

GTA Today

Message from the President

As I hope you are aware, this is a very difficult and contentious time in public education. Many of the rights we rely on are under attack. From APPR to tenure, there has never been a more concerted effort to demonize and demoralize public educators. Governor Cuomo has made it clear that “education reform” means destroying public education and teacher unions.

What we do know is that essentially every one of the governor’s “signature” accomplishments has damaged public education.

First, the “tax cap” has been the single largest contributor to the largest gap in education spending between the richest and poorest districts. This misguided and undemocratic law has created a system where the poorest students and districts must make due with fewer and fewer resources. It is not surprising that it is in these districts that we also see the lowest student performance scores.

Next, was Cuomo's failed and incompetent implementation of the Common Core Standards? It is clear that the state failed to meet its obligation to properly support students, teachers and districts prior to the implementation. Further, the varying cut scores, the delay in use of these scores as an accurate measurement for students, and the “Opt-out” movement all illustrate the failings of the governor’s implementation of the CCLS.

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Specifics about the Issues and What You Can Do

Issues Facing Teachers:

Tenure Lawsuit: Campbell Brown has filed a lawsuit on behalf of parents and the Partnership for Educational Justice. This lawsuit is attempting to remove the due process protection of tenure. The opening arguments began in January 2015.

NYSUT's response: NYSUT's motion, filed in state Supreme Court in Albany, strikes back against the Partnership for Educational Justice, a group headed by former television host Campbell Brown with ties to Students' First, the Success Academy Charter School network and several Wall Street billionaires. NYSUT is seeking to intervene on behalf of seven representative teachers - including three New York State Teachers of the Year - whose ability to teach would be jeopardized without the commonsense safeguards that tenure provides. For more information, go here:
<http://www.nysut.org/resources/special-resources-sites/tenure>

What you can do: Go to <http://www.nysut.org/resources/special-resources-sites/tenure> and read the resources available. Share the resources and information via social media or in person.

Governor Cuomo and Chancellor Tisch's aggressive changes to Education:

1. Eliminate the locally selected measures and use 50% of evaluation based on state provided scores
2. Establish State-prescribed scoring ranges for the other measures of teacher and principal effectiveness (the observation subcomponent) rather than allowing them to be locally negotiated.
3. Enhance the expedited disciplinary process to make a pattern of ineffective teaching a rebuttable presumption of incompetence rather than merely a significant factor in incompetence determinations, as is done in Education Law §3012-c (5-a)(j) for NYC, but not in §3020-a (3) for the rest of the State. A teacher who has received two consecutive Ineffective ratings should not be permitted to return to the classroom.
4. The best means to accomplish that, while realizing further cost savings, would be to replace the current group of independent contractors who serve as hearing officers with State employees who will be held accountable for strict adherence to section 3020-a time lines.
5. The use of APPR as the only means for granting tenure for teachers and principals.
6. Extending the probationary period to 5 years.
7. The State Legislature should be authorized to make the appointment of a receiver for any school or district designated as chronically underperforming. The receiver is authorized to take numerous aggressive actions to increase efficiency and dramatically improve student achievement
8. There should be no arbitrary barriers to increasing the number of high quality seats in charter schools.
9. The Department has a Regents priority bill that has been introduced for the past three legislative sessions seeking to **establish regional high schools** to provide districts with the opportunity to work together to establish a regional secondary school, to allow for improved educational opportunities and more cost-effective service delivery.

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What NYSUT is doing: NYSUT is going to war with Cuomo. They are actively filing lawsuits and have held two protests in Albany in the last two weeks. Further, we will be having local ED meetings with presidents to look at next steps that we can do locally.

What you can do: Read the information on NYSUT.org or greeceteachers.com. Further, you can sign electronic petitions on <https://mac.nysut.org/> and nysape.org. Further, participate in any actions requested by GTA.

Teacher Pensions: Governor Cuomo said recently, "We've sent thousands of children to schools we knew were failing from an educational point of view. Albany has been too concerned with protecting the pension rights of teachers and not concerned enough with the future of students." The Constitutional Convention must be added to the ballot in 2017. Changes to the constitution around pension can impact both in-service and retired members, as well as any tier.

What NYSUT is doing: NYSUT is organizing rallies and lobbying lawmakers. Further, they are actively working with other groups to oppose any attacks on pensions. Further, NYSUT is actively hitting social media and using their website.

What you can do: Read the literature and be active on social media defending our rights. When we need to get mobilized, please be prepared to participate. Further, consider donating to VOTE-Cope.

Tax Cap- Cuomo's tax cap has been an unbelievable failure. Not only has it hand-cuffed districts in contract negotiations, it has had the unintended (or perhaps intended) consequence of creating the widest gap in per pupil spending between rich and poor districts in NYS history.

What NYSUT is doing: NYSUT has filed a lawsuit that challenges the legality and constitutionality of the tax cap.

What you can do: Go to <https://mac.nysut.org/> and participate in the on-line petitions. Further, share the actions on social media.

Other Concerns:

- Charter Schools
- Mandated Field Tests
- Common Core
- Privatization of Schools

What can you do? Go to <https://mac.nysut.org/> and nysape.org and become informed and sign petitions. Share your actions on social media. Further, be ready to participate in GTA sponsored actions.

Problem Solving Update with Brian Casey

Colleagues,

Please be conscious of what is written in your APPR. This document represents your professional history and will permanently be a part of your personnel file. You are an active participant in this process and the best advocate for its faithful implementation. Familiarity with the rubric language is important, but understanding the bargained procedure and deadlines is equally critical.

If you need a copy of the negotiated guidelines for implementation please see your GTA Senior Building Representative. Knowledge is power, and the deeper your understanding of the APPR procedure the better you will be able to ensure its fair depiction what you accomplish as a professional. Always remember that subjective comments do NOT belong in your APPR. Please see your GTA Senior Building Representative with any questions or call/email the GTA office.

Brian Casey
GTA Problem Solving Chair



Contract 101

Usually, a Step One meeting is conducted by the GTA Senior Building Representative when addressing a concern, problem or contractual violation. These meetings should be documented and the GTA has a form available explicitly for Step One meetings. Step One contractual language is part of Article V and it reads;

In the event a unit member believes a problem exists in relation to that members terms and conditions of employment, the unit member shall discuss and attempt to resolve the problem with the unit members immediate supervisor. Either the unit member or immediate supervisor may request an Association Building Representative or another individual within the building to assist in the attempt to resolve the problem. If the problem is not resolved in (10) school days of that discussion, the problem should advance to Step Two.

Executive Vice President

Fellow Teachers,

Many of us describe ourselves as “apolitical”, “neutral” or simply just “not interested” in politics. Today, as teachers in New York State, we can no longer ignore what Governor Cuomo is proposing to do to teachers and public education in New York. Fred Le Brun (a reporter for the Albany Times Union) perfectly captures what a foolish, dangerous politician Cuomo is. Reporting on Cuomo’s January 21, State of the State address, Mr. LeBrun wrote the following:

“...THE GOVERNOR IS GOING TO WAR ON PUBLIC EDUCATION. HE IS AS WRONGHEADED ABOUT THIS AS HE CAN BE. HE’S CALLING HIS CAMPAIGN TO ADVANCE THE CAUSE OF CHARTERS AT THE EXPENSE OF TEACHERS NEEDED “DRAMATIC REFORM”. REFORM IS THE MOST ABUSED WORD IN THE CUOMO LEXICAN...

PARENTS AND STUDENTS HAVE HAD IT UP TO HERE OVER THE HIGH ANXIETIES THIS GOVERNOR AND THE CURRENT NOT TERRIBLY SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP OF THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT HAVE BROUGHT US IN THE NAME OF “REFORM”. CUOMO BETTER TREAD CAREFULLY HERE....”

If you are not already, please read the articles and links that Jason is sending you.

Sign the petitions, get informed, and speak up.

Your livelihood today and in your retirement depends upon it.

Margaret

Keep Informed and Get Involved

There are a number of things members can do to get information and keep involved. First, follow the GTA on twitter (@Greece Teachers). Further, you may want to follow NYSUT, NYSUT Action Center, Randi Weingarten (AFT President), Karen Magee (NYSUT President), Andy Pallotta (NYSUT VP), and the AFT.

Further, you can visit greceteachers.com, NYSUT.org, mac.nysut.org, and nysape.org. These pages have valuable information and opportunities to participate in quick political action.

An active and well-informed membership will be vital as we work to defend our students, our profession, and our rights.

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Both of these issues are a concern for many of our local unions.

Finally, the governor has nurtured a system that has created the most segregated schools in the United States.

What is the governor's solution? More changes APPR. Blackmailing districts into adopting his "reforms". And threatening the teacher pension system.

Therefore, more than ever, we need involvement. In this issue, and on greeceteachers.com, there are simple and quick ways to become politically active. Please support your profession, your colleagues, and your students during these contentious times; the future of public education is in jeopardy.

In solidarity,

Jason

greeceteachers@gmail.com

Middle School Advisor

As you are well aware educators are under attack from our governor and his wealthy backers. His decision to take retaliation on teachers because NYSUT rightly decided not to endorse him in the last election is sad. His tactics and rhetoric are at a level we've never seen before. What used to be thought of as political suicide is no longer true because of the big money he has backing him. We MUST pull together and fight as one. I urge you to use social media to expose his incorrect accusations (see the many articles that Jason has forwarded) because unfortunately we are not getting much help from news media, as witnessed by the slanted Channel 10 stories. If you have family or friends that are in law enforcement or are firefighters please make sure they know that if he is successful in taking down public education he will come after them next.

On a happier note, your middle school senior reps have continued meeting with me to discuss middle school issues. At this point the biggest concern continues to be the schedule. It is not an easy issue to fix but we continue to work on it.

If you have any ideas or concerns please see your middle school senior rep and ask when we're meeting next. You are always welcome to meet with us.

David Metzger



Striking Rochester garment workers, 1913

A Day in Labor History

January 23

Some 10,000 clothing workers strike in Rochester, N.Y., for the 8-hour day, a 10-percent wage increase, union recognition, and extra pay for overtime and holidays. Daily parades were held throughout the clothing district and there was at least one instance of mounted police charging the crowd of strikers and arresting 25 picketers. Six people were wounded over the course of the strike and a sweatshop contractor shot one worker, 18-year-old Ida Breiman, to death. The strike was called off in April after manufacturers agreed not to discriminate against workers for joining a union – 1913

Vice President of Public Relations

Public Relations Update:

With all of the negative news regarding political attacks on teachers and public education it's important that as teachers we remain positive. One way we can do that is to take time to relax and enjoy the company of our colleagues. Whether it is in classrooms, faculty lounges, department offices or getting together after school, being able to unwind with fellow teachers is important. Not only can it relieve some of the negative stresses but it can also be a good opportunity to inform each other on current issues and promote participation in activities that support the teaching profession. It was encouraging to see the strong turnout at our most recent GTA happy hour at Bar Louie. Building a sense of unity among teachers is essential to the success of public education and social gatherings are a fun way to do it! I hope that we will continue to become a more united GTA and rely on each other in the challenging times ahead. As always, I welcome any ideas for ways we can do that.

Al Firlit
GTA VP of Public Relations –GTAVPPR@gmail.com

Elementary Advisors

The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.

Because of the increasing anti-teacher and anti-public education legislation and policy coming from Albany, the time to defend our profession and our students is now. We are using the GTA website and Twitter to communicate with membership and increase our political action online. We encourage you to visit the website at www.greeceteachers.com, which we are updating regularly.

You can follow @greeceteachers on Twitter, where we are spreading the word about the governor's agenda and the effects it has already had, and can continue to have, on our profession. NYSUT is encouraging teachers to use social media "between now and April 1st, the budget deadline, to call out Cuomo and tell him what our schools, students, and communities really need for public education in New York."

If you have any recommendations for how we can increase our online presence, we would love to hear from you at gtaelementaryadvisors@gmail.com or, better yet, follow us on Twitter and tweet at us.

In solidarity,

Joe Lombardo &

Chris Marino

Senior High Advisor

Grades. We all give them. We assess a student's paper, give it a grade, record that grade, accumulate a whole LOT of grades, average them together and arrive at a quarter grade. This quarter grade is supposed to communicate a level of achievement or level of mastery of the material we teach. But does it?

The more I think about grades, the less I seem to know and understand about them. I mean really... what is a 65%? And who determined that a 65 was a passing grade while a 64 was failing? It seems completely arbitrary, and both the 64 AND the 65 seem like a failure to me. I suppose a 65 is meant to convey the fact that the student has mastered 65% of the content and 65% of the skills taught in that quarter (or unit or whatever). But who determined that 65% was good enough? (You know the old, "If a plane successfully landed only 65% of the time, would that be considered good enough?" argument...)

I really wish I had three grading options. Pass. Fail. Mastery. Or maybe six grading options. Pass, Fail and Mastery for both *content* and *skill* acquisition. That would communicate everything I need, and am trying to disclose with our numeric system. And I think it might be much clearer than 72.4%. But the numeric grading system is archaic, and it is what parents know and understand... even if they don't understand (as I don't understand) what it actually means. It is familiar, like an old friend. And nobody wants to see an old friend tossed aside.

So beyond the slightly arbitrary nature of numeric grading, I have other questions. We can add these thoughts to the ever-growing "Wonder Box" that appears in my APPR.

Like, I wonder about standards based grading. Each course can be broken down into major content and skill standards in which a student is required to demonstrate proficiency. And if a student can demonstrate proficient knowledge or skill of these standards, then the student passes the course. So far, I'm with you standards based grading junkies! My first "wonder" is this: If a student can demonstrate proficient knowledge of content and skills without having taken a course, should the student get credit for the course? In a standards based world, the answer is yes. But I really wonder if that is appropriate... like Empire State College giving college credit to adult students for their "life experience". Many of my 9th grade students could already pass the ELA 11 exam, and could probably pass the Global History regents exam as well. Should they be given credit for three years of ELA and two of Global History? Answer: No, of course not. For one, there are more standards required in the course than could be crammed into a standardized exam. But also, the course itself is more than just the sum of its standardized parts. It's an experience that is valuable, and something is definitely lost if it is not experienced.

I also wonder where this leaves me in my "standards based classroom". If a student is an auditory and independent learner, and a practiced writer, and can demonstrate mastery on assessments of all kinds without doing a stitch of homework, should the student be penalized with a 0% homework average? I mean, homework only counts 10% in my class, so it would not fail a student like this... but it does suggest that their average could never be higher than 90%. Say the student got As and A+s on every assessment, but did no homework. Their average would be a B. Or maybe a B+. Does the average appropriately illustrate the level of knowledge the student displayed? In a standards based classroom, the grade of B or B+ is inappropriate. The important thing is demonstration of knowledge and skill-based ability, and the student demonstrated A to A+ knowledge and ability. But do the ends negate the means? Or do they justify whatever means Is something immeasurable lost by not counting homework at least a little bit? I don't know... but it's something I wonder.

I also wonder where this leaves us with programs like Twilight, Credit Recovery, Saturday School, Boot Camps, and all other programs that seem designed to help students acquire missing credits. I understand that students might need alternative pathways from time to time... but this pathway is starting to seem well worn from all the use it gets. Certainly not the path less traveled. Are we doing these students a favor by distilling our courses down to a handful of “standards-based” assessments? Does this process invalidate all the hard work that was done in our classrooms over the last 10 weeks? Again, I don’t know... but it’s something I wonder.

My final “wonder” surrounds my work as a teacher here in NYS with a governor who is clearly antagonistic to teachers and public education. I also get a “grade” as a teacher with my APPR score each year. Do I think that grade reflects my knowledge base, my skills or my abilities as a teacher? In NO way. It is a joke. I know incredibly skilled and dedicated teachers who were only “effective” or in some cases, “ineffective”, while others who were not nearly as skilled or dedicated were deemed “highly effective”. My governor has decided that 40% of my evaluation should be based on student test results (and honestly, if he had his way, it would probably be more than 40%). I have to wonder how my students’ test results are an accurate measure of my knowledge, skills and abilities as a teacher. There is a flaw in the governor’s logic. He claims that if A, then B... where A= teacher effectiveness, and B= student achievement on standardized tests. He then claims $\sim B$ then $\sim A$. In other words, if students don’t achieve, then the teacher wasn’t effective. And while I do acknowledge a potential relationship between student results and teacher effectiveness, it does not shake out so easily as a 100% accurate causal relationship. There are a million things that might contribute to student achievement on standardized, high stakes tests... not just teacher effectiveness. If we accept the governor’s flawed logic, are we really prepared to suggest that only the most ineffective teachers work in the city, while the most effective ones work in East-side suburbs? Of course not. And so, Governor Cuomo, I wonder if you could find a more standards based way of evaluating me, my knowledge, my skill set, and my abilities? I wonder if you could find a way to work as a partner with us to help the students of this state instead of crushing us under your feet as you step up to the next level? Again, I don’t know... but it’s something I wonder.

Lauri Secker

High School Advisor

VP of Educational Programs

On Wednesday, January 21st, Governor Cuomo gave his State of the State speech to the people of NY. This speech has officially set the stage for several battles on our professional front. He has signaled that he will pursue several major initiatives involving evaluations of teachers and an expansion of charter schools. Whether you are politically aware or not, you certainly should be on high alert, not only because we live here in NYS, but also especially if you are a teacher. Governor Andrew Cuomo is annoyed that the teachers of our state did not back him in his run for re-election this past fall. He and Chancellor Tisch have been laying the groundwork for an aggressive education agenda, during his second term in office. He is seeking several major changes that, atypically for a Democrat, will put him in direct conflict with teachers' unions.

In both speeches and interviews over the past few weeks, the governor has attacked various aspects of our teaching profession. Items such as teacher tenure, seniority and our teacher evaluation system, have been identified targets. He has even said publicly that he thinks "The state's teacher grading system, is too easy to pass, making it too difficult to fire underperforming educators". Governor Cuomo is, "angered that results this past school year, showed that 96 percent of the state's graded teachers achieved the two highest ratings, and fewer than 1 percent were given the lowest rating". He and Chancellor Tisch would like to take away our union's ability to bargain the portions of the APPR, which are bargain able. He would like to rely more heavily on student test scores and eliminate the local 20%. He has also threatened our pensions and is blaming our pensions for not being able to fund schools.

Any and all of these issues impact our profession deeply from 2015 forward. They may even impact your children if they are going to college to become educators! It is extremely important to read as much as you can, listen to the media and the GTA leadership. Read your e-mails, open article links, get the NYSUT Member Action Center App. Become as informed as you can. You will be dialoguing with co-workers, parents, neighbors...the list is endless. Now is **NOT** the time to sit back and stay quiet. Now is the time to agitate. In the next several months, we will be sending out articles to read, opportunities to make your voice heard, and perhaps attending rallies with other districts both locally and statewide. You are fighting for your profession. Let your voices be heard!

Holly Stettner

Vice President of Educational Programs

The Greece Teachers Association is the sole bargaining agent for the professional teaching staff of the Greece Central School District

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