

The Member Ship



The Newsletter of The West Genesee Teachers' Association

DON'T READ THIS

You might be years from retirement, you might be in your last year of teaching, you might be preparing a lesson on doubles plus one or a lesson on teleconferencing with a researcher in Brussels or having a Greasers versus Socs activity at a middle school. If any of these apply to you, don't read this. You don't have time to read this, I hear it all the time. We are all at different stages of the educational game, but the game is changing. We need 400 collective voices at West Genesee and 600K collective voices across the state to stop the attacks on teachers and public schools.



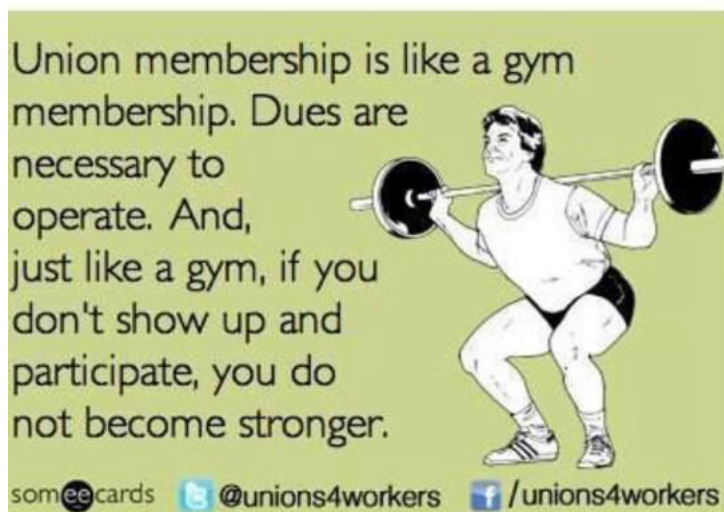
Recently the Editorial Board of the Post Standard submitted the following editorial related to teacher evaluations concluding that tougher evaluations are necessary. You in your first year, you with thirty years of experience and you chaperoning the dance are failing the children of this country.

http://www.syracuse.com/opinion/index.ssf/2014/12/teachers_get_an_easy_a_change_new_york_teacher_evaluations_editorial.html

WE HAVE LOST OUR FOCUS OF WHAT THE REAL ISSUE IS.

Evaluating teachers is not the problem. Teachers have always been evaluated, and teachers need to be evaluated. It's the evaluation process that needs work. Yet, why would there be changes made to the current teacher evaluation system, which is impartial, subjective, inconsistent and unfair, at the same time that the Common Core Standards were implemented? Illogical. Why were these standards rushed out not allowing school districts enough time to develop curriculum and lessons around them? Illogical. Why were tests aligned to these standards, and

...continued on Page 2



Stay Connected on Facebook and Twitter. Join the West Genesee Teachers' Association on Facebook, or follow WGTA president John Mannion's twitter feed.



...continued from page 1

then rushed out without the standards being piloted? Illogical. The NYS Grade 3 - 8 ELA and Math exams have also had changes to the minimum score necessary for a student to show that they are proficient in that discipline, at their grade level. These changes have resulted in fewer students scoring a 3 or 4, which is considered proficient. Raw scores on the exams are converted to scaled scores and then divided into four levels, 4 being the highest. In 2012, approximately 60 percent scored proficient (3 or 4) or above on these exams. After the cut lines were adjusted in 2013 and "Common Core questions" added, that number dropped to just over 30%. Illogical. Why are teachers are not allowed to see the exams after they are graded to analyze the skills or content that need to be addressed? Illogical. Only after teachers, parents and administrators aggressively pushed the state education department were some of the questions released. Additionally, school districts now have to overcome the impact of Gap Elimination Adjustment which has stripped millions of dollars of funding from school districts across the state. This has increased class size, causing districts to cut staff including those that serve the neediest students. Why? Illogical.

It is not teacher evaluations that are the problem, nor new curriculum, decreased funding or more testing. The problem is not that students are coming to schools with greater emotional, social, behavioral, financial or academic needs. The problem is not that schools are dealing with these students with fewer staff and decreased funding. It is the perfect storm combining all of these issues that has teachers turning their heads wondering which new initiative they need to address. Teachers still teach, they overcome and keep their focus on the students in front of them. The greater crime in all of this is that it is done under the guise of saving children from the dreadful state that public schools will impose on them. The education reform movement is not saving our children, in fact it is stealing away the joy of education, a joy that we all encountered. This chaos is intentional. Many teachers, administrators and elected officials are afraid to call this what it is, the creation of a new industry. The changes are being driven by billionaires and hedge fund coordinators that are seeking a profit, a guaranteed profit mind you.

Test-making companies will profit from the mandatory testing and selling supplementary materials to prepare for these exams. Textbook companies profit from the creation of texts and other materials which align to the new curriculum. The worst atrocity of all is that while caring, empathetic, dedicated teachers do their best to juggle all the changes imposed on them, they are demonized as the problem. How can students be successful when there is no way for them to succeed as they take developmentally inappropriate exams designed to display their failure? They cannot. Who will save these students from their own failure.....charter schools? Governor Andrew Cuomo has stated that he will, "break the last public monopoly, public education." He was once named honorary chairman by a group of charter school advocates. It is time for elected officials to appreciate the work that is done by citizens working in the field of public education, rather than attack them.

Recently Governor Cuomo has delivered a toxic and resolute notice to Chancellor Tisch and outgoing Commissioner King. Using the latest test scores and attaching per pupil spending, he casts New York public education as a failing endeavor. Keep in mind that the Gap Elimination coupled with the Tax Cap Legislation, have left schools financially crippled. The letter pushes Cuomo's long political agenda which includes:

1. Merit pay
2. Elimination of Tenure and Seniority Protections
3. Changing APPR to become a greater hammer than teacher development model

...continued on Page 3

...continued from page 2

4. Again revising 3020a (the legal term and process to fire a teacher) to 'simplify' the process
5. Increasing the probationary period for new hires and establishing a required renewable tenure cycle (say every several years)
6. Invest in and increase charter schools in NY
7. On-line course requirements for HS students
8. Taking control of the Board of Regents
9. Making changes to the current pension system

Cuomo further assails our profession by placing all those invested in public education as monopolizing blockers of true reform change. The megalomaniacal governor, through this letter, has drawn the proverbial battle lines. There is no longer a question as to his intentions. We are certain to need our 600K NYSUT membership, retirees, students, parents, and business to unite and remind our Governor that those directly connected to the education process have the answers to our maladies. I ask that you all let the governor and your legislators know that you believe in public schools.

What else can you do?

- Use this link and download the app to let your voice be heard: <https://mac.nysut.org/issues>
- Join CNYPAC for daily, informative, BRIEF emails PCleary@nscsd.org. Just send an email and ask to be added to the list.
- Follow my blog at mannionforwgta.com.
- Read Diane Ravitch's blog. <http://dianeravitch.net/>
- Provide the WGTA with your personal email. West Genesee Teachers' Association: Home Page
- Call your legislator and voice your concerns regarding the attacks on public education.
- Attend upcoming rallies in support of public education.
- Praise your colleagues.
- Stand together.
- Voice your concerns to your administrators and ask for their support.
- Engage parents and inform them of the current challenges you face.

Stay gold.

Sincerely,

John Mannion

<http://www.wgta.net>

Contact Your WGTA Executive Officers

John Mannion, President

Email: mannionforwgta@gmail.com

School: 315-487-4601

Cell: 315-333-2094

Susan Marshall, Treasurer

Email: smarshall1@rocketmail.com

School: 315-487-4615

Mary Weaver, Vice President

Email: mweave66@gmail.com

School: 315-487-4615

Jeanine Stables, Secretary

Email: jstablesster@gmail.com

School: 315-487-4653

Keith Newvine, Vice President for Grievances

Email: konewvine@gmail.com

School: 315-487-4601

Cell: 315-771-8928



How are other districts handling the issue of testing? Here's an open letter to the Fairport community, near Rochester, written by the Superintendent William Cala and School Board President Margaret Cardona:

A Message from the Superintendent and Board President

Dear Fairport community,

During the past few years, education in New York State has changed drastically. The current movement in education has led to setting arbitrary goals for children at each grade level and encourages frequent, formal measurement to determine whether or not the child is achieving at a prescribed rate.

Recently, the long-respected Gesell Institute for Child Development published an article about what parents should know about kindergarten. The article demonstrates the research that validates the importance of class sizes of 18 or fewer in kindergarten and the fact that kindergarten classrooms are diverse in terms of readiness. Some children are 4 years old and some are age 6. Some have had rich early childhood experiences through quality pre-schools and supportive families, while others have had little to prepare them for school.

We know that children develop at different rates physically, emotionally and academically. Just as some children walk at 9 months and others at 15 months, some children are developmentally ready for reading and writing at 4 years old and many, many others at ages 5, 6 and even 7. Many advanced countries, including the highest performing Finland, begin reading instruction for all children at age 7. There is too much demand in academic performance in the areas of reading, writing and computing, when many children have not yet reached developmental readiness.

When children are not progressing at these predetermined times, they are further examined to find out why not. This sounds good in theory, but the reality is that, especially in the early years, children are all at different places academically and socially. This practice of trying to get everyone at the same place at the same time not only defies over 100 years of research on child development but also causes enormous stress, anxiety and an uncalled for sense of failure. The constant testing associated with this movement has made teachers experienced in child development feel as though they are spending more time measuring than teaching.

Remaining silent is no longer an option. We need to be a voice for our children. The testing dilemma goes well beyond kindergarten. State tests are mandated for all grades 3 through 8 and there are five Regents exams required at the high school level. In order to create questions for future tests, field tests are included on the mandated 3 through 8 exams. This is the only valid manner to develop future questions for tests. This has been affirmed by the Commissioner of Education, yet New York State is planning on requiring 'stand-alone' field tests every spring.

We object to this practice of stand-alone field testing. In February, the Board of Regents will vote to make stand-alone field testing mandatory.

The Fairport Board of Education has historically opposed these field tests for the reasons mentioned. If you are concerned about over testing and the use of invalid assessments used to measure your child, there is something you can do about it. We have written to the NYS Education Department and the Board of Regents and expressed our strong opposition. You can, too. They need to hear from parents and community members as well.

Change is slow in education and we all recognize that our children grow quickly. Typically students only have one year to be a kindergartner, a third grader and so on. Think about what you want for children now and contact the Board of Regents, the Commissioner of Education and your local state representatives to tell them what you want.

Thanks for joining us in this effort.

Sincerely,



William C. Cala, Ed.D.

Interim Superintendent



Margaret Cardona

How to help: Let your voice be heard!

Send email messages expressing your concerns to New York education representatives to express opposition to field testing.

Sample subject line: "*Oppose Mandatory Field Testing of NY Students*"

Here are the representatives' email addresses:

RegentsOffice@nysed.gov;
Regent.Tisch@nysed.gov;
Regent.Bottar@nysed.gov;
Regent.Bennett@nysed.gov;
Regent.Dawson@nysed.gov;
Regent.Phillips@nysed.gov;
Regent.Tallon@nysed.gov;
Regent.Tilles@nysed.gov;
Regent.Bendit@nysed.gov;
Regent.Rosa@nysed.gov;
Regent.Young@nysed.gov;
Regent.Cea@nysed.gov;
Regent.Norwood@nysed.gov;
Regent.Cashin@nysed.gov;
Regent.Cottrell@nysed.gov;
Regent.Brown@nysed.gov;
Regent.Finn@nysed.gov;
FahyP@assembly.state.ny.us;
breslin@nysenate.gov

Send the same email message to the *New York State Education Department* before January 20, 2015, which is the public comment period related to the proposed amendment. The email address is NYSEDP12@nysed.gov.

Share this message with friends and family in other school districts to amplify the voice of opposition to mandatory field testing.

Save Thousands of Dollars—Literally

By Susan Marshall, WGTA Treasurer



You may be thinking about reducing your tax liability for 2014, or maybe your New Year's Resolution is to start saving for your retirement. One of your options is opening a 403(b) account through payroll deduction. You can access the Omni website under the Staff Resources tab on the WGCSD home page then selecting Staff Benefits/Forms. Once on the Omni website, select Participants. In the lower left-hand corner, use the pull down menu to select EMP STATE as New York. In EMP NAME type West Genesee. Click Show Details.

Now is the hard part. You need to make some decisions. The amount and type of investment(s) you choose are based on the amount of risk you are willing to take, your age, the number of years until retirement, and your current financial situation. There is information on all of the participating service provider's websites. You can use their websites to research the different types of investments yourself, or talk to a financial planner or an associate at any of the participating service providers.

Your maximum contribution can't exceed the lesser of:

100 percent of your compensation, or:

\$17,500 for the 2014 tax year (\$23,000 for employees age 50 or older).

\$18,000 for the 2015 tax year (\$24,000 for employees age 50 or older)

You can find 403(b) information at this NYS website:

<https://www.nysdcp.com/iApp/tcm/nysdcp/learning/planinfo/faqs/index.jsp>

You can access 403(b) information on the IRS website using this link: <http://www.irs.gov/publications/p571/cho1.html>

CORRECTIONS:

In last month's issue of the MemberShip, Nov./Dec. 2014, we we ran an article which included projected numbers of student enrollment, and the numbers appeared incorrect. We apologize for this mistake. Below are the correct numbers:

Below are the number of 6th grade students over the past few years, as well as projected enrollment. These figures were provided by the district on January 31, 2014

Year	WGMS	CMS	DIFFERENCE
2013-2014	231	182	49
2014-2105	244	134	110
2015-2016*	201	138	63
2016-2017*	185	120	65
2017-2018*	203	108	95

**Projected*

Spotlight On...Caroline Brackett

By Ellen Miller, Assistant Editor



One of the most rewarding experiences for a teacher is helping a student to find new abilities and strengths within her- or himself. Caroline Brackett has enjoyed guiding her West Genesee High School Dance students along their path of self- discovery in her program during the past 18 years.

“What I like best about teaching at West Genesee High School are the diverse and very special students who dance,” Brackett says. “Some are musicians, some are athletes, some are lost and searching for something. Each one has a spirit and a longing to explore that which is special and slowly being uncovered... themselves.”

Brackett’s preparation for teaching at WGHS is extensive. She was a professional modern dancer in New York City for 14 years, and a principal dancer with the New Orleans Ballet Company for four years. She attended Marymount Manhattan College for dance on a full scholarship and graduated from Hunter College in NYC with a double major in Dance and Political Science. In 1996, Brackett earned a Master’s Degree in Dance Education from Columbia University Teachers’ College, where she also taught modern dance.

In 2000, Brackett garnered the New York State Individual Artist Award, along with a colleague, and together they choreographed two pieces which were performed in several venues including West Genesee High School. In 2001-02, she attended a year-long program at the Laban Bartenieff Institute of Movement Studies where she received a CMA-Certified Movement Analyst. Her musical theater performances include Nickie in *Sweet Charity* and Kristine in *A Chorus Line* at Tulane Theater’s Summer Lyric Session, among others. At WGHS, Brackett helps choreograph the Wildcat Marching Band’s Color Guard. She trains the dance ensemble for annual musicals, and has brought several groups of students to NYC to attend performances and take dance classes with other professionals.

Her family life encompasses two sons, nine and four years old; and a four-month-old foster son, as well as her 93-year-old mother. When not working, she loves to spend time with them mini-golfing, swimming, going to waterparks and visiting friends and family. Brackett speaks highly of her students, whether they spend one year or four in the dance program. “Each one leaves with a new sense of self, a refined self-confidence and a new appreciation for dance and the performing arts. This has been the most rewarding 18 years of my life.”

Make your dental & vision care a priority!

Well, another year has passed us by and the New Year is upon us! As you take stock of the various resolutions you've made for this year, now is the time to make your dental & vision care a top priority.

Dental Care



The NYSUT Member Benefits Trust-endorsed Dental Plan features the MetLife PDP Plus Network.

The Plan offers easy to understand dental coverage that allows you to:

- Protect you and your family by providing competitively-priced dental coverage for most preventive and routine services that help promote long-term oral health.
- Choose the dentist of your choice at the time of treatment. You do not have to select a primary dentist and there is no ID card to show or referrals needed for specialty care.
- Save on out-of-pocket expenses by receiving services from thousands of participating dentist locations nationwide that agree to charge fees typically 15% to 45% lower than the average charges in your area.

With the MetLife Dental Plan featuring the PDP Plus Network, you'll receive a wide range of benefits that provide choice, savings and convenience to help make your dental health a priority.

Vision Care



The NYSUT Member Benefits Trust-endorsed Vision Plan provided by Davis Vision ensures that you are able to obtain proper eye care.

The plan offers a variety of benefits, including:

- One complete eye exam (including glaucoma testing, and when professionally indicated, dilation).
- One pair of eyeglasses (lenses & frames) or contact lenses per benefit period – paid in full according to plan specifications from participating providers.

Once you've enrolled in the plan and you're confirmed, simply call an in-network provider, identify yourself with your name or NYSUT ID number (available on your NYSUT membership card), make an appointment, and use all of the plan benefits at that visit (exam & glasses cannot be split into two appointments).

The provider's office will contact Davis Vision and verify your eligibility for benefits. There are no claim forms or ID cards needed to use the plan.

February is Member Appreciation Month!

Don't forget that NYSUT Member Benefits is teaming up with its endorsed program providers for a special month-long event in **February 2015**.

Member Appreciation Month will feature a special prize drawing each day of the month in February, including a Bose Wave Radio, iPad Mini, several



Amazon Kindles, and a variety of gift cards. The winners of the daily prize drawings will be announced exclusively on the Member Benefits website throughout the month of February.

You **MUST** be a member of the voluntary Member Benefits MAP Alert email service to be eligible for these drawings!

For more details about these endorsed programs or Member Appreciation Month, visit the Member Benefits website at memberbenefits.nysut.org or call **800-626-8101**.

More Ways to Be Active

By WGTA President John Mannion

NYS Allies for Public Education (NYSAPE), a coalition of 50 groups state-wide, has sent a letter to Governor Cuomo, responding to the questions posed in a letter from his office addressed to Commissioner King and Chancellor Tisch on December 18 and shared widely by the media.

The WGTA is not a member of this coalition, however, many of our executive officers, cabinet members and members in general agree with many of the positions that NYSAPE takes on educational issues. Some of their positions and tactics may be controversial to some but they are advocating on behalf of students and educators throughout the state. We are providing a link to Governor Cuomo's letter to Commissioner King and Chancellor Tisch, as well as NYSAPE's response to those questions. Whether you are in agreement with the Governor or NYSAPE we feel that you should be aware of the Governor's agenda and how some groups are responding.

Governor's Letter

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/250484629/Cuomo-Education-Reform-Letter>

NYSAPE's response

<http://www.nysape.org/nysape-response-letter-to-governor-on-public-education.html>

Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?

By Lynn Davis , WGTA Member

Reprinted from the June, 1999, The Member Ship (with major modifications)

When I started teaching in 1972, WGTA President Jim Ridgeway took me aside and strongly suggested I start investing for my retirement in a Tax Sheltered Annuity (TSA). At the time, I didn't know what a TSA was, nor was I thinking about retirement! Today, 42 years later and over 6 years into retirement, there isn't a week that goes by that I don't think of Jim and that valuable information he shared with me. While I did not retire a millionaire (starting salaries in 1972 were around \$7,000), my wife and I are fiscally comfortable because of Jim's advice.

I would like to pay that valuable information forward and share with you some of the insights that I have learned about retirement and money. This is especially useful information for beginning teachers because, with a little bit of planning, you might be able to retire as a millionaire!

To read the rest of the article please click here: <http://www.wgta.net/MillionRev2014.pdf>

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.

MJS Home Improvement L.L.C.

"for all of your home improvement needs"

*Doors, Windows, Decks, Kitchens, Baths,
Flooring, Interior/Exterior Painting, Additions,
Retaining Walls, Patios and Walkways*

*Insured with over 25 years of experience
free estimates*

(315) 696-8395 or (315) 559-0244

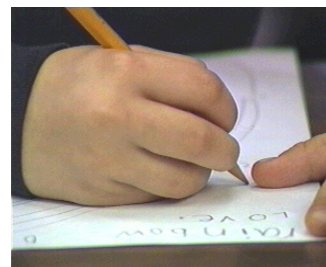
WGTA Email Directory



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.



Grant Opportunities

Fill your 'Toolbox':

Lowe's is looking for applications for its Toolbox for Education grants program. The program seeks to provide tools to help educators and parent groups through today's challenging times efficiently while providing the greatest impact, with basic necessities taking priority. K-12 public schools and public school parent-teacher groups can apply for grants ranging from \$2,000 to \$5,000. Eligible projects include, but are not limited to, the following: reading gardens, vegetable gardens, physical fitness areas, school landscaping projects, school nature trails, parent involvement centers, peer tutoring centers, playgrounds and rotating student art exhibits.

DEADLINE: Feb. 13.

CONTACT: info@toolboxforeducation.com; Toolbox for Education

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.