



Middletown Teachers' Association

# MTA News

## A Message From Your MTA President Christopher White

MTA News

Middletown Teachers' Association

AFT Local 2831

1 Beattie Avenue

Middletown, NY 10940

845-343-1517

845-343-4867 Fax

<http://middletownta.ny.aft.org>

PRESIDENT

Christopher White

VICE PRESIDENT

Kerry Luba

SECRETARY

Stephanie Stopa

TREASURER

Kristine Savarese

© Middletown Teachers  
Association. All rights reserved.

As I sit here preparing to write the president's message, the Senate has confirmed school-choice activist Betsy DeVos as Education secretary, with Vice President Mike Pence breaking a 50-50 tie. This is the first time in the history of the Senate that the vice president had to break a tie on a Cabinet nomination. This is not, however, the first time we have had a secretary of education for which we had to voice our opposition!

This past election has definitely shown a rift in ideologies amongst even those in our own profession, but the one common thread is the need for a change. Regardless of which party holds the political office, we must advocate for our profession and our students. We must use our voices to advocate. Our elected representatives must know us by name, and they must know what we stand for.

As we prepare for the coming years and the protection of our profession, it is of the utmost importance that we stay informed of the political landscape. Our elected officials will determine what comes next in our profession. One key piece is opposing the constitutional convention, which has the possibility to affect our pensions. This is where we can protect our livelihood by staying educated. Don't sit on the sidelines of history pointing a finger. Be the change that we desire. Get involved.

The appointment of DeVos leaves me with many questions and, sadly, few answers. Even though that is the case, I am confident we will stand together. There can be no divide in the respect we demand for our profession. Standing side-by-side we will protect not only our profession, but also our students!

Stay informed!

## MTA Benefit Fund News

**Newsletter Submissions**

Newsletter submissions can be sent to Jennifer Sitko at [jennsitko@yahoo.com](mailto:jennsitko@yahoo.com) and copied to Kerry Luba at [klubamta@gmail.com](mailto:klubamta@gmail.com)

The submission deadline for the next newsletter is April 3rd.

Please use private emails for newsletter articles.

- Tom Blon—MTA Benefit Fund Manager

**Tax info:** The NYSUT Legal Service Plan premium payments notice has been mailed to all members enrolled in the legal plan. Please contact me if you have not received your notice.

**Trustee needed:** Would you like to be more involved with your union? Benefit fund trustees are responsible for the proper administration of our fund. Meetings are quarterly, in addition to volunteering during fall and spring will days. Contact Chris White or Tom Blon for details

# Constitutional Convention Concerns

- Robbyn McCauley

In our last newsletter, I wrote about some of the concerns of a potential NYS Constitutional Convention. I've received a lot of requests for more information, so I felt there was value to write follow-up articles that are more in-depth.

To dive right in, as NYS citizens and union members, we rely on the NYS Constitution to protect our pensions, our right to organize, and our work. A convention is one way to amend the NYS Constitution. So, how does the process work? On the November 7th ballot of this year, all voters will be asked to decide whether or not a convention is needed to amend the current NYS Constitution. If the votes come in as yes, a convention is needed. The next step is for delegates to be elected to attend the Constitutional Convention on November 6th, 2018. What's interesting is that any NYS citizen can run to be a delegate, but the current delegate selection process favors political insiders. Once elected, delegates are then given the opportunity to propose and discuss amendments to ANY part of the current NYS Constitution. If a majority of delegate voters agree to any amendment, it is placed on the ballot to voters (in the 2019 election).

This may be the part of the article where you are saying, "ok, so what? This is two years from now and I can't worry about this." Initially, I would have agreed. However, as I've done more research, I have come to the conclusion that a NYS Constitutional Convention could be disastrous for **US**. The Constitution of New York State does much, much more than the national Constitution. Both create a structure and rules for how to govern. But the national Constitution largely stops there. Our state Constitution sets forth our values and priorities as human beings, including almost every part of our social fabric. For example, the national constitution says nothing about education; the state constitution has an article devoted to it. Our national constitution does not mandate the state to take care of the needy; our state constitution does. Clearly, it is our state constitution that more directly affects our lives.

For the purpose of this and future articles, I will focus on union members, so here's what's at stake for **US**:

- **OUR** protection against reduction in our pensions
- **OUR** rights as employees to organize and collectively bargain
- **OUR** children's rights to a public education
- **OUR** rights to worker's compensation

Over the next few newsletters, I will take each item that would directly affect us and expand on what could happen in a constitutional convention. If you have questions, suggestions, etc., please don't hesitate to contact me through interoffice mail or email. And always remember, we are stronger **TOGETHER**.

## Emily Soper Wins \$1,000 NEA Grant for Monhagen Library

- Stephanie Stopa

Congratulations to Emily Soper, Library Media Specialist at Monhagen Middle School, for winning a \$1,000 NEA Read Across America Library Grant! This grant program was established by the NEA in 2006 to provide books to public school libraries in need. To date, this program has awarded over \$500,000 in grants. In 2016, 131 schools from across the country applied for a grant to fund the purchase of diverse books. Emily's grant application was one of 71 that were awarded. Emily earned a degree in Library and Information Science/School Media from Long Island University. She worked at Elwood Middle School in Greenlawn, NY before joining the faculty at Monhagen in September of 2016. Emily is planning to use the grant money to order 157 diverse books compiled from the First Book website. These books will offer a new range of topics and characters that reflect the racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, challenge, and gender diversity of our students. Thanks to her efforts, the students at Monhagen Middle School will now have a greater variety of books that honor the lives of all young people.

# New or New to You: Student Engagement

-Stacey Atlas

A struggle for many teachers is finding different ways to engage *all their students*. *Class sizes range from 20-30+ students. That means a teacher can have as many as 30+ different personalities, likes, and dislikes sitting in one room. How can one teacher engage so many different personalities?*

According to Eric Jensen's **Engaging Students with Poverty in Mind**, there are seven engagement factors that are strongly tied to socioeconomic status. These are: **Health and Nutrition, Vocabulary, Effort and Energy, Mindset, Cognitive Capacity, Relationships, Stress Level**

Let's take a look at how each one impacts a student's ability to be successful in your classroom.

## Health and Nutrition

Some families struggle with health and nutrition due to having lower paying jobs with little or no health coverage. Many times these are the students who experience asthma, untreated ear infections and hearing-loss issues, and obesity. These health-related factors have a significant effect on cognition and behavior. Along with health-related issues, often times nutrition is a co-conspirator. Low paying jobs equals poor nutrition. When students do not eat or do not eat well it has a negative impact on their behavior. "Deficiencies in minerals are linked to weaker memory, and low levels of certain nutrients such as omega-3 fatty acids are linked to depression" (Jensen, 10). Ideally students should be eating a high protein or complex carbohydrate for breakfast: eggs, lean meats, yogurt, or oatmeal. Unfortunately, many students are eating simple carbohydrates such as sugary cereals, pastries, Pop Tarts, or fast-food which create fluctuations in blood sugar which is linked to weaker cognitive and behavioral outcomes. Jensen states "**food quality is more important than quantity**" because "**cognitively, it's better to eat less but better-quality food**" (Jensen, 10-11).

## Vocabulary

Vocabulary is an important key to academic success. Some vocabulary building strategies include: front-loading, visual aids, context clues, scaffold, (and so much more) for students so they have the tools they need in order to be successful. This gives students the confidence to try and complete assignments. When students do not feel they have the tools to be successful often times they don't even try. It is important to incorporate vocabulary building activities in an effort to make students feel successful, before they try the independent or group activity.

## Effort and Energy

Students slouching in their chairs, or not making eye contact while instruction is going on often leads a teacher to the conclusion that 'these' students are lazy, or they don't care. When in actuality students living in low socioeconomic situations are practical about what motivates them. They need to know who their teacher really is and they want their teacher to connect to their world! "When teachers cannot or will not connect personally, students are less likely to trust them" (Jensen, 12). Teachers need to provide students with a viable reason to play the academic 'game'. When teachers do not connect with their students, the students just give up. As teachers, it is extremely important we make a connection to each and every student who walks through our door. When teachers care about their students, they respond! You, as the teacher, have the power to make a difference!

## Mindset

Many students do not believe in their capacity to learn. They hold low expectations for themselves. However, when students have positive attitudes about their learning capacity, and when teachers focus on growth and change, student engagement increases (Jensen, 13). As teachers, we hold the 'magic wand' to changing how students view themselves. When teachers change the mindset of a student's view of themselves, that student's life will change forever!

## Cognitive Capacity

What you need to know...IQ is NOT fixed! IQ is influenced by the exposure it receives to engaging lessons and/or experiences. When students come into the classroom with little or no academic or worldly exposure, their hippocampus is smaller than students who have these experiences. This does NOT mean that 'these' students will not, or cannot be successful academic students. What it means is that

## New or New to You

Continued from page 3

these students need an engaging teacher “who is willing to teach the core cognitive skills that lead to academic success” (Jensen, 15).

### Relationships

Let’s face it, we all crave relationships: parental guidance, friendships, love. It is human nature to seek out people who ‘like’ us. Relationships build trust. Students with positive relationships learn healthy, appropriate emotional responses to everyday situations. On the contrary, students who do not have positive relationships fail to learn these responses because of absent positive relationships. In short, many students simply do not know how to behave. “Developing strong student-teacher relationships helps counter the negative effects of these inappropriate emotional responses and has a profound effect on student engagement” (Jensen, 16). Keep in mind, it takes twenty-one consecutive days to break a habit...teachers do not have twenty-one consecutive days with their students. It will take time, but with positive reinforcement, trust, and a strong relationship, it is possible!

### Stress Level

Yes, stress is part of life, but living with acute or chronic stress can destroy one’s future. Small amounts of stress are healthy, they can actually build resilience. However, when students are living in acute or chronic stress, they go into survival mode. This is exhausting to say the least. These students have high demands put on them in order to survive; forget about academic success! While acute stress may cause a student to become aggressive, chronic stress has the opposite effect. Students dealing with chronic stress often times withdraw, give up, and become passive and uninterested in school. When students are taught appropriate coping skills and stress relieving techniques, hostility decreases (Jensen, 18). Stress occurs when we feel ‘out of control’ in our own life. Giving students appropriate amounts of control over their daily lives at school helps “diminish the effects of chronic and acute stress and increases engagement” (Jensen, 18).

These are the seven engagement factors as Eric Jensen describes them in his book **Engaging Students with Poverty in Mind**. In order to engage our students, we must first understand them as a whole student. Remember, together we make a difference!

## MTA in the Community

- Jennifer Younghans

For the past six years, as the advisor for the Middletown National Honor Society, my goal has been to foster a sense of civic responsibility within its members. During this time, National Honor Society has increased their involvement within the community by helping with Habitat for Humanity, Run 4 Downtown and Middletown City Clean-up. Last year we hosted our first Touch-a-Truck event which raised close to \$4,000 for the Brittany Miller Foundation and a local student with a rare condition. This would not have been possible without the support of the countless teachers and staff that organized their clubs and music ensembles to participate. That being said, many of the events were also supported by the Middletown Teacher’s Association.

As teachers and members of the greater community, we also have sense of civic responsibility to give back. At the beginning of the year, when I was asked to help coordinate MTA volunteers for future events, I was honored. With spring on its way, we have some new opportunities to give back to our community. In the coming months you will hear from me in regards to these opportunities for us to get involved. In addition, if you have anything you would like the MTA to get involved in, please feel free to reach out to me. Listed below are a few events to mark on your calendar:

- Middletown City Clean-Up: Saturday, April 22, 9am-12pm
- NHS Touch-A-Truck, Saturday, May 14th 10am-2pm
- Orange Classic, Sunday, June 4th 7am
- Dare Night, TBA (June)

If interested in volunteering or if you have any ideas of how to get more involved, please contact Jennifer Younghans, MTA Community Outreach at [jennifer.younghans@ecsdm.org](mailto:jennifer.younghans@ecsdm.org).