

VC ECHOES

Volume 18, Issue 3

Valley Central Teachers' Association

January 2016

WHERE HAVE ALL THE TEACHERS GONE?



Teacher preparation programs have seen steep declines in enrollment over the last five years. California is down 53%, while New York and Texas have seen significantly diminished numbers as well. In North Carolina, enrollment is down nearly 20% in three years. How can we reverse this trend? **TAKE BACK THE PROFESSION!** See pages 3 and 5 for related stories!

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

Valley Central Teachers' Association

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Contribute to the next issue!
Articles or
Contributions
should be sent to
Meghan Rilley, HS, by
20 February 2016

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The VC Echoes is the official publication of the Valley Central Teachers' Association—Local 3076—and is published regularly during the school year. Any articles submitted to the VC Echoes will also be posted on the VCTA web site.

Enjoy the Ride

Leave it to Tiiu and Mike Presutti to come out of retirement to help make the holidays special for children!

As some of you may know, for many years, Mike Presutti worked closely with John Van Fradenburgh with the *Kids Helping Kids* program at the Middle School which connects refurbished bicycles with needy children. Even though Tiiu and Mike retired in June 2015, they continue to remain involved in the program. Since their passion to help children didn't end with their teaching careers, they reached out to the Valley Central School District to help as many children as possible receive bikes when their own families were not able to provide this gift at the holiday time.

Mrs. Hershfield, the School Psychologist at M.E.S., was excited to be one of the district's contacts to help organize a portion of this event. Along with the *Kids Helping Kids* program which was swamped with business this season, sixteen beautiful bicycles were refurbished by Mike (with a little help from Tiiu!). The gifts will bring smiles to the faces of children and their toddler siblings! The Presuttis delivered finished bicycles to schools and some homes just like Santa's elves! We'd also like to thank Gregg Heidemann and Rich Post for their help!

We thank the Presuttis for all their hard work and continued dedication to the children of Valley Central.

—Adrienne Hershfield, School Psychologist & Melinda Sulzbach, School Social Worker

Why is there a Sub Crisis?

Recently the Poughkeepsie Journal (Dec. 19, 2015) reported on a sub shortage that is plaguing the Hudson Valley. We feel it here at Valley Central with some building's teachers even receiving robo-calls from the principal to warn them about "high sub demand" days. The issues involved in the shortage cannot be dismissed as simply a result of too many teacher absences.

In Orange County, the lowest rate being paid to a certified sub is \$85/day and the highest is \$110. At a recent Orange County Teachers' Association meeting, districts were asked if they were experiencing a sub shortage. Every district represented reported that subs were hard to come by; and surprisingly, the amount they were paid did not seem to be a factor. Several districts; however, did voice that subs were worked too hard, resulting in an unwillingness to return.

At VC, a sub may be asked to be with students for up to 6 hours, 30 minutes since the scheduled plan in a teacher's schedule may be reassigned to a substitute to cover a class where there is no sub for the day. The same may happen to any duties that might be in the teacher's schedule. Subs are expected to carry out the plans the teacher has left in a way that the learning will go on in the teacher's absence. A sub must deal with classroom management and make decisions on the spot with no immediate supervisor to turn to, since department chairs teach full loads and supervisors teach .8 loads. They are asked to do all this at a rate barely over minimum wage.

The minimum wage is now \$9.00 per hour in NYS. Sub pay at VC is currently \$75.00 if uncertified and \$90.00 if certified. Subs work a 7 hour day. An uncertified sub makes \$10.71/ hour and a certified sub makes \$12.85/hour. An uncertified sub could make \$14,025 in a school year. A certified sub can make \$16,830 in a school year. The salary a

certified sub could make is about the same salary as a fast food team member at McDonald's (<http://www.indeed.com/salary/McDonalds.html>). And the fast food team member doesn't have to have a four year degree or be certified in order to get that amount, not to mention they probably get a break in addition to their lunch break.

To add insult to injury—consider that Care.com listed the average babysitter pay at \$13.50/hour (2014). In New York City the rate is \$15.35/hour. Babysitters can be certified at age 11 by the Red Cross for \$29.00. Most parents will pay a little more and most will tip at least an extra hour's wage. And that's for one kid. That 12-14 year-old babysitter has the potential to earn nearly \$23,000 if they were to babysit 7 hours a day for 187 days with an hour's tip each day. And of course that pay is under the table—so no taxes! Who could blame the subs if they chose to babysit one kid a day instead of sub for up to 150 kids for a day?

In the past, subbing was generally considered the entrance way for new teachers in many districts—sort of a rite of passage between college student and professional. It allowed districts to take a potential teacher out for a test drive. In some districts the only way in the door to teaching was through subbing—ours wasn't one of those districts. Although subbing has opened a few doors to permanent employment for some here at VC, others have been disappointed when they hoped to have a leg up on a position realizing that their sub work didn't matter in the employment decision. Basically, it is hit or miss at VC with regard to whether a sub will get a permanent teaching position. In fact, sub work may be detrimental as those responsible for hiring are now aware of strengths and weaknesses demonstrated during daily sub work. In contrast, applicants with no VC experience need only present a good resume without any pre-existing negative impressions from daily substitute work impeding their potential permanent employment. The old adage "familiarity breeds contempt" may be playing itself out for substitutes (*continued on pg 4*)

Why is there a Sub Crisis? (from page 3)

and this, along with poor compensation, may be depleting our pool of substitutes. Compound that with the fact that enrollment has declined sharply in the states that are the nation's biggest producers of teachers (California, New York, North Carolina, and Texas—there are reports of that decline being as much as 53%) (<http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2015/03/03/389282733/where-have-all-the-teachers-gone>).

Who can blame college kids for not choosing teaching as a profession? These college kids were public school students during the years of over-testing and drastic public school cuts. They saw how hard their teachers worked and how little respect they were given. Who could blame them for thinking, "If I went into this job and it doesn't pay a lot and it's a lot of hard work, and it may be that I'd lose it"—then maybe I should choose a better career option (<http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2015/03/03/389282733/where-have-all-the-teachers-gone>).

After all, who wants to sign up for a job that is the scapegoat of policymakers, politicians, the media and foundations?

Solving the sub shortage/teacher shortage will take more than just counting and complaining about teacher absences. It will take restoring teacher back to superhero. Amy Cuddy, Associate Professor at Harvard Business School has proposed power posing as a pathway to greatness (https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are?language=en). Perhaps a suggestion for a useful professional development topic—or at least a good use of 5 minutes of time at a faculty meeting. Certainly there needs to be some heroic building between public schools and teacher prep programs; we need to form a symbiotic relationship between the two. We need to look at compensation of teachers—yes...compensation. Attacking our pension programs while telling new teachers,

"C'mon down—join the teaching profession" is contradictory. Telling new teachers that they won't be permitted to retire until age 63 and that they will be provided less support than all the teachers that worked before them doesn't necessarily attract them to the profession. Attention needs to be given to working conditions; the fact that teachers currently spend \$500 on average for their classrooms is ridiculous because it is an expectation associated with the profession. When we surveyed VCTA members in 2013, the amount that the average VC teacher spends is closer to \$1000. I can name two teachers that bought their own LCD projectors for their classrooms because the district was so slow to bring in that technology in years past. As Janet Fass of the AFT pointed out—are engineers or accountants or lawyers expected to spend their own personal money on supplies for the office (<http://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=95922&page=1>)?

So how do we address the sub crisis? I believe the answer lies in addressing the teacher crisis. Katy Farber has authored a book entitled, Why Great Teachers Quit and How We Might Stop the Exodus. This topic is addressed in the companion article found on page 3 of this issue.

—Patti Behr, MS Art, VCTA VP

VC Reindeer Working the Craft Fair in November



Taking Back the Teaching Profession

Our profession has been hijacked by politicians and policy makers who have painted a national picture of public schools full of bad teachers. And shame on us if we have not spoken out loudly enough to stop this from happening.

Katy Farber, (http://katyfarber.com/?page_id=2) is a 6th grade teacher in Central Vermont who wrote a book in 2012, Why Great Teachers Quit and How We Might Stop the Exodus. She interviewed new teachers to find out why they quit and discovered that layoffs, pay cuts, anti-union sentiment, program cuts and strict mandates were all factors.

She gives 6 suggestions for stopping the exodus and creating schools that are “supportive, humane, dynamic and creative.” I would like to apply her suggestions to our school district.

1. “Provide leadership and growth opportunities for teachers.” Farber recognizes that while most teachers don’t want to be principals they do want to continue to grow. Since a Master’s degree is required within the first five years of teaching, there is a vacuum created for the next 25 years of a career. Farber suggests that teachers need meaningful opportunities for leadership. This could be accomplished by curriculum planning and mentoring.

At VC, curriculum planning is a daily experience that teachers undertake as part of their normal workload; and usually a work in progress. Time could be devoted to curriculum reflection and giving teachers the time to collaborate on this reflection. Action research is also something that teachers take on as part of the best practice but they are not given the time for reflection or sharing.

2. “Cultivate collaboration in schools.” Farber recognizes the benefits to students and teachers when time is given **daily** for teachers to reflect, plan and collaborate. This takes two things: careful scheduling and the valuing of that time by administration. Overall most teachers at VC are scheduled this time on the ATF half days; but that time is often over scheduled and packed with district initiatives. Teachers are told what to collaborate on and sometimes it is like going to a buffet—you get a taste of a lot of different things but are not satisfied that you actually had a nourishing meal.

3. “Create humanity in schools for students and teachers.” Farber expresses what most teachers accept as part of the profession—never having time to use the bathroom or eat lunch. She also discusses the need for teacher input in scheduling. At the high school and middle school levels, department chairs are generally consulted, and at the elementary level it seems like classroom teachers’ schedules are generally rolled over while special area teachers’ schedules of late, have often not made too much sense with some teachers being shared over three buildings. These teachers often are the epitome of 1 plan/1 lunch period with the rest of their day jam packed.

4. “Solicit teacher feedback and use it in decision-making.” Farber recognizes something VC paid a lot of money to professional development diva, Connie Kamm, to say although the VCTA officers didn’t really see administration heartily adopting—you have to take a grassroots approach to new initiatives and change. It has to be something that is bottom-up and not top-down. And Connie used to meet with building ATF teams and constantly tell them, “Stop biting off more than you can chew—one initiative at a time”. I was on the VCMS team when we did just that and a successful initiative was implemented and is still working—creating one consistent homework policy.

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Taking Back the Teaching Profession (from 6)

But it seems that most decision-making is top-down. Even when teachers are on committees they are seldom given time to talk with their colleagues to find out what they want so the decision is still perceived as top-down.

5. “Plan for a better work/life balance.”

Farber recognizes the importance of morale and a healthy work/life balance for teachers. Some of her suggestions such as running/walking groups, potlucks or sharing classes are examples of grassroot organization by teachers but is hit or miss building by building. She also suggests the burden and stress of paperwork could be shared with support staff—that suggestion has been made at many levels. For example, the HS academic department chairs have continually asked for a shared paraprofessional for their departments only to be consistently turned down. The only time we were successful in getting a paraprofessional to assist teachers outside of special education was when the Literacy Coordinators asked for it and the District reluctantly conceded and cut the position as soon as they proposed cuts to the budget (although it was observed by the VCTA officers, Executive Council and LC’s that their para was cut before administrative paras were cut).

6. “Create an environment that compensates master teachers who continue to grow, evolve and perform.” Farber states, “Teaching is one of the only professions where the level of education and responsibility is not commensurate with its salary.” While the salary of VC teachers has improved over the past decade, those improvements finally brought VC out of the bottom of the county with regard to pay. It still takes a long time and a lot of education for a teacher to make a salary commensurate with professions such as lawyers, doctors and engineers, although our salaries are now comparable with our neighbors in

the county. However our working conditions—size of our classes, number of preps and number of students assigned daily—still have a ways to go to create a professional environment where teachers can grow, evolve and perform.

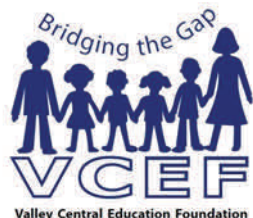
The good news is that there seems to be a turning of the tide in regard to public education, but that doesn’t mean that the “barbarians” are not still at the gate looking to destroy our public school profession. We must be vocal as a whole to take back our profession and to lead our schools to becoming the wonderful places of learning that we envision.

<http://schoolsofthought.blogs.cnn.com/2012/06/19/my-view-six-ways-to-retain-great-teachers/> (Source)

—Patti Behr, VCMS Art, VCTA VP

VCTA Blood Drive

- ⇒ **Date:** Wednesday, January 20
- ⇒ **Time:** 2:00 - 8:00 pm
- ⇒ **Where:** Montgomery Fire House
- ⇒ **Who:** 16 years or older can donate (with parent permission)
- ⇒ No Appointment is necessary!!!
- ⇒ We LOVE Walk-In’s!!!!
- ⇒ To schedule an appointment go to: www.nybloodcenter.com



Annual Harvest Reception 2015

On a brisk October 1st evening, the Valley Central Education Foundation held its annual Harvest Reception and Award dinner at Osiris County Club. The event was well attended by Valley Central staff, members of the community, friends and family. The evening honored the efforts of esteemed Valley Central employee, Debra Calvino, and distinguished members of the VC community, Marc Devitt, Steve Jardine and Paul Teutul Jr. The highlight of the evening went to the awarding of 12 Valley Central teacher grants, totaling just over \$5,000, to enhance, maintain and promote opportunities for students enrolled in the Valley Central School District while supporting creative educational opportunities.

Below is a brief summary of the grant winners:

- “Scholastic Storyworks”** submitted by Lisa York, Tara Meyer and Karen Uszenski from Walden Elementary. 5th Grade
- “Digital Storytelling”** submitted by Dawn Rubino and Kristina Storaska from Berea Elementary School. 2nd Grade
- “Once Upon a Mat”** submitted by Amy Wendel and Amy McCann from Walden Elementary School. Grades K-5
- “Homeless Help”** submitted by Barbara Gravel, VC’s homeless coordinator in the amount. Grades K-12
- “Leg Go of that Lego”** - Building Problem Solving and Pragmatic Language submitted by Gail Nozell of Montgomery Elementary School. Grades K-3
- “Art Spectrum – A Community Service Club”** submitted by Fran Adams from Montgomery Elementary School. 4th-5th Grade
- “Photograph Math”** submitted by Kerry Devine, Nancy Phelps, Mary Wingerden, and Tara Meyer from Walden Elementary. Grades 3-5
- “Berea Post Office”** submitted by Jennifer Kinsley and Traci Sick from Berea Elementary. Grades K-5
- “Snowshoeing Across America”** submitted by Pasquale Leo from Berea Elementary. This grant to purchase snowshoes and poles will allow students to experience snowshoeing! Grades K-5
- “In Celebration of the Discovery of Synthetic Dyestuffs and the Birth of Organic Chemical Industry”** submitted by Terri Campbell from Valley Central High School. Grades 9-12
- “Growing Minds & Healthy Bodies”** submitted by Kristina Storaska, Barbara Cook, Amy Doce and Dawn Rubino of Berea Elementary. 2nd and 4th Grades
- “Literacy in the 21st Century Classroom”** submitted by Launa Kruithof from East Coldenham Elementary. 1st Grade

This year, grants were awarded to teachers and staff across the district spanning K-12 including special populations. It was a wonderful evening had by all and the Valley Central Education Foundation is looking forward to reading the grant applications for next year and awarding even more VC teachers and staff!

—Melanie Montenora, District School Psychologist

Getting Out the Vote



VCTA members made multiple trips to phone banks this Fall to make calls in support of union endorsed candidates. Each year the VCTA collaborates on a local level with the Orange County Teachers' Association (OCTA) and Hudson Valley Area Labor Federation (HVALF). The VCTA also works with our state and national affiliates to support education and labor friendly initiatives and candidates: (i.e. NYSUT, AFT, NEA and AFL-CIO).

First Book Initiative



Last year, the VCTA, with support from our NYSUT Tarrytown Regional Office, participated in the AFT's *First Book Campaign* by asking VC employees to complete First Book sign-up forms. As a result of this initiative, VC staff earned approximately 1,500 books for our students that were delivered to all seven VCSD buildings for student use during the Fall. Thank you to everyone who sorted these books by age/reading level and building.