



News & Updates January 16, 2018

Tragedy at NRHS

There really is no other way to describe the events at New Rochelle High School last week as anything other than heartbreaking. The murder of Valaree Schwab was tragic, a devastating loss to her family, her many friends and the entire school community. Compounding the terrible loss was the fact that her assailant was also a student at NRHS. It's hard to make sense out of this sad situation that has ended one young life and destroyed two families.

In the days since the the incident, there have been many more questions than answers about how this could have happened. While police investigators continue to seek out clues that will shed some insight on what led up to the awful encounter, many staff members, parents and students have voiced questions and concerns about security and safety inside and outside of our high school.

There are unanswered questions about why timely and accurate email and robo-call notifications were not immediately forthcoming, and serious concerns about the lack of a “lock-out” or a “lock-down” at the high school once the attack took place and the attacker was still in the vicinity.

But there are two questions that have been raised most often since Wednesday: the first is about whether or not NRHS has an “open campus” and the second concerns the residency status of the accused attacker.

From a televised press conference last week, one could be left with the impression that the Board Policy regarding NRHS campus *allowed* students to leave school property during lunch, and that now, in light of the harrowing events of Wednesday, that policy will now be under review. That impression, however, is **not at all accurate**. Board Policy 5520, adopted by the School Board in 1989 is clear and unambiguous:

“It is imperative that the school district be able to provide constant and appropriate supervision of all its students during the entire school day.

*Because of the school district's inability to control events that occur off-campus, New Rochelle High School students are **required***

***to adhere to the regulation of remaining on school grounds
from their arrival at school until they are dismissed after
their last class of instruction each school day.***

Now, to be fair, however, this regulation has been unenforced for many years. Hundreds of students leave the high school campus on any given day for lunch or during an unassigned period. This is no secret to anyone in the school district or in the community, especially those who are driving or walking on North Avenue near the high school during lunch hours.

Superintendent Brian Osborne and and NRHS Principal Reggie Richardson seemed to struggle in explaining this contradiction. The long standing practice of students leaving school during the day was described accurately, and the policy that it conflicts was acknowledged as outdated and needing to be updated. Yet a clear declaration that NRHS was a closed campus was notably lacking and the cause of some consternation.

In the school district's policy manual, there are a number of policies that were last adopted in 1989 and we are in the process of updating this as well as other outdated policies to bring them in line with current practice." I didn't attempt to obfuscate or misrepresent anything. The long standing practice was described accurately, and the outdated policy that it conflicts was acknowledged as outdated and needing to be updated. Given the explicit language of the regulation, it was disconcerting to listen to the Superintendent's and Principal's responses that seemed to suggest the opposite was true. The indisputable fact is that the official policy of the Board mandates that New Rochelle High School be a closed campus. They made no attempt to make that point clear during that press conference.

The issue of whether or not New Rochelle High School should be "closed" or "open" is not really the question here. That question should be reviewed by a team of administrators, teachers and other staff members, parents, law enforcement, students and community members.

What was a cause of concern -- and some frustration -- on the part of staff members was that the answers offered by the Superintendent to and Principal seemed to obfuscate the fact that NRHS, on paper at least, is a closed campus. Whether deliberate or not, the appearance of attempting to obscure the facts surrounding the painful events of Wednesday undermines the school district's credibility.

The second question many have asked is why a young person from Yonkers was enrolled in New Rochelle High School. As most school employees know, there are numerous reasons why a child with an address outside New Rochelle may be legally entitled to enroll in New Rochelle's

schools. Custody agreements, foster care placements, laws regarding the education of homeless students and a host of other reasons may allow a child with an address outside of a particular school district to attend school in that district. As much as some may want to know the particular circumstances that allowed the assailant to attend the high school, privacy laws like the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) prohibit school districts from making such information to the public.

Amidst all of the clamor about residency and the call for residency audits and rumors of hundreds of students “illegally” attending our schools, staff members should be aware that New Rochelle has one part-time and four full time attendance teachers who diligently follow up on any referrals on students who are believed to not to be eligible to attend New Rochelle’s public schools. This involves home visits at varying hours of the day -- even early morning or mid-evening, as well as reviewing and verifying documentation that certifies the student’s eligibility to attend school here.

Finally, I can’t help but note that in this school year, there have been several student deaths at NRHS. But with each sad loss, the staff of the high school has risen above their own grief and proven themselves to be a source of comfort and consolation to each other, the affected families and to their students, most of all. Along with social workers and psychologists from around the district who offer their professional and healing presence, our colleagues at the high school have offered their students support and sympathy to deal with the sad losses they have suffered. Their compassion and professionalism is a testament to their whole-hearted commitment to our students and our community.

Contract Negotiations

The FUSE Negotiating Committee has been meeting regularly since November and is almost finished putting together the package of proposals for contract negotiations with the school district.

At each meeting, proposals submitted by members of the FUSE Leadership Council, the FUSE Building Representatives and individual members have been discussed and a final set of approximately 15- 20 proposals will be decided upon soon.

It is expected that the first negotiating meeting with representatives of the School Board will take place in early February.

The FUSE committee is chaired by Michael Chwick (NRHS). Members of the committee are Sandy Annunziata, William Coleman, Vic Cristiano, Martin Daly, Lauren Lanigan, Ann Marie Manganiello, Cheryl Smith, Tania Syriaque and Paul Williams.

Keep an Eye on This:

Who is Janus? And why should you care?

Source: NYSUT United

Here's the thing about existential threats: You have to take them one at a time.

A year and a half ago, the U.S. Supreme Court decided for the defendants in *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*. In a 4-4 deadlock, the court upheld decades-old precedent that says those who benefit from union representation must pay fair-share fees. We won! Right?

Well, the 4-4 tie was, of course, precipitated by the death of Justice Antonin Scalia.

Get ready for the big rematch.

The Supreme Court in September agreed to hear *Janus v. AFSCME Council 31*, a case that again challenges fair-share fees and threatens public sector unions. *Janus* culminates decades of attacks on working people by corporate CEOs, the wealthiest 1 percent, and the politicians who do their bidding.

So, how much do you know about the next battle over "fair share?" Take our quiz:

1. Who is *Janus*?

- a. A film distributor known for introducing many foreign classics to American audiences.
- b. A whiny television character who dated Chandler Bing on "Friends."
- c. Mark Janus, a child support specialist at the Illinois Department of Healthcare Services, who benefits from union representation but does not want to pay his fair share for those benefits.

2. *Janus v. AFSCME* aims to:

- a. Limit the freedom of working people to join together in unions.
- b. Make it easier for workers to join together for the purpose of collective bargaining.
- c. Allow consumers to cut the union label off of their pillows and bedding without fear of prosecution.

3. People keep talking about *Abood*. What is that?

- a. A Boston-based, high-end clothing designer.
- b. A side dish made with beans and rice served in Turkish cuisine.
- c. The 1970s case in which the Supreme Court determined it was fair and reasonable to expect people who benefit from union representation to pay something for it.

4. Who really initiated *Janus*?

a. Someone named Harris V. Quinn.

b. New York City Executive Assistant District Attorney Jack McCoy.

c. Billionaire Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner in an overt political attack on public sector workers. He was later found to have "no standing" to bring suit. Undeterred, Janus, was then used to sign on instead.

5. Who said: "At the end of the day, your union fights to protect your salary, pensions and rights in the workplace."

a. NYSUT President Andy Pallotta

b. Gov. Andrew Cuomo

c. Mr. Met

ANSWERS:

1. C 2. A 3. C 4. C 5. A