everything they are likely to be great at something or at least want to be great at something, then we may be able to help them find their way to that goal. And we can do that if we remember that right now we have the best that they are—maybe we can help them become the best that they are able to become. May this year be your best yet!

—Patti Behr, VCTA VP/Treasurer



Angela Lee Duckworth: The key to success? Grit



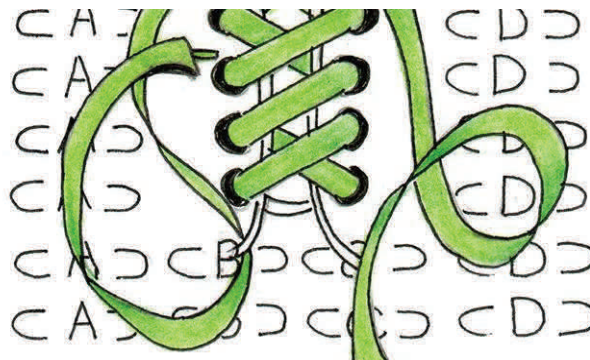
These dads wanted to protect their children—their own and the ones they teach and even the ones they don't teach—from practices that they knew were harmful.

First they dressed up in funny costumes, but that didn't get them far.

They called their group “Lace to the Top,” to symbolize kindness and concern for children, as opposed to the aggressive competition encouraged by Race to the Top.

This is a gentle kind of resistance, but it is resistance nonetheless.

Learn More At:



Is the message of “Lace to the Top” too gentle to overcome the “survival of the fittest” mentality that is implied by Race to the Top? Funny how history repeats itself. In school, we learned about social Darwinism, and we thought it was an obsolete ideology. We were taught that our society had long ago outgrown the philosophy that the strong win and the weak die off. We thought that our society had learned some lessons about social responsibility. And yet, here we are, more than a century later, with a federal policy that explicitly encourages survival of the fittest.

—Diane Ravitch

- <http://dianeravitch.net/2014/08/16/do-you-want-to-join-lace-to-the-top/>
- <http://www.lacetothetop.com/home.html>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZnQLtcbxuyw#t=43>

## A True Tale About Testing...

**F**orty years ago, a little boy was taking a benchmark test in the third grade at Berea Elementary. His teacher set up a puzzle center so as children finished the test, they could quietly go do a puzzle while the others finished. The little boy loved puzzles. He really didn't like tests. So he filled in the mark-sense (*precursor of scantron—for those of you under 40*) answer sheet as quickly as he could. So quickly he didn't even take the test—he just filled in the sheet. And then he went over to the puzzle center and happily worked on puzzles.

About a week or two later, his parents received a call to meet with the school principal. They were told that the principal was very sorry that no one had noticed their son's immense disability. He was barely educable according to the test results. His father knew that had to be wrong. His son was bright although he struggled a bit with spelling. His father told the principal that he was willing to let his son stay back as he would then graduate when he was 18 rather than 17, but his father didn't think that test was any good—and he told the school that. So the little boy repeated the third grade the next year, and his father worked with him every night on spelling and made sure his other homework was done.

The boy passed the third grade the second time and the rest of elementary school and middle school without issue. And in high school he took advanced classes and made the National Honor Society. He graduated with an engineering degree from Clarkson University, and a master's degree from Steven's Institute of Technology. He has had a very successful career with Boeing and he is in charge of a unit of engineers who are responsible for launching satellites and keeping them going for government and private use—that third grader who was barely educable, is responsible for keeping a lot of technology going that we depend on daily.

Many, many, many years later, the boy

### JAMES DYSON, DESIGNER

*“The one size fits all approach of standardized testing is convenient but lazy.”*

[http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/j/](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/j/jamesdyson509722.html#Aw0tiELF2LTCIHqt.99)

[jamesdyson509722.html#Aw0tiELF2LTCIHqt.99](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/j/jamesdyson509722.html#Aw0tiELF2LTCIHqt.99)

and his father had a conversation about that particular test.. The boy laughed when his father told him about the conference at school. He told his father that he had just filled out the sheet to get to the puzzle center—he thought the story was pretty funny. And it was.

It was funny because adults who write tests (*for companies like PEARSON*) to evaluate what they think kids need to know—so they can evaluate teachers, and evaluate the school the teacher works for—forget about how kids think. If you think about it, the boy showed some 21st century skills in his decision-making way back in the middle of the 20th century. He focused on a goal and came up with a way to solve the problem of getting to the puzzle table quicker. And actually the puzzle table probably required higher level thinking than the test did, all things considered. The point is that no matter how much attention outsiders place on one test, those of us in the classroom know that a test is nothing more than a snapshot capturing a moment in time and not all-telling about the potential of any school—any teacher—or any little boy (*or little girl*)!

—Patti Behr, VCTA VP, Treasurer



## **Communication and Trust: Opening Day Remarks**

**G**ood morning and welcome back. Valley Central employees and the children we serve have suffered tremendous academic losses and personal attacks during the past few years. With regard to the damaging academic cuts generally attributed to the loss of state aid and the impact of Gap Elimination Aid adjustments, in hindsight, one must question the necessity of the depth of these cuts in light of the recent and unexpected seven figure budget surplus. A surplus denotes funds in excess of that which was projected or expected and this seven figure surplus represents millions—that is millions with an “s.” The loss of programs such as kindergarten, music, art and library for even one year have had, and will continue to have, a permanent negative impact on the formative and summative education of our students. One only need consider that some VC teachers, the true experts in the field of education, removed their children from VC to be placed in private institutions to avoid the devastating impact these cuts would have on their own children.

At this point in time the VCTA has limited direct communication with the Board of Education. Other than the use of public participation at Board meetings, the Board’s primary source of employee concerns is management, some of whom have not been in a classroom in over 20 years. In other districts this is not the case. There are Boards that have monthly meetings with elected employee representatives to directly hear their concerns and listen to their perspective without the message being filtered or manipulated. In contrast, the VC school attorney encourages Board members to avoid conversations with us; instead, the Board is encouraged to get all of its information from CO. In other words, let’s view all employees as the enemy.

What is the impact of this intentional attempt to limit communication between elected Board members and us? It permits management to make the claim that union officers are

not representing rank-and-file members. Since this is the oldest anti-union trick in the book, I hope you can see why I don’t dignify that claim with a specific response. At this time, however, I would like to extend an olive branch to our new Board of Education—an olive branch to meet with elected representatives of the VCTA so that the message of our members is not lost in translation with a third party. Otherwise, our only avenue will be to survey our members and post the results on the web for everyone to see, which in the end, unfortunately, translates into airing our dirty laundry. We also ask that the president of the BOE consider sitting in on negotiations so that our message is heard clearly and accurately without a third party intermediary wordsmithing our message. School Districts should not be run utilizing internal political FUD tactics; FUD represents the political practice of sewing *fear, uncertainty and doubt* to achieve desired results. Let’s leave these type of tactics to the democrats and republicans. Although we have come to expect many state and federal politicians to be fair-weather friends of education, we should not expect this type of relationship to be the norm within a local school district.

Why is this olive branch being extended? First, most of our Board members are new and I believe recognize the need for better and more direct communication with employees. Second, I believe that the words coming from management each year depicting us as the “VC Family” are getting a bit old in light of the dismissive manner in which our concerns have been handled in recent years. If the VC Family concept is nothing more than an insincere sound-bite it should be deleted from opening day speeches and other venues. In truth, there is a lot of dirty laundry that I would like to air today, but as much as my frustration is encouraging me to do so, it is my preference to do this in a more private and formal setting, in an official capacity. But there is one thing that I would be remiss for not pointing out. (*cont’d 9*)



## **Communication and Trust: Opening Day Remarks (from 8)**

This district has cried poverty to such an extreme, while closing an elementary building and cutting crucial programs, that the VCTA negotiating team has on three different occasions offered concessions. In fact, one of these concession offers was presented in its entirety in a general membership meeting two years ago for your feedback. Each time these concessions were rejected by the District as “not being good enough.” Quite frankly we are, in hindsight, happy that the District was too short-sighted to accept the best concession offers in the entire county because we are currently millions of dollars ahead with regard to projected revenues—enough to have funded last year’s program losses. Meanwhile, only in VC have employees been blamed for the financial woes of the district. You do not see this type of scapegoating in Pine Bush where a 4 year deal was recently reached with teachers at 1% per year (much more than you have been offered) and with a only a modest give back of 2 and 3 months of increment (much less than we offered the district). Here at VC there seems to have been a conscious choice to blame all employees including but not limited to teachers, paraprofessionals, cafeteria workers, secretaries, maintenance and custodial staff, computer techs, occupational and physical therapy staff, principals, assistant principals and directors, by trashing salaries and benefits as the culprit. On top of already having the toughest work schedule in the county, you continue to be expected to do more every year while, in more recent years, being blamed for everything. It is our hope that our new Board of Education will put a stop to this blame game that seems orchestrated to deflect attention away from the decisions that management has made. Notice I said management and not employees because if employees had a true voice, our students may not have suffered as much as they did over the past few years. Sometimes I wonder if the failure to settle unit contracts is an intentional tactic to better enable the district to con-

tinue this blame game in this difficult political climate.

Finally, I am tired of hearing that salaries make up the biggest portion of a school budget. Of course it does. We are not Apple Incorporated. Our students are not iPhones for sale—although our students are certainly never without them. We do not sell our students to the highest bidder when they complete their education so we can make our money back. Salaries, benefits, materials, books, maintenance equipment (the list could go on) are not investments that directly translate into monetary profits for a school district; these investments simply permit school districts to function. We are a service industry, not a factory. Teaching is an art form that cannot always be quantified with a standardized test and, by the way, those damned standardized tests cost a lot of money and, no, we do not get that money back. This money is an investment into the future potential of our students—although admittedly, too often a bad investment. My goodness, what would America do without Pearson? In closing, however, I would like to say for the record...that if we were in the habit of selling our students...because you guys do an awesome job...we would make a crap load of money on an excellent product.

Thank you, and have an awesome year putting children center.

—*Timothy Brown, HS, VCTA President*

## Feudalism at VC

**F**eudalism, as we all once learned in a Social Studies classroom (shameless plug), emerged as a political system in the aftermath of the Fall of Western Rome. In large part this was due to invasions by foreign and less developed tribal groups running from the brutality of the Huns, though internal decay and social strife certainly contributed to Rome's decline. The feudal system developed as a reaction to the chaos that ensued with the loss of a strong central government. Without order and stability, people became fearful. The wealthy and landed aristocracy sought to protect its property while the poor, largely uneducated peasant populace grew more than willing to relinquish its rights and freedoms in exchange for comfort and security.

In the feudal system, life revolves around the Lord's manor which is a self-sufficient, protected community in a sea of chaos—always vulnerable to attack. Central to the manor is the castle. Lords built castles as fortresses to protect themselves and the people of their manor from invaders. This protection is what forged the bonds between the lords, knights, serfs, and peasants and allowed the lords to raise an army as well as collect crops from the serfs who were tied to his land forever. There were kings in the feudal structure, but they were merely figureheads who held very little power without the support of the lords.

So what does this have to do with Valley Central?

The recent history of education in New York State and here at Valley Central harkens back to the feudal model. NYSED equates to the kings of the feudal structure, haphazardly issuing decrees (read COMMON CORE) but with little organization or planned implementation of how to enact them effectively. Commissioner King (aptly named for my comparison)



has no real power without buy-in from administrators at all levels (for our purposes, the lords). District-level administrators and all of their subordinates, much like the lords of the feudal system, have experienced chaos as a result of this lack of a strong, centralized leader. As history shows, when the aristocracy experiences instability, its collective instinct is to protect its status and position. Turn back to the cover if you will for a moment. Notice that Central Office at Valley Central is literally turning into a fortress, protected and distant from the serfs who work the land (also known as faculty and staff) and, most notably, from where the work is done: the classroom.

In times of uncertainty, serfs look to the lords for protection. In the feudal model, the serfs are uneducated and manual labor fills their waking hours. In VC Feudalism, faculty and staff are inundated with constant work. Though educated professionals, the workload has increased to the breaking point and the serfs lack time to even lift their heads. This has made what we will call the separation between serfs and state (Central Office Administration) fall off the radar for the past few years. While we were working, it has widened from its natural crack width to a vast chasm. Central Office has been chasing its tail in its attempts to implement the weak King's decrees rather than solidifying its relationship with or seeking counsel from its serfs, who are the ones with expert knowledge of the landscape. The serfs have not been invited to help protect and maintain the castle. They have been kept steadfastly outside of its gates. *(cont'd on page 11)*

## **Feudalism at VC (From page 10)**

History teaches us that feudalism does not work in the long-term. The Ancien Regime of France operated under the Estate System. This rigid social class structure represented some of the last vestiges of the feudal system in Europe. It came to a violent end in 1789 with the outbreak of the French Revolution. King Louis XVI was a weak, ineffective monarch who lost touch with his people and their plight. He understood nothing of their day-to-day struggles and how hard they worked. He thought that maintaining the lords' favor would ensure his power. He was wrong. The Enlightenment brought new ideas to the peasants and they realized that they had rights and that there was strength in numbers. King Louis XVI's disconnect from his own people caused him to lose his head to the guillotine. It led to a bloody revolution that plunged his country into foreign wars. Had he listened to his people, enlisted their aid in effecting change, his outcome may have been very different. For Louis XVI, it was "bad to be the king."

VC is at a tipping point. Will the separation between serfs and state continue to widen? Or will Central Office work towards bridging the chasm before it is too late? Together we could launch the true revolution against the madness that has encompassed the New York State Education Department by joining with districts throughout the state to reject testing mandates, modify common core implementation, and stop the destructive policies that are so damaging to our children. We will accomplish none of that if we cannot first get our manor in order.

*--Meghan Riley, HS, Soc St., Editor*



**Congratulations, Ashley Zanos (HS, ELA) on receiving tenure!**

**Congratulations also to administrative tenure recipients: Jedd Beukelman, Barbara Butler, and Matthew Canino!**

Who is



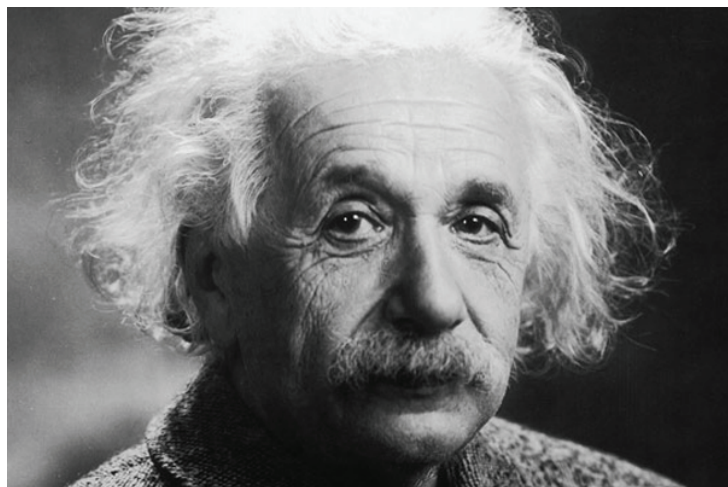
and Why Does He Hate Teachers and Unions So Much?

[http://www.alecexposed.org/wiki/ALEC\\_Exposed](http://www.alecexposed.org/wiki/ALEC_Exposed)

<http://dianeravitch.net/category/alec/>

<http://www.alec.org>

- ALEC was formed by a group of conservative state legislators and conservative policy advocates to implement a vision of Limited Government, Free Market, and Federalism
- During the Reagan Administration ALEC established 7 Cabinet task forces
- In 1981, ALEC pushed for the decentralization of government from the federal to state level.
- In 1982, ALEC weighed in on health care.
- IN 1983, ALEC offered solutions to public education—vouchers, merit pay and standards
- To date, ALEC introduces about 1000 bills annually in states. About 20% become law.
- Teacher Competency testing, Pension Reform and Enterprise Zones are ALEC victories.
- Pending Legislation-
  - Great Teachers and Leaders Act: Tenure Reform-Renewable Tenure based on student evaluation; Teacher Placement changes yearly and teachers can be “benched” unpaid by administration based on performance
  - Public Employee Bargaining Transparency Act: Public Hearing on Public Employee Bargaining—online 14 days before ratification
  - Public Employee Freedom Act—allows for free agents
- Indiana Education Reform Package—signed by Gov. Mitch Daniels. It has created the largest voucher system in the country.



*“I consider it important, indeed urgently necessary for intellectual workers to get together, both to protect their own economic status and ... to secure their influence in the political field.”*

—Albert Einstein~ Charter Member of AFT Local 552 at Princeton University in 1938