

VC ECHOES

Volume 17, Issue 4

Valley Central Teachers' Association

January 2015

PUBLIC EDUCATION'S ENEMY #1



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



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Contribute to the next issue!
Articles or
Contributions
should be sent to
Meghan Rilley, HS, by
20 February 2015

Executive Council Building Representatives

•Berea: Amy Doce, Dawn Rubino, Robin Scott
•E. Coldenham: Tiffani Garrison, Denise Bromm
•Montgomery: Gail Nozell, Susan Page, Randy Sutter
•Walden: John Fisher, Erin Uszenski, Kathy Bordone, Pasquale Leo (A)
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•Retirees: Kevin McFadden, Arline Friedman, Linda Draughn
•ALC: Holly Bacon

•High School: Nancy Brother, Deborah McKenney, Antoinette Oakes, Henry Pizzonia, Mike Score, Melissa Verlin, Darci Fletcher, Meghan Rilley
•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.

VCTA Blood Drive a Success!

The VCTA hosted a blood drive on January 22 at the Montgomery Firehouse. 39 Donors came out to donate blood, 8 of which were eligible to donate on the ALEX machine (double amounts of red blood cells). We were able to collect a total of 44 pints of blood.

My sincerest thanks go out to the 5 district employees that came out to support this very worthy cause

— Sonya Berger, MS, Bldg. Rep.

***** Save the date now for our next Blood Drive May 13th*****

Should Cuomo Be Deemed Ineffective On His Political APPR?

Governor Cuomo is up to his old and despicable political tricks again. The governor recently claimed:

"But we have teachers that have been found guilty of sexually abusing students who we can't get out of the classroom." ~Andrew Cuomo

I am somewhat confused by the governor's unsubstantiated claim. How is it possible for a teacher to remain in the classroom when a felony conviction results in the revocation of teaching certification by State Education Department? Laws are already in place that ensure this legal process. In fact, the following provisions already exist due to a 2008 law (<http://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/legalservices/ch296.htm>) that mandates the following:

"Upon conviction of a teacher of a sex offense...the district attorney or other prosecuting authority who obtained such conviction shall provide notice of such conviction to the commissioner..."

"Upon receipt of a certified copy of a criminal history record showing that a teacher has been convicted of a sex offense or sex offenses or upon receipt of notice of such a conviction...the commissioner shall automatically revoke and annul the teaching certificate of such teacher without the right to a hearing..."

Furthermore, "[t]he employee may be suspended pending a hearing on the charges and the final determination thereof." In other words, a charge or accusation can result in the suspension of a teacher pending a final determination. It would appear that Governor Cuomo is accusing police, local school administrations and the State Education Department of all failing to fulfill their responsibilities with re-

gard to reporting and acting upon this "felonious" information. Where are all of these convicted classroom pedophiles who are still working in the classroom with students?

What could possibly motivate the governor to make such an erroneous and inflammatory statement? Following are two likely explanations:

1. The governor understands the law perfectly and is intentionally lying to the public to gain political advantage in his crusade to privatize ("charterize") public education for his hedge fund buddies.
2. The governor does not understand the laws of New York State—the very laws he is charged with understanding and upholding.

The first explanation speaks to something disturbing due to its nepotistic and unethical implications. The second explanation is disturbing due to its obvious hypocrisy. In recent years, in part due to the governor, no profession has been more scrutinized, criticized or vilified than teaching. Teachers are evaluated yearly based on:

- performance in the classroom as observed by administration;
- student academic growth throughout the year that does not adequately consider mitigating factors such as chronic absenteeism;
- state test scores that have often been proven to be unreliable and, therefore, invalid;
- building test scores and graduation rates that may have nothing to do with a specific teacher's performance or competence.

At the end of each school year teachers and other school employees must be evaluated as highly effective, effective, developing or ineffective. This is a mandate that Governor Cuomo negotiated himself. Not only did this time-consuming, expensive and draconian evaluation process have the governor's approval—it was essentially forced upon (continued on page 4)

Should Cuomo Be Deemed Ineffective On His Political APPR?

teachers and local school districts by the governor. Should the governor be deemed "ineffective" on his political APPR (Annual Professional Performance Review) and lose his job?

I suspect that there are far more elected officials who break the law, including sexual offenses, than there are education professionals who do so. It is also important to note that although public school teachers and public school administrators must be terminated from their jobs if convicted of a felony, this is NOT true with regard to elected politicians.

Governor Cuomo's words and actions testify to his disdain and ill will for public education and public school teachers. But why such animosity and lack of support for a state institution and profession that has been the envy of other states for so many years? Perhaps the next Cuomo quote can shed some light upon this:

"Albany has been too concerned with protecting the pension rights of teachers and not enough with the future of students." ~Andrew Cuomo

You see, Mario Cuomo, Andrew's father, attempted to illegally steal money from the retirement system to close the funding gap in New York State when he was governor. The Retirement System, in collaboration with New York State United Teachers, took legal action against Governor Mario Cuomo for this unlawful action. Governor Mario Cuomo lost in court, as he should have, for violating the law. Isn't it interesting that the pension system now seems to be an evil program in the eyes of an angry elitist child?

A Personal Message to Governor Andrew Cuomo: (To make this a little personal Andrew...since this seems to be personal from

your end). I was not born with a silver spoon in my hand. I am where I am because of awesome teachers like John Bray and Christy Wilson from Hermon-DeKalb in upstate New York—an awesome school that your policies are forcing into a version of foreclosure. Doors did not open for me because of my family name and, therefore, I had to earn my job and prove myself in a way that you never did. When I make mistakes, and I certainly do at times, I don't have the comfort of money, rich and connected friends, or a full-time press staff to cover for me and spin my BS. At the end of the day, win or lose, my integrity may be all I have left. So you see, Governor Cuomo, I hold on to this integrity to the best of my ability—even when confronting bullies such as you. As a union officer for 20 years, I have vowed to never lie, cheat or steal to win a battle—political or otherwise. I will not lie, cheat or steal when it comes to representing a member because due-process should never symbolize winning-at-all-cost. Win-at-any-cost tactics create too many innocent victims that could include children in my profession. Truth too often gets lost in the murky waters of win-at-all-cost tactics. I hope, Governor, that someday you will grow beyond your need for superfluous scapegoating. I hope, Governor, that someday you will STOP believing that you are entitled to misrepresent New York State laws for political gain.

—Timothy Brown, VCTA President



HERE'S AN EASY WAY TO GET INVOLVED.



Take the fight to them! Go to the MAC, Facebook, and Twitter to make your voice heard!

School Nursing Notes

I've been a Registered Professional Nurse for a long time. I've worked in many stimulating positions such as: Labor and Delivery, Intensive Care and the Emergency Room or Trauma, but none of these positions was more challenging than the position I now hold as a School Nurse. How can this be? When I worked in the hospital setting I always had back-up, not just other nurses but physicians, pharmacists, respiratory therapists, physical therapists, dietitians, psychiatrists, social workers, lab techs, and even clergy. We all knew our roles and depended on each other when a crisis hit. When a nurse joins a school system she soon realizes that these other health care professionals are not even within shouting distance. A School Nurse is an independent health care practitioner working in an educational setting.

To be honest when I took the job I thought to myself, *how hard can it be? You've been working in life and death situations for years; this should be a piece of cake.* Silly me. You see, I had become accustomed to quick fixes. When you work in the Emergency Department your patients go to one of three places, home, to a unit or floor, or to the morgue. There is no time to really get to know them or get attached to them. But here, in the high school the students grow up with you and they spend four (or more) years under your care. It isn't uncommon for a School Nurse to form relationships with not only the students but with their families as well.

My first day as a school nurse a skinny red headed girl about fourteen years old bounced into my office and said, "Hey I need a gym note cause I'm pregnant." After I closed my dropped jaw, I'm embarrassed to say that I responded in a not so professional voice, "How old are you?" I realized on that day that this job was not going to be about quick fixes. And it isn't. The specialty practice of school nursing allows the nurse to practice preventive healthcare with a truly holistic approach because it allows for daily interaction with the students. The

school nurse is able to monitor students, create healthcare plans, and intervene when necessary. It also allows the nurse the autonomy to be creative in her approach to the ever changing needs of the population.

Part of my job, as described by The National Association of School Nurses, is to help kids be healthy and ready to learn. So...yes, I do vision and hearing screenings, take temperatures and hand out ice packs and Band-Aids, and sometimes that's enough to get a student back to class. But when the issue is abuse—be it physical/emotional, drug/alcohol or even sexual assault—there aren't any quick fixes. Each student, each situation, demands careful assessment, planning, intervention and long term support. Many times networking with community agencies such as Law Enforcement, Child Protective Services, Planned Parenthood and the Department of Mental Health are necessary. All of these activities take time, and may mean missed classroom instruction. However, it has become clear to me that students experiencing a crisis are not ready to learn and often disrupt the learning of others. It is also clear that when an intervention occurs and they are supported at school they tend to come to school because that is often where the support exists in their lives. They feel connected and that connection is paramount to their attendance and educational success. It is pretty basic; they come to school because that is where the support is.

No school nurse can practice efficiently or effectively in a vacuum. She depends on input from other professionals, including School Psychologists, Counselors, Administrators and especially the teachers in the building. Teachers see their students every day. They are able to notice subtle changes in behavior, attitude, hygiene, weight, attendance and grades. They are often the primary referral source when a student is in trouble. Teachers on lunch duty will notice when a student doesn't eat, whether they have a social group to sit with or not, if they are being bullied, or if they visit the rest- (continued on page 6)

School Nursing Notes (from page 5)

room right after eating every day. On a side note, this School Nurse wouldn't be able to do this job without the incredibly efficient and caring Health Office Team that I am lucky enough to work with. Those of us who work in schools may see students more often than their parents. We notice things earlier and are therefore able to intervene sooner. This increases our student success rate which after all, is our collective goal.

I believe that it is our professional responsibility to work together to address the growing needs of our students. This is especially true now, when many resources have dried up and class sizes and unfunded mandates are increasing. We are lucky at Valley Central that we have been able to maintain most of our student support services and I hope we maintain that focus individually and as a district. Keeping children center is the Valley Central motto. The VCTA and all of the other members of the Valley Central Family live by it every day.



I've been at Valley Central for twenty four years now and I can tell you I'm never bored, but often surprised and constantly challenged. And, although I can honestly say that I loved each of my nursing positions prior to joining the "VC Family," this position has allowed me to grow professionally and personally and has taught me more about humanity than any of them. I'm truly proud of the work that we do every day. I'm also proud of the countless students I've had the privilege of knowing who have grown, recovered, and survived whatever the issue and ended up in a better place.

—Nancy Brother, HS, Nurse, Bldg. Rep.

Family Math Night

On a bitter cold night in January, approximately 70 Montgomery Elementary K-5 students and their parents attended the school's annual Family Math Night. Parents brought their children back to school to play math games. This event was coordinated and facilitated by a team of seven teachers along with the support of administration. Parents and their children were actively engaged in playing games and participating in activities that support math instruction. The evening was designed to show parents the important role they can play in supporting the mathematics learning of their children, while having fun at the same time. Our parents have reported that they left with some great ideas and resources to use at

home. This event is just one of the many the school hosts to foster and strengthen a home/school partnership. —Montgomery Elementary



Grievance Summary

As the year progresses the VCTA is diligently attempting to settle a variety of disputes with the District. Our progress on each of these is summarized below. For more detailed information regarding these disputes speak to a building representative.

Subcontracting Grievance: In June of 2014 the High School created a new Aviation course that utilized instructional employees outside the VCTA membership. The contract requires that “[t]he district shall provide reasonable and timely notice to the Association, with advance consultation, on subcontracting of work presently performed by members of the teachers’ bargaining unit.” Teaching/Instruction is VCTA unit work. This grievance was settled at Step 3 of the grievance procedure; that is, at the BOE level. At this time the VCTA has also reached out to our JROTC colleagues and documents have been filed to include them in our contractual recognition clause.

Class Load Grievance: In September 2013 the VCTA filed a grievance on behalf of the membership due to a violation of the Commissioner’s Regulations as specified in Article XVI.F: “Teacher assignments and class loads will be evenly distributed, to the fullest extent possible, and will be in compliance with Commissioner’s regulations.” This grievance settled in an arbitration hearing on November 13, 2014 at Stage 4 of the grievance procedure. The VCTA agreed to withdraw the September 2013 grievance and the November 2014 grievance that mirrored the 2013 grievance. Class loads will now be provided to the VCTA by September 1st of each school year and meaningful discussion will now take place between the Association and District regarding compliance with Article XVI.F. If a solution acceptable to the Association is not reached via these conversations, the VCTA may still opt to file a grievance.

Department Chair Load: In November 2014 the Association filed a grievance specific to Article XV.F: “Department Chairs will be assigned a maximum of five (5) classes with one (1) building supervisory duty.” A department chair was assigned six classes and one duty in violation of this agreement. This grievance was successfully resolved at Step 1 of the grievance procedure.

Certification Grievance: Article X.C states: “In order to assure that students are taught by teachers working within their areas of competence, teachers shall not be assigned outside the scope of their teaching certificates except as permitted by the Commissioner’s Regulations.” Under normal circumstances the VCTA would not be overly litigious regarding this particular contractual provision, assuming another member was not being denied employment due to a misapplication or violation of SED regulation, as it is the District’s responsibility to ensure compliance with SED regulations. However, last year the District eliminated a plethora of positions throughout the district and would not permit any of these members to be rehired in areas for which they were not certified. In fact, one member was required to spend \$3,000 of her own money to get certified in a new area so that s/he could be employed in this new area but was then forced to take a \$30,000 cut in pay as s/he was placed her on step 1. Our Labor Relations Specialist from NYSUT indicated that the district was within its rights to do this but that he was unaware of any other district that had ever treated an employee in this manner. Only at VC—one big happy family! Thus, we demanded that the district not show favoritism by enforcing the Commissioner’s Regulation regarding certification compliance equally for all members. This grievance was settled satisfactorily at Step 1 of the grievance procedure.



It is time to fight harder than we ever have so that this does not become the future of education in New York State!!