

The Member Ship



The Newsletter of The West Genesee Teachers' Association

CONGRATULATIONS RETIREES!

Laurie Albanese

Beth Capizzi

Leonide Connelly

Tom Donahue

Betsy Eibert

Donna Graham

Mary Heil

Karen Kotlar

Sandy Ladd

Sue Potrikus

Christine Rust

Jim Vermeulen

Jacklyn Young

Thank you for your many years of dedicated service and best of luck on your well-deserved retirement!

What Do I Stand For?

[John Mannion](#), President



We come to work every day. We work hard. We care—and we come back for more. We all have our stories about our battle in the trenches, and some of those pages have yet to be written. Not too long ago, I sought the advice of a very knowledgeable man, and he reminded me of something we all know: We are all dealt a hand, but it is how you play that hand that makes all the difference. That sentiment couldn't have more truth than it does in public education.

The other night I was watching the movie *Moneyball* with my family. The movie chronicles the story of Billy Bean, the General Manager of the Oakland A's, as he rebuilds the team with decreasing finances. He seeks the advice of others in his pursuit of finding positive qualities in players

that have been cast off by other teams. As you may know, each player eventually finds his niche and a special chemistry develops, leading to victory after victory. One moment that stood out for me was a scene where Manager Art Howe, played by Phillip Seymour Hoffman, questions having to work under a one-year contract. He feels disrespected and disappointed by a lack of support from his superior, and this contributes to a lack of confidence in his managerial duties as he coaches under a guise of fear. As I finished the movie, I realized that success can only be achieved by looking forward rather than over your shoulder, and I couldn't help but think: Is this what it feels like to be a teacher sometimes, especially in a charter school?

Here at Home

Over the decades, parents have made a decision to move within the West Genesee Central School District because they know that their child will be in a supportive environment that challenges them. Those parents may have selected this district due to its high rate of success, the variety of college level courses offered, the outstanding Fine Arts and Athletics programs, or a combination of all of these wonderful opportunities. In addition, our district has served the needs of students with a variety of learning styles for many years. West Genesee has kept class sizes relatively low while offering a plethora of fine arts experiences that enrich the education of many of our students. Although we face the challenges of decreasing enrollment and continued mandates from the state and national levels, we need to assure that class sizes remain small by, in part, holding on to full time teaching positions. Additionally, maintaining our current number of teachers and support personnel assures that we can still offer the variety of courses that we have in the past and provide assistance to students who need help reaching their educational goals. Additional benefits include providing programs that meet the individual learning styles of each student while drawing new families to the district. All of these important components make our schools one of the major reasons why parents chose to move into our district.

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Stay connected this summer by following us on Twitter or liking our page on Facebook. Click on pics to see how you can stay informed!

<http://www.wgta.net>

Born to Teach

[Ellen Miller](#), Assistant Editor

People go into teaching for different reasons. Some want their summers off, some desire stability, and some are just born to teach – it's a higher calling they can't ignore. **JoAnn Macaluso**, sixth grade teacher at West Genesee Middle School, is one of the select few in the last group.



JoAnn has taught in the West Genesee School District for 45 years. "It seems like I just started a few years ago," she says. She began her career as a student teacher at Onondaga Road Elementary School and had a full time job by the time she was done.

After a year and a half in fourth grade, JoAnn moved to sixth grade at Onondaga Road, and then moved to West Genesee Middle School where she remains to this day. She chose to teach Social Studies. "To me," she says, "Social Studies is like one big movie. I try to engage my students by using different techniques like storytelling, role playing, projects, TV shows, creative writing activities, and class discussions."

To keep teaching exciting and interesting, JoAnn thinks it's important to stay current "so that you don't become a dinosaur." She enjoys taking part in collegial circles and workshops to learn about the newest and best programs.

"The best part of teaching is getting to know the students," JoAnn says. In the beginning of the year, she buys posters of the latest

movies, TV shows, sports figures, musicians, and celebrities that her students would be into. "I especially enjoy helping them grow into independent learners. It's wonderful to see them over the years and see who they have become."

Outside of school, JoAnn enjoys going to lunch and dinner with friends, whirlwind trips to California to visit family, and sees many, many movies. She is a season ticket holder to "Famous Artists." And she's active in "a great Bunco group." She loves to travel and would like to travel more in the future to see some of the places she has taught about.

"She gives attention to things that matter most: making connections with students, having a willingness to take risks and try new things, listening to people, working for what is right for students even if it isn't necessarily convenient for the adults, and having fun at this incredible profession every single day," says former student and mentee Steve Dunham, who is now JoAnn's principal at West Genesee Middle School. "JoAnn is a mentor, a leader, a teacher's teacher, and a true friend to all that know and work with her," says Dunham. "She is blue and gold through and through, and quite simply, she's the best!"

It's clear that despite her 45 years of experience, JoAnn is far from jaded or burned out. In fact, she has these words of wisdom for new teachers: "Teaching is an exciting profession. Get involved in the newest programs, be prepared and open for many changes over the years, and keep changing with the times." Most of all, she says, "Have fun, fun, fun." Clearly, JoAnn has had fun every minute of her 45 years of teaching, and so have her students.

The Privatization of Public Education

Unfortunately, traditional public schools like ours are meeting greater challenges in providing enrichment and support partially due to a shift of funding towards charter schools. Charter schools are public schools with a few private twists. They lack the level of oversight from state education departments. They have a bottom line that is not the success of their students because they are for-profit institutions, and these schools do not have to follow the provisions of some educational law. West Genesee and other traditional public schools are obligated to take on all children within their borders. Contrarily, charter schools can select which students can attend. Students in need of greater support, and therefore greater expense, are not guaranteed admission. Some charter schools even prevent admission of new students after a certain grade. Traditional public schools accept all students, some of which are credit deficient, which can have a major impact on their graduation rates. Charter schools are not obligated to accept these students and can dismiss the students that are failing. This practice inflates graduation rates and other rates of success, such as college acceptance, advanced degrees, or standardized test scores.

Moreover, charter schools can use uncertified teachers to instruct students and have their teachers work a longer school day or school year. They can fire their teachers and administrators at will, without due process, and charter school teachers do not gain tenure and sign one year contracts.

Despite all the disparity, there are success stories around every corner in our public school system. Let's keep class size down, maintain our electives and extracurricular programs, and continue to meet the increasing challenges that public schools face. The wheel has already been invented. The West Genesee model works. Different does not equate to better, especially when there are two sets of rules.

Please go to [here](#) to watch a video about the importance of our continued unity.

Good luck the rest of the year and enjoy your summer!

John

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Just so you know, teachers
don't "have the summer off".

They just do a year's
worth of work in
10 months.



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The Happenings...

FROM THE VICE-PRESIDENT, [MARY WEAVER](#)

In April, I participated in the NYSUT Representative Assembly in New York City. A new leadership was voted in and the entire Assembly approved new policies taken on by NYSUT. One vote included a no confidence vote against Dr. King as Commissioner of Education in New York.

Most impressive to me were the fellowship and connections among locals from across the state. The locals across New York banded together to show support against the policies connected to the changes on curriculum and continuing inconsistencies in many evaluation systems in districts. It hit home that we are all in this together for the support of teachers and students in NY.

The Superintendent's Liaison Committee has been functioning well since the start of the school year. There is great representation, especially from our elementary schools. Topics have included access to schools after hours, the new entry systems coming your schools, and instructional support in all our schools. Committee members do not hesitate to discuss topics in support of members' concerns in all our buildings. I continue to be impressed and proud to represent the members in our local and be part of this important contractual committee. To see the minutes from our last meeting, go to <http://goo.gl/UVMPS1>.

I am also co-chair of the West Genesee/Syracuse University Teaching Center Directing Council and am enthusiastic at the connections made through this council. It allows for significant professional development, from Collegial Circles to Action Research, and further connections with Syracuse University. Also, there have been connections to programs and workshops on Singapore Math to support the Common Core shifts. Many teachers took advantage of these opportunities and presented at Collegial Cafe on May 8th and at the annual leadership conference at Drumlins on the 27th of May. There are a lot of good things happening at the Teaching Center!

FROM THE TREASURER, [SUE MARSHALL](#)

The union is fiscally sound. How are your personal finances? With tax day having just passed, have you thought about your deductions? If you had to pay this year, you should consider changing your withholdings for federal or state or both. Are you saving for retirement? Yes, we get a pension, but will that be enough to sustain you? People are living much longer than ever before. Think about supplementing your pension with a 403b account. You can get a direct withdrawal each paycheck. Finally, do you owe on a student loan? You may be able to get part of it forgiven. Get information for four types of loan forgiveness programs at <http://www.tuition.io/blog/2013/01/4-student-loan-forgiveness-programs-for-teachers/> or simply search student loan forgiveness on your favorite search engine.

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The Myth of Having Summers Off

from <http://www.edutopia.org/summers-off-myth>

"So, you're a teacher, huh?" says the umpteenth Joe Know-It-All. I know the tone, and I know what's coming next: "Must be nice having summers off," he sneers. I don't know what mythical job this guy thinks I have, but I have never had a summer off.

And I'm not sure who these teachers are who are supposedly lying around all summer sipping sangrias without a thought of prepping for the year before them. But I'm not one of them. In fact, is there really a "them"?

Bottom line is that every year since entering teaching, I have seen some of the busiest summer months of my life.

This is for many reasons:

- I work summer school. Hey, who doesn't need the moolah? And it's not just about the hours I spend with students; it's also the hours I need to spend prepping for them. I develop the lesson plans and set up my learning environment for a whole new slew of students that I'll have for only a month or so.
- I attend or lead department and curriculum meetings scheduled during July and August.
- I develop and improve the curriculum that may, or may not, have worked over the school year. Summer is the only chunk of time to reflect and tweak those lessons.
- I build a library of new lessons, because, let's face it, I sure as heck don't have a lot of time to do that during a year packed full of high-energy, tightly paced, overscheduled days.
- I learn the new technology or new curriculum programs I've been given. Once again, summer is the only time to learn them. Case in point: my interactive whiteboard. I received mine in the fall, right at the start of school. I have been learning it as I go, but what with that little full-time gig I have that's called teaching, I have had time to explore only the tip of the iceberg. Summer will, hopefully, be my chance to revisit the training modules, explore the online assistance, create better flip charts, and further integrate the board.
- I train new teachers.
- I explore my own professional development. After all, those units also bump me along on the pay scale. And currently, my only option to get a raise is by spending my own money first, right?
- I lick my wounds. It's true. By the end of the year, teachers are limping toward "vacation."

And do the math: If you teach summer school, you have only the weekend between the end of school and the beginning of summer school to take a breath. By the end of summer school, you have only three weeks or so until the start of the new school year. And those weeks are filled moving your students' desks from the pile in the middle of the room, putting up your bulletin boards, shoving shelves back into place, and planning, prepping, preparing, and scabbing over.

Back to my pal Joe Know-It-All: I really should've asked him whether he wanted to spend his year doing what I do. I spend my days, my hours, and my minutes existing at the pace of a middle school student. Frankly, I deserve some time off after that. But the fact is, not only do I not get it, I don't know how I would ever function with it.

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After all, thinking like a teacher never ends. And when you love teaching, you can't just turn it off at the end of June.

You still continue to search for books in every store to replenish your classroom library. When a big news story comes out, you still seek out the *New York Times* (1) to use as a primary resource to refer to in upcoming years. You pick up props and realia (2) to supplement your lesson plans. You attend conferences or seminars to learn new strategies in order to fill in gaps that might exist in your current curriculum units.

The fact is, we need the breaks we get in order to do the job that we do ten months of the year. And the other two months are spent doing other parts of the job.

Civilians don't realize the toll teaching takes on a person -- on their energy and on their appearance, even. You ever see the pictures of a president before his term began and after his term ended? Well, teaching is kind of like that. Adult humans aren't built to spend their days with hundreds of children each day. It takes a lot out of an adult to have their antennae up so high, so often, and so consistently.

And yet, we have troops of people willing to return to the classroom year after year, with no summer break, just for the honor of calling themselves teachers.

The least those civilians can do is acknowledge that while their children are at summer camp, giving them a break from parenting, we intend to do what we always do: be teachers.

KUDOS!

POSTED ON WESTGENESEESCHOOLTEACHERS.ORG ON MAY 28, 2014/UPDATED ON MAY 30, 2014

Debbie Quick, Stonehedge Elementary School fourth grade teacher, and East Hill Elementary School speech teacher **Sandra Ladd** are recipients of a 2014 NYS Senate "Teacher of Excellence" Award. They received notification of this recognition in a letter from New York State Senator John DeFrancisco last week.

The New York State Senate Teachers of Excellence awards program recognizes and honors those teachers who are making a difference in our community. They will be presented the award by the senator at a ceremony to be held on Thursday, June 5 at the Jordan Elbridge High School Auditorium.

Congratulations on this honor!

Congratulations also goes out to **Jeanine Stables**, Special Education teacher at Onondaga Road Elementary School! Jeanine was appointed as the West Genesee Teachers' Association Secretary, replacing Katie Williams, at the May Cabinet meeting. Jeanine will take over July 1st!
Good luck Jeanine!

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