



Middletown Teachers' Association

# MTA News

## A Message From Your MTA President Christopher White

***“All that harms labor is treason to America.”***

- Abraham Lincoln

As we enter into February and are reminded of the foundation that our forefathers laid before us, I thought it would be fitting to add the above quote. What a mighty impact these words had when they were first uttered...and, how fitting they still are today!

This school year has brought many challenges that have tested us in every aspect of our profession: the rigors of testing (tied to our APPR), the Constitutional Convention vote, the upcoming Janus case which is being heard at the federal level, and the continually changing landscape of our own district.

There is an important message woven through each of these issues: Union Strength! The fight for a fair system for APPR is still very much alive in NYSUT. It was the amazing unity of all labor unions that helped defeat the constitutional convention by a resounding 80%. That same resolve needs to be present as we battle for our very existence with the Janus case. What would happen if we fail to become a union shop? As we prepare for what the future may bring in regards to unions, our new reality is that we will need to fight for our survival against those trying to break us.

As these struggles play out at the federal and state level, our own district is going through tremendous changes. With the recent retirement of our superintendent, our Board of Education has decided to perform a national search for the next superintendent. Many are wondering what this process entails. The Board of Education has hired an outside consultant group to help with the search. At the request of the BOE, all vested shareholders in the district were asked to participate in a focus group where they were asked what qualities and attributes were essential for the next superintendent. This process was run by a Mr. Robert Christmann. For our unit, all of the senior building representatives, as well as past MTA officers were asked for their input. Once they receive input from all vested parties, the BOE will privately conduct its superintendent search. The goal is to have a new superintendent by July 1 of this year.

As we begin our march towards spring and the eventual close of the school year, we tend to only focus on the local issues like the one above. This is not to say that who our next superintendent will be is not important; while many questions still linger regarding the state of our district, it is important to remember that our union's future at the state and federal level is just as important. Regardless of the level, please remember that in unity, we are stronger. Let us band together and be stronger than we were yesterday.

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Middletown Teachers' Association

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**Newsletter Submissions**

Newsletter submissions can be

sent to Jennifer Sitko at

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The submission deadline for the next newsletter is April 6th.

Please use private emails for newsletter articles.

# New or New to You- Parent Conferences

- Stacey Atlas

Parent Conferences can be an overwhelming experience. We prepare the best we can for what we know about conferring with parents/guardians. Conferences are a way to communicate to parents/guardians about their child's strengths and areas of weakness. While we would all love nothing more than to have only wonderful things to say about every child, sometimes we are met with the difficult task of informing the parent/guardian of behavior(s) that hinder the child's academic/social success. Whether you are meeting with parents/guardians during conference day/night, teacher requested meeting, parent requested meeting, CSE, 504, or any other reason- here are some suggestions to help you prepare for conferences.

Being prepared covers many areas. Some ideas to consider:

- ◆ Do your homework – read the student's cumulative folder, speak with other staff members (guidance counselor, social worker, school psychologist, etc.) who may have helpful information.
- ◆ Have pertinent family/guardian information – who does the student live with, what language is spoken at home.
- ◆ Have conversations with parent/guardian throughout the year. This makes conferences go smoother.
  - ◆ Have all the necessary data and facts – homework, test and quiz results, attendance, etc.
  - ◆ Have the conversation: Using data and facts, what are the student's options at this time? How can they pick their grade up? Will they pass the class; regents? Summer school? Midpoint? Repeat course/class?
  - ◆ Have a plan – if necessary (and possible), do not just present information but also have a plan for improvement with a follow-up meeting date in mind.

It is also a good idea to rehearse and plan how you will present the information. Some suggestions:

- ◆ Begin and end the conversation with positive statements.
- ◆ Avoid words with negative connotations and be sure to rehearse your phrasing so that you will make the best word choices during the conference.
- ◆ When referring to behavioral concerns, be sure to be specific using exact language and describing the event (s) factually.
- ◆ Try to address only one problem at a time - prioritize.
- ◆ At the meeting - take notes (you can generate a form for this in advance) and try to document the important points. Save this information.

While parent/guardian contact is a job requirement, it is also a very powerful tool when trying to help students achieve success. Parent/Guardian support can assist you with finding the best solutions in order to support and help every student reach his/her full potential.

## Benefit Fund Updates

-Tom Blon

### 1. Address Change:

Please notify the MTA Benefit Fund (tantblon@gmail.com) if you have changed your mailing address.

### 2.Spring Will Day: *Tuesday, April 10, 2018 at the MTA Office.*

Scheduling for appointments will take place late March, early April.

### 3. National Legal Office Telephone Numbers:

NY residents: 800 - 832 - 5182 All other areas: 800 - 292 - 8063 After Hours Hotline: 800 - 292 - 8063

### 4. Tax Info: NYSUT Legal Service Plan notices have been mailed to all members.

Contact T.Blon (tantblon@gmail.com) if you have not received your notice.

### 5. Vision Plan

MTA members are covered under the basic plan. Members can purchase a Family Plan (\$395 / yr) through the following website:

<http://memberbenefits.nysut.org/program-service/insurance/vision-plan>

Contact MTA Benefit Fund Manager T. Blon at tantblon@gmail.com for further information.

# Did You Know?

- Robbyn McCauley

Sisters and Brothers,

As we make our way through these winter months, it has become quite clear that many of our members are not getting the support needed when it comes to student disciplinary actions within our buildings. Our MTA Negotiating Committee has worked diligently over the years to craft and collectively bargain for our rights as MTA Members and there is clear language in support of us when it comes to discipline. I refer you to our contract, page 13, F. Discipline:

1 - In the cases of continuing disruptive action anywhere on school property by individual students, **strong disciplinary action in support of the teacher** must be taken by the administrative personnel in each school building.

*This is clear language meaning administrators need to act on discipline referrals in a way that shows support for the teacher. This support should be in the form of the language that follows in item 2 and 3 below.*

2 - Following every written disciplinary referral of a student to an administrator stating specific reasons for the referral of the student, the teacher making the referral shall be informed of the action that was taken. Written notice will be given by the administrator **within five (5) school days of the referral**.

*This is clear language that gives us a timeline for the administrator's action to fall within. Take notice that we are to be informed of the action that was taken, not just informed that the referral was received and written notice must come to us within 5 school days.*

3 - Upon request, **a teacher will be provided support** from his/her supervisors in the form of visits to the classroom in which particular, habitual discipline problems arise between individual students and teachers.

*This is clear language about the direct support we should expect once we REQUEST it.*

As you can see from these items, our language is clear and precise: strong action in support of our teachers has been collectively bargained, won, and must be adhered to. Here's the thing - it is our duty and responsibility to know our contract language and to use it in order to uphold our rights. As members, we also have a wonderful tool to be utilized - our union representatives. All union reps have been trained and know our contract. They are here to support each and every member, whether that be individually or as an advocate with an administrator. If your referrals are not receiving the administrative action as written in our contract, be sure to reach out to a union representative and make them aware.

Our union is only as strong as we are collectively, so let's utilize our contract language and demand our rights that we've worked so hard for and are so well-deserved. Remember, we are STRONGER together.

As always, I am yours in solidarity,  
Robbyn

## New or New to You - Growth Mindset

- Stacey Atlas

By now everyone has heard the term *Growth Mindset*; the idea that, with effort, it is possible to increase intelligence, talents, and abilities. As educators we know that a student's belief in oneself determines their success. What we want to know more is how to build a student's *growth mindset* so that they reach their full potential! *Growth mindset* is **not** about layering on praise when a student struggles, but **is** about teaching students how to learn and use strategies to overcome challenges.

Here are *6 Tips to Help Students Develop a Growth Mindset in the Classroom*:

<https://www.lexialearning.com/blog/6-tips-help-students-develop-growth-mindset-classroom>

**1.) Read books with characters who face challenges and develop strategies to overcome them.**

a. *Your Fantastic Elastic Brain: Stretch It, Shape It* by JoAnn Deak, Ph.D.; *Beautiful Oops* by Barney Saltzberg; *The Most Magnificent Thing* by Ashley Spires; *What do You Do With a Problem* by Kobi Yamada, etc.

b. *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton; *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* by J.K. Rowling; *Maniac Magee* by Jerry Spinelli, etc.

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## New or New to You - Growth Mindset

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### 2.) Conduct activities that give students the change to practice phrases that promote mindset.

- a. Have open class discussions by giving examples of a fixed mindset phrase and brainstorm a few growth mindset phrases.
- b. Have students work individually and in groups to sort into Growth and Fixed mindset columns.

### 3.) Display visible reminders of growth mindset vocabulary using inspirational posters and bulletin boards.

- a. Anchor charts are a good display/reminder of growth mindset.
- b. Have students create their own poster.
- c. Post words and phrases that promote growth mindset around the room.
- d. Feature athletes, business leaders, presidents, and community members (with permission) who have overcome challenges. Be sure their failures and success are noted when featured.

### 4.) Have students turn in growth mindset exit tickets.

- a. Use reflexive questions or personal challenges as “tickets” to leave at the end of class.
- b. Use as a “Do Now” at the beginning of the class to prepare students to persevere. Start class off on the right foot!
- c. This will help students evaluate their attitude and processes with classwork, build a strong work ethic, and focus on the positive.

### 5.) When giving feedback to the students, use prompts that facilitate growth mindset.

- a. When providing feedback, focus on the method or process used that was successful. For example, instead of saying, “you are so smart,” or “you did a great job,” say, “what made you decide to try that method?” or “what process did you use that lead you to this response?”
- b. Other growth mindset statements include: “What do you think you can do differently next time?” or “When X occurred, how did you feel and what did you learn from it?”
- c. This provides an opportunity for self-evaluation so students discover more about their ability to work through a challenge. This also encourages self-talk strategies for future obstacles.

### 6.) Model growth mindset as an educator.

- a. When we are faced with a challenge or make a mistake we can talk through the situation with students and demonstrate the path to learning, helping students connect to real-life situations.
- b. Students may suggest different ways to solve the problem now and for next time.

*Growth Mindset* is linked to students performing better; students are more likely to recognize the importance of effort in academic success, they seek out challenging academic tasks to enhance learning, and they value critical feedback.

We are only as successful as we think we are! It is a *self-fulfilling prophecy*- we can or we can't; whatever you believe IS TRUE! Spend some time on *growth mindset* in your classroom: you won't be sorry you did. ;)