

Kevin Rustowicz,  
President  
Ext. 3122 (SHS)

Lee Galmbacher,  
Vice President  
Ext. 5110 (West St)

Cindy Mt. Pleasant,  
Recording Secretary  
Ext. 5313 (Tuscarora)

Darla Bubar,  
Communications  
Secretary  
Ext. 2708 (ETMS)

Kevin Schucker,  
Treasurer  
Ext. 1506 (SHS)

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# The Agenda

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## Wit and Wisdom...



Kevin  
Rustowicz,  
President

This calendar year ends with productive discussions on several fronts. Our union leadership is in constant conference with administration on all levels and is moving forward confidently. It is with great optimism that we can look to the future knowing that we have such a solid contract to take us through the next three years.

Discussion and decisions are always informed by

contract language and experience defending the rights of our membership per our Collective Bargaining Agreement.

It is the opinion of this president that the state of our union has never been stronger.

Membership solidarity in our district has been galvanized by the rich history of the Nwta... a history of diligence that has consistently yielded positive results for the faculty, students and administrators of our district.



We are indeed fortunate to be involved in an organization as successful as the Niagara Wheatfield school district.

In this holiday season, I would like to personally thank the membership and the union officers for continuing the proud tradition of the Nwta into 2010.

Happy Holidays,

~Rusto

## Contract Connection

Here's your chance to win a \$10 gift card to either Tim Horton's, Starbucks, or Dunkin' Donuts...

*Patty Q. Teacher wants to take a graduate course in the spring. She is seeking tuition reimbursement from the District. This is her first Masters. According to our contract, what steps does she need follow to*

*get tuition reimbursement?*

Site the article, page number, your name, building, and card preference along with your entry to [dbubar@nwcsd.org](mailto:dbubar@nwcsd.org).



All correct entries will be entered into a drawing to win a gift card. **One winner per contest.** All members in good standing are

eligible to enter.

**Congratulations to our previous winners:**

Gary Chimera, Amanda Jasper, and Paula Neureuther who all correctly guessed that sick days are NOT used when summoned to appear in court.

See Article 14 for a full explanation!

# From Where I Stand... Thanks



*Darla Bubar, Editor*

With the holiday season upon us, I want to use this month's editorial to thank everyone for another successful and prosperous year. The economy has been tough. I have personally watched as my friends have been laid-off or lost their jobs, and I realize, it is with heartfelt thanks that I belong to a strong union that works hard on my behalf to insure my benefits and wages. I am also thankful to work with some of the finest



people around.

As I walk the halls, attend meetings, and have encounters with parents and students, I know we are each making a positive difference. I wish you all the best this holiday season and hope each of you finds your days filled with the joy that this time of year brings.

May the peace of this season fill your hearts; and to each of you, a happy and healthy New Year!

~Darla

## Tier 5 Will Go Into Effect!

NYSUT was successful in delaying enactment of Tier 5 legislation for almost a full year and was the last major union standing tall when the final deal was passed. As a result, an entire class of NYSUT members was able to enter public service this year under the Tier 4 plan. While the new Tier 5 plan has some relatively significant changes for future members, NYSUT was successful in maintaining the integrity of the defined benefit plan that can be counted on by all members, current and future - for example, continuation of a permanent COLA benefit for all future retirees.

The Tier 5 pension plan will apply to future public employees in the state Teachers' Retirement System and Employees' Retirement System. The New York City retirement system also is instituting a new program.

Details vary by system and reflect different combinations of contributions and length of service, geared to the trends/preferences of each unit.

For state TRS, the minimum retirement age for employees hired after Jan. 1, 2010, will be 57, with 30 years of service without penalty. Members will be vested in the pension system after 10 years of service (up from 5) and will contribute a lifetime 3.5 percent to their pensions (current members contribute 3 percent for 10 years.) They will receive the 2 percent per year of service of the final average salary calculation at 25 years and beyond (up from 20).

Members of ERS hired after Jan. 1, 2010, will be eligible to retire with unreduced benefits at age 62 with 10 years of service or with reduced benefits upon the attainment of age 55 with 10 or more years of service. They will be required to contribute a lifetime 3 percent for their careers (currently it is 3 percent for 10 years) and will receive vesting of benefits after 10 years of service (up from 5).

**Make sure you encourage building substitutes to join the NYS Teacher Retirement System before January 1, 2010!**

### IMPORTANT REMINDERS...

#### VOTE COPE

Our annual VOTE/COPE Drive begins this Friday, December 11, 2009.

Please consider giving through payroll deduction if you don't already do so!

If you do already give, consider raising your contribution by \$1.00. We had such a successful drive last year and it is thanks to our membership for this!

If you have any questions about VOTE COPE, contact our coordinator, Lee Galmbacher.

#### ADMINISTRATOR MEETINGS

If you are asked to meet with your building administrator, you are allowed to ask for a meeting agenda in advance. If at any time you are made to feel uncomfortable in the meeting, or find that you are being reprimanded, you may ask for the meeting to be stopped and seek union representation immediately. The meeting can then be rescheduled.

If you are asked to meet with the Superintendent, you are to bring a union officer along to the meeting.

#### COLLEAGUES

Please refrain from speaking about colleagues or fellow union members with the administration. We are strongest when we are united.

## Professional Development Seminar Held by N-W

On Wednesday, December 9, 2009, the District held a seminar to discuss the new Professional Development requirements for teachers holding Professional Certification. The new requirements for certification went into effect as of February 2, 2004.

Here are some helpful tips to help you maintain your Professional Certification:

- Send copies of transcripts to both Barb Wendt AND Kim Meisenburg at Central.
- Send copies of your Professional Certificate to both Barb Wendt and Kim Meisenburg.
- Pursue professional development training/activities that enhance or align with the certification you are trying to maintain.
- You must log 175 hours of professional development every FIVE years (only 175 hours total, even if you have two certifications) and these hours MUST be documented with the District and the State!
- Your 5-year calendar does not begin until July 1 of the year you receive your Professional Certification.
- Kim Meisenburg will help you research and record your hours. Set up an appointment with her if you have questions.
- You must sign up through the TEACH system to have your records submitted to the State.
- It is the employee's responsibility to submit all Professional Development activities to Kim Meisenburg in the Office of Instruction utilizing the District's reporting form and supporting documentation, i.e. certification of participation, principal's signature,

course grades, or proof of attendance.

- Graduate courses count for Professional Development—1 credit hour = 15 hours of Professional Development
- NYSUT ELT courses count toward Professional Development and are reimbursable through our tuition reimbursement system!
- District form for Professional Development are located in TEACHER SHARE under "175 Hours PD."
- Those teachers who are close to the end of their five year cycle will have all documented hours counted, but those documents must be turned into Kim Meisenburg ASAP.
- Once you complete a course, or any type of Professional Development, submit your form along with documentation to Kim Meisenburg as the hours are completed.
- Make copies of everything before you submit it!
- Transcripts do NOT have to be official copies to be acceptable.
- Email Kim Meisenburg if you have questions or need assistance with tracking your hours.
- If you have Professional Certification and it is NOT your current teaching assignment, you will have the option of maintaining that certificate, i.e. dual-certification.

**The Professional Development process is ongoing. All documents and information regarding Professional Development will continually be updated and revised as new information comes about.**



**The NWTA Board of Directors will meet on the SECOND Thursday of each month.**

**Meetings start at 3:45 and are held in the ALC at Edward Town Middle School.**

**All members of the NWTA are allowed to attend BOD meetings.**

**Board of Directors meetings for the remainder of the school year are as follows:**

**January 14, 2010**

**February 11, 2010**

**March 11, 2010**

**April 8, 2010**

**May 13, 2010**

**June 10, 2010**

## Regents Efforts Aim to Improve Teachers

November 16, 2009, *The Buffalo News*

State educational policy changes supported by the state Board of Regents in concept—but approved so far only in principle—are designed to reach good goals: teachers with more clinical experience, students involved at earlier ages in science, math, engineering and technology, and people with great non-teaching experience given a better chance to become teachers.

Getting there will take work. And it will take commitment, from all levels in the education system.

The plan, which sidesteps the sticky issue of teacher tenure, does seek improvements that will ensure a high-quality education at the earliest stages for students. State Education Commissioner David M. Steiner and the Regents still need to have discussions with experts in the field to determine the best method and time-line for reforms, but the new commissioner is taking a promising approach.

His reforms would make it easier for mid-career professionals to become teachers, and for institutions and research centers to award teaching degrees. The reforms seek ways to get highly experienced professionals—medical researchers, for example—trained and certified as teachers more quickly than otherwise would be possible.

Also being considered, depending on the

state's troubled financial climate, are ways to provide incentives of up to \$30,000 over five years to those willing to teach in both high-demand concentrations such as science, math and special education, and in high-need struggling schools.

Currently, most high-performing school districts put a great emphasis on classroom experience with weekly formative assessments, peer group and principal evaluations and state tests. The state now seems willing to shift away from tests—criticized by many as having come to dominate what and how students are taught—to performance as a standard. That's a worthy evolution, and one that opens the door to teachers with greater clinical and other practical experience outside the classroom.

Steiner's suggestion of videotaping teaching, especially for newer teachers, also should be applied to veteran teachers who might not be keeping current despite an existing 175-hour training requirement over five years. It's also important to stress mentoring for teachers during their first three years, and school districts should report on how that is being done.

The bottom line is that improving teaching is a sound way to improve learning, and that student achievement is the ultimate goal. These policy shifts seem a good step in that direction.

*If you had a name change or address change over the summer, please contact our membership Roster Chairperson, **Andy Zwelling**, via email ASAP... it is important that we keep our rosters as current as possible to eliminate overpayment of dues and duplication of enrollment.*

## Certification Videoconference Schedule Reminder

**Information on Initial & Professional Certification [Block B] - The New Requirements for Teachers:** This session will provide information on the new certification requirements in place Feb. 2004. Anyone applying for a certificate in a new subject area after this date will be held to these requirements.

**Information on Teaching Assistant Certification [Block C]** - This session will provide an overview of the certification process for teaching assistants under the old as well as the new requirements. Workshops will be approximately 45 minutes long with opportunities for Q&A. All workshops begin at 4:30PM.

**Workshop Dates:**  
**2010: Thursday, February 2**  
**Tuesday, March 16**  
**Wednesday, April 14**  
**Tuesday, May 18**

*To register for any of these sessions, please call the Western New York Regional Office at 634-7132.*

## The Lighter Side



## Locking in to Tier 4

After many months of warning, Tier 5 is now a reality. The state's midyear deficit reduction plan includes creation of a new Tier 5 pension plan that will apply to future employees in the state Teachers Retirement System.

Rest assured that if it weren't for NYSUT, the Tier 5 regulations would have been much harsher for the incoming generation of educators. As approved, Tier 5 will apply to TRS members hired after Jan. 1.

That means there is still a very small window - a matter of days - for future members to still lock in Tier 4.

### Here's how:

You can join Tier 4 by substitute teaching for **one** day. Keep in mind you must file a notarized membership application completed by you and your district **on** your first day of substitute service.

You can get an application from your employer, by calling TRS at 800-782-0289 or by downloading from [www.nystrs.org](http://www.nystrs.org).

Be sure to have your school district fill it out **on the day** you sub. Then mail it to the NYSTRS (certified, return receipt), 10 Corporate Woods Drive, Albany, NY 12211-2395.

Membership will begin the first of the month during which you render service, on or after the notarization date of the application.

One day is enough to "lock in" Tier 4 for seven years, but in order to receive service credit, you must substitute for 20 days.

## Official Newsletter of the Niagara Wheatfield Teachers Association

NWTA  
2292 Saunders Settlement Road  
Sanborn, New York 14132

*If you'd like to contribute an article, photo,  
or ad, please contact Darla Bubar at  
dbubar@nwcsd.org.*

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WE'RE ON THE WEB  
WWW.NWTA-UNION.ORG

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We are pleased that our history dates back to 1971 when the New York State Teachers Association certified our union. Today we are proudly affiliated with the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) and The American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

We are also honored to be a part of The American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO).

*We stand united... we stand for education*

## What's Good on the Bookshelves

This month, two excellent mysteries set in foreign countries.

**Stalin's Ghost** by Martin Cruz Smith.

You may remember Gorky Park, probably the most famous of this series, with Detective Arkady Renko, since it was also a movie. This is a nice complex plot where you are looking for the reasons for the events and trying to sort the motives of the very interesting characters and their relationships. Set in Russia with reference to events also in Chechnya, this is a very good read.

**The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo** by Stieg Larsson

Set in Sweden, this is an excellent story with again, interesting and complex characters. Circumstances are set so that at first one person, then later two, end up trying to solve what appears to be unsolvable, a forty year old disappearance of a teenage girl. The investigation, the characters and the eventual solution are quite intriguing.

*Both these books are highly recommended.*

Charlie Donner  
Edward Town Middle School



*Any views expressed in editorials or in opinion-type articles of this newsletter are solely the viewpoints of the individuals themselves and do not necessarily reflect the viewpoints of the NWTA at large.*