



PENFIELD EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
United in Excellence

BROADSIDE

October 2015



President's Column

A teaching colleague once told me that when Open School Night is over, the school year is over. I'm not so sure that the year has gone by *that* quickly, but I am always surprised at how quickly the weeks seem to fly by in the fall. My column this month deals with two very important issues that I want to address because each of them brings with it a certain level of stress for our membership. This is not acceptable.

In a perfect world, if a teacher had a job-related issue, he or she could approach the building principal, address the issue personally, and walk away feeling supported and respected. Furthermore, there would be no concern over retribution on the part of the administrator. Unfortunately, this is not a perfect world, and many of our members do not feel comfortable bringing their concerns to their supervisors directly. That is where the PEA building reps step in to do their part. Your building reps were elected to help you and support you in doing your job.

When an issue arises in your building, and you feel that your rights under the contract are not being respected, your first call should be to your building reps. The reps have studied the contract and can help you navigate through the information and how it applies to your specific concern. They will take the issue to your administrator on your behalf. In most cases, building issues can be resolved at this level. In the event that resolution is not forthcoming at the building level, the reps will bring the issue to me. It is my job to seek clarification at the district level. This may or may not involve my meeting with you and the building reps.

I need to stress the necessity of this process. Whereas some administrators might prefer that unit members not utilize their building reps but meet with administrators first, it is essential that PEA reps are informed before such a meeting occurs. This is to protect you and your rights. I do not want any of our members to feel intimidated, bullied, or targeted if they bring an issue to the forefront. Make no mistake. I will do everything I can to ensure that this will not occur under my watch.

The PEA is working hard to make our buildings places where everyone feels valued and respected, but changing school culture is not easy. We are not where I would like us to be in that regard, and much work still needs to be done. I am hopeful, however, that administrators and the PEA will find common ground which is based in mutual respect. I am heartened by conversations with Superintendent Putnam, and I feel that we are moving in the right direction.

Please remember that your PEA reps are in place to help you. Please do not hesitate to contact them with your contract-related issues or concerns. I personally want to thank the building reps

for stepping forward to fill these important positions. They and your officers work tirelessly for the good of all our members.

It is almost a certainty that I will hear a concern regarding substitutes at least once or twice a week. Teachers at all grade levels are affected in one way or another. The substitute issue is really two-fold: difficulty securing appropriate substitutes who are called to our buildings, and the use of TA's or colleagues to teach in place of a substitute teacher. I will address each issue separately.

I have heard from both teachers and administrators that it is sometimes very difficult to secure a qualified substitute through the sub system. I have already had conversations regarding this problem with Barbara Gregory, Assistant Superintendent for Personnel and HR. Ms. Gregory is acutely aware of the situation, and it is reassuring to know that she is currently in the process of changing the practices and policies regarding how the district hires substitutes. She is looking to open the substitute pool of applicants so that we have a greater number of substitutes available.

Recently, I met with Ms. Gregory to discuss the substitute situation, and I brought the following questions to the table:

- What is the district doing to make sure that Penfield “is the place to be” from a prospective substitute's perspective?
- Has research been conducted which compares our substitute pay to that of neighboring districts?
- How do the working conditions at Penfield compare with those at our neighboring districts?
- What are the other options for class coverage instead of pulling TA's or other teachers?

Teachers have reported to me that after pre-arranging for a particular substitute, they return to school only to find that their subs were “pulled” to fill a different vacancy. Teachers who pre-arrange substitutes do so with the assumption that their vacancy will be filled by that particular person. Plans could have been made with that particular person in mind, and a last minute switch of subs without the teacher's knowledge could prove to be very problematic for the teacher, the sub, and the students. This practice cannot be allowed to continue unless the situation is *truly* a building emergency and not just a matter of convenience.

I have also been informed that when a substitute has been called to fill a particular teacher's schedule, the substitute has been told to cover classes in addition to the ones on that teacher's schedule. This sometimes results in a substitute working consecutive classes with no breaks throughout the day. This is another practice that must be stopped. Plain and simple, it is disrespectful to the substitute. Would the district consider compensating the substitute for the additional classes taught? If the answer is “no,” then the practice should be discontinued immediately. Substitutes work side by side with us and are essential to our school community. Our substitutes deserve to feel valued and respected.

So far this year, I have heard numerous concerns over TA's being pulled from their legitimate assignments to cover for a teacher's absence. To me, this is a case of "robbing Peter to pay Paul." If a TA is pulled, then students suffer. The TA cannot support the class where he or she was originally assigned. In some cases, this might violate a student's IEP. Once again, in a true emergency situation, this might occur. I am hearing that this is not the case, however. It is becoming the norm, not the exception. In "Team Penfield" we all need to help out when necessary, correct? Are administrators helping out? Are they covering a class or two if necessary? Are they filling in to work with a student if a TA is pulled? This could be a real eye-opener as to why pulling a TA is a serious problem. It is much easier to do the work when we all share the workload, not just certain teachers or certain TA's.

I look forward to continuing these conversations with Ms. Gregory. I can assure you that the District is well-aware of the issue. We are working collaboratively to examine all possible avenues to solve these issues.

For your own peace of mind when securing a sub, please put your request in the system as soon as you know a sub will be needed. That may help to prevent "last minute" adjustments in individual buildings. Please continue to inform your building reps of any irregularities in substitute acquisition.

As the first marking period comes to a close, I would like to personally thank you for all you have done to make the opening of this school year such a success. You are an incredible faculty.

I will close with a couple of reminders:

Although the *Broadside* will continue to be distributed via school email, any PEA items of a sensitive nature will arrive by personal email. You will be notified if this is the case.

We are still actively seeking folks to help set up our PEA Forum where PEA members will have a secure way to discuss district issues. Please contact your building reps or me if you are interested. Perhaps a group could meet to discuss the "nuts and bolts" of such an undertaking. Any suggestions would be appreciated. I truly believe that this could be a great method of communication among all of our members. We do not often have the opportunity to speak with colleagues from other buildings. Imagine the possibilities!

We are also seeking a permanent editor for the *Broadside*. Please contact me if you are interested.

Look for the PEA budget report coming to you soon via your personal email.

Finally, do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns. Your building reps and I are here to serve you, the membership.

In solidarity, we are Union Strong.

Bob Young



Participatory Politics

Dinner is finished. The day's work is done. You settle in to watch a little television to relax after a hard day. First channel: a political ad. You switch channels: the same political ad. Frustrated, you try channel number three: a different political ad. You give up and order Netflix. Sound familiar?

You might not care about politics, but politicians certainly care about you! They are actively seeking your vote...and now is the time to advance *your* own agenda.

There is no doubt that education will once again be a primary focus for politicians this election cycle. If we, as educators, are not communicating with our elected officials, they will have to rely on non-educators for their information. We all know how that will turn out.



I present you with a challenge: Each month, make it a priority to communicate with at least one elected official regarding education policy.

Why does this matter? As educators, we have seen the harm that has been caused by ineffective policies and misguided goals. Students suffer. Parents suffer.

Teachers suffer. We have also witnessed the power that a collective opinion can have. Flash back to last February when teachers from all regions of New York State marched in the frigid cold protesting Governor Cuomo's flawed education

policy. Change is coming as a result of our united voices, but now is not the time to sit back. Quite the opposite. This is the time to mobilize to an even greater degree. If we don't educate our elected representatives, they will listen to others outside of education instead. Right now, those voices are well-funded and there is no hesitancy to use financial resources to drive education policy. This practice is not good for students, teachers, or the community at large.

How much time will this take? That is totally up to you. You may write a personal letter or email to your elected representative outlining your position on one or a variety of educational issues. If you don't like to write, you can use the MAC app. Text NYSUT at 38470 to send faxes which are pre-written. Save your information the first time, and subsequent faxes are only a click away.

So...please join me and thousands of other New York teachers in making sure our representatives listen to **us**:

Choose a day: the first Friday of the month, the 15th of the month, faculty meeting day, etc...

Choose an elected official: County Legislator, State Assemblyperson, Senator, the President...

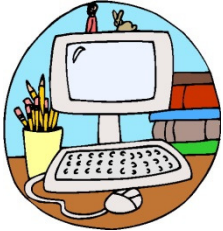
Choose a medium: email, phone call, fax, letter, in-person visit...

We need to make participatory citizenship a cornerstone. Right now, both major parties are listening to those who have created our current education mess. It is time they start to listen to us. Let's start speaking. Teachers have the answers!

Please contact me if you have any questions. Thank you for your help.

Russ Byer

PEA Vice-President



Letter to Educators

Commissioner MaryEllen Elia

Colleagues,

The past five years have brought a lot of changes to your classrooms. I know the implementation of the Common Core Standards has been a challenging transition. I know changes need to be made, and I thank you for your patience. Any time you endeavor the size of the reforms we're making in New York State, you must make adjustments large and small along the way in order to move forward.

It's time for us to step back and assess where we are and where we should be going. You work with students every day. You know what's working and what's not. Your classrooms are the front line in our struggle to help our students aim higher.

The New York State Education Department tomorrow will launch an online survey that will allow New Yorkers to provide detailed feedback on the State's English Language Arts (ELA)/Literacy and Math Common Core Learning Standards for prekindergarten through grade 12. Teachers, administrators, school board members, parents, the business community, and anyone with an interest in the future of our schools should participate in the review.

The survey, which can be found at www.NYSED.gov, allows respondents to review and comment on any ELA and math standard for any grade level. The survey will be open until November 30, 2015, and the results will help inform changes made to the standards. An advisory group - made up of stakeholders, particularly teachers, school

administrators, and parents - will review the survey results and recommendations and present suggested changes to the standards.

As educators who work with students every day, your comments will be especially valuable. You know the power of rigorous standards. High standards challenge your students to think critically, read closely, articulate their arguments using evidence, and understand math concepts more deeply. These skills prepare children to be the problem solvers who are ready for the jobs of tomorrow.

We owe it to you and your students to make sure we have the right standards to help us get there. The online survey is a way to improve upon and adjust what we have.

I know how busy you are in your classrooms, but your input as a teacher is vital to our success. I want to make changes that will help strengthen our schools and give every kid the chance to succeed. And, with your help, we can ensure those changes are the right ones.

Thank you in advance for participating in the survey.

Sincerely,

MaryEllen Elia
Commissioner

Fair Trade Products

Fair Trade is an economic system that ensures farmers, artisans, and workers in developing nations receive a living wage for their products in the marketplace. Purchasing Fair Trade products improves the economic lives of workers and ensures that products are grown, harvested, crafted and traded in environmentally appropriate ways.



NYSUT has partnered with Fair Trade Campaigns USA, a national grassroots movement to promote Fair Trade practices in communities, congregations, college campuses, and schools nationwide. Fair Trade USA offers ready-to-use campaign materials to promote Fair Trade—including toolkits, lesson plans, and ideas for contests and other events. This initiative is part of a worldwide movement to expand Fair Trade. For information, visit <http://fairtradecampaigns.org>.

(Excerpt from NYSUT Bulletin Fall 2015)