

The Member Ship



The Newsletter of The West Genesee Teachers' Association

Equity, Fairness, & Togetherness

John Mannion, President

Two of these three concepts we cannot control. Be it across the state or across the hall, there are a multitude of variables that impact the success of our students. I don't have to list the potential inequities that exist within grade levels, at different grade levels, or between departments, disciplines, and buildings. Unfortunately, it will never be equitable or fair. Although steps can be taken to minimize the inequities, they will forever exist.

The Common Core and standardized testing tries to provide standards and assessments that evaluate the effectiveness of instruction. NYSED tells us: "Here are the standards. Here is the test. Now it is up to you, teacher. Show us what you've got." One major flaw in that method is that we are human, our students are human, and as such, we are all flawed. How can students have such different opinions of a particular teacher? One student will say a teacher was inspiring, connected, and helpful. That same teacher may have students that are indifferent or have a negative opinion of them. Simply put, the personalities, strengths, weaknesses, and practices have a range of how complimentary each teacher-student relationship is. It is their education, the students, and whether you use direct instruction or are communicating half way across the world via the Internet, some things are going to suit one student better than another. You can give us a number or rating, but we will really never know how impactful and effective we were in June of this year or June of 2050. It is not measurable, nor should it be.

It is easy to find such inconsistencies in education. The challenge is to remember that we all are teachers and that most of us do not know the challenges which occur in the typical day of another teacher. In the frustration that comes with APPR--attempting to implement new standards, prepare for exams, complete binders, and attend more meetings--we may look for a direction to focus our ire.

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A PRESENCE ON THE WEB



In case you don't know, the West Genesee Teachers' Association is on Facebook and Twitter! In fact, Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers, personally thanked us for a mention in one of our tweets (and she really does do all of her tweeting herself, unlike other twitter accounts). We have also received several retweets and mentions from the NYSUT twitter account. Our Facebook book has over 100 likes, but we are still growing! That page is used to post articles and discussion about all things education.

To stay current and up-to-date, please like our Facebook page @ West Genesee Teachers' Association and follow us on twitter @wildcatteachers!

<http://www.wgta.net>

Spotlight...

Working with a Reading Rock Star

Ellen Miller, Assistant Editor

It's weird. We work alongside these people and we know they're great people. We know they're gifted teachers, but we don't always know their story; we don't know about the rock stars we have working among us.

Take Ann Barlow, for instance. She is an Instructional Specialist at Stonehedge Elementary, working with kindergarten through second-grade students.

Now I know something about Ann; I worked with her for many years at Stonehedge. I was privileged to have her visit my second-grade classroom and teach model lessons during our early "Early Literacy" days, so I have seen firsthand how she commands the classroom. The students are mesmerized. They love her. And she loves them.

"My motivation is those little powerhouses that show up every day," she said in an interview on Jan. 13. She could be talking about herself – full of energy, ideas, and humor. "To stay fresh, I do a great deal of reading," Ann said, "and work with my teammates to problem solve."

Ann is probably the first person her fellow teachers turn to when they need advice or ideas about instructional strategies, and it's no wonder. She has 37 years of teaching experience. She's worked in Chicago, Des Moines, North Syracuse, and for the ARC in Syracuse as well as West Genesee.

She has an undergraduate degree in speech pathology and audiology from SUNY Fredonia and a Master's degree from SU in special education. She attended Ohio State to earn a Literacy Coordinator certificate. She has taught countless students how to read or how to read better. That's what I mean when I say rock star.

And not one colleague would disagree.



Contact YOUR 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@yahoo.com
School: 315-487-4615

Katie Williams, Secretary
Email: kwilliams1126@hotmail.com
School: 315-487-4653

Keith Newvine, Vice President for Grievances
Email: konewvine@gmail.com
School: 315-487-4601
Cell: 315-771-8928



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That frustration must be directed at the failures of education reform. The rapid, unpiloted implementation of multiple practices is damaging to students. I beg you not to find another teacher to focus on who you may perceive to have it easier. Every time you think of the person who has it easier than you, replace them with the memory of how you felt at the beginning and end of each day of school just a few years ago: energized, inspired, challenged, and rewarded.

One of the worst instances of the collateral damage of APPR is the animosity amongst teachers and between teachers and administrators. This must be avoided. If one of us receives a lower rating, we all need to support that person because I have seen firsthand that the ratings are not fair or accurate.

The time to stand together is now. We must rely on each other for that support, complement each other, offer assistance, and remind each other of what is important in education. We are fortunate to work with the people that we do. Keep your expectations high. One expectation is that we support each other and remain together. It is one of the few things we can control.

As a result of all this, we are creating an APPR committee. We are looking for representation from all departments, buildings, grade levels, and special areas. If you hear of practices or guidelines that are working in other places, let us know, and if you are interested in joining the committee, the meeting will take place at the WGTA Office (25 W. Genesee Street 2nd floor), on Monday February 27 at 4pm. All are welcome to attend.

Best of luck in the second half of the school year!
John



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Advertisement

Vacation Rental in Eastwood

Small apartment in private home; full kitchen, bath, combined LR/BDR (queen bed), enclosed porch, separate entrance, easy access to highways; nonsmokers only please. \$75/night; \$500/wk. Contact: EKramer2@msn.com for more info.

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The Happenings...

Keith Newvine, Editor

FROM THE VICE PRESIDENT, MARY WEAVER

I hope you all had a restful break. I wanted to update you on three important committees in the District. We have a functioning Superintendent's Liaison Committee with pertinent issues on recent agendas. The line of communication to our Superintendent has been reinforced by this committee. The Superintendent is open to solving problems that arise from our collective concerns. We have also had agendas for our Special Education Teachers' Committee. Sue Murray and Cheryl Saidel are also open to discussing issues that occur across our district. Their cooperation in this committee, along with Co-Chair Janine Stables, has been appreciated. Our Professional Development Committee, or as contract language states, "In-Service Committee," is also up and running. This committee is looking into methods of evaluation for Professional Development in our district. Contact your buildings representatives on these committees or your WGTA Representatives with any issues. It is my sincere hope that this positive communication will continue to grow!

FROM THE SECRETARY, KATIE WILLIAMS

If you are going to be on a maternity or medical extended leave, we strongly encourage you to talk with your WGTA building leader and discuss how this may or may not affect your APPR Score. Two questions and answers about leaves are listed in the Guidance of New York State's APPR for Teachers and Principals to Implement Education Law §3012-c and the Commissioner's Regulations, which was updated on November 20, 2013. Please go to <http://www.engageny.org/sites/default/files/resource/attachments/appr-field-guidance.pdf>. The Executive Officers are working with the District to get a clear, concise, manageable policy in the books, and we encourage your input. Email any of your Officers with questions or ideas.

FROM THE TREASURER, SUE MARSHALL

The union's finances are in great shape. We are staying within our budget in order to keep dues down for our members. We have a new Reimbursement Policy ready for approval. Your building leaders have copies of this policy and you can find it on page 5 of The Member Ship. If approved, this policy will be added to our By-laws. When I attended the NYSUT Conference in Cooperstown, Helen Vickery, our NYSUT accountant, stressed the importance of having financial policies in place in order to safeguard our members' money, and this policy will do just that. You can also rest assured that all money spent is recorded with its appropriate receipts and that the bank statements are reconciled to ensure there are no errors on either side. Lastly, the Cabinet members will also be completing a mid-year audit of the union's finances as well as an end of the year audit that will get sent to AFT later this year. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to send me an email.

FROM THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR GRIEVANCES, KEITH NEWVINE

In addition to the Reimbursement Policy mentioned above, the Executive Officers also drafted an Election Policy for to be voted on and added to our By-laws and Constitution. You can find the policy on page 6 of this Member Ship or by contacting your Building Leaders. While we have not had any formal grievances to file with the District, we encourage members to continue to communicate with their respective Building Administrators and Leaders to promote a healthy work environment for staff and students. The Executive Officers continue to meet with District Administrators to discuss the various initiatives, both present and future, to ensure a collective agenda what we can all be proud of. Shoot me an email if you need anything!

Advertisement Policy

We want to advertise for you!

Advertisements in The Member Ship are provided free to West Genesee Teachers' Association Members and their family. Please send your advertisement to Keith Newvine (HS) at kone-wvine@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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Amendment Proposal Reimbursement Policy

The following amendment is proposed to be added as Bylaw XII—Reimbursement Policy

1. The purpose of this policy is to provide specific guidelines for member expense reimbursements. This policy follows accountable plan rules as defined by the IRS. As such, expense reimbursements must meet the following rules:
 - A. Expenses must be related to activities for the West Genesee Teachers' Association.
 - B. The expenses must be substantiated with original documentation within sixty (60) days of the expense.
 - C. Advances or excess reimbursements must be returned to the WGTA within one (1) week of the reimbursement.
 - D. As long as these rules are met, expense reimbursements will not be included in a member's taxable income.
2. This policy applies to any and all members who use personal funds to pay for WGTA related expenses and wish to be reimbursed.
3. In order to be reimbursed tax-free, the business expense must be both "ordinary" and "necessary" and be directly connected with or related to your responsibilities as a WGTA member.
 - A. The term "ordinary" refers to an expense connected to a common and accepted practice related to your responsibilities as a WGTA member.
 - B. The term "necessary" refers to an expense that is appropriate and helpful in developing or maintaining your membership.
4. WGTA Members should familiarize themselves with the types of expenses that are/are not eligible for reimbursement prior to incurring such expenses.
5. WGTA Members may not authorize reimbursement of their own expenses or expenses of supervisors, department heads, etc.
 - A. Authorized signers must confirm that expenses and reimbursement requests meet the following criteria:
 - i. The expense meets the IRS guidelines of a business expense.
 - ii. The travel expense was incurred while conducting WGTA activities.
 - iii. The information contained on the Expense Reimbursement Form and the documentation attached is accurate and in accordance with WGTA policy.
 - iv. Original receipts are submitted in accordance with this policy.
6. A properly completed and signed Expense Reimbursement Form must be submitted to the Treasurer within 60 days after the expense has been incurred.
7. Requests for reimbursement must be accompanied by original documentation to support the expenditure, which may include electronic receipts such as an e-ticket or e-mail receipt.
8. The Expense Reimbursement Form must be completed in its entirety to substantiate the expense and indicate the business purpose.
9. All Expense Reimbursement Forms must be signed by the individual making the request and approved by WGTA President and Treasurer.

Please contact your Building Leader or Representative or any of the Executive Officers with any questions, comments, or concerns.

<http://www.wgta.net>

Amendment Proposal
Bylaw II, Part C—Elections

The following amendment is proposed for Bylaw II, Part C—Elections.

7. All election procedures shall be in conformance with applicable State and Federal Law.
 - A. A written ballot and Member List for each building will be created and distributed to the respective Building Leaders by the Nominating Committee Chairperson at least two (2) days prior to the election.
 - B. Members are to cast their anonymous, written ballot by the end of the school day on the previously agreed upon election date.
 - C. The following protocol must be followed for casting a valid ballot:
 1. Members are to mark their ballot to denote their respective vote(s).
 2. The ballot is then to be placed in a 3 ½ x 6 ½ enveloped and sealed.
 3. The sealed ballot envelope is then to be place in a 4 x 9 ½ enveloped, sealed, and signed across the seal by the member.
 4. Members are then to sign their name on the Member List for their respective buildings.
 - D. The Nominating Committee will convene at a predetermined location to count the ballots following the procedures described below:
 1. At least one (1) committee member confirms the number of ballots by counting the total number of envelopes and the total number of signatures on the Member List.
 2. At least two (2) committee members must confirm each ballot by matching the signatures from the back of the sealed 4 x 9 ½ envelope and the Member List.
 3. Then, each of those envelopes is opened and the sealed ballot envelopes are removed.
 4. The sealed ballot envelopes should be randomized to ensure anonymity.
 5. Each sealed ballot envelope is then opened and the ballot removed.
 6. At least two (2) committee members then counts and confirms the number of votes for each position.
 7. Final counts are then confirmed by the Nominating Committee Chairperson and released to all members no later than five (5) days after the election.
 8. These procedures also govern any and all building level elections.
 9. Any violation of these procedures shall invalidate a vote or an entire election.

Please contact your Building Leader or Representative or any of the Executive Officers with any questions, comments, or concerns.



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Are you looking to book that incredible vacation you've always dreamed about, map out that important business trip you need to take or rent a vehicle for an upcoming excursion?

NYSUT Member Benefits offers a variety of endorsed discount travel programs that allow you to do each of these while saving money at the same time!

Travelzoo

Save up to 65% at top restaurants, luxury spas, museums, and other locations with one of the newest NYSUT Member Benefits Corporation-endorsed programs -- Travelzoo.

Travelzoo also offers getaways that include stays at the finest inns, hotels and resorts across the U.S. combined with exclusive hotel perks and amenities to give guests an added bonus to complete their stay. Please note that many of these deals are offered for a limited period of time.

Grand Circle Corporation

One of our newest Member Benefits Corporation-endorsed programs is provided by Grand Circle Corporation, which offers a variety of group tour vacations designed specifically for American travelers over 50 years old.

Grand Circle Corporation -- which includes Grand Circle Travel, the award-winning Grand Circle Cruise Line, Overseas Adventure Travel, and Grand Circle Small Ship Cruises -- is committed to providing international travel, adventure and discovery opportunities that offer impactful and intercultural experiences.

NYSUT members & their family members can either save \$100 per person on their trip or travel for free if they gather at least 10 paying travelers for a group tour.

Wyndham Hotels & Endless Vacation Rentals

If you're on the hunt for savings, look no further than the NYSUT Member Benefits Corporation-endorsed travel program offered by Wyndham Hotels & Endless Vacation Rentals.

NYSUT members enjoy savings of up to 20% at nearly 7,000 participating hotels among 17 hotel brands with Wyndham Worldwide and savings of 25% at more than 200,000 vacation rentals in 100 countries with Endless Vacation Rentals.

Wyndham Hotels has the right hotel for you at the right price -- whether it's an upscale hotel, all-inclusive resort or something more cost-effective.

With Endless Vacation Rentals, NYSUT members can save on beautiful resort condos, villas, homes, and cottages that provide space and flexibility ideal for families and groups of friends traveling together.

Car & Truck Rentals

Do you need to rent a vehicle as part of your next trip? NYSUT members can get discounted rates on passenger car rentals with the following companies: Alamo, Avis, Budget, Enterprise, Hertz, and National. You can also receive 20% off local or one-way truck rentals from Budget Truck Rental.

Learn more about these endorsed programs -- including how to access discounts, unique website codes and website links -- by contacting Member Benefits at **800-626-8101** or visiting memberbenefits.nysut.org.