

The Member Ship



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

It's Unanimous! WGTA Members Ratify Contract 346-0, WG Board Approves *By John Mannion, WGTA President*

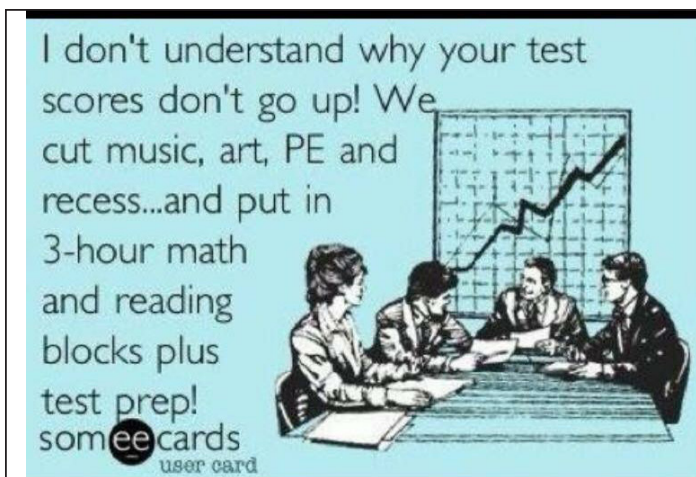


The 2016-2020 contract between the West Genesee Teachers' Association and the West Genesee Central School District included many favorable changes for current and future members. The percent increases ranked among the highest on average, if not the highest, across the county. The increases to salary, in chronological order will be (2016-2017) **3.8%**, (2017-2018) **4.0%**, (2018-2019) **4.1%** and (2019-2020) **4.25%**. An additional benefit that was gained was extending maximum amount of coverage of district-provided health insurance from 7 years to 10. All future retirees still receive 5 years of free insurance coverage, paying 0% of the premium. All employees also can pay a small percentage of the premium for coverage in years 6 and 7. They can continue that coverage through year 10, however they must use 6.25 unused sick days for every month of coverage. One month of coverage once "cost" 10 sick days under the old contract.

A voluntary sick bank was also negotiated. It was the position of the WGTA that the procedure previously used to access the sick bank was in part a violation of the employees' rights protected by Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Members can join the sick bank by donating two days. From that point on they can apply to the Sick Bank Committee if they have exhausted all of their sick days. Members also no longer have to go 10 days without pay, to use this benefit.

Coaches and Co-Curricular pay scales were unfrozen for the first time in 6 years. The steps of the salary scale will be returned to their appropriate levels, as if those salaries were never frozen. Nurses now have the same retiree and health insurance benefits that teachers enjoy.

Continued on Page 2



Retirees

It's your turn! Would you like to tell your union story in a NYSUT video? NYSUT is making videos of members who can convey - in a very personal way - why the union matters. If you're willing to participate, send us an email at

webmaster@nysutmail.org

The major concession was a change in prescription drug co-pays. Currently, the following co-pays apply: **\$5 Generic, \$20 Brand/Specialty (30 day supply)** and **\$10 Generic, \$40 Brand/Specialty (90 day supply)**. This plan will change to a new, three-tier plan that may affect what you pay for brand name prescriptions. The new copays are: **\$5 Generic, \$20 Brand, \$40 Specialty (30 day supply)** and **\$10 Generic, \$40 Brand, \$80 Specialty (90 day supply)**.

The cost of the majority of prescriptions that our members utilize will not be affected unless they are using a Specialty prescription with no generic equivalent. Please look for future articles for other ways to save on your specialty prescription drug plans.

REMEMBER TO:

- 1. ASK YOUR DOCTOR FOR THE GENERIC VERSION**
- 2. USE MAIL ORDER FOR MAINTENANCE PRESCRIPTIONS (90 DAY+)**
- 3. CHECK WITH LOCAL PHARMACIES THAT MAY FILL MAINTENANCE PRESCRIPTIONS AND/OR HAVE THEIR OWN CO-PAY PROGRAMS THAT REDUCE YOUR COST.**

Dates to Remember

Sabbatacal applications can be submitted between **February 15 and March 15.**



To receive one of the financial incentives for retirement in the contract, an employee must inform the district of their intent to retire by **March 24.**



Adopt-A-Highway Cleanup and Lunch **Saturday, April 16, 10-12 p.m.** Meet us at the WGTA Office at 10 a.m. All volunteers must be at least 16 years old, and please wear boots and gloves. More information will be sent via e-mail.



Mark your calendars for the newly named “Dinner of 100” (formerly Dinner on the WGTA), **Thursday, June 23, 6p.m.-10 p.m.** at Coleman’s

FREE TO THE FIRST 100 WGTA MEMBERS AND THEIR SPOUSES! FREE DRINKS, FREE FOOD, FABULOUS DOOR PRIZES!

Negotiations Update *by Keith Newvine, Vice President for Grievances and Negotiations*

2016 Negotiations Recap & Review



Well, it's done. I can't say it was easy, but I wouldn't say it was terrible either. Luckily, the District and the Negotiations Team came to the table with professionalism, respect, and foresight. If I had to do it all over again, I probably would. I'm a gigantic dork, and in a previous life I wanted to be a lawyer. When I read *Henry VI* and Dick the Butcher said, "The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers," I decided against it.

Just a few things to bring to your attention about the process and the new contract...

A very special thank you goes out to John Mannion, Mary Weaver, Jeanine Stables, and Superintendent Chris Brown. There were multiple meetings that lasted much longer than we expected. We were all pulled from our students and our families during this process, but the dedication to our membership was and is without question.

A shout out to Greg Allen, Barb Randall, Dan Hallinan, Dom Fruscello, Don Schuessler, Janet McDonald, Jeanine Stables, John Mannion, Kathy Nason, Marie Thompson, Mary Gotham, Mary Weaver, Melanie Callahan, Michael Perkins, Patti Sullivan, Steve Shoults, and Tony Alvaro for volunteering to serve on the Negotiations Committee. The time and energy (not to mention technological skill) they gave to researching other local contracts to put together a data sheet of negotiation points grounded in research was invaluable.

Lastly, while I wish we could have put the entire 2016-2020 contract in your hands before you voted for ratification, that just wasn't possible. The proposed changes to the contract are just that--proposed--and aren't put into print until July 1, when the 2012-2016 contract expires. As I mentioned in our presentation, we certainly did not "roll over" the previous contract; we changed so many things (down to commas and pronoun/antecedent agreement) that a presentation of all of the changes would have been hours long. There is one section within the proposed changes which some members have brought to my attention as an item that should have been included in our presentation: Leave for Personal Business or Religious Observance (Article XI, Section G).

Our goal in revising this section was to give members more freedom to use their personal days at their discretion. While the list included in the 2012-2016 was expansive, it was not exhaustive; members could certainly need to use a personal day for a reason that just wasn't in the list. Therefore, we deleted the list of reasons for which members can request a personal day from the contract to allow for members to request a personal for any reason other than "recreation". We also changed the language regarding the use of a personal day immediately before or after a vacation to include the following language: "These personal leave days can be used at the discretion of the teacher but may not be requested for days immediately before or after a vacation unless for a religious observance; attorney/mortgage/realtor transaction requiring the teacher's presence; or with the approval of the Superintendent."

This language change **does not** alter anything about the process through which members apply for a personal day. The application form will remain the same, according to the District. Therefore, we did not feel this portion of the contract warranted inclusion in the presentation--along with many other language changes. Let me assure you: nothing about the process through which any member applies for a personal day, no matter the date, has changed. If anything, this allows for some members to make the request directly to the Superintendent should their request get denied through the initial application. Furthermore, some members have always requested unpaid leaves of absence for days immediately before or after a vacation because taking those days off was frowned upon by the District, and rightfully so. This change allows for members to continue to apply for a personal day **at their discretion** as they always have **and** allows for members to seek approval directly from the Superintendent.

I hope this clears up any confusion or concern about this section of the contract. The last thing we want is for members to think that we withheld any information from them. In fact, this language change was not included because, if anything, it gives members even more freedom to use their personal days at their discretion. I always encourage members to read the contract, and if anything good comes out of this article, it will be that members are more likely to read the contract closely and carefully.

If you have **any** questions regarding this or any other portion of the contract, please don't hesitate to contact me directly at knewvine@gmail.com.

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Benefits Of Being a NYSUT Member



- 1. Higher pay & better benefits**
- 2. A contract you can rely on**
- 3. A strong voice at work**
- 4. Professional learning**

5. NYSUT Member Benefits

NYSUT members & their families can choose from a variety of insurance, financial, legal, and shopping & travel programs designed with the NYSUT member in mind -- including term life insurance, auto insurance, legal & financial services, car rentals, vacation packages, and much more!

Member Appreciation Month is back again this February!

Since it was such a big hit last year, we're doing it again! Member Appreciation Month is coming February 2016.

To be eligible for these drawings, all you need to do is participate in our voluntary MAP Alert email service.

This year will be even bigger because it's a leap year... that means more chances to win even more great prizes!!!

Once again, Member Appreciation Month will be filled with a series of special prize drawings for items donated by Member Benefits and our endorsed program providers. Prizes will include gift cards, Beats headphones, a Go Pro camera and more.



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

It's the strength of the more than 600,000 NYSUT members that makes it possible for Member Benefits to offer more than 40 endorsed programs & services designed with you in mind.

For more details about this exciting event, visit the Member Benefits website at memberbenefits.nysut.org or call 800-626-8101.

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<http://www.wgta.net>

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Important Contract Changes *By Jeanine Stables, WGTA Secretary*

I thought I would take a minute to highlight a few changes that will begin with our newly ratified contract starting in September 2016.

The first involves a name change. The current contract addresses the issue of support for students with disabilities through the Committee on the Handicapped. We have agreed that this language is somewhat antiquated. The committee will now be called the Special Education Committee, and will refer to this population as students with special needs.

The second change involves the creation of Instructional Specialist Chairpersons (Grades K-5), and Elementary Special Education Chairpersons (Grades K-5). Each elementary building will now have a chairperson in these areas. The duties of each chairperson will be as stipulated for elementary grade level chairs in the current contract. Some of these responsibilities include functioning as liaison between administration and the teachers, and serving on the Elementary Curriculum Council. Since the new contract goes into effect in September, we have some time to address questions that teachers might have regarding their new responsibilities.

The third change is regarding the Sick Bank. The current procedures for securing sick leave donations for a member in need are cumbersome, and more significantly, lack confidentiality. After investigating how other locals have negotiated this benefit, we have agreed on a new, more confidential procedure. Under the new contract, the Sick Bank will be created by members signing up to participate. Each member who signs on agrees to donate 2 days. The Sick Bank Committee will be responsible for reviewing and approving requests, and in the contract language, "will consist of two Association representatives appointed by the Association President and two District representatives appointed by the Superintendent. The Committee shall provide the authorization forms for participation in the sick leave bank and shall monitor the activity of the sick leave bank." In order to draw from the sick leave bank, the employee must have made a contribution to the bank from their own available sick leave, and used all of their own accumulated sick leave. We will have more details and forms for participation soon.

Any members who have questions regarding these or any other changes related to our negotiated contract should contact their building representatives.



Education Reformers' \$\$ = Unethical Conflict of Interest for News Outlets By Mary Gotham, WGTA Treasurer

It is no secret that widespread, unethical, conflicts of interest in journalism have turned major media outlets into propaganda machines that misinform and influence the general public. Journalists and media influenced by big money are unable to deliver unbiased reporting. We've seen this scripted reporting in a number of areas such as politics and global warming. It should be of no surprise to anyone that reports on education are also manipulated.

The rampant Charter School scandals go unreported. The abuse and misuse of VAMs, the absurdity of APPR, the disconnect between standardized tests and student learning goes unreported. Anthony Cody is one of the founders of the Network for Public Education. In his recent blog "[Will Ethical Walls Protect Education Journalism from Billionaire Influence?](#)" Cody exposes the inherent bias of education journalism by following the money. Reformers such as the Gates Foundation, the Waltons and the Broad Foundation contribute millions of dollars to *PBS*, *American Public Media*, the *Teaching Channel*, and *NPR*. Just this week, Diane Ravitch blogged that the "independent" media [Edweek received 2 million dollars](#) from the Gates Foundation. I suspect they are no longer "independent." Anthony Cody argues that the education reformers' sponsorship of nonprofit news outlets has effectively silenced educator's voices. Educator's voices are not completely silent, however. Public education champions are out there and they are vocal.

If you want to know what is really going on with public education, follow blog feeds. Independent bloggers are a critical component of reporting an accurate story. I follow a couple of education blogs to stay abreast of reformist moves and the constant changes in our profession. I encourage you to follow bloggers like Diane Ravitch <http://dianeravitch.net> (my favorite), Anthony Cody <http://www.livingindialogue.com>, and Carol Burris <http://roundtheinkwell.com/author/carolcorbettburris>. Their discussion of important education news provides a basis for me to solidify the issues and communicate the truth.

Improving our communication is key to strengthening our voice. As educators on the frontlines, it is imperative that we stop using the reformers' vocabulary and buying into the mainstream education propaganda. It is not education reform. It is the privatization of education. It is public education destruction. We must counter the overwhelming misinformation with current, reliable, accurate accounts provided by the education professionals and unfettered education bloggers that are in the trenches. We must develop our own pro-public education vocabulary and be just as grounded in our public education position as we are in our pedagogy. Let's reframe the "reform" conversation. Take the first step; become informed. Follow Diane Ravitch. If you would like a list of bloggers to follow, or if you have blogs to recommend, send me an email, gothamwgta@gmail.com.

Sources

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Superintendent Liason Update, by Mary Weaver, WGTA Vice President Mary Weaver



I want to apologize for not having the Superintendent's Liaison Meeting attached to the Membership the passed few months. It was my miscommunication and from now on they will be available on the WGTA website <http://www.wgta.net>.

Just a reminder-please be aware that the items placed on the Superintendent's Liaison Committee are those that directly connect to an all-district situation or concern, or if there hasn't been any change to an item discussed at a Principal's Liaison Committee. Items that can be directly discussed for individual building and at Principals's Liaison could be handled directly in those cases.

On a personal note, I want to state how completely proud I was to be part of the WGTA while being part of the negotiations process. Our team was informed and insightful. Also, being an employee of West Genesee for almost 22 years, I was also proud to be part of the process. It's always a good day to be a Wildcat!!

Board of Regents Places a Moratorium on 3-8 Test Scores Tied to APPR

By John Mannion WGTA President

The task force created by Governor Andrew Cuomo made a recommendation to the Board of Regents to eliminate state assessments from teacher evaluations. The Board of Regents approved this recommendation which includes 3-8 ELA and Mathematics Exams. Teachers of grades 4-8 have state growth scores generated for them. The Board of Regents stated that it would disconnect state exams that are tied to a teacher growth score from the Teacher Performance category that results in an APPR score until the 2019-2020 school year. This is excellent news for our 3-8 teachers. They clearly have been playing by the most unfair of rules up to this point.

So what does this mean for the teachers of West Genesee? Grade 3 – 8 state tests that generate a growth score cannot be used in any way towards a teacher or principal's score.

Everyone who is not a math or ELA teacher in grades 3-8 is playing by the same rules as before. You either write your SLO, with a target based on the Regents Test results of your class or you are going to be part of the group SLO. You have already taken care of this. Everyone who is a 3-8 math or ELA teacher will be put into the group SLO which has already been approved by NYSED. This has already been taken care of for you. Simply print off the completed SLO form and submit it to your principal.

What is the group SLO? This was developed over the summer in case we end up with a high number of opt outs in the state exams. The group SLO is based on a target set at an average of a 90% passing rate on five Regents exams, Global History, US History, Common Core Algebra, 11th Grade English Language Arts and Living Environment.

Will this delay in tying the results of grade 4-8 student test scores put an end to parents refusing to have their students take the state exams? It is unlikely for the following reasons:

- No proof that the tests now produced by Questar will have greater clarity, validity or worth
- Impact on stress created from the testing environment on all children, particularly children with special needs
- Belief that the scores tied to the tests do not accurately reflect a child's level of college and career readiness
- Changes to state education law that still tie some form of testing to 50% of a teacher's rating
- Commissioner Elia stated that there will be no time limit applied to the exams
- Change to tenure law that mandates that a school district bring 3012a termination charges against a tenure teacher who receives three consecutive Ineffective ratings
- Change to tenure law that extends receiving tenure to four years
- Change to state law that allows teachers to be suspended without pay if a claim of sexual harassment is filed against them
- New law mandating that the bottom 5% of schools be entered into receivership. This percentage is determined largely by the results on state exams.

What should you do if a parent or student asks for information on opting out?

DON'T:

- Discuss opting out of state tests with students in your classroom
- Provide a student or parent with a form that allows them to opt out of the exams
- Encourage a parent to opt their child out of a state exam

DO:

- Discuss concerns you have regarding the validity, content, usefulness and developmental appropriateness of the exam with colleagues
- Answer parents by stating that you support whatever decision they make regarding the state exams
- Encourage parents to educate themselves on the topic by visiting a variety of websites and other resources
- Administer the exams

Retirement Extra Credit – More Money for You! By Lynn Davis, WGTA Member

You might be eligible for some retirement financial extra credit – and not even know it!

If you have “prior service” in any NYS public retirement system, including the NYS Teachers’ Retirement System (NYSTRS), you may be eligible to receive additional “time served” toward your retirement calculation. For example, while doing my undergraduate work at SUNY at Fredonia, I was a lab assistant and a resident hall assistant. Because I was paid a salary for both of these positions (and automatically enrolled in the SUNY retirement systems), I was able to transfer a number of months of credit to my total number of years I served as a teacher under NYSTRS.

I also worked one summer in a NYS public library, did some substitute teaching in some NYS schools and served my active duty time in the NYS Army National Guard - all prior to teaching. Added together, I worked in West Genesee for 35.5 years, but accumulated another 1.9 years of service credit, for a total of 37.4 years. At the time, Tier 1 teachers were also given an additional 2 years of credit, thus I retired with a combined 39.4 years of credit!

Additional service credit can affect your eligibility for, and the calculation of, your yearly financial benefit from NYSTRS. Being in Tier 1, I increased my retirement benefit by 2% for each “extra” year of credit I was able to accrue. I accumulated a total of 3.9 extra years, almost an 8% increase in my retirement yearly benefit.

There are some caveats. You cannot receive credit for federal government employment or non-public school teaching except for a charter school participating in NYSTRS. There is a cost involved to move your employment time to the NYSTRS and that amount is based on the Tier that you are in. The cost is not large. The dollar amount I increased my retirement benefit for one year was greater than the amount I had to pay to get the extra credit.

If you think you might be eligible, start by reading the information found at the NYSTRS website: <https://www.nystrs.org/Active-Members/Service-Credit>. You can also call NYSTRS at 1-800-348-7298, ext. 6030 for information.

I’d suggest starting this as soon as possible. You will have to provide proof of prior employment to NYSTRS. Most companies and organizations are required to keep employment records for a long time, but the older records may not be computerized and may be difficult for a former employer to locate. You might also be able to use old W-2’s and Income Tax forms as acceptable proof of employment.

It’s retirement extra credit that you’ve earned – you just have to go out and claim it.

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.

The only other advertisements that are run in The Member Ship are those provided by NYSUT, AFT, or the AFL-CIO.

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If you would like to be a part of this FREE Directory, please send your name, Email address and WG status (school name / retired / WG staff, etc.) to Lynn Davis at: DavisRetired@gmail.com.

Email address are only shared with other members of the Directory.

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