



Middletown Teachers' Association

MTA News

A Message From Your MTA President Christopher White

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Middletown Teachers' Association

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By the time you read this, spring break will have been a recent memory, and we will be buckling down for the long stretch before the end of the year. For me, there has been a huge change since my last president's message: I am the proud father of a beautiful baby girl, Philomena (my mother's middle name). I don't have to explain it to parents, but she is a game-changer in every sense of the word. When I look into her eyes, I find myself asking: *What will she be like? Will she change the world for the better? Will she be a leader? A champion for the under-represented? As I ponder these questions, I am reminded of my own decisions and I ask myself: Am I leaving a legacy of hope, charity, and unity?*

Over the past several months, I have relied on the Executive Board and various members' help in so many ways. I am so thankful for everyone's help, guidance, and compassion. You exhibit the truest definition of union, and I am humbled by your generosity of spirit. Becoming a father has strengthened my resolve to stand up and try to be the best version of who I can be. I also realize that we already do this as teachers. We strive to be the best version of who we can be for our students. We provide them with rich opportunities, in the hopes that they will be successful.

As the year draws to an end, there will be many causes and opportunities for us to unite. Water stops, city-wide events, and more. I look forward to standing with our fellow brothers and sisters and representing our union to the public.

Newsletter Submissions

Newsletter submissions can be

sent to Jennifer Sitko at

jennsitko@yahoo.com and copied

to Kerry Luba at

klubamta@gmail.com

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

Please use private emails for newsletter articles.

MTA Benefit Fund News

- Tom Blon—MTA Benefit Fund Manager

MTA Spring Will Day: Tuesday, May 9th
2:30 - 6:00

Contact Benefit Fund Chairperson Ashley Burke at Presidential Park Elementary

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. Please contact Chris White or Tom Blon for details.

#NoConCon

- Robbyn McCauley

Every 20 years the people of New York are asked a seemingly simple ballot question; "Shall there be a convention to revise the constitution and amend the same?" This question will appear on the back of the ballot on November 7, 2017 and we are urging all of our members to vote **NO**. Why? Let's look at our NYS Constitution Article 5, Subsection 7: Prohibiting reductions in public pension benefits.

This provision from the 1938 state constitution says, "... no public employee pension shall be diminished or impaired ..." That is the constitutional protection and guarantee for our pensions that exists in this state. So, what is guaranteed for us and our retirees? Our basic defined-benefit pension is guaranteed. The fact that our pensions are not subject to state taxation is guaranteed. The fact that our pensions are protected against diminution is guaranteed. A Constitutional Convention threatens all of it. According to NYSUT, "...Advocates argue the changes would give workers more flexibility and control over their pensions, let's not fool ourselves! Scrapping defined-benefit public pension plans like we have here in New York in favor of defined-contribution plans would be a big mistake. Here's why. Right now, your defined-benefit plan is based on the number of years you teach, final average salary and your age at retirement. Your monthly payment is guaranteed until the day you die. Most plans also offer joint survivor benefits and annual Cost-Of-Living Adjustments to guard against inflation. However, under a defined contribution plan, you're out of luck if your happen to retire when the stock market goes down. Or if you make the wrong investment choices."

And, make no mistake, there has already been talk on changing the pension language in the constitution. Governor Andrew Cuomo included pension stripping in his State of the State address. Assembly Speaker Carl E. Heastie and the Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan have shown their support for some form of pension stripping in their legislative session opening remarks. Now, these specific examples were referring to public officials that had been recently convicted of crimes. However, such changes can be made via an amendment. It does NOT require opening the constitution and, thus, possibly changing the language of protection for our pensions.

When I went to the Committee of 100 in Albany on March 6/7, NYSUT's latest polling numbers showed that the public approves of a New York State Constitutional Convention by almost 70 percent. After all, it sounds so democratic, especially if you don't know what the consequences could be. Now is the time to commit to voting NO. Now is the time to start talking with everyone you know about voting NO. Now is the time to become involved with the MTA and mobilizing our membership to get everyone to vote NO. Together, we can stop the Constitutional Convention.

Remember, we are stronger TOGETHER.

New or New to You: Management

-Stacey Atlas

Welcome back! Upon your return you may be faced with some classroom management concerns. Many times after an extended break, students forget the expectations in the classroom. It never hurts to quickly review the guidelines you set up at the beginning of the year. Since this is not new information, this will not take up much of your instructional time. It is well worth the 5-10 minutes! Keep these tips in mind when sharing classroom expectations:

- **Communicate:** expectation, infraction, and consequence
- **Be explicit:** Show students 'HOW'; model
- **Follow through;** Be consistent; hold students accountable
- **Remind students you care** (with your actions, not your words)
- **Respect students**
- **Communicate:** Give worthy praise: thank the students who do what is expected; praise the students who go above and beyond the expectations
- **Build/Re-Build rapport:** Be pleasant, good humored, and provide an enjoyable learning environment
- **1:1 conversations as needed**

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New or New to You: Management

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- **Reflect**

Remember, as their teachers, we are their role model. They observe and absorb our behavior; how we react to situations. We need to provide students with examples of how to handle hard to handle situations. What can they do when...? Every choice is coupled with a consequence (positive or negative). Sometimes we need to model this problem solving skill aloud so students hear what we (take for granted) are thinking.

If management is not under control, spring fever will be even worse. If you would like guidance and support, please reach out to me: Stacey Atlas- stacey.atlas@ecsdms.org 326-1317. *All meetings are kept confidential!*

The key to successful leadership is influence, not authority. ~Ken Blanchard

ED 13/14

- Patrick DeCosta

The quarterly ED 13/14 meeting was held on Thursday, March 30th. The meeting discussed the upcoming state budget, the current state of the federal government, and its policies toward education and updates from NYSUT. The Committee of 100, a group of local Presidents, spent some time in Albany lobbying state representatives. There was some good news and bad news that came out of the lobby efforts. First, the Education Tax Credit, which is basically a back door voucher program, will be removed from this year's budget. This is a good win for the battle against Charters. There was some not so good news related to the 2% tax cap. According to the sources for both houses of the legislature, there will no effort to remove or change the current 2% tax cap law.

While the overall agenda of the federal government's Department of Education is becoming more clear, there are some things that we need to be keep in mind. The Betsy DeVos agenda and its efforts to privatize education at the expense of public schools and taxpayers needs to be confronted. We must also recognize that the US Supreme Court nominee Neil Gorsuch is likely to be confirmed by the Senate. This is going to certainly meet another attempt at challenging agency fee for public unions with the goal of making all states "Right to Work." The Friedrich vs. California Teachers Association case was defeated by a four to four tie due to the untimely death of Justice Antonin Scalia. The appointment of Gorsuch will almost certainly mean that that future cases will be upheld. Many of the speakers at the ED 13/14 meeting addressed the need to fight the Constitutional Convention referendum in the upcoming election.

At the state level, the big issue discussed was the possible Constitutional Convention. A Constitutional Convention could mean drastic changes to things like public education funding, teacher evaluation, teacher retirement, and pensions. It was emphasized that as a union we need to stand together to support the effort to defeat this referendum. By the time you read this article the State Budget should be passed and we will have a better idea of the priorities in Albany.

Martin Messner, who is the NYSUT Secretary Treasurer, gave an update and addressed questions about the current financial state of NYSUT. The good news was that for the past three years NYSUT has been able to accumulate \$53 million in reserves. This is vital because NYSUT believes that by June of 2018, New York will be a "Right to Work" state. According to Mr. Messner, NYSUT will be able to absorb a 10% member reduction due to the loss of agency fee. Anything over 10% could lead to catastrophic scenarios for NYSUT and its members.

The meeting ended on a positive note when Patrick McCarthy discussed this past years VOTE-Cope results. There was a 7% increase in VOTE-Cope contributions over the previous year. We will need all that we can get as we gear up to fight for public education, our teachers, and our students.

#IAMAPUBLICSCHOOLTEACHER

- Gregory Farina

Thank you everyone who supported our #IAMAPUBLICSCHOOLTEACHER campaign by purchasing shirts and sharing the enthusiasm with your friends and family on social media. The response has been tremendous. The logo began as a Facebook profile picture using student artwork to show love and support for public education and disapproval of the new Secretary of Education. Inspired by Wear Red for Education Day, colleagues then suggested using the hashtag and logo on a t-shirt. Our goal was to sell 200 shirts and by the end of the campaign we sold 434 to Middletown teachers and colleagues in five other districts. It's the largest group purchase on Custom Ink to date.



Every Monday, from now until the close of school, we encourage our members to wear red and proudly proclaim #IAMAPUBLICSCHOOLTEACHER. Take pictures. Post them on social media. Share them on the Middletown Teachers Association Facebook page. Show pride in who we are and everything we've accomplished.

Teachers across the district show their support by "Wearing Red for Ed!"



Presidential Park Elementary



William A. Carter Elementary



Middletown High School



Twin Towers Middle School