

The Member Ship



The Newsletter of The West Genesee Teachers' Association

Why Public Education is in for the Battle of a Lifetime with WGTA Members on the Front



Why have we gone through so many changes in Public Education in the past five years? A veil has been lifted on the real rationale for APPR, State Tests, Common Core implementation and decreased funding to districts: privatization. The next American industry to keep the economic wheels churning is public education, at least public for now. Fire departments, law enforcement and corrections facilities could be soon to follow. I'm hopeful that this prediction is not the case because these American institutions are how we as a country maintain our order, freedom and rights. The plan for public education is as follows:

1. Starve the public institutions to the point of insolvency. Programs and services that were embedded within these institutions are no longer funded. **We have lost over 20 million dollars at WG over the past 5 years due to Gap Elimination Adjustment.**
2. Criticize the institutions for not holding up their end of the bargain. If this is the case it is due largely to fewer staff available and decreased funding. **We have lost Early Literacy Teaching Assistants, our Writing Program, Gifted programs, Clubs, Modified Sports, along with Fine Arts and Library Staff reductions. The new 3-8 tests, along with their new cut lines give the impression of failure in schools.**
3. Demonize the employees of that institution and their representatives. **Pairing Teacher APPR ratings with flawed, inaccurate ELA and Math test results give the impression that the students are failing even though teachers have wonderful evaluations.**
4. Marginalize those who fight back. **Constant anti-teacher and anti-teacher union rhetoric from the governor and the media.**
5. Seize the organization and impose privatization alternatives. **All Public Schools in York, Pennsylvania, most in New Orleans, Louisiana, and a new one, potentially next year in Cleveland, New York.**

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If you have the feeling that something is wrong, don't be afraid to speak up. -Fred Korematsu

<http://korematsuinstitute.org/institute/aboutfred/>





The governor has called himself an advocate for New York students. However, that advocacy really translates to the owners of the private charter school networks that could one day oversee the instruction of these students.

Organizations such as Students First and the Walton family-funded Families for Excellent Schools call themselves parent advocacy groups in the media, when in reality they are political lobbying organizations for charter school networks. The governor is the driving force of the locomotive that is privatization.

West Genesee and other districts are allowed to hold 4% of their annual budget in a reserve fund. The purpose of this fund is to help bridge any gaps that may occur during bad budget years due to decreases in state funding or lower local property tax revenue. A recent audit was performed on 182 charter schools. This audit found another example of how charter schools do not have to abide by the same laws and guidelines of a public school. The **average** reserve fund balance in the schools was 25% of their annual budget. One obvious concern is that these charter networks have stockpiled funds to quickly fund the takeover of failing schools or entire districts that are insolvent. Just as concerning is that while we cut programs and deal with larger class sizes, the charter school are not even spending their money on their students, they are packing it away.

The Governor has identified 178 failing schools that are in need of revitalization. He contends that the state should have the power to take over these schools, removing their local control and potentially handing them over to charter organizations. The charter lobbying group Students First echoes these words. There are tremendous challenges in these schools, often including poverty, family structure, homelessness, crime and a lack of emphasis on education in their home. Charter organizations do nothing to address these systemic problems. There are great success stories in public education, even within the failing schools. We don't have to deal with 50% graduation rates at WG, as they do in other places. That number does show failure, but behind the number are some inspiring stories. Students leave some of the so-called failing schools of the Syracuse City School District and attend college on academic and other scholarships. One Syracuse city alum Trinh Truong, who attends Utica Proctor is now applying to Ivy League Universities. Many students in these urban, failing schools complete their four year degree and move on to Law or Medical School. Many also volunteer and participate in the fine arts, receiving individual and group awards in band and art. Athletic teams in these schools are winning sectional and regional championships. These schools have high poverty rates and many have to overcome a devalued view of education in the home. The challenges that the teachers and students face on a daily basis appear insurmountable, yet bands travel to participate in the parades, there are National Merit Scholarship Award winners, success is still occurring despite the challenges. These schools have produced professional athletes, Congressmen, actors, producers, the list goes on forever.

There are charter schools in the city of Syracuse. I've heard anecdotes from friends who send their students to Syracuse City Schools. There is such demand for entrance into charter schools that lotteries are held to select which students will be enrolled. One student that was a chronic discipline problem was one of the students selected to attend a charter. That student was enrolled in September of 2014 and by November he had accumulated so many discipline referrals that the charter school expelled him. Where does that student get an education now? He is back in the same public school where he began. Charter schools do not have to abide by the rules of APPR, school finances, state testing or even the acceptance of students. They are allowed to select who stays and who goes. Public schools educate everyone. Our results cannot be manipulated by removing our low performers or chronic discipline problems from the equation, we do not have that luxury. Do charter schools accept a percentage of students with special needs or that have a first language other than English? They have no obligation to accept them.

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Do Charter Schools have political clout?

On Wednesday, March 4th, all 32 Success Academy Charter schools were closed. Students were put on coach buses in NYC and headed to Albany to participate in the “Don’t Steal Possible Rally.” These students received t-shirts, hats, lunch and were out of school for an entire day to flood the state capitol with 13,000 supporters. This “field trip” was paid for by the taxpayers of NYS to push the privatization agenda. In 2014 Families for Excellent Schools spent 9.7 million on lobbying. In Washington and Albany, money talk and 10 million dollars gets people to listen.

Can it happen here?

Last year parents in the community of Cleveland on the north shore of Oneida Lake fought hard to keep their community elementary school open. The Administration made a recommendation to the Board of Education to close the school due to decreased enrollment and financial challenges. Parents protested and presented the district and the board an analysis of how to keep the school open, including providing data that financially justified maintaining it. These protests and concerns were ignored and Cleveland Elementary had its last student walk through the doors in June of 2014. Obviously, there was no need for this community school due to enrollment.

Just 7 months after its closing an application has been submitted to the NYS Education Department to open a Charter School entitled, Unlimited Potential Charter School of Cleveland. This school would occupy the building that formerly housed Cleveland Elementary of the Central Square Central School District. The quote from the Syracuse.com article states,

http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2014/04/central_square_school_board_votes_to_close_cleveland_elementary_report_says.html

“Cleveland Elementary was named a national Blue Ribbon School in 2010 by the U.S. Department of Education. The program honors schools with high academic achievement or those that have made great strides in closing achievement gaps. Menard said the district does not have any plans for the Cleveland Elementary building but selling the building is something the district would consider.” I guess CSCSD could have just kept the school open. Fast forward to February 2014, where an application was already being prepared for submission.

Less than a year after [Cleveland Elementary](#) School closed, a Central Square graduate is seeking approval to use the empty building to start a charter school. The charter school will be named the Unlimited Potential Charter School of Cleveland or Cleveland UP for short.

http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2015/02/central_square_alum_wants_to_open_charter_school_in_former_cleveland_elementary.html

If it can happen in just a few months in a small community in Central New York, it can happen anywhere. This was a blue ribbon school, which was acknowledged for its ability to turn things around, now its going to be a charter school. Charter school teachers may have no NYS Pension, no tenure and no seniority rights, they sign yearly contracts. Advocating for students becomes a little more challenging when your honest opinion can impact your professional career.

John Mannion

Letters from Keith Newvine, WGTA Vice President for Grievances

February 9, 2015

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo

Governor of New York State

NYS State Capitol Building

Albany, NY 12224

RE: New York State Education Reform Proposals

The Honorable Governor Andrew Cuomo,

Thank you so much for taking the time to read my letter. I am well aware of how actively involved you are in the many reforms scheduled to take place or taking place all across New York State at this time. For that reason, I will try to keep my letter as brief as possible.

I need your help.

I am currently teaching AP English Literature and College Composition at West Genesee High School where I have been selected as Department Chairperson beginning in the 2015-2016 school year. I am also currently a PhD Student in English Education & Literacy at Syracuse University where, in addition to my course-work and field-work, I am fortunate enough to work with student teachers to prepare them for success in their later years of teaching. Lastly, I am currently the Vice President for Grievances for the West Genesee Teachers' Association.

As a result of this positions, from my senior students to my colleagues at West Genesee to my student teachers from Syracuse University, I am continually asked to explain your recent Education reform proposals and mandates in the 2015-2016 New York State Budget.

This is where I need your help. Despite the many research articles I have read, I can find little to no research-based evidence to support your Education reforms. When asked to defend or explain your proposals, I continually seek scholarly articles from a variety of sources to give justification to your proposals and my analysis thereof. I especially attempt to locate articles not written by educators as we sometimes get too invested in the education of our students to be able to make an objective argument. However, I am still unable to make an informed, educated, research-based argument for your Education reform agenda.

Therefore, I would like to schedule a meeting with you to discuss your proposals and to get answers for the many queries I receive on a daily basis. I am willing to meet anywhere in New York State at any time of the day or night any day of the week. I would assume that this topic, should both of us have the time, would take hours to properly discuss. However, I am not requesting hours--just 15 minutes.

Please contact me at your earliest convenience to schedule this 15 minute meeting. I am centrally located in Syracuse, New York, so there is no location in New York State which I can't drive to in 5 hours or less. All I ask is that you give me 6 hours advanced notice for this meeting.

I look forward to meeting you and discussing this important issue. As I mentioned earlier but want to stress: there is absolutely no agenda for this meeting. I just need to get some answers for myself, my colleagues, and--most importantly--my students.

Sincerely,

Keith Newvine

See the Governor's Response on Page 8

Union Work is Ever Important

Union membership has been a big part of my life since I was a kid. My dad was a civil servant and I saw him go on strike two times in my life. He was union foreman for most of his time working for the state. I respected my father's beliefs and thought I should look into being a part of a union when I begin working. My family was totally middle class. Being in the union is being middle class. We have a middle class in the US was because of unions negotiating with business to acquire benefits that we have today (retirement, insurance and other widely known conditions of employment). My father knew it was important to support workers. He believed in the ethics of collective bargaining. I too, believe in collective bargaining.

Being a teacher for West Genesee for 22 years and a NYSUT member for 27 years, I have seen a lot of wonderful and frustrating things. I have been supported by WGTA/NYSUT when a decision was made and it was not going benefit a student, and me, the teacher involved. Also, the administrator at the time, knew the situation was not appropriate for all involved. That experience made me feel like I would be supported in the future, in so many ways. I became even more involved in the WGTA. Throughout the years. I have had many administrators and multiple WGTA leaders. There have been ups and downs with these two groups in my life as teacher and as a union member, but the support I have felt, during that trying situation never left my memory. I know that the new administrations in our district will not let students down. I hope in the coming months, district leaders make decisions that won't let teachers down. I have been shown that in the past by the great support from WGTA and by the district administration. I know we will problem solve together and work hard on behalf of students and staff of West Genesee.

Sincerely,
Mary Weaver, WGTA Vice President

EARTH DAY FUN! We are conducting an earth day cleanup of our section of the adopt a highway program on Rte. 695 in Camillus. It will be from 10am - noon on April 25th. We will meet in the parking lot behind Krabby Kirks around 9:45 a.m. Lunch at Krabby Kirks following the cleanup. All are welcome!

Contact Your WGTA Executive Officers

<http://www.wgta.net>

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Spotlight On...Tim Meaney

By Ellen Miller, Assistant Editor

Tim Meaney is one of the best in our business. And that is from some very reliable sources – his former students. He graduated from Niagara University with a business degree and worked for a few years in Buffalo and Rochester before going back to school for teaching. Lucky for us and scores of West Genesee students, he did.

Tim's favorite subject to teach is science, "because it's hands on and the kids love it." Past students love how he reads very exciting books to his class as well. "The best part about teaching is watching my students grow during the year and interacting with them," Tim said. "Their energy, enthusiasm, and smiles make it all worth it."

Outside of school, Tim stays busy snowboarding in winter, attending Syracuse football and basketball games at the Dome, hunting, wakeboarding in summer with his brother in Virginia, and rebuilding his house, "a never-ending project." He enjoys spending time doing anything with his wife, Barb, and son, Joey, and stepsons Zack and Greg.

Tim remembers two important mentors from his early years at West Genesee. Ann Casler was his mentor and "just watching her operate with the kids and adults in our building gave me tons of knowledge," Tim said. He also remembers then-superintendent Dr. Rubeis saying at new teacher orientation in 1993, "if you can look at yourself in the mirror at night and say 'I did my best, I gave it all I could today' that we would be successful at West Genesee."

All who have worked with Tim or who have been in his class would agree that Tim can definitely say this when he looks in his mirror.

Union History Matters to You

By Jeanine Stables WGTA Secretary

Did you know...

The average American worker benefits every day from the hard work and dedication of labor unions. Many of the workplace standards we take for granted exist today because of labor unions' advocacy. Some of these rights and laws include: lunch breaks, paid vacations, sick leave, overtime pay, Worker's compensation, unemployment insurance, pensions, collective bargaining, child labor laws, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the right to a public education. In fact, unions have advocated for quality public education for all children since the early 1900s. I'm certain that those who stood up and fought for education and a better quality of life for American children never dreamed we would be doing it again in 2015. Let us work together, stand up, and speak out for our students and their future.

On another, very important note...

The response to recent sick bank requests was overwhelming. Thank you all for your generous donations.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

NYSUT Member Benefits is excited to launch its newly created online Financial Planning Center to assist NYSUT members & their families with making a variety of important financial decisions.



Whether you have questions about retirement planning, saving for college or considering purchasing a home, the Financial Planning Center offers valuable tools & resources to assist you. Take the time to check out everything this new section of our website has to offer and remember to bookmark it as we will continue to offer new items on a regular basis.

This unique resource provides NYSUT members with free access to the following:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Financial calculators• An interactive planning module• Customized Kiplinger’s retirement newsletter | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kiplinger’s Annual Retirement Guide• 403(b) Field Guide• Preventive Law Guides• And more to come |
|--|---|

To access the NYSUT Member Benefits Financial Planning Center, visit the Member Benefits website at memberbenefits.nysut.org and click on “Financial Planning Center.”



STATE OF NEW YORK
EXECUTIVE CHAMBER
ALBANY 12224

February 18, 2015

Dear Mr. Newvine:

Thank you for inviting Governor Cuomo to meet with you.

On behalf of the Governor, I regret to inform you that he is unable to accept your gracious invitation at this time. However, because a discussion with you is important to him, he would like to offer Anthony Vilardo, Governor's Regional Representative, to participate on his behalf. If you would like him to participate, please feel free to contact his office at [315-428-4337](tel:315-428-4337) to discuss the necessary arrangements.

Thank you again for your thoughtful invitation. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact our office at [518-474-4727](tel:518-474-4727).

Warmest regards.

Sincerely,

Jill DesRosiers

Director of Scheduling

Dear Governor Cuomo,

Your Opportunity Agenda proposed that "Highly effective teachers will be eligible for up to \$20,000 in annual supplemental compensation through the Teacher Excellence Fund." A subsequent email sent from Rich Azzopardi, a spokesperson for your office, said that "Teaching is an important and admirable profession, and that's why we're seeking to reward the best ones with merit pay..."

As a teacher who might very well be one of the professionals who is deemed "highly effective" because the Annual Professional Performance Review process you proposed (Education Law §3012-c) is desperately and inherently flawed in a multitude of ways, I humbly reject any merit pay you propose I be given.

I did not get into teaching for the money. Unlike some politicians, special interests and monetary contributions don't matter so much to me; I teach so that I can help students find success in school and in life.

Instead, I ask that the proposed bonus of up to \$20,000 be given to my school district so that they can distribute the money to the most needy students or that the money be given to schools whose students struggle to find success because of the abhorrent poverty they have to deal with on a daily basis.

Sincerely,

Keith Newvine

The Back Page

Your guide to services, deals, and promotions for the WG education community

We want to advertise for you!

Are you an artist, a carpenter, a house painter looking to advertise your services?

Advertisements in *The Member Ship* are provided free to West Genesee Teachers' Association Members and their family. Please send your advertisement to Kelly Chambala (SR) at kchambala@gmail.com. The only other advertisements that are run in *The Member Ship* are those provided by NYSUT, AFT, or the AFL-CIO.

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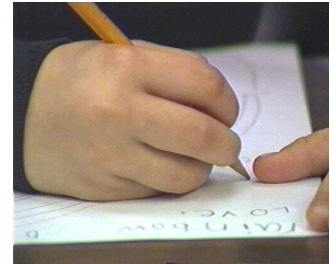
WGTA Email Directory



Join the FREE WGTA Email Directory. There are currently around 200 WGTA members, retirees, WG Staff and WG parents in the Directory. We share our Email addresses and send each other educational articles, WGTA and union information and personal notes.

If you would like to be a part of this FREE Directory, please send your name, Email address and WG status (school name / retired / WG staff, etc.) to Lynn Davis at: DavisRetired@gmail.com.

Email address are only shared with other members of the Directory.



WGTA Members,

I want to thank everyone for their efforts in combating the attack on teachers currently being waged. As many of you know, I have tried to provide people with some ideas on how to let our legislators know that our schools are working despite the ever growing challenges we face. I've spoken with Assemblymen Magnarelli and Finch, as well as Senator DeFrancisco. They have been listening and are very supportive of teachers. John DeFrancisco even described the governor's position as mind boggling. I believe their frustration is that they all have school with low graduation rates and test scores by students in their district. They are looking for a solution to these complex issues and agree that teachers are not the problem. Another frustration for us is how unaware many of them are concerning teachers' frustration with APPR, new curricula and state testing. I think they get it now. One bright spot is that Assemblyman Finch will visit a WG school in the near future. Your collective voice is being heard loud and clear in Albany and each representative let me know that West Genesee has clearly been one of the strongest advocates for their students over the past few weeks. It is going to be a fast and furious next couple of weeks as they work on the budget. I'm hopeful that the funding will be there and the so-called reforms will not. Realistically, it will most likely fall somewhere in the middle but not without a continuous fight. This week's #onethingwgta is to compliment one of your colleagues. We'll give Albany a chance to clean out their inbox this week.

Thank you to everyone who provided their email. To the Building Representatives, Leaders and Executive Officers, another thank you for collecting the emails, especially Lynn Davis who spent hours compiling them. If you are on multiple email lists or hear of someone not receiving them, please let us know.

Focus on the kids and give each other a pat on the back, you've done well.

Sincerely,

John Mannion

The Member Ship is published by the West Genesee Teachers' Association-3106, P.O. Box 417, Camillus, NY, 13031-0417. Affiliated with the New York State United Teachers and the American Federation of Teachers, NEA, AFL-CIO.