



# THE MEMBER SHIP

The Newsletter of The West Genesee Teachers' Association <http://www.wgta.net>

## Process, Trust and Transparency

**Process** is defined as to deal with someone or something using an official, established procedure. Ask someone in the military, process is important. Process often slows the process, ironic. However, it provides a greater level of assurance that decisions and actions are made objectively, thoughtfully, without shortcuts or favoritism. Process may decrease efficiency, but it increases trust.

**Trust** is defined as a firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability and strength of someone or something. Without it, we cower into a shell. We revert to a default setting that limits our creativity, our ability to challenge ourselves and our willingness to allow true vulnerability and transparency.

**Transparency** as it relates to organizations is defined as a lack of hidden agendas or conditions, accompanied by the availability of full information required for collaboration, cooperation, and collective decision making. The only way to achieve true transparency is to follow the process.



The only way to truly trust something or someone is if they, or it, is transparent. The way to ensure transparency is to follow a process that is standard, understood and easily monitored.

~ John Mannion, WGTA President

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## **A Seat at the Table** *by Mary Gotham, Treasurer*

Recent events have made clear the value of true transparency and the importance of ensuring the WGTA has a voice in the operations of West Genesee Central School District. In her article, "Why Teacher Unions Are Good for Teachers--and the Public," Diane Ravitch emphasizes the importance of unions, not only for protecting teachers' rights and supporting teacher professionalism, but for the role unions play in checking administrative power. After attending the last couple of BOE meetings, it has become apparent to me that even though our board alluded to change moving forward, our BOE president seemed reluctant to build a cooperative, collaborative partnership with your WGTA officers.

Your WGTA officers believe that the leadership practices and culture at West Genesee has allowed for and contributed to the recent scandal. Diane Ravitch warns that when leadership assigns, rewards, punishes and removes employees that question the status quo they put students and the community at risk (Ravitch). It is time for WGTA to ensure all stakeholders have a voice in decision making, beginning with our own. A needed systemic change in hiring and decision making practices will promote learning and success in student achievement.

The WGTA is asking that our voice be heard. Teachers, social workers, school psychologists, nurses and counselors have valuable insight into promoting progress and higher achievement for student success. We can contribute to this success by bringing our years of experience and expertise to all of the decision making forums. Token participation is not enough. We must have a seat at the larger tables. According to Rubinstein and McCarthy, when districts, schools, school administrators and union leaders form partnerships, students benefit. "Building strong relationships that facilitate collaboration among educators and is focused on teaching quality and educational improvement for students... leads to innovation and an infrastructure for problem solving as a means to improve student achievement" (S. Rubinstein and J. McCarthy). WGTA wants to exercise your voice by having a greater role in decision making. The WGTA wants to assure that a genuine, collaborative relationship with administration is a true partnership.

Saul Rubinstein and John McCarthy conducted a study that looked at a number of public school organizational designs. Based on the results of their study, "Reforming Public School Systems Through Sustained Union-Management Collaboration," they offer the following conclusions and recommendations for improvement:

**Systems.** Education reform and improvement must be seen as a systems problem.

**Formal structures.** Shared decision-making in school improvement must take place at both the district-level as well in the schools themselves.

**Quality.** Successful union-management collaboration in public school reform must focus on substantive areas affecting the quality of teaching or student achievement.

**Networks.** The development of peer-to-peer networks for improving teaching provides teachers with better skills, but also with a social network that can continue to support them and the ongoing exchange of ideas and techniques necessary to increase instructional quality.

**Culture.** In addition to formal structures at the district and school level, districts must develop strong cultures of collaboration that inform approaches to planning and decision-making, as well as hiring decisions by school boards and superintendents.

**Learning organizations.** Shared learning opportunities are critical to building and sustaining long-term collaboration.

**Stability.** The longevity of all of these cases has benefited from the long-term tenure of union leaders, superintendents, or both.

**Board of education.** Collaborative systems and management styles require the full support of school boards.

**National union.** Districts and local unions can benefit greatly from the technical assistance, support,

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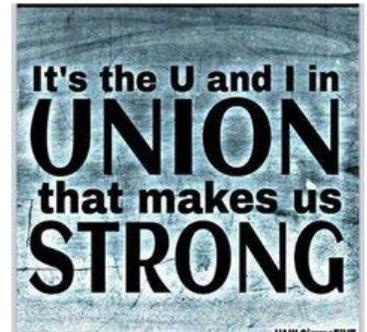
training, and resources available from their unions at both the national and state levels.

**Community.** Community support is critical to institutionalizing collaboration.

It is obvious to your WGTA officers that change is necessary. The kind of change we envision will not come automatically or easily. In order to enact change, it is vital that WG School District's teachers, social workers, school psychologists, nurses and counselors have a voice. As Diane Ravitch states,

"When teachers--who are on the front lines of implementation--are left out of the decision-making process; if there is no "buy-in", if teachers do not willingly concur with the orders handed down from on high, then [change] cannot succeed.... Only in an atmosphere of mutual respect can administrators and teachers produce the kind of partnership that will benefit students. And administrators cannot achieve this collaborative atmosphere unless they are willing to talk with and listen to the leaders chosen by teachers to represent them" (Ravitch.)

WGTA's strength relies on the participation of every member. It is your voice added to those of your peers that will affect necessary change. Your support was evident by your attendance at the past two BOE meetings. As we work towards changing systemic procedures, we need you to show your support by continuing to attend BOE meetings. We need your support when presented with new directives and when asked to pilot new initiatives. Talk to each other. Talk to your representatives. Stand with your union leaders and members when administrative decisions are not in the best interest of children or negatively impact working conditions. Your WGTA officers will work to bring your voice to the table. It is incumbent on each of you, not only to buy-in to our "partnership" vision, but to add your individual voice to our collective voice. It is through unity of purpose and solidarity of actions that you will ensure we are given a seat at the table.



## WGTA Seeks Individuals Interested in Running for Board of Education



The WGTA wants you... to spread the word! Three of the nine Board of Education positions are up for election in May of 2019. The WGTA is recruiting, interviewing, and endorsing individuals that are interested in running for the Board of Education. Running for an elected office can be a bit intimidating. We are here to help guide potential candidates through the process, making it as painless as possible. Getting on the ballot is as simple as completing a short form and obtaining only 30-40 signatures. Many of our teachers live in the district and have children or grandchildren who attend West Genesee Schools. We all have a stake in the education of our children, some of us as both teacher and parent.

If you know someone who lives in the district that is knowledgeable, professional, and most importantly passionate about the education in this community, please have them email me at [mannonforwgta@gmail.com](mailto:mannonforwgta@gmail.com). Organizations prosper most when there is a triangular set of checks and balances in place. At West Genesee, this triangle includes District Administration, the Board of Education, and educators that work in the district. WG teachers, social workers, school psychologists, nurses and counselors have a great deal of perspective and

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information that we can provide to the Board of Education members when making critical decisions. We will continue to encourage board members to maintain open communication with West Genesee educators, especially when deliberating and determining board actions. We appreciate that BOE members dedicate their time and energy to ensure a sustainable future for the children of this district.

We continue to extend an invitation to all candidates and BOE members to meet directly with some of our teachers. To the current members we will not only show our appreciation for their service but will also provide insight on how policy or program changes can impact the classroom. Part of our responsibility as an organization is to help assure that concerns of our teachers reach the board members. Beyond meeting with our current board members, we know that building partnerships with new candidates can bring a fresh set of ideas and philosophies that are necessary considering the ongoing changes and challenges in education. If you are one of those folks or you know someone who is, please consider running for Board of Education. Your community needs you!

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**A Way Forward** by Mary Beth Smith  
Intervention Specialist, WGM  
WGTA Vice President

**How are you feeling, my WGTA colleagues?** It is a difficult, dark time of year for me.

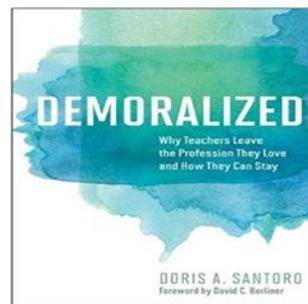
Daily doses of Vitamin D used to help me keep the blues at bay, but in the last several years, it has not been enough. Since the adoption of the NYS CCLS, mandated high-stakes testing and its negative effects on my students, the relentless pace required to address the standards, which precludes professional discretion in many ways, and APPR, I began to think: "I am not able to help my students like I used to be able to. I mustn't be doing a good enough job."

I have worked with my smart, committed colleagues to make the new math program work for our students. I have taken more courses on helping struggling students succeed academically and how to provide greater social/emotional support to students. I feel frustrated, exhausted, angry, sad. I take blood pressure medicine, antacids, drink less of my beloved coffee. I must be burning out. I started Googling "Teacher Burnout."

Perhaps, I am not feeling burnout, but rather, I am demoralized! My quest brought me to the work of **Doris A. Santoro**, former teacher, now a professor of Education at Bowdoin College. She spent over ten years interviewing experienced teachers to understand why passionate, committed professionals leave. **I encourage you to listen to her interview on Harvard's Edcast:**  
<https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/18/09/harvard-edcast-demoralized-not-drained>.

*"Teachers can certainly burn out," Santoro argues, "but many are more likely to be demoralized by the direction of public education and the effect it has had on their profession. High-stakes testing, standardization, the stripping of teacher autonomy – these and other trends have eroded what Santoro calls the 'moral rewards' of teaching" (Walker).* This statement is so freeing!

We must shift the vocabulary from burnout, which places the blame on the individual, to demoralization, which focuses on the problem of policy mandates, legislative decisions, and school practices as our source of anguish. Santoro states, "If the focus is on the individual, then the problem is not systemic or institutional  
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or policy-based....It comes down to, 'If you were more *this* way, this wouldn't be a problem.'" Self-care for teachers has become the only solution (Walker). This sounds familiar to me. We celebrate learning! We work smarter, not harder! Let's Step Around the World! Yoga, anyone? Santoro suggests, this "is an insufficient and entirely too passive way to address the problems teachers are encountering today" (Walker). I am not alone in feeling maxed out. I miss the gratifying sense that what I am doing daily is right and just. I miss the moral rewards of teaching. I want them back. Focusing blame on us, as educators, is demoralizing.

"Trust and Transparency" for me, is a demoralizing phrase. The lack of open communication and trust within our district has contributed to a high profile separation with our former Superintendent, as well as still-unresolved issues in administration in some buildings. Rather than internalize the recent scandal, we can reframe the external events with new resolve. It is not the quality of our professional practice that has diminished. It is the systemic deficiencies that contribute to the demoralization of West Genny's professionals. Now my thoughts are: What program, procedure or process changes must be made to help our students succeed?

So if, like me, you have been feeling the demoralizing effects of these challenges, what do we do? In the Harvard podcast, Santoro suggests **we begin by defining what's most important to us**. Think back to your youthful ideals: Why did you go into the profession? Now, add in the wisdom of your experience: **What does, doing your job well, look like? What is getting in your way?**

**What else can we do?** We can let our students know that we are on their side, despite all the demands upon all of us. We can share our concerns with our administrators and union leaders. We can recognize and support our co-workers as they advocate for what we know is right. We can talk to our union representatives about our concerns. We can attend West Genesee Board of Education meetings and WGTA meetings and PTA meetings. We can fill out the Strategic Plan survey to advocate for our students' success. We can fill out the BOE survey and state the qualities that are necessary in our new Superintendent. We must find ways to enact what is most important. **We must talk to those who will hear and respect our concerns, our colleagues in the WGTA.** We are here for each other.

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## Dates to Remember

- Highway Cleanup  
4/27/19 10am – 12pm

- Dinner of   
6/26/19 6pm – 9pm

Taking reservations now for Dinner of 100,  
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# 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 Shana Michel (WGHS) at [shanamcaffrey@gmail.com](mailto:shanamcaffrey@gmail.com). The only other advertisements that are run in “The Member Ship” are those provided by NYSUT, AFT, or the AFL-CIO.

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.



## Benefits designed exclusively for NYSUT members

NYSUT members and their loved ones have access to dozens of endorsed shopping, travel & personal programs available through NYSUT Member Benefits, including discounts on hotels & vacations; car & truck rentals; international group tours; sports & concert tickets; theme parks & attractions; and more.

Whether you are participating in one of our shopping/entertainment/travel offerings; auto, homeowners or life insurance plans; or financial or legal services, NYSUT members have the "Power of the Union" behind them ready to serve as their advocate.

### **The following is just a sample of the endorsed programs available to NYSUT members:**

**Bose** -- NYSUT members receive special educator pricing on high-end, high-quality electronics such as music systems, headphones and bluetooth speakers. You must contact Bose toll-free at 877-709-2073 and mention "educator pricing" to receive this exclusive pricing.

**Orlando Employee Discounts** -- NYSUT members save up to 30% on unforgettable Orlando, FL excursions to Disney World, Universal Studios and many other attractions.

**Grand Circle Travel** -- NYSUT members can enjoy a number of unique travel deals on international river cruises and other travel opportunities with Grand Circle's small ship cruise tours, river cruises and land tours.

### **Member Appreciation Month is back!**

One of our most popular annual events is set to return this February. The 2019 Member Appreciation Month celebration will be filled with a series of prize drawings for items donated by NYSUT Member Benefits and our endorsed program providers -- including gift cards, iPads, Echo Dots and more!

As a MAP Alert member, you are eligible to win prizes every single day throughout the month of February.

All MAP Alert members are already entered to win; if you have colleagues who would like to be eligible to win, they simply need to sign up for our MAP Alert service on the Member Benefits website. Prize winners will be listed daily on the Member Benefits website.



To learn more about Member Benefits-endorsed programs & services, visit [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.