

# The Member Ship



The Newsletter of The West Genesee Teachers' Association

## The Impact of Gap Elimination Adjustment

By John Mannion, WGTA President



Due to the Great Recession and housing market collapse at the end of last decade, New York State has deducted from each district an amount of aid known as Gap Elimination Adjustment. This deduction was used to help the state fill its revenue shortfall that resulted from the impact of an economy that was spiraling downward. Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) sounds great, there must be a gap that is going to be filled. The problem is the gap is in the state budget, our funds are assisting in adjusting that budget and as a result multiple programs end up being eliminated. The West Genesee Central School District budget for 2014-2015 was approximately \$77 million dollars. We would have received an additional 2.7 million had it not been for GEA. More shockingly, this is the smallest amount that has been pulled from the budget in the last five years. Imagine the amount of technology, workshops, staff and programs that could have been added if those funds were present. GEA started in 2010-2011 and since that time our district has lost just shy of \$18 million dollars, like the commercial says, "18 million dollars." Do you think this shortfall has been impactful? Absolutely! Let's take a look at what has transpired over those five years within the district.

**A decrease in elementary Early Literacy TA's**  
**The loss of full-time Librarians in Elementary Schools**  
**Art teachers either split between buildings or reduced from full time**  
**No full-time ADA-PEP Counselors**  
**Writing Program cuts**  
**Elementary and Middle School Gifted Program cut**  
**Booster Club funding Modified Sports**  
**Middle School and High School students riding the same bus**  
**Reduction to the Dance Program**  
**Inability to pay advisors of clubs (recently restored)**  
**Larger Class Sizes**  
**Fewer Electives**  
**Printers removed from Elementary Classrooms**  
**Stipends frozen for coaches and fine arts advisors**  
**Loss of computer and keyboard instruction in middle schools**

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Stay connected!

Do you know how to "like" us on Facebook?  
Make sure you have a Facebook account. Once you're logged into Facebook, search for West Genesee Teachers' Association. Then click the "Like" button.

I'm sure if you put your mind to it, you could add to this list. The staff and students of West Genesee Central School District have had to adjust, rather sacrifice, to meet these demands. Some of the items above have been restored or they were gone before GEA impacted the district. However, we could have added programs or restored some of these programs or positions. District Administration is forced to develop budgets that address the issue of decreased state funding. Difficult decisions have to be made that not only impact instruction and enrichment, but create resentment among those that have their programs cut.

For the students currently enrolled, THIS IS THEIR TIME. Their time to experience the joy of learning, to build the skills, knowledge and memories that will remain with them long beyond graduation. Some of those experiences and possibilities are forever lost. Even tax dollars can't buy back time.

<http://www.wgta.net>

### **Spotlight On...Kathy Annan**

By Kelly Chambala, WGTA Newsletter Editor

Every now and then, after hundreds of lessons taught, scores of grades delivered, and hours of professional development covered, a teacher gets the gift of a lifetime. Knowing that her or his teaching has inspired students to want to learn more. For West Genesee High School science teacher Kathy Annan, not only has she heard back from past students who have chosen to pursue studies in chemistry, biology, and medicine, but even her own daughter has followed in her scientific footsteps and is currently working on her doctorate in physical therapy at Ithaca College. "My greatest accomplishment is raising a daughter who loves science," writes Annan.

In her 33rd year of teaching, Annan can look back at a full and productive teaching career, which began at Moravia Junior-Senior High School. She taught 8th grade science for 13 years in Moravia, spent one year at Auburn High School, and then made the move to West Genesee, where she has been inspiring students for the past 19 years.

She studied at SUNY Plattsburgh and Alfred University, and is certified to teach biology, chemistry, and physics. She also holds National Board Certification in Adolescent Science education.

Accomplishments are many in Annan's career, including being chosen as a New York State Master Teacher. Staying current in the field of science is imperative to being able to teach her lessons well, and Annan has attended several institutes for that reason. She has participated in the Cornell University Institute for Biology Teachers, and has attended the University of Massachusetts at Amherst Nanotechnology Institute.

Keeping up physically is another accomplishment Kathy Annan can add to her list, as she trains with the Kitty Hoynes Cycling Club. She has also competed in 5 marathons.

Kathy Annan has been married to her husband James Annan for 31 years, and says it is the students who truly inspire her to keep teaching each day. "Also, because of the teachers I work with at WG and through the master teacher program who are successful yet full of new ideas and still constantly trying to improve."

## Your Health Care

*By Susan Marshall, WGTA Treasurer*

Most of us have a basic knowledge of health care. As it becomes more complicated, the WGTA officers know we need to have more than just basic knowledge. Mary Weaver and I attended a workshop at the NYSUT Fall Leadership Conference entitled "The Latest on Health Insurance."

We learned that even though we are part of the BOCES Consortium that negotiates health care with Excellus, not all districts pay the same amount nor do we have the same benefits. Prescription costs and co-pays are still negotiated at the district level thus changing the cost of insurance for both the district and the employees.

Not all districts are part of the BOCES Consortium. Some negotiate their own contracts with insurance companies; others are self-insured. There are pros and cons to all of the options. The strength is obviously in numbers. The more people who are part of a contract, the lower the price. Right? Not always. Insurance companies audit their claims to see how many claims are being processed and at what cost to the insurance company. Typically, the higher the average age of those insured, the higher the number of claims and the higher the cost to insurance companies. Therefore, districts with a lower average age of employees will cost insurance companies less.

Be a wise consumer. Don't be afraid to ask questions of your doctor or their staff. Make sure you are getting quality healthcare, but forego unnecessary tests and exams. Some procedures and tests need pre-approval. Check with Excellus when in doubt. If a claim is denied, call Excellus at 1-800-499-1275 and ask for an explanation. If the doctor's office used the wrong medical code, they can change the code and resubmit. If you're still having a problem getting paid, you can dispute the denial. Keep records of all paperwork and the names, job titles, and phone numbers of everyone you speak with regarding your denial. If the insurance company won't budge, you can file a complaint with the state regulatory commission. Persistence pays off.

Visit the Milliman Report Blog at <http://www.healthcaretownhall.com/?tag=milliman-medical-index#sthash.CONcFYpT.dpbs>

### Contact Your WGTA Executive Officers

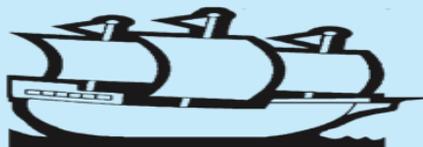
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## Current Issues

By [John Mannion](#), WGTA President

### PD HOURS, CERTIFICATIONS and SERVICE CREDIT

Teachers that received their Professional Certification (in 2007 Permanent Certification was no longer granted) are required to complete 175 professional development hours every 5 years. It is the responsibility of the teacher to make sure that they are completing these hours and have documentation of these hours. The link below is from the district website.

[http://westgenesee.org/District/StaffResources/District\\_StaffResource\\_TeacherTAAdmin.cfm](http://westgenesee.org/District/StaffResources/District_StaffResource_TeacherTAAdmin.cfm)

Any teacher receiving a new certification should make sure the school district is aware of the change. DASA training is a new requirement of certification as of July 1, 2013. Six hour DASA training workshops are available through BOCES and other organizations.

<http://www.highered.nysed.gov/tcert/certificate/dasa-applicant.html>

Teachers that have a student teacher, student observer, volunteer for a Teaching Center/Directing Council Committee or lead a workshop should be sure to document that credit using the Edmodo page for the Teaching Center. Search for the document "Converting Service to Voucher Credits" which is in the "Individual Voucher Applications" folder.

### ONLINE HS

An issue of concern brought up recently involves high school students in a non-traditional setting. There are currently 19 students taking high school courses through Western Suffolk County BOCES, also called Online HS. These students are credit deficient, do not work well in a structured, typical school setting, or are on homebound instruction. The state regulations allow a school district to use BOCES to offer programs and courses to students that the district may not be able to offer. Our local BOCES has been a wonderful resource that has helped many students pursue areas of study beyond what can be offered in a conventional setting. This provision of the regulations was part of a different time before distance learning became more accessible. I believe the intent of the BOCES provision of the state regulations was to assist students in training towards a specific career choice which would normally culminate in additional courses taken in college.

This provision of the regulations is now being used to allow WG Central School District students to take courses online, instructed by teachers connected to the furthest BOCES from us, still within the confines of New York State. The district has purchased 25 passwords, allowing students to recover or accrue credit over the course of this year. The passwords were not only purchased but all of them have been activated, allowing students to enroll in courses. The WGTA and District Administration are currently in negotiations to assure that if our teachers can teach these courses, we will. You may ask, is it legal to have our students taught by NYS Certified Teachers across the internet? Yes, it is. Do we think we, the teachers of this district, can best serve the West Genesee population? Absolutely we do. I ask that teachers at the high school continue to ask questions about this program and take an active role in the future implementation of an online program at West Genesee. There is NO substitute for the in-person connections between student and teacher in a brick and mortar classroom. Our world is not a virtual one. At a time where we are drifting further apart, it is more important than ever for students to experience the reality of a typical school day. Collaborating with other students and seeking the guidance of adults happens best in person. School is a chance to put the technology away and build on the characteristics that make a good citizen, a good neighbor and good friend. Technology is a wonderful resource to assist in our learning, but the content is secondary. It's how we work with each other that is the most important lesson of all. That lesson can only be taught, and learned, face to face.

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## Getting Back to Work

*By Keith Newwine, Vice President for Grievances*

More and more, the teaching profession is getting attacked. Whether it is Time Magazine attacking our due process rights (<http://time.com/3533556/the-war-on-teacher-tenure/>) or Governor Cuomo referring to our work is a “public monopoly” (<http://goo.gl/zmMFDO>), the constant onslaught on our livelihood from all directions sometimes makes it difficult to get back to work. The minute any of us tell someone we are teachers, the comments begin to fly which undermine what we do on a daily basis; it is frustrating, I know.

We need to get back to work. We need to close our doors and return to what matters: the students. I’m tired of thinking of a student as a number--as an LAT score which determines my effectiveness. I’m tired of spending any of my instructional day, no matter how little, preparing students to be a good test takers. I’m tired of pushing papers to appease the demigods in Albany. I’m tired of letting people into my room to watch me work, all in guise of professional development when they are really just checking things off of a list. I’m tired of missing opportunities to work with and for my students because I have a meeting to go to. I’m tired.

(No. You didn’t write this article, but I bet it sounds familiar, doesn’t it?)

Don’t get me wrong, I still love going to work every single day, but there are times when I know that I am doing something because I have to--not because it is what is best for students. Well not any more. I am going to take my own advice, taken from Mahatma Gandhi, which I tell students all the time--”Be the change you want to see in the world.”

It is this charge which has reinvigorated my teaching this year; it is this charge which compels me to continue to fight for West Genesee teachers’ rights on a daily basis.

This year, I wrote my Local Achievement Target and Student Learning Objective with 100% passing or mastery rate, respectively. I know what you are thinking, “That’s crazy! I would never do that, and you told us to set reasonable goals for our SLOs and LATs!” To me, it’s simple: I would rather be an “Ineffective” teacher who expects great things from my students than a “Highly Effective” teacher who expects little. I know what’s going to happen: I’m going to bomb either my SLO or LAT--and you know what? I couldn’t care in the least.

There is no piece of paper anyone can give me that says “Effective” that will make it okay for me to let me students down. There is no label that can be placed on me which will make me feel bad for inspiring a student to make a difference in the world. There is no test that I will ever be forced to give that will ever wash away the memory of the smile on my students’ faces when a light goes off--that memory is mine, and they can’t take one away.

No matter your slant or opinion, let’s make a promise to get back to work that gives our students the chance to become the great young men and women who will change the world. Let’s forget the drama--amongst ourselves and with the “Big Brother” of Albany--and most importantly, let us remember the words of Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzia: “One book, one pen, one child, and one teacher can change the world.”



## REDISTRICTING

Many of the staff members at West Genesee Central School District are not only employees, they are also taxpayers and parents of children that attend school here. A few years ago a redistricting committee convened and an outside consulting firm was hired to explore potential changes in how we determine which schools district residents will attend. This helped in balancing the populations of the three smaller elementary schools. Unfortunately we have not seen the same positive impact at the middle level. Future projections show that there may be an even greater disparity between the middle schools over the next few years. Below are the number of 6<sup>th</sup> 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*	120	185	65
2017-2018*	108	203	95

*\*Projected*

These changes have left empty classrooms at Camillus Middle School and packed hallways with teachers moving to multiple rooms during the day at WG Middle School. It has caused staff to leave CMS and move to either WGMS or one of the elementary schools. This has impacted the continuity in each building. Stability in staffing is a key element in taking on new challenges in education and having people who have perennially worked together makes for a productive working and learning environment. Listen to your middle school coworkers and their concerns about the population in each school. Employees of both schools need your support in moving forward. The WGTA wishes to advocate for, and support, all of our members that are affected by these changes in population. The issues in each building are unique, but still challenging in their own way. We need your input in addressing limiting the disparity in population and troubleshooting the problems that the disparity leaves us with. I urge you to stay together in a collective voice that advocates for all the students of WG.

### **VP Update**

*By Mary Weaver, WGTA Vice President*

I attended the NYSUT conference in Cooperstown in October. While there, I attended the insurance benefits conference and the retirement workshop. We gained a lot of information regarding insurance for the upcoming negotiations. More information will be forthcoming. We also have information in booklets about retirement. If you need more information we can send you an informative booklet. There seems to be a lot of good information for those thinking about retiring. Just email me at [mweave66@gmail.com](mailto:mweave66@gmail.com).

Superintendent's liaison has met and the minutes will also be forthcoming. Keep the agenda items coming. There is always lively conversation at these meetings. I appreciate the input and your members surely do also.

Teaching center information includes collegial circles and action research applications are starting to come in. I know that our members will have great ideas to research and develop.

## Protecting your family for the future



It's important that your family members are financially protected throughout their lives. Have you stopped to consider what would happen to your spouse and/or children if you were to suddenly pass away?

**Would your loved ones be able to continue to live in their home, pay regular bills and maintain a comfortable lifestyle?** What about your final medical, burial or funeral expenses?

And it's not a question of just having a life insurance policy... make sure you have *enough* coverage to provide for your family. Find a plan that's right for you and your specific financial situation.

### ***Plans designed specifically for NYSUT members***

As NYSUT members, it makes prudent sense to look into the Term Life or Level Term Life Insurance Plans endorsed by NYSUT Member Benefits. Both of these plans offer specific terms and rates designed exclusively with NYSUT members and their families in mind.

The **Term Life Plan** is available for NYSUT members and their spouses/domestic partners under age 85. If you are under age 65, you can apply for coverage from \$25,000 up to \$1 million at premiums negotiated specifically for NYSUT members.

Meanwhile, the **Level Term Life Plan** offers terms for 10, 15 or 20-year periods. The premium that you start with is projected to remain the same and the benefit amount will not decrease throughout the term – regardless of your age or health condition.

You can enjoy an **additional savings of 15%** on published rates if your local association has approved automatic deductions from your paycheck or pension check and you sign up for that benefit.

To learn more about the Member Benefits-endorsed Term Life or Level Term Life Insurance Plans, call **800-626-8101** or visit [memberbenefits.nysut.org](http://memberbenefits.nysut.org).

## Member Appreciation Month is coming!

NYSUT Member Benefits wants to start the New Year off right with a celebration of the entire NYSUT membership.

**These offers will continue into February 2015, which has been designated as Member Appreciation Month!**

It's the strength of the more than 600,000 NYSUT members that makes it possible for Member Benefits to offer approximately 50 endorsed programs & services designed with you in mind.

This special celebration will be kicking off in January 2015 with the arrival of your new membership cards. This mailing will include a variety of special offers only available to NYSUT members.



This will be a month filled with a series of special prize drawings for items donated by our endorsed program providers. To be eligible for these drawings, all you need to do is be a participant in our voluntary MAP Alert email service.

We will announce the winners of these special prize drawings exclusively on the Member Benefits website throughout the month of February.

For more details about this exciting event, visit the Member Benefits website at [memberbenefits.nysut.org](http://memberbenefits.nysut.org) or call **800-626-8101**.



For information about contractual endorsement arrangements with providers of endorsed programs, please contact NYSUT Member Benefits. Agency fee payers to NYSUT are eligible to participate in NYSUT Member Benefits-endorsed programs.

Nov./Dec. '14

# 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](mailto: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.

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## E-MAIL DIRECTORY

Join the **FREE WGTA E-mail Directory**. There are currently over 100 WGTA members, retirees, West Genesee staff and WG parents in the Directory. We share our E-mail 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, E-mail address, and WG status (school name / retired / WG staff / WG parent) to Lynn Davis at: [davis@twcny.rr.com](mailto:davis@twcny.rr.com)

E-mail addresses are only shared with other members in the Directory.



Have your photo highlighted in the next MemberShip!  
Send it to  
[kchambala@gmail.com](mailto:kchambala@gmail.com)

*We wish you and your family a safe and joyful holiday season!*

## 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](mailto:info@toolboxforeducation.com); Toolbox for Education

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