

Welcome Back CSTA!

It has been a wonderful summer, I hope you've enjoyed the hot days and have had time to relax with your friends and family. My oldest daughter was married this summer and I'm still basking in the after wedding glow of a wonderful event with friends and family. It has been challenging to change my mindset from florists and DJ's to APPR and test scores but I suppose all good things must come to an end.

I'd like to thank our Superintendent for this opportunity to speak, as well as thank Board of Education member Lori Wood for being here with us today. Thank you both for your work and dedication to our school district and community!

I also want to publicly thank the union officers who work year round on your behalf, often pressing their spouses and children into licking stamps, making posters, or putting up with yet another late night phone call or meeting. Executive Vice President Rich Creamer, Vice President Jaime Blakes, Secretary Jen Colvin and Treasurer Nicole Heath. Nicole is busy making her own little activist as we speak. They are a great team and I am fortunate to work with them!

I want to welcome our newest members to Central Square. We've spent some time with them last week and I know they are eager to jump in. We are also welcoming back teachers from the preferred eligibility list that have been teaching elsewhere and chose to make their way back to Central Square - welcome back to Steve LaFaso, Angelo Carroccio and Heather Lacey!

We are missing some of our veterans who took advantage of the retirement incentive last spring. When I see or hear from the retirees I know most all of them plan some special event for the first day back to school, and they often get together to do something fun. It is hard to let the day go by without some type of acknowledgement for what you have dedicated much of your life doing.

My goal in speaking to you today is to share information about what is happening nationally and then bring the focus to the local level. I'd like to ask for a show of hands of people here today that belong to a union- it doesn't have to be the teachers' union, it could be SANYS, CSEA...As I look around the room I see most every hand raised.

The Officers and I took part in a Crisis Workshop at NYSUT two weeks ago. You may or may not be aware that the Supreme Court of California has taken on a case that will have an impact on unions across the country. The Freidrich vs. California decision will determine if unions will be capable of collecting their dues, or if individuals will be allowed to decline paying dues while still receiving the services and benefits of union membership.

While we all like to get something for nothing, we know it usually comes at the cost of quality. Unions have gone through a steady decline in our country since 2000, and as the unions have declined so has the middle class. The discrepancy of wealth continues to increase, with the rich getting richer and the number of families living in poverty increasing. The fear is that this court case will be the beginning of the end of unions. It seems unimaginable to me that this could happen in NY but we are at the precipice of finding out if that is the case. And we have only to look at Wisconsin, Indiana and Michigan to know that it can happen.

It has been a privilege of attending rallies with many of you here - last year we gathered at North Syracuse and again in Fulton to educate the public on high stakes testing and the concern of losing local control of our school districts. And the public heard the message, our parents are paying attention and changes are happening in Albany. We have a new commissioner of education -She has met with teachers and parents as well as the NYSUT leadership and Pearson has been disinvited as a vendor for our end of the year assessments. Questar is taking its place with the promise of an assessment with more teacher input. Thank you

While I believe that is moving in a more positive direction, we are all discouraged by the changes the Governor made in the APPR law last spring. Our lobbying efforts to our legislators were able to save us from the very worst threats, so we're not looking at evaluations that count test scores as 80 percent of our APPR, but the governor was able to get through many of the heinous pieces that he wanted, handcuffing negotiations on a variety of pieces that we had control of in the past. We are working collaboratively with administrators because we are all in the same boat. Our scores are their scores and we need to work together to insure not only academic success for our students but fair evaluations for our teachers and principals.

Our state test scores continue to improve and we lead the county almost across the board, we are also proving ourselves as leaders in Onondaga County. Your hard work in planning and designing lessons is paying off for our students, and their hard work is paying off for them as they find success in graduation and move on to college and careers. I hope you feel pride in those numbers. I hope you feel pride in the growth of your students that will be coming by to say hello next week, and see the potential in the students that will be sitting in front of you in a few days.

This year amongst all the political challenges and the pressure of your responsibilities, we have to find a way to focus on what is most important- reclaiming the joy of our profession. You are the master of your classroom and your attitude will determine what kind of year you have.