

2011-2013  
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EXECUTIVE  
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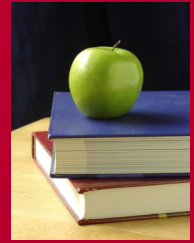
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Secretary  
Ext. 2708 (ETMS)

Kevin Schucker,  
Treasurer  
Ext. 1506 (SHS)

*'No problem can  
be solved by the  
same consciousness  
that created  
it. We need to see  
the world anew.'*  
Albert Einstein



# The Agenda



VOLUME 38, ISSUE 4

DECEMBER 2011

## Wit and wisdom...



Kevin Rustowicz,  
President

If you read your email last week, you know that I was thankful for your support at our general membership meeting on December 6. I want to take this opportunity to again thank each of you for coming out and for your constant feedback. Your input is always appreciated. As I stated, each of your concerns will be taken into account and discussed as we work through upcoming negotiations. Please make sure that when the surveys are distributed, you add any additional comments and feedback.

As you are well aware, school districts across the county, state, and nation are going through rough times. We, as educators, continue to face a budget crisis that will leave devastation in its wake.

We can, however, be hopeful in the fact that at the national, state, and local levels, our elected officials and concerned citizens like you will continue to advocate for education. We saw this as recently as last week with Governor Cuomo's tax compromise. This should bring

money back to education across the state.

I did want to take some time to address an excellent question that was posed by Al Pogel at our meeting last week. He wanted to know what we can do as a membership to prevent what happened last year in the "11th hour". I want to remind everyone that budgets and negotiations do impact each other, but caution you that they do not go hand in hand. We only control 50% of negotiations, the District controls the rest. They control 100% of the budget process. They have to decide what is best for taxpayers, children, programs, and the school as a whole. Negotiations won't save the day in this budget crisis. The gap that must be closed could reach as much as \$8 million by some reports by the end of the 2012-13 school year. Certainly, we will ask you—as members—what you are willing to give up so that we can bring your ideas to the table, but you cannot hold fast to the idea that any concessions we make will save jobs. The district cannot give us that kind of guarantee.

What we must do is remind ourselves that great school

districts raise taxes when necessary, seek input from all stakeholders, and share in the cost savings process. We cannot take sole responsibility for this budget crisis. There are so many factors that went in to creating what is now the perfect storm. What we can do is look to make compromises that are a win/win for both the NWT and the District. Please do not tell people of ways we can save money that would hurt programs that are important to colleagues. Please don't sacrifice one department for another. We must share the financial burden with all. Teachers are not the only component of the budget. We cannot and should not carry this entirely on our backs.

Please continue to be active in our union. Continue to attend meetings, both of the union and Board of Education. Stay informed. Share your ideas and concerns with our building reps. As officers, we need and appreciate your continuous input and support. Please have a merry Christmas.

*Yours in solidarity.*  
~Rusto

We are currently having a **SCHOLARSHIP FUND DRIVE!**

Please consider payroll deduction ... our scholarship funds are getting low.

If every member gives just \$1.00 per paycheck, our scholarship fund will be replenished for years to come!

Contact Kevin Schucker, Treasurer, for a payroll deduction form or see a building rep!



Ladies... please remember to do your monthly self-exam and to schedule your annual mammogram!



## Common core standards: getting it right

*NYSUT Leader Briefing  
December 9, 2011*

The Regents approved the New York State P-12 Common Core Learning Standards in January, with introductory phase-in to begin this school year. According to the State Education Department, this is a transitional year, with school districts providing support and professional development on how to incorporate the new standards into instruction. SED has posted a handful of exemplary lessons and Commissioner John King has urged teachers to try aligning at least one unit per semester with the common core standards.

While a recent NYSUT survey shows members are aware of the Common Core State Standards, too many districts are not providing members with the professional development that is needed. We're hearing reports from the field that some principals and superintendents are trying to require teachers to submit lesson plans aligned with the new common core stan-

dards. This is NOT a state requirement this year. Nothing is mandated until 2012-13. (In fact, this spring's state assessments in ELA and math will continue to be based on the 2005 learning standards.) It's also important to keep in mind that many collective bargaining agreements include provisions about lesson plans. The introductory phase-in does not supersede collective bargaining agreements. Local leaders are encouraged to bring to their labor relations specialists any concerns about contract violations or unilateral changes in working conditions in connection with the common core standards.

"Our position is very clear. We support the common core standards because they are deeper, clearer and, if implemented appropriately, can improve student learning," said NYSUT Vice President Maria Neira. "However, in order to make this sea change in planning for instruction, we need quality professional development, adequate time and collaborative teams

working on capacity-building."

Once again, Neira noted, SED is rushing the transition and not getting the sequence right. SED is planning to leapfrog to new assessments on the common core standards in 2012-13, before all of the curriculum modules are ready. "We are continuing to advocate for a meaningful transition so this effort can be successful," Neira said.

Neira urged local leaders to ensure practitioners are involved with district and school-level committees working on realigning instruction. For background information, SED has set up a new Web page, EngageNY.org, with exemplar lesson plans, a video and an overview of the 12 major shifts in instruction. In addition, the union's Education & Learning Trust and the state's Teacher Center network are partnering to offer professional development opportunities to help educators with the transition.

In an effort to improve communications with the field, SED has requested teacher work emails from school districts. The emails will be used to create a listserv specifically with teachers to notify them of new instructional materials available on [www.engageny.org](http://www.engageny.org), make requests for feedback through online surveys and distribute other instructional information. Teachers will have the option to not receive these emails.

# From where I stand... *Groundhog Day*



*Darla Bubar, Editor*

A good friend of mine – who pays rather astute attention to detail – always uses the phrase “Groundhog Day” when describing the moment at which history repeats itself. This is his cue to me that no matter how much we hope for things to change, they instead stay the same – much like in the Bill Murray film. I suppose the only difference is that the main character, Phil (played by Bill Murray), after being giving at least 38 Groundhog Days, gets to learn from his mistakes and change the future by preventing history from repeating itself.

Unfortunately, it seems a lot more like we’re still stuck on Groundhog Day around here – without any lessons learned. We are repeating last December. We are in a looming budget crisis. We keep telling the membership the same thing – over and over - with little result. So – how can we fix it? Or can we...

We felt the beginnings of loss last year when the first large scale round of budget cuts hit. We continue to feel those as things get trimmed little by little with each board meeting. The District has a huge gap to close – but it shouldn’t fall solely on the backs of the

teachers. As ETMS Rep, Pat Creamer, said at the General Membership Meeting, we should all share a little bit in the burden so that one group isn’t hit the hardest.

I know we are preparing for the worst – and I think that we should. Not to do so would be foolish. We’ve come to realize there won’t be a miracle – even though we do have a glimmer of hope with Cuomo’s tax proposal. There are some guarantees, however –and those are afforded to us by our contract. Those are the things we can hold fast to. And, rest assured, your negotiations team will make sure that everything that’s discussed during negotiations becomes what Vice President and Negotiations Chair, Lee Galmbacher, calls a win/win for both the Nwta and the District. We have to look at those things that we are willing to give up to insure that any concessions made are not only cost saving but that maximize benefits and working conditions for all members.

In all of this though, we must remember that state law prevents the district from using any concessions to guarantee job savings. At no time can the District give up its right to govern the budget process – that it’s the sole ownership of the District.

I’m certain that each of you is feeling a bit frustrated. I just have to step into the hall or approach a colleague and I hear the latest speculation on what fate has in store for us. Gossip is rampant in times of uncertainty. It is the one thing we can count on to be there. But – until we have INFORMATION the only SPECTUALTION we can make is that Mr. Sabo, NWCSB Board President, was quoted in the paper as saying, “Future job loss numbers could fall between 75-125... should a plan to under spend in 2011-12 by \$3 million not occur.” (Timothy Chipp, Niagara Gazette, 11/03/2011) This news is not only disturbing, but frightening.

We know we are facing difficult times ahead – but, if the difficult times mean losing our arm a finger at a time verses a clean amputation at the elbow – I wonder which would be less traumatic? It’s Groundhog Day, folks – and there is no easy way to say what we know is the inevitable... if we don’t change, we will keep reliving this over and over until we get it right.

~Darla



*“I know we are preparing for the worst – and I think that we should.”*

**You MUST meet the proper deadlines for tuition reimbursement and hand in ALL necessary paperwork ON TIME! Failure to do so will result in non-payment.**



**IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER:**

The NWTA Board of Directors will meet on the **THIRD** Thursday of every month beginning on November 17, 2011 at 3:45 PM in the ALC at the middle school.

All NWTA members are welcome to attend. If you cannot attend, but have an issue or question you'd like brought up, please see a building rep.



## NYSUT applauds state measures to boost funding

The statewide union lauded last week's state legislative action to stimulate the economy and provide much needed funding for crucial programs in education and health care. Union leaders offered kudos to Gov. Cuomo, Assembly Speaker Silver and Senate Majority Leader Skelos for following through and passing the three-way tax reform agreement that nets an additional \$2 billion. Restored funding for educa-

tion and higher education in particular is a crucial investment for economic development and jobs growth, said NYSUT President Dick Iannuzzi. "We thank the leaders in Albany for recognizing the need for the revenue to adequately support education," he said, "and we thank NYSUT members who answered the call to action. Public education is the engine that drives the economy and will create the New York

we all want and deserve. We await a budget that reflects that commitment." In addition to the main components of the agreement, NYSUT lobbyists succeeded in adding language to the agreement that ensures BOCES, 4201 and Special Act schools in the eight-county New York City metro region will gain from an easement of the MTA tax. Also, schools will now be eligible for part of the flood relief funding that was included.

**REMINDER!**

*The seniority list is being updated and will be completed by the District on January 1, 2012... PLEASE check it for accuracy!*



Don't forget the important things this Christmas

The lighter side

## Contract connection

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

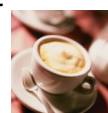
Decide if the following scenario is a **grievance** based on our current contract language:

*Jenny I. Q was directed by her principal that she shouldn't call a substitute*

*for an absence because she and another teacher co-teach in an AIS lab sharing the same students and the same schedule. She didn't understand this directive. Jenny checked with her reps who checked with their union grievance chair. Jenny thought the principal was required to provide a substitute.*

**In order to be eligible, you must cite the article, section and page number from our current contract that you used as evidence in your entry.**

Please email Darla Bubar with you answer. Winners will be selected from all eligible contest entries. Good luck!



## Guest Editorial... *What we CAN do*

Tracy Bloom,  
SHS Art

When discussions about funding and cuts began surfacing last year, I remember senior faculty members saying, "Just wait until next year." So our present budget challenge does not come as a surprise, though the degree in which our district overspent for 3 years in a row I find terribly disturbing. This is my eleventh year in the district. I am asking myself what I can do, as a proud member of our Union collective, to help us survive the impending storm. I've heard the advice, "Stay informed." I think it is great advice and I read my NWTA agenda each issue. I read my NWTA BOD meeting minutes. I even read the Buffalo News and Niagara Gazette coverage of our board meetings, regardless of how painful it can be. I know enough of history to recognize that ignorance will serve no one. I also know that information void of action isn't an effective way to guarantee consideration of our best interests.

My husband served on the school board of the district we live in for 9 years. He told me of one time when the board decided unanimously to vote against a teacher contract in executive session. When the board reentered the public meeting they saw a room full of teachers. Faced with the pressure of voting against the contract with the teachers present, they promptly changed their votes to yes. He experienced the power to influence how board members vote by witnessing the turn of events that happened sim-

ply because teachers showed up at the board meeting.

Another lesson can be learned from what happened in the states of Ohio and Wisconsin this year. People in support of unions launched protests all over our nation to shed light on the attempts at union busting by Ohio's Governor John Kasich and Wisconsin's Governor Scott Walker. I stood in the cold at Niagara Square on several occasions, lending my support by being seen, heard and counted as someone who felt what was happening was unfair. Spurred on by national support, Ohio workers recently visited their neighbors going door to door to collect signatures against the attack on collective bargaining rights and bring the issue to a vote of the people. Diligence and action was on the side of union workers and the people voted in favor of collective bargaining rights during November's election process. The Ohio Governor admitted defeat and honored the democratic process as well as the efforts from so many to protect the rights of hard working people.

**I think that never before has it been more important to be seen, heard and counted.** I no longer think that it is enough to just stay informed. If the Ohio workers had settled for just staying informed, the democratic change they brought about for workers' rights would not have happened. Taking a passive role could be our folly, making us look like we don't care enough to show up. The ALC saw a full house at the BOE meeting November 2<sup>nd</sup>

when the auditor's report was presented. Two weeks later the ALC was prepared for a full house again. Instead of receiving a crowd, this time there were half a dozen of us, surrounded by empty chairs. Why aren't we showing up at NW Board of Education meetings as a collective? A sprinkling of teachers does not make much of a statement about our collective other than we don't care enough to show up.

Beginning in December our school board will begin tackling our district budget. I have never felt such a sense of urgency to show up. A statement will not be made from half a dozen teachers. We need the numbers we saw the night of the audit report. As part of the discussion about what role our Union will play, we ought to consider ways to do more than be informed. We ought to force those who will make decisions about us to face us – it's easy to assume apathy, even if such an assumption is erroneous, if we take no direct action.

~ Tracy

"Taking a passive role could be our folly, making us look like we don't care enough to show up."

# Guest Editorial... What can/can't be negotiated

*NYSUT/AFT Member,  
Mark Peters  
SHS Counseling Dept.*

The NWTA and the NW School District will soon embark on another series of negotiations. This is the fourth or fifth such process since I have been employed by the district (over 23 years). I preface all of my comments with sensitivity to colleagues who may be in jeopardy of being laid off. I am also aware of the current difficult economic times that the district, state, and nation face. Further, I realize that the district's revenue comes from school taxes and that the amount of collected revenue may be capped.

The items that are of most concern to union AND management during negotiations are wages, health care, and sick back. This has not changed. Other items of concern are various working condition items (i.e. teaching time, length of school year) and contract language. These are negotiated items, items that may be bargained.

What items are not negotiated? Jobs and economic conditions are not and have not been negotiated. Further, they CANNOT be negotiated. I have been a member of the NWTA Board of Directors and

Executive Board although I have never been on a negotiating team. I have been employed during both prosperous and lean economic times. I have seen staffing increase and decrease.

Again, I am sensitive to colleagues who may be at risk of layoffs. But, make no mistake: jobs are not a negotiated item. You will hear management profess that they can save jobs by pay cuts, pay freezes, and work furloughs. Will it be added to our contract that jobs will not be cut? Absolutely not, as it is NOT a negotiated item. The NWTA, however, has always done what it CAN do to preserve teaching positions.

The fiscal conditions at the district, state and national level are bleak. I could spend a considerable amount of time on why this is the case but will not. Many districts and states manage their money much better than us in both lean and prosperous times. The economic conditions will change. The negotiations between the NWTA and the NW School District will not change these conditions. You will hear management profess that our contract must change based on economic conditions. Will it be added to our contract that when

economic conditions change the district will undue various provisions? Absolutely not, as it is NOT a negotiated item. The NWTA, however, has always been sensitive to the economic conditions when working with the district.

Please remember what you have heard many times in various forms: A union is about unity. Management has a role to play in negotiations. I suppose one tactic that they could use is to divide union on what matters, our collective brother/sisterhood. Another tactic may be to accuse sensitive professionals of not being sensitive to the dire economic conditions that everyone is facing. Union has a role to play in negotiations, to do what is best for all of the membership. I have confidence that the NWTA will negotiate the best contract for all of the membership. Independent of these negotiations, I have confidence that the NWTA will continue to do what it can to preserve teaching positions.

~ Mark

**“Make no mistake: jobs are not a negotiated item.”**



Three Time Award Winning Newsletter of  
the Niagara Wheatfield Teachers Association

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If you'd like to contribute an article,  
photo, or ad, please contact Darla  
Bubar at [dbubar@nwcsd.org](mailto:dbubar@nwcsd.org).

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



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).

## What's good on the bookshelves

**holidays on ice** by david sedaris

A collection of wonderful politically incorrect holiday stories. This Sedaris collection includes the classic "Santaland Diaries", his adventures as a Christmas elf. If you are in the mood for some off beat humor this is it.

**Three Stations** by Martin Cruz Smith

This is an Arkady Renko novel. You may recognize the police inspector

from Gorky Park or Stalin's Ghost. This story is set in Russia amidst the modern day upheavals. Renko deals with the results of the corruption and decay of moral fiber which accompany the economic and social changes. This is a great story.

Thanks for reading!

~Charles J. Donner, Retiree Class of 2010



Please remember to report any name or address changes to our membership Chair, Andy Zwelling, to avoid duplicate enrollment and dues overpayment.

*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.*