



THE MEMBER SHIP

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

President's Notes - Michael Perkins

You're Not Crazy! This Is a Stressful Year!

We were all hopeful that this was going to be the year that everything went back to normal. Unfortunately the Delta variant of the Coronavirus had other plans. On top of the CoronaVirus we have new mandates that are wreaking havoc on our ability to adequately fill teaching, substitute, and bus driver positions. In the classroom, many of us have had to manage large groups of quarantined students and find ways to provide at home learning. With all of these challenges piling up many of us are feeling the stress and anxiety build.

So, how can we deal with this? What can we do to manage the stress of a return to "normal" plus COVID?

- Share your concerns with your union leadership. We're here to help you. But please be nice. Our union representatives are not punching bags.
- Use a mental health day if you need it. (It's okay to use sick/personal days)
- Take a minute to breathe. Go outside for a walk. Do something fun with your colleagues.
- Stop pretending that things are normal and give yourself permission to pause.

I know that some of you are experiencing stress and anxiety related to building leadership. At the time of writing this newsletter, I am actively sharing suggestions and concerns with the building principals so that they have an understanding of what we expect from them as a faculty. You can read the article I'm sharing with principals on the next page of this newsletter. We need to pause as a learning community, be allowed to take a breath, and work to support each other through another very difficult year.

I ask all members to please share your concerns with **union representation**. We have a good working relationship with both the administration and the Board of Education. Together we can try to address your concerns.

This past weekend I attended the Regional President's Conference where we met with NYSUT leadership to learn about what is happening around the state that affects teacher unions. Here's a quick summary of the main points from the weekend.

- Everybody across the state is dealing with both a teacher shortage and sub shortage. This is forcing districts to use TAs, AIS teachers, as well as special education teachers. NYSUT sees this as a larger problem caused by the bash the teacher campaign started by our previous governor. Teacher preparatory schools have seen a 50% reduction in their admissions. COVID is putting an added strain on the system. We have asked NYSUT to address this problem with the state. NYSUT is also allocating resources to address the teacher shortage by providing local unions money to start future teacher clubs in their high schools.
- The best news from NYSUT was that the state has guaranteed increased funding to schools for the next 3 years. Our request to the district will be to use that funding to adequately staff our schools. We need more ELL and special education teachers along with reduced class sizes.
- Governor Hochul has ended the Cuomo administration's hiring freeze. This means that NYSED can start hiring more staff. This will increase processing of certifications and allow NYSED to become a service organization rather than a compliance organization. Overall, NYSUT sees a far more promising future for teachers with this new administration.
- Several locals identified that there has been a problem connecting to the TEACH system website. Many teachers have tried to connect to their accounts and have been blocked from entering the portal. NYSUT is looking into this problem. If you have any problems accessing the TEACH system and need assistance, please contact your building leader and we will see what we can do to help you.
- NYSUT identified that educators are facing many new challenges this school year and across the state everyone is struggling. NYSUT's Education and Learning Trust has developed professional learning to assist educators to meet these challenges. <https://elt.nysut.org/getting-back-on-track>

Three Things Leaders Need to Do for Teachers This Year

[Stephanie Burroughs](#) through [ASCD](#)

This past year and a half (and more) has been a test for district leaders in steering their teams through a crisis. Since the pandemic began, we've worked twice as much and twice as hard to keep teaching and learning moving. Meetings became virtual and the ground moved beneath our feet multiple times as we adapted and adjusted to new safety regulations and newly identified needs or gaps in our thinking. The

pandemic has taught us the true value of collaborative leadership and the reality that we cannot be successful without a high-functioning team by our side.

Our teachers have met every challenge and change with gusto, operating on fumes but maintaining a brave face for their students. And while over a typical summer they have time to reflect and think about what they want to do better or differently, at the end of this summer, our teachers were still navigating the trauma of this past year and a half. This is not your usual reset; our teachers are unsteady.

There is uncertainty in what the 2021-2022 school year will bring, and an uneasiness over how effective we were during virtual learning. As leaders, we have to support our staff and acknowledge that our teachers might still be in survival mode.

Here are three things leaders should be thinking about as they continue their work this year:

1. Pump the Brakes

We cannot assume that our stakeholders are prepared to jump back into the change conversations that were happening in 2019. The pandemic has been more than a bump in the road; we went off road, and in some cases, without four-wheel drive. Getting back on our route won't be simple. Instead, we have to hit pause on change, check over our work, and analyze how the pandemic has impacted prior plans.

This current school year we need to engage in [reflective practice](#). We should take the time to reflect thoughtfully and plan future work in a way that is mindful of the impact the pandemic has had on teaching and learning. Our job as leaders is to support our team in that process while resisting the urge to make disruptive change when we're not even in the COVID-19 clear. When collaborating with our teacher teams, we should be thinking about what we need to do for our students and how the pandemic has changed the way we can support them. Teachers and leaders should be working together to make these decisions, assess their effectiveness, and adjust their approach throughout the year. This cycle of reflection and improvement must be our primary focus.

2. Lead with Love

[Education needs compassionate leadership](#). We need to be checking in with our staff consistently and spending our time listening instead of asking. Taking our work online and at a distance has created a transactional relationship between our teachers and our leaders. We've become accustomed to laying out expectations and asking our teachers to complete tasks to meet them. Leading with love means approaching this year with our teachers differently.

Leaders should focus on rebuilding supportive relationships with teachers. We can start simply by asking our teachers, "How are you?" and "What do you need?" But we must also think about our pacing of initiatives. We do not need staff to be stressed or anxious about taking on new professional learning this year—we need healthy and happy teachers who are comfortable with what they can accomplish and committed to continuing the great work of educating our students. Leaders should consider increasing teacher professional time by giving back meetings or making time for professional learning communities during the school day. Show your teachers you appreciate them by giving them the gift of time.

3. Honor the Work

This school year is about picking up the pieces. We have to acknowledge the challenges our communities have been facing. Honoring that work means giving our students and teachers the space they deserve to recover from these disruptions.

District leaders should look at gaps in curriculum and create a multi-year plan to support unfinished learning. According to [TNTP's Acceleration Guide](#), supporting students on unfinished learning will take districts 3-5 years. To keep our students progressing, it is recommended that gaps in curriculum are folded into grade-level content as prerequisite skills rather than having teachers backtrack or remediate them. This process is easier said than done; it will require teacher teams to consistently collaborate on curriculum planning to ensure that all students have access to grade-level content with meaningful connections to unfinished learning from prior years. Valuing the magnitude of this task will require ensuring that teachers have time and resources available to them to plan for curriculum and instruction that addresses unfinished learning for all students.

Picking up the pieces after experiencing trauma is a slow and unpredictable process. Some teachers will be energized and fare reasonably well; others will be exhausted and overwhelmed by additional tasks. And there will even be some who present as well-adjusted but are actually close to giving up—experts at hiding their trauma. When we hit pause, lead with love, and honor the scope of the work on our teachers' plates, we gain trust and build community. Leaders must remember that happy and healthy teachers create happy and healthy schools.

NYSUT ENDORSED CANDIDATES - FALL 2021



The poster is a blue and white graphic with the following sections:

- Greater Syracuse Labor Council** logo (AFL-CIO) with website www.cnylabor.org
- ENDORSEMENTS 2021 ROUND 1&2**
- VOTE NOV 2ND**
- TOWN RACES**
 - Camillus Town Board Christopher Hess
 - Camillus Town Board Lauren Hardee Chase
 - Camillus Town Board Maureen Oneil
 - Camillus Highway Kenneth Stoneburg
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 - DeWitt Town Board Sarah Lee Hood
 - Manlius Town Supervisor John Deer
 - Manlius Town Councilor Katelyn Kriesel
 - Manlius Town Councilor Sara Bollinger
 - Manlius Town Councilor William Nicholson
 - Salina Supervisor Kathy Zabinski
- MADISON RACES**
 - Oneida Ward 3 City Councilor James Coulthart
 - Madison County Board of Supervisors Oneida Wards 1-2-3 John Nichols
 - Madison County Supervisor Wards 4,5,6 Oneida Lewis Carinci
- COUNTY RACES**
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 - County Legislator District 04 Stephon Williams
 - County Legislator District 06 Diane Dwire
 - County Legislator District 07 Mary Kuhn
 - County Legislator District 08 Christopher Ryan
 - County Legislator District 09 Peggy Chase RN EdD
 - County Legislator District 10 Heather Allison Waters
 - County Legislator District 11 Ryan Suser
 - County Legislator District 12 Sunny Aslam
 - County Legislator District 13 Kenneth Bush, Jr.
 - County Legislator District 14 Shanelle Benson Reid
 - County Legislator District 15 Bill Kinne
 - County Legislator District 17 Linda Ervin
- SYR CITY RACES**
 - Syracuse Mayor Benjamin Walsh
 - Syracuse Common Council President Helen Hudson
 - Syracuse Council District 1 Jennifer Schultz

Food For Thought

TIME

Why Everyone Is So Rude Right Now

Belinda Luscombe

September 2021 was a bad month for manners. On the 21st, [a woman pulled a gun](#) on servers at a Philadelphia fast food restaurant when they asked her to order online. On the 16th, [several women from Texas pummeled](#) a hostess at a New York City family-style restaurant. A few days prior to that a Connecticut mother was investigated for slapping [an elementary school bus driver](#) and that same week, a California woman was [charged with felony assault](#) for attacking a SouthWest airlines flight attendant and dislodging some of her teeth.

Of course, it's the people-have-lost-their-everloving-minds incidents that make the news, but they are also a reflection of a deeper trend; Americans appear to have forgotten their manners, especially with those whose job it is to assist them. Lawyers are reporting ruder clients. Restaurants are reporting ruder clients. Flight attendants, for whom rude clients are no novelty, are reporting [mayhem](#). (FAA fines for unruly behavior have already exceeded a million dollars this year.) So legion are the reports of discourtesy that some customer-facing businesses have been forced to play Miss Manners.

Visitors to the Indiana University Health system are now greeted by a sign that reads, "Please take responsibility for the energy you bring into this space ...your behaviors matter." The Cleveland Clinic uses what it calls behavioral contracts when patients' behavior is continually difficult. The clinic issued nine such contracts in 2017; so far this year, it's issued 111.

It's not just health systems. The Rhode Island Hospitality Association, after an emergency meeting in July, devised a [Please Be Kind Toolkit](#) for its members, including downloadable posters. The Massachusetts Restaurant Association launched a billboard campaign to remind patrons that restaurants are still coming back up to speed, so things might move a bit slower than usual. Nevertheless, people have been so rude that at least one restaurant in the area felt obliged to [close for a day](#) to give its employees time to recover from the impoliteness of the guests.

Some people may have thought that, having been prevented from mingling with other humans for a period, folks would greet the return of social activity with hugs, revelry and fellowship. But in many ways, say psychologists, the long separation has made social interactions more fraught. The combination of a contagious, life-threatening disease and a series of unprecedented, life-altering changes in the rules of human engagement have left people anxious, confused and, especially if they do not believe the restrictions were necessary, deeply resentful.

Our ‘fight’ instincts are triggered

“We’re going through a time where physiologically, people’s threat system is at a heightened level,” says Bernard Golden, a psychologist and the author of *Overcoming Destructive Anger*. This period of threat has been so long that it may have had a damaging effect on people’s mental health, which for many has then been further debilitated by isolation, loss of resources, the death of loved ones and reduced social support. “During COVID there has been an increase in anxiety, a reported increase in depression, and an increased demand for mental health services,” he adds. Lots of people, in other words, are on their very last nerve. This is true, he adds, whether they believe the virus is an existential threat or not. “Half the people fear COVID,” says Golden. “Half the people fear being controlled.”

Heightening the anxiety, the current situation is completely unfamiliar to most people. “Nobody expected what happened. We didn’t have time to prepare psychologically,” says Cristina Bicchieri, director of the Center for Social Norms and Behavioral Dynamics at the University of Pennsylvania. Then, just as it seemed like the danger had passed, other limitations arrived; staff shortages, product shortages, longer delivery times. “People think, ‘O.K, now we can go shopping and go out,’ and they find that life is not back to normal,” Bicchieri says. “There is an enormous amount of frustration.”

This is an atmosphere which can ruffle even normally very calm people, or in which very slight infractions can set off those with less of a handle on their emotions. (And with an overloaded mental health care system, those who need help may not be getting it.) Golden had a client who grew so irate when the car in front of him did not respond quickly enough to a green light that he followed it home and went and knocked on the driver’s window. “I said to him, ‘In Chicago? Are you nuts?’” says Golden.

Power dynamics have shifted

It’s not a coincidence, psychologists say, that much of the incivility occurs towards people who are in customer service industries. “People feel almost entitled to be rude to people who are not in a position of power,” says Hans Steiner, emeritus professor of psychiatry at Stanford University. “Especially when they come at them, and remind them of the fact that they have to do their piece to get rid of this pandemic.”

The workers who are now in charge of enforcing rules are traditionally regarded as caregivers and servers. The power dynamic has been completely upended. And of course, it’s always easier to punch down. “It’s displaced anger,” says Bernard. “They’re angry about other things but they take it out in those encounters.”

It wasn’t like Americans were exactly overlooking their differences before the pandemic. Some researchers point to the increase in crude public discourse, both from political leaders and in online discussion—which encourages outsized emotions—as the gateway rudeness that has led to the current wave. “We don’t filter ourselves as much as we used to,” says Bernard. “On the internet, people feel like they can say anything.”

They no longer guard themselves. And I think they transfer that lack of filter into public life. I think from leadership that we've had in the last number of years, that's only been more encouraged."

But it goes deeper: Impolite interactions are not the only thing that's on the rise; crimes are too. "We're seeing measurable increases in all kinds of crimes, so that suggests to me that there is something changing," says Jay Van Bavel, associate professor of psychology and neural science, and co-author of a book on social harmony, [The Power of Us](#), that came out in September. He suggests the reasons for the rise in both are structural and profound; America has lost sense of social cohesion, as a result of the widening gaps between the wealthy and working class. "The more inequality you get—which has gotten really bad in the last few decades—the less of a sense of cohesion there are across socioeconomic classes," he says. "That's something that if that's not addressed is going to continue to cause turmoil."

The rules were rewritten

There's some international agreement that the situation may not just be one where people have forgotten their manners, or are out of practice because everyone had to stop shaking hands for a while. Matteo Bonotti and Steven T. Zech, both of the politics department at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, who wrote [Recovering Civility During Covid 19](#), conclude that even if the people were initially bamboozled because they had to communicate using a new set of rules, that soon wore off.

"At the very beginning [of the pandemic] people just didn't know how to be polite," says Zech. It was hard to communicate a smile, and it became necessary to avoid rather than embrace people. But after a certain point, the unintentional rudeness became intentional and deliberate. "It's meant to call attention to what they see as this kind of unjust policy, some discrimination, or some infringement on some other right," says Zech. In the minds of some of the individuals, snapping at the flight attendant is not rude, it's civil disobedience.

If the rash of bad behavior is not just short-term impatience with the unique situation and actually a symbol of something much deeper, then unwinding it will be more difficult than merely giving flight attendants more training on what to do with mid-air contretemps, although that can't hurt. Meanwhile psychologists suggest that people slow down, breathe out more slowly and lower their voices when encountering difficult social situations or irate people so as not to make any situation worse. "All of anger management," says Bernard, "involves pausing." Unless, of course, the traffic light is green.



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Check out what your union membership has to offer!

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Carnival Cruise Lines
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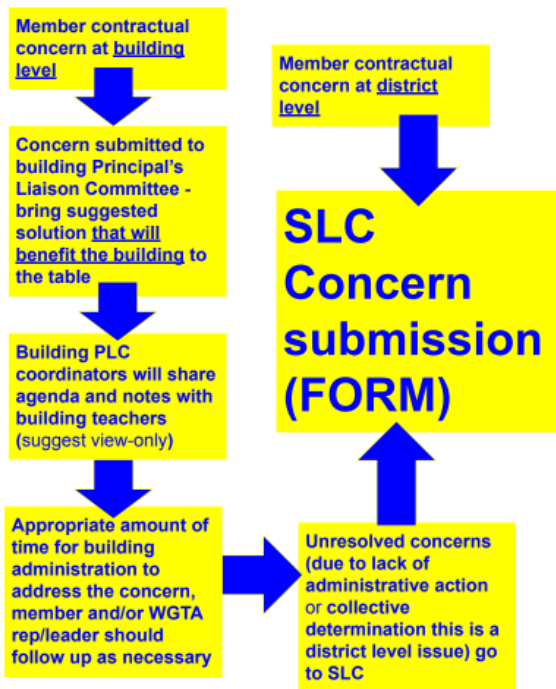
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Effectively Dealing with our Concerns and Grievances

Building level *Principal's Liaison Committee (PLC)** meetings are an essential process for the efficient functioning of our individual buildings. (note - we are planning to change the name of this process to Building Concerns Committee)



"The purpose of the committee shall be to assist in the implementation of this [Teachers' Contract] Agreement [between WGCSD and WGTA], as well as to aid in the development of building practices and act as a sounding board for the faculty members of the building."

~WGTA Contract

Classroom teachers have every right, and are encouraged, to bring issues related to the classroom or other concerns of a teacher directly to the appropriate building administrator. Specific concerns not being properly addressed, following a teacher's conversation with administration whenever possible, should be brought to the attention of building reps and leaders. These concerns can then be brought to the attention of individual building administrators and proper

resolutions can be considered. Administrators will be given time to process a response to the concern insofar as possible and provide a solution in writing and/or verbally in an open forum as determined collectively by building administration and WGTA building leadership.

Regular opportunities to share questions and concerns shall be provided by WGTA building leadership and regular meetings (in person, virtually, or asynchronously using collaborative services) should be afforded to all teachers. Following conversations with administration, this is the next step towards addressing building level matters.