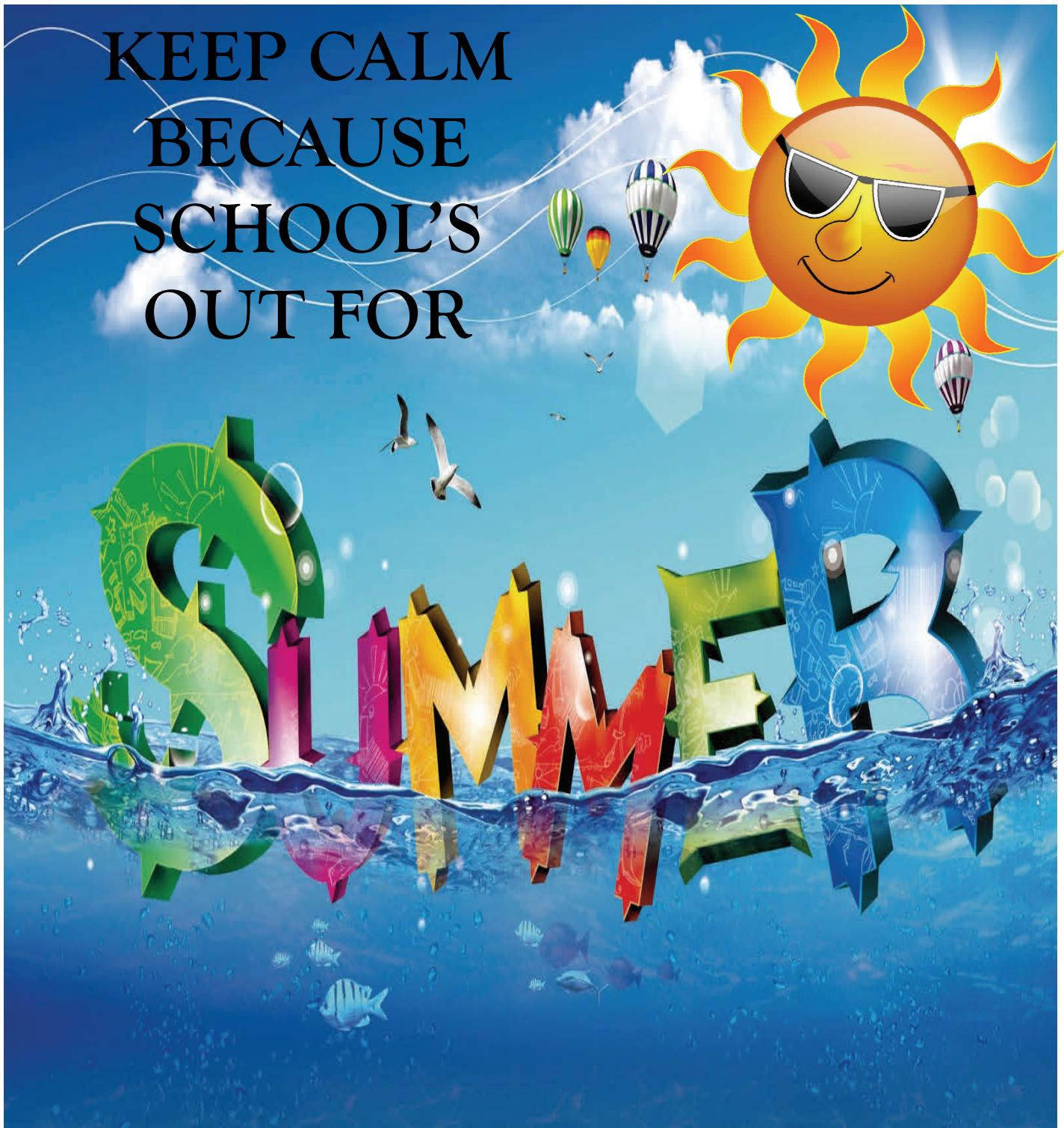


VC ECHOES

Volume 18, Issue 5

Valley Central Teachers' Association

June 2016



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



Volume 18, Issue 5
June 2016

Valley Central Teachers' Association

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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.

Thanks to all who have contributed articles, found people to write for retirees, and distributed ECHOES in the buildings for the past 12 years. I am grateful for your help and hard work! Thank you especially to Tim Brown, Patti Behr, Rich Steger, and Derek DeVoe for always writing terrific articles. It has been a pleasure to work with all of you.

- Meghan Rilley

Did you hear that Carolyn Lahue is retiring?

Yes, it is true – after 30 years at Valley Central, Carolyn is leaving our district and taking time to enjoy her retirement.

Did You Know? Carolyn was a graduate of the Crane School of Music. She has her certification in Music and Elementary Education. Prior to working at Valley Central, she taught at Livingston Manor from 1983 – 1986. In September 1986, Carolyn was hired by Dr. Art Nugent and her career began at Valley Central. During her years at VC, she has taught at East Coldenham Elementary, Maybrook Elementary, Berea Elementary, and even spent a year at the Middle School. During these past few years, Carolyn's primarily responsibility was teaching only vocal music, but for many years, she taught instrumental music as well.

Did I Tell You? Carolyn has organized many concerts during her years at VC, including Christmas shows so that the students could become familiar with singing carols before the holidays. While at East Coldenham, Carolyn was instrumental in creating a Select Chorus at the request of her then Principal, Mr. Gregory. This Select Chorus went onto perform at numerous school events. She even introduced performers, as young as first graders, who sang alongside the Select Chorus. Over the years, Carolyn worked tirelessly with numerous students to prepare them for great performances at other events, such as Founders Night, Fall and Spring concerts, and other shows. Students have performed many a show (at a moment's notice) with little practice time and were still able to do an outstanding job as a result of Carolyn's work ethic, dedication, and love of teaching music! Carolyn has used sign language in her lessons as a teaching tool to help students learn their scales. Her creativity stops at nothing! She has had students perform while using props, hats, or other costumes. Carolyn has spent many years nurturing, praising, and encouraging students and there is no doubt that these children have



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learned to appreciate music because they have been taught by a Master who has eagerly shared her love of music!

The High Notes... Carolyn has touched many lives during her years at VC. Her enthusiasm for her job has positively impacted both staff and students. She has received several letters of commendation from many current and past VC Administrators, including: Mr. Coonan, Dr. Nugent, Mrs. Lyons, Mrs. Malley, Mrs. Hurewitz, Mrs. Goffman, Mr. Kessler, and Ms. Lease-Murphy. There have been many heartwarming and outstanding comments about Carolyn and her performances, such as: *"Carolyn brings a richness and depth of understanding to her students by knowing and loving her subject;"* *"Carolyn takes professional responsibilities seriously;"* *"students are well prepared for concerts."*

Carolyn was the well-deserved recipient of the PTA Founder's Night Award at East Coldenham in 2002. Over the years, many students, parents, teachers, and others have thoroughly enjoyed the All District Concerts - something Carolyn formed and collaborated with fellow V.C. Music Teachers.

One Last Note... Carolyn Lahue has devoted numerous hours helping students learn song lyrics, musical notes, and ways to deliver a brilliant concert to very proud parents, teachers, and other staff. Carolyn may be retiring and leaving music, singing, and band behind...but we hope that she continues to keep singing and playing piano.

Carolyn has a lovely husband Phil and two beautiful daughters, Jessica and Michelle. She has many wonderful *(continued on page 4)*

Did you hear that Carolyn Lahue is retiring?

milestones to look forward too, especially planning for the upcoming marriage of her oldest daughter, Jessica (who also works at V.C.) In her free time, I am sure Carolyn will be making many trips to NYC whether it's to see a Broadway show or to take in the sights. We wish her all the best!!!

On a personal note, I wish my friend and colleague, Carolyn Lahue, all the best in her retirement. I cannot say enough about how you have made a difference in the lives of so many students who have benefited from your musical passion, dedication, and true love of teaching!

This quote sums up a message that you have certainly delivered these past 30 years at Valley Central:

There is music in
every child.
The teacher's job
is to find it
and NURTURE it.
.....
~Frances Clark

– Melinda Sulzbach, Building Rep.,
Montgomery Elementary

Collective Voice

Over the last decade we have seen a decline in organized labor across the country. New companies did not see their workers unionize and companies with unionized labor were able to break the unions. Like education policy in New York State and across the country the pendulum was pushed too far in the wrong direction. A pendulum always swings back in the other direction once it is pushed too far. Education policy in New York State became too focused on standardized testing and once the parents, specifically the moms, felt that things had gone too far they began to mobilize and use their voice to push that pendulum back in the right direction. Likewise, Organized Labor is beginning to see the momentum push in a positive direction.

“The Labor Movement has a long and proud history in New York State and that strength continues today” said New York State AFL-CIO President Mario Cilento. According to

the Bureau of Labor Statistics, New York is the most unionized state in the country. In New York 24.7 percent of all workers belong to a union. Across the nation only 11.1 percent of workers belong to a union. “We are proud to add nearly 60,000 members to the Labor Movement providing even more dedicated working people with good, solid, middle class jobs and an opportunity for a better life” added Cilento.

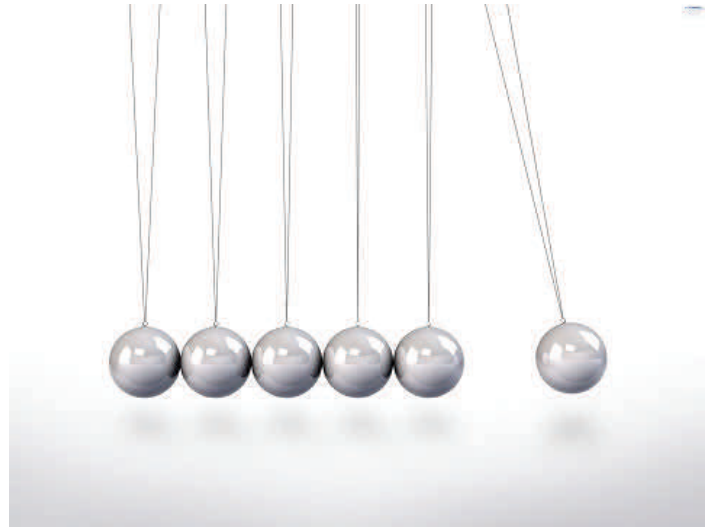
For obvious reasons I follow many Labor organizations on social media. While New York is an anomaly, there is a regular occurrence across the country of workers organizing and joining the Union Movement. These workers are from a wide array of workplaces. This past year the O'Reilly Auto Parts Workers, Coca Cola workers in Allentown, Nurses and Medical Technicians at St. Vincent Hospital in Massachusetts, and the Google Express Workers in California are examples of workers who believe union membership is vital. When these groups were asked why they chose (continued on page 5)

Collective Voice (from page 4)

union membership the reason that was consistent with all the groups is that alone their concerns were not heard by those in power. They chose to join the Labor Movement to come together as a collective voice. They simply wanted those in power listen to their concerns.

The pendulum in regard to the Labor Movement has been pushed too far. The 1% have become too greedy and not just monetarily. Although the main focus is the almighty dollar, they are greedy for power. In their effort to gain power and money the 1% devalued the person. The employee who does the work in the trenches and creates the product or service that enables the business to thrive no longer feels as though he/she is valued as a worker or at the most basic form: a human being. When the profits of the CEO are over 100 million dollars but the employees are struggling to feed their families, pay their rent or mortgage then the workers rightfully believe they don't matter to those in power. This is why workers across the country are beginning to look at unions as a way to be heard.

The Friedrichs vs the California Teachers Association case existed because the corporations and the 1% are actively trying to silence the voice of working people. The wrong verdict could have caused every state to become a "Right to Work" state. Remember Right to work simply means that you have the right to work for those in power and those in power do not need to listen to you: the worker. Donald Trump has made it perfectly clear, "My position on unions is fine, but I like right to work. My position on right to work is 100%". What he is saying is that he is 100% for right to work, because as he demonstrates he likes to be able to tell people what to do but doesn't feel he needs to listen to the worker in the trenches. He is deceptively clear on his position on unions. If you are for right to work then you are **against** unions. I am sure the he feels his position on unions is fine, because right to



work (the removal of collective voice) makes it easier to ignore and manipulate the worker. Those in power want us to believe that right to work is good for us. Let me make this perfectly clear. We **have** to work. It is not a choice for us. We, the American worker, should be smarter than to believe this Right to Work rhetoric. We need to educate our members and others workers to not fall victim to "Right to Work." We must remind our members and others workers to exercise the power of their Collective Voice.

The pendulum of collective bargaining has swung too far. The working people are starting to see how much strength they have if they come together as a collective voice. The American workers and the American people deserve to be heard. They deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. They deserve to go to work and be able to provide a decent life for their families. They deserve to go to work and be valued as human beings that contribute to the success of the business. The time for Collective Voice is now.

—Rich Steger, VCTA VP, East Coldenham

What's New in the Education World?

The "Obama Principle"

President Barack Obama nominated former NYS Education Commissioner John King as U.S. Secretary of Education. Holy CRAP! At a time when the nation is moving away from over-testing initiatives, Obama appointed the "KING" of test and punish. When Obama said "Yes we can," no one expected this to mean "Yes we can... do irreparable damage to children and public education." I wish this appointment of John King could be classified as the Peter Principle in action:

"The Peter Principle is a concept in management theory formulated by Laurence J. Peter in which the selection of a candidate for a position is based on the candidate's performance in their current role, rather than on abilities relevant to the intended role. Thus, employees only stop being promoted once they can no longer perform effectively, and 'managers rise to the level of their incompetence.'" (Source: Wikipedia—Hey...don't criticize this site...it is more reliable and rational than John King!)

Unfortunately, the Peter Principle classification would necessitate that King was successful in his old job which, of course, he was not. Therefore, I humbly submit to you the newly discovered Obama Principle:

"The Obama Principle is a concept in management theory formulated by Tim Brown, on behalf of President Barack Obama appointments, in which the selection of a candidate for a position is based on cronyism rather than experience or success in their current or previous role or their abilities relevant to the intended role (Note: this new Obama Principle was applied equally to both Arne Duncan and John King). Thus, employees continue to be promoted after they can no longer perform effectively, and these managers rise to even higher levels of incompetence,

negatively impacting even larger numbers of people and, in this case, children.

(Source: Wordsmithed from the Wikipedia quote above—Hey...don't criticize... sometimes the truth hurts!)

In fairness, the Obama Principle could have been called the Bush Principle, the Clinton Principle, the Reagan Principle, etc. It is just frustrating to realize that nothing changes and most of our leaders are self-serving, manipulative, partisan and unethical.

The "Shut to Hell up and Stop Complaining if You Don't Vote Principle"

83% of NYSUT members were registered to vote in 2014 and only 56% voted. 83% registered may seem good but consider that 17% of what I hope would be pro-education voters were ineligible to vote in 2014, notwithstanding the massive number of registered members who did not make the effort to get to the polls. Thus, NYSUT has started an initiative to have 95% of each local's members be registered and vote for the upcoming elections. The first step will be a voter registration drive to get VCTA members registered. This spring members received a letter, a 2016 NYSUT voter registration card and personal contact from a colleague to make this registration drive a success. Thank you for your support and together we will make our voices heard.

—Tim Brown, VCTA President, High School



The Impact of Tribalism in Education

Have you ever considered how tribal the world really is? A tribe is simply a grouping of people who have something in common (e.g. heredity, location, religion, education, economic status, etc.). These commonalities split the global human tribe into a plethora of tribal subcategories that include but, of course, are not limited to race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, religion, politics, school, community, neighborhood and family. Tribes can be united by physical features, physical location, common beliefs, common goals, etc.

The extreme horrific impact of tribalism has led to wars being fought over differences in culture, nationality, race, ethnicity and religion. Basic human rights have been denied to entire groupings based on these same tribal differences but have also branched out to include categories such as gender and sexual orientation. The human race's ability to divide, conquer, subjugate, enslave, bully, abuse, demean and devalue its fellow human beings knows no limitation.

In its more subtle forms, tribalism has also negatively impacted workers' rights. The fact that we need unions to balance corporate greed while ensuring fair wages, benefits and workplace safety speaks to economic tribalism. How many people actually pay attention to or even care about whether goods or services purchased have been certified as free-trade (i.e. exploitation free)? Economic tribalism, with the top .1% of Americans making as much income as the bottom 90%, is more entrenched today than it was at the beginning of the 20th century.

Tribalism can be a very confusing and/or elusive concept. Thank goodness public schools and colleges of higher learning remain bastions of sanity that resist tribal warfare in all of its forms...or do they? Unfortunately, I have witnessed tribalism within education as well: college professors vs. K-12; urban vs. rural vs. suburban schools; elementary vs. secondary; ELA and math vs. the rest of the disciplines; science vs. history vs. English; regents vs. non-regents; core content areas vs. special con-

tent areas; mandates vs. electives. All of these categories represent educational tribes that are too often at war with one another for favor and resources rather than collectively viewing the whole as a large single tribe with an altruistic common goal. Collective agreement with regard to a common tribal purpose or direction (e.g. putting children center) can unite a tribe around this chosen goal.

Public schools and public school teachers are the last great hope for America's students. There are so many people and institutions trying to take advantage of public education for personal and corporate profit. If education stakeholders do not stand together as a single tribe in supportive collaboration of our common goal (i.e. making sure America's student's get the BEST and most well-rounded education possible), outsiders will make their corporate profits at the expense of our students and our nation's future. We cannot afford to practice the same self-serving tribalism that the rest of the world practices. To be successful in achieving our goal, we must collaboratively look to the future and put children center.

It is okay to disagree about how to achieve the best results; however, it is not acceptable to manipulate facts to create a perception of success or failure that does not exist. Both New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo and former Florida Governor Jeb Bush have engaged in this type of deception. For example, Bush claims that his voucher programs have improved test scores. However, one only needs to look at the low benchmark set by Bush and his privatization cronies to know that these claims represent overt statistical manipulation. If student success is truly the goal of all tribes, there would be no need to lie, cheat or manipulate—facts would speak for themselves. If charter schools truly represented the defining evolution within education that wealthy donors and hedge fund operators claimed, there would be no need for charter schools to manipulate data, hand pick students, expel students that were underperforming, etc.

Our students are being used for corporate profit and greed. Wall Street and the .1% that control Wall Street stand to make a lot of money

The Impact of Tribalism in Education

if they are successful in destroying public education. Although education must constantly evolve to meet the needs of each new generation, these evolutionary changes must be guided by caring stewards that place children at the center of the discussion, not by corporate demigods motivated by profits. The loss of teacher voices with regard to directing these evolutionary changes is hurting our students and, therefore, is unacceptable.

Educators can no longer afford to dabble in tribal pettiness. We do a disservice to our students when we do not stand united in their defense. Our united front to support our

students must start locally. We must hope that this united front spreads like a controlled wildfire and sets the stage for planned regrowth. But if it does not spread beyond our local walls; we will be able to take solace and pride in the fact that we fought the good fight on behalf our students... that we did not give up... that we fought to be a part of the solution rather than capitulate to the greedy tribal economic problem created by those who wish to make huge profits on public education at the expense of our students.

—Tim Brown, VCTA President, HS

“No Helping Hand”

Have you ever wondered if Babe Ruth could hit today's fastball? Or perhaps if Michael Jordan would dominate today's hardwoods? It's sometimes fun to wonder how the champions of yesteryear would have fared in today's world. Here is my take on Ridgely High's fictional American History teacher in today's world.

Mr. Hand sits waiting to see the assistant principal, Mr. Starbucks. The secretary, Mrs. Donovan puts down her phone. “You can see the assistant principal now.” Mr. Hand enters the office and sits down.

“Sit down Mr. Hand it's time for your quarterly evaluation. Unlike in years past we have some very serious concerns. It's come to our attention that an incident occurred during your afternoon history class.”

“What seems to be the problem?”

“The incident involving you and a student in your class by the name of Jeff Spicoli. Apparently you tore up his attendance card? Refused him entry into your class and sent him



to the office on the first day of school.”

“He showed up late, His eyes were bloodshot and there was a suspect odor in his vicinity. I thought it best he be evaluated by office personnel.” Mr. Hand explained.

“Now Mr. Hand, we can't go making unfounded accusations. Jeff might have had a lack of sleep being nervous about the first day of school and all. Many students have trouble finding their classrooms (continued page 9)

“No Helping Hand” (from page 8)

on the first day, even seniors. Not all students smell the same. It's not for us to judge. It could be a cultural thing. Surfers have a culture all their own. They might not feel the need to shower as often, going into the ocean most days. You need to be more sensitive. What was the point of you ripping up his attendance card?"

Mr. Hand responded in a calm but measured tone. "I agree that was a bit overdone, but I try to send a strong message on the first day of school by dressing professionally with a nice pressed shirt and tie, reviewing school policy, establishing general routines, one of which is not tolerating tardiness from day one."

Mr. Starbucks replied "I certainly understand why Jeff became angry. You came dangerously close to denying him his right to an education. It's a good thing he picked up the torn pieces of attendance card or you would have been guilty of littering school grounds as well."

"I am forever in his debt" said Mr. Hand.

"That's exactly the kind of attitude that will get you in trouble!" Mr. Starbucks exclaimed as he passed Mr. Hand a sheet of paper.

"These are our new guidelines to help you in the future. It's called the "Student Appeasement Directives". They can be summed up as follows:

"The student is our customer and the customer is always right. Use that as your guiding principle and hopefully you can get things turned around by midterms."

A few more months pass and Mr. Hand is back at the assistant principal's office just after winter break.

"Happy New Year, Mrs. Donovan. How was your break? Did you make any resolutions?" "I made a few, but I am afraid I've broken most of them already," she said while reaching for the candy bowl on her desk. "How about you?"

"Well," Mr. Hand paused and took a deep breath, "I've resolved to hold students to basic academic and behavioral standards that I've been accustomed to these many years" he sighed. "Just because a message isn't well received doesn't mean we shouldn't send it."

"I certainly agree, but good luck with that!" replied Mrs. Donovan. "Mr. Starbucks will see you now."

"Mr. Hand. It seems things have escalated since last we spoke."

"Indeed." Mr. Hand began "Young Mr. Spicoli took it upon himself to have pizza delivered to my class, causing a major disruption but I handled it in my own way so you didn't need to get involved," offered the veteran history teacher.

"Oh no Mr. Hand the escalation I was speaking of was on your part. How do you explain taking student property and giving it away to the rest of the class?"

"Thinking outside of the box. Um.... the pizza box that is. I was attempting to get his undivided attention. It seemed to be working, for a moment I thought he was actually listening."

The administrator grew annoyed. "Well why didn't YOU listen to me before? Students today must be treated with kid gloves and must not feel uncomfortable at any time. I gave you a playbook to follow. What more do you want?" he asked rhetorically. "You were even heard to mutter something about kids today being on dope. You DO realize that the age of rabbit ear antennae and black and white television has passed away? We are lucky your behavior didn't end up on the Internet by the *(continued on page 10)*

“No Helping Hand” (from page 9)

afternoon. Remember our motto: perception is reality.”

“More importantly there have also been several complaints from parents about low grades in your class. I want to make a few suggestions in this area as well. First don’t show any displeasure when handing back low grades. This can damage a student’s self esteem. Secondly, as part of a much needed sensitivity training we want you to observe Mr. Passemall’s class. He does a lot of very progressive group work. Real cutting edge stuff. He is the model we want all teachers to strive for. Also consider making a 50 the lowest possible score your students can receive. We are an institution of second chances after all.”

“But Mr. Starbucks won’t these changes decrease student effort and further erode academic standards?”

“Not at all. This will become the new normal. We are thinking of making this official school policy next semester anyway. So, going forward in order to repair the damage you have done, I am instructing you to make these changes immediately. Also reimburse Spicoli for his pizza. You might want to go the extra mile and make it a stuffed crust just to show there are no hard feelings. I’ll check back with you next quarter to evaluate your progress.”

Next we see Mr. Hand outside of Mr. Starbucks’s office. It’s a pleasant June day just after the close of another school year. “Come in Mr. Hand. We have a lot to discuss. How did things go with Mr. Spicoli?”

“I think, after all was said and done things went pretty well. I decided to drop by his house and have a chat with him about his tendency to waste class time.”

“What???” blurted out Mr. Starbucks.

“I stopped by the night before the graduation dance to go over some last minute 20th Century history. It all worked out. Jeff and I worked on some material that he had missed throughout the year.”

“You could have been accused of trespassing!” replied Mr. Starbucks.

“His parents were home. They didn’t seem to have a problem with it.”

“Disrupting his last senior social event could be interpreted as harassment. What if he had a date? The mental anguish and feelings of regret could haunt him for years”

“More than failing to graduate?”

“Don’t be ridiculous Mr. Hand. We have summer school, night school and credit recovery programs. We are an institution of multiple chances after all. The dance ,however was a once in a lifetime opportunity.”

He continued, “ A good lawyer could make you look like a stalker. You’ve put this institution at risk of a lawsuit. His parents could have a change of heart. They might want to fight for his right to party.”

“We shook hands in the end and I think he learned a valuable lesson, and not just about history.”

(continued on page 11)



“No Helping Hand” (from page 10)

“Well Mr. Hand you know what I’ve learned? That I can’t trust your judgment! I won’t condone your out of touch and unorthodox methods. If you insist on deviating from the playbook again you will be placed on suspension and put through retraining.”

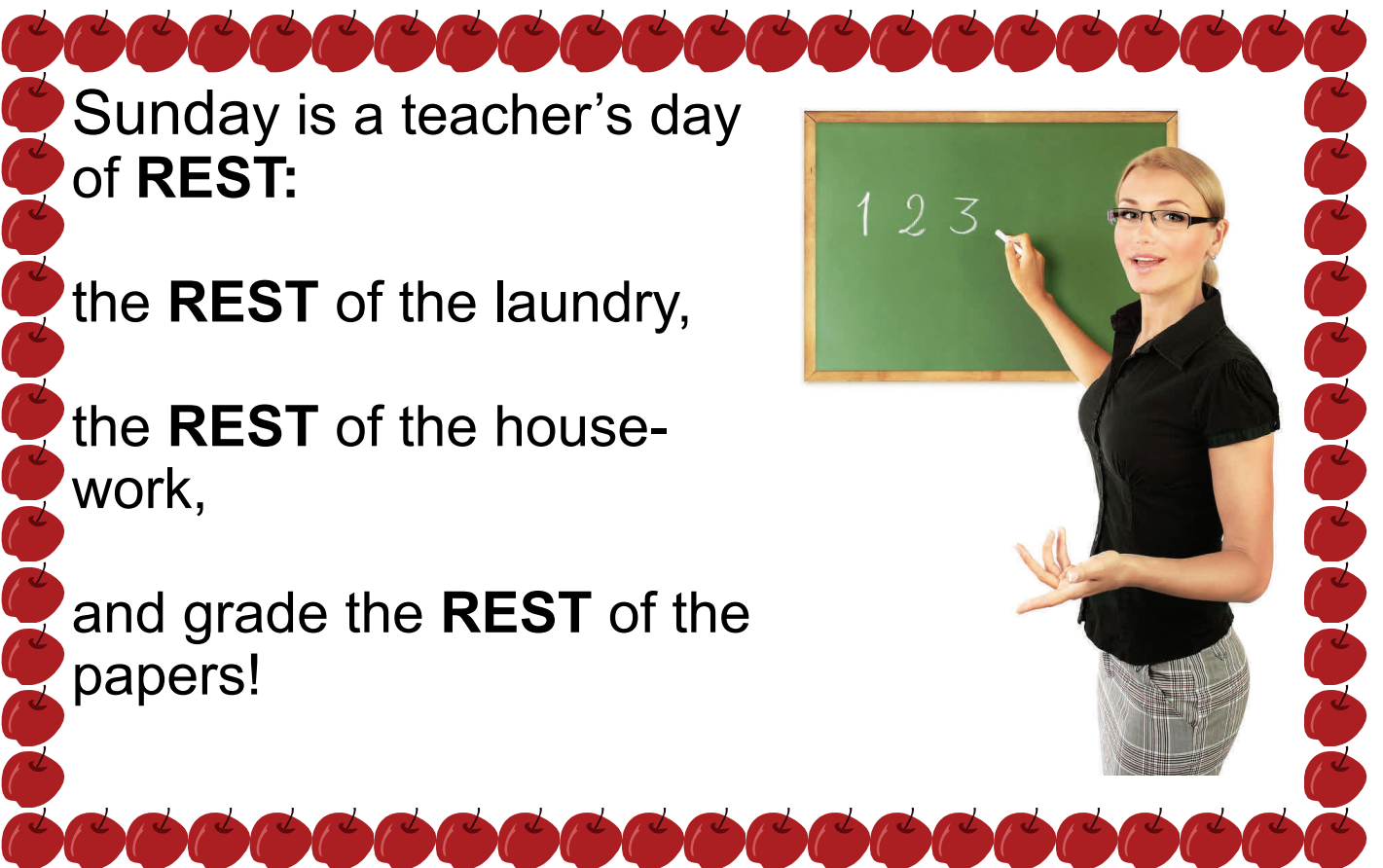
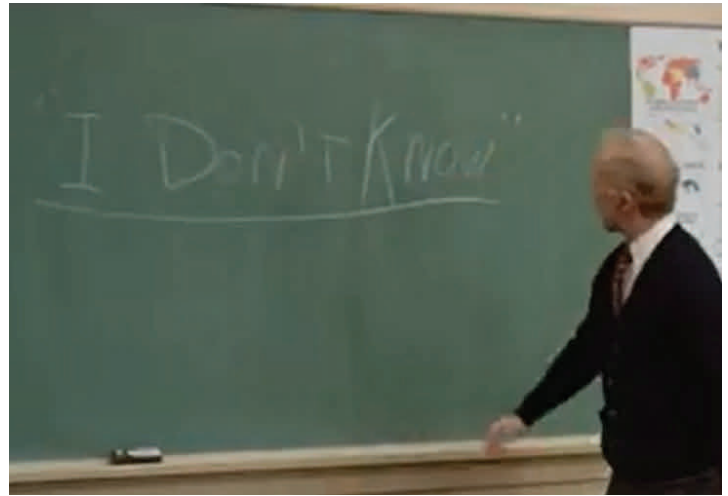
“Sir, if I can’t use any alternative methods in dealing with difficult students, can I count on your full support in the future when problems arise?”

“Gee Mr. Hand” the assistant principal slowly replied.

“ I.....Don’t..... know.”

Based on characters from *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*.

—Glenn Eckert, Science, High School



How is this in the best interest of children?

There was once a VC Administrator who wanted to paint the question, “How is this in the best interest of children?” on the wall behind her desk. Her intention was that anyone sitting across from her would have to consider that question as they spoke to her.

What if that question was painted on the walls throughout Valley Central whenever decisions that affect children are made? What if every decision made from board room to the band room was made considering that question?

There are many decisions being made for education by people who haven't got the slightest idea of what good education is and what is good about education. What if every decision that they make was measured by the same question?

How could the answer to this question change if we were allowed to answer it for those people? That is exactly what we need to do. Instead of letting those decisions be made for us; we need to influence those decisions. It means not waiting to see what will happen but making something happen. And it can start in our classrooms by considering that question in all aspects of our work.

—Patti Behr, VCTA VP, MS



Meet Your New Editor: Matt Gill!

Matthew Gill is an excellent, energetic 6th Grade ELA and Social Studies (with clearly terrific taste in disciplines!) teacher at the Middle School. He is finishing up his third year at Valley Central. He will be the new ECHOES editor starting in September. Help Matt get a great, smooth start by writing him an article or two over the summer! The ECHOES could not be in better hands! Welcome, Matt!