RA 2012: Reclaim the Dream, VOTE
Diane D. DiChiara, Secondary-at-Large

For me, this year’s RA Convention seemed to be missing some of the magic of past RAs. The WCT elects nine members to represent the constituency at the yearly convention; however, this year the convention fell at the same time as the New York State testing for elementary students. Therefore, five of my colleagues made the critical decision to stay with their elementary students to support them through the testing rather than attend the convention. The four members who attended all teach at the secondary level. By the end of Thursday, there were 1,709 registered delegates at the convention.

In the past, by the end of the first evening, I’ve been inspired and motivated to act, but not this year; however, despite not living up to past expectations there were some convention highlights.

- The Kenmore East Jazz Band, a vocal ensemble, from the Buffalo Academy for Visual and Performing Arts beautifully entertained delegates.
- A social justice video made by Springville-Griffith Institute middle school students Caitlin Bruscia and Sarah Gorski highlighting the human rights defender Asma Jahangir of Pakistan. View it at and other student-created Speak Truth to Power videos at http://www.viddler.com/v/d89241ac
- Vice-president Maria Neira, always a dynamic and thoughtful speaker, challenged delegates to stand up and fight for what’s right. Every delegate rose from their seats and shouted, “We’re mad as hell and we’re not going to take it anymore.” Of course this was reminiscent of the 1976 movie Network and actor Peter Finch’s “mad as hell” speech. State Education Commissioner John King was present to hear the thunderous crowd.
RA 2012: Reclaim the Dream, VOTE (cont’d)

- Maria Neira then introduced State Education Commissioner John King. As he walked to the podium many teachers led by the Buffalo teachers quietly rose from their seats and left the room. Others remained and held up various placards displaying their displeasure with King for his refusal to release promised federal funding. After a brief speech, King held a question and answer session and returned later in the evening for a second question and answer session. UFT teacher, Ann Marie Nowak said, “the pineapple may have nothing up its sleeve, but Pearson got 25 million up theirs.” Many delegates still had questions, but the 2nd session ran out of time. King agreed to answer questions sent to askdriking@nysutmail.org. The answers will be posted at www.nysut.org.

- As State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli took to the podium many teachers held up signs that read, “Thanks, Tom.” DiNapoli has defended our defined benefits plans through the years. He said, “a 401k plan was never meant to take the place of a pension.”

- NYSUT Secretary-Treasurer Lee Cutler asked the members to support a dues increase as NYSUT also takes steps to cut costs. Cutler explained that 90% of NYSUT’s revenue comes from dues, but that we have lost members over the past three years. Currently, there are 610,000 members. The membership includes 15,000 Health Care Workers, 92,000 School Related Professionals, 69,000 Higher Education, 253,000 K-12 Teachers, and 181,000 Retirees. The RA supported the increase and beginning in September, members’ dues will rise approximately $12.00 a year.

- Senator Kirsten Gillibrand called for women to get more active, politically. She encouraged women to get out and vote. She is working towards getting the Elementary and Secondary Education Act repaired and believes teachers should have a “powerful voice” and “flexibility” in giving students a well-rounded education.

New Babies...

Karen Zmudosky, her husband Jason, and big brother Jacob welcomed a little girl into the world. Claire Elizabeth was born on May 9, 2012, weighing 8 lbs, 1 oz. and measured 21.5 inches. Congratulations to the Zmudosky Family!

Congratulations... The scholarship committee is pleased to announce the 2012 recipients of the WCT Ralph and Janet Capasso Scholarship. The winners are Cheyenne Cutter, daughter of Alison Schukal (Van Wyck), Keith Loh, son of Margaret Loh (John Jay), and Matthew Tarby, son of Carol Tarby (John Jay).
RA Convention or State Exams?

Christine Romano is a Myers Corners Elementary Teacher and although elected by the WCT to attend the RA Convention in Buffalo she was one of several who made the difficult decision to stay behind and not attend this year’s convention.

“We have been reviewing and practicing for the state test for months now (in addition of course following the curriculum). I know the students had lots of anxiety. We have also been emphasizing how important the tests are and I felt that if I was not there it would send the wrong message. I needed to be there to reassure them they could be successful and to let them know it was as important to me as it was to them. I am very happy I made that decision. The test had some very difficult questions and I think being there to put the kids at ease was very important. In addition, I wanted to see the test (and actually take it) for myself. It’s important that I saw the questions so I have a feel for what the state asks on a test. This was my last RA and I was very disappointed that I wasn’t going, but it was far more crucial for me to be with my students during the tests.”

Christine Romano

A “Morning Line” Limerick: By Bill Green

A TAXPAYER VOTE ONE DAY
WAS TO SEND TWO INCUMBANTS AWAY.
THEY ACCOMPLISHED THEIR TASK
BUT NOW THEY WILL ASK-
DO WE DO IT AGAIN NEXT MAY?

Enjoy the Spring...
RA Convention: Proposed Resolution Committees
Diane D. DiChiara, Secondary-at-Large

All delegates participate in self-selected Proposed Resolution Committees. This year’s committees were Civil and Human Rights, College and University, Educational Issues I and II, and Health Care and Workplace Safety. I served on the Civil and Human Rights Committee. There were 5 resolutions on the table and all were passed, some with discussion and some passing unanimously. The resolutions were:

Recognizing and Honoring the Contributions of the US Colored Troops (USCT) by NYSUT collaborating with other groups in the planning and installing of an appropriate monument.

Additional information: In the 62 counties of NYS, Civil War monuments do not depict the contribution of the African-American soldier. 170,000 African-American soldiers served in the Union Army and 4,125 of those soldiers were from NYS most served in three NY regiments known as the “United States Colored Troops.”

Education and Action in Support of NYSUT’s Position on Withdrawal from Afghanistan The resolution calls for NYSUT to report to its members the steps it has taken to advocate for this position and for NYSUT to publish educational materials for its membership on the importance of ending the war and its relation between the cost of war and the deficits in state budgets, furthermore, that NYSUT call for the funds that would be spent on the war to be spent on jobs, with preference given to the 2 to 3 million recent veterans who have particular problems finding employment.

End of NYC Police Department’s Ineffective, Unjustifiable, Racist, Massive “Stop and Frisk” Policies The resolution calls for NYSUT to develop and disseminate educational materials for students and parents from middle school through college which identify the risks to democracy and civil rights of such police practices; furthermore, that NYSUT oppose the “stop and frisk” practice that target communities of color and that NYSUT support the Center for Constitutional Rights’ demand for accountability.

Additional Information: According to the NY Civil Liberties Union, the police have made more than 3 million “stops” of New Yorkers between 2004 and 20011, the overwhelming majority of whom were not engaged in criminal activities. 82% of those stopped in 2006 were people of color and 50% of them were black (twice the representation of the NYC population). The Center for Constitutional Rights states that the police are twice as likely to use force when stopping a person of color as when stopping a white person.

The Civil Rights Challenge of the Decade: Mass Incarcerations as the New Jim Crowe NYSUT should educate members about the true costs that the war on drugs has imposed both on New York’s poor communities of color and educational stakeholders. Furthermore, NYSUT should support public policies that promote drug treatment rather than prosecution and NYSUT should support restoration of full citizenship rights for non-violent drug offenders on probation or parole, including the right to vote, serve on a jury, an full access to government services such as financial aid for education and housing and employment assistance. Lastly, NYSUT should support legislation that ends the federal financial incentives that result in racist police practice of targeting and criminalizing poor communities of color within the context of the “war on drugs.”

Additional Information: Michelle Alexander’s 2011 book The New Jim Crowe: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness states that the rise in the US prison population from 350,000 (1986) to 2.3 million (2006) reflects changes in laws and policies rather than an increase in crime rates. The resolution states that the Rockefeller Drug Laws mandated longer prison sentences for the possession of small amounts of illegal drugs and have led to a 650% increase in the numbers of Americans – especially people of color and poor people – incarcerated over the last 25 years.

Seeking the Creation of a Statewide Anti-Bullying Hotline NYSUT should call upon the legislature and State Education Department to develop a statewide anti-bullying telephone hotline for students, parents and school staff to receive support and counseling on bullying and related issues modeled after the NYC hotline known as the BRAVEline.

The Professional Staff Congress, the union that represents more than 20,000 faculty and staff at the City University of New York (CUNY), submitted resolutions 2, 3 and 4. The most interesting discussion focused on resolutions 3 and 4 where many CUNY professors spoke about the role that economics plays in the issues and recognizing the outcomes of our policies and practices. One professor voiced the criticism that Alexander’s book is only about African-Americans and the issue is broader. Finally, a professor summed it up by saying, “It’s economic; it’s social; it’s
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Trustees:
Christine Romano, Chairperson
Kim Mahusky, Treasurer
Erin Mulligan, Secretary
Flip Gertler, Trustee
Pasquale Delli Carpini, Trustee
Ronnie Dwyer, Administrator

• You must let the WTF know of any changes in your personal information ASAP
• Student verification forms must be sent to Daniel H. Cook every semester
• Dental & prescription reimbursement forms are on-line at the WTF website
• Please direct all questions & concerns to the WCT office or directly to Daniel H. Cook

From the WCT Welfare Trust Fund

A financial consultant from Stacey Braun Associates, Inc. will be in the WCT office on the following dates:

June 13, 2012
Appointments are one-hour blocks available between 2:00-6:00 PM on a first-come first-served basis. When you call the office to schedule an appointment, we will forward a questionnaire to you. Please complete it and bring it with you to the meeting.

Since these slots fill up very quickly, call as soon as possible! If the above dates are not convenient for you, call Stacey Braun Associates, Inc. directly and other arrangements may be possible.

Stacey Braun has no affiliations with any 403(b) Providers.

Directions to the WCT Office

• The WCT Office is in the Heritage Square complex at 2537 Route 52 in Hopewell Junction.
• Heritage Square is a short distance east of the intersection of Routes 376 and 52 and west of the Taconic State Parkway.
• Enter the parking lot and make the second right turn into the parking area
  • Enter the main entrance of the building.
  • The sign over the main entrance reads “Prudential”
  • Take stairs or elevator to the 2nd floor
  • Go right, all the way to the end
• Look for the “Wappingers Congress of Teachers” sign posted on the Suite 15 door

Important Phone Numbers:

WCT Office.................................(845) 227-5065
Daniel H. Cook...............................(1-800) 342-6651
Mirkin & Gordon (attorneys)............(914) 997-1576
Davis Vision .................................(1-800) 999-5431
Stacey Braun Associates (fin.consultant) ..(1-888) 949-1925
Health Advocate ..........................(1-866) 695-8622

WCT Office Address
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WCT COMMENTATOR Policy

The content of the WCT COMMENTATOR shall reflect the official positions and policies of the WCT, with the following three exceptions:

1. The President of the WCT should present his/her views in a message to the members from time to time, but not less than bimonthly.

2. Signed Letters to the Editor (of responsible length) containing personal views from members and subscribers shall be published subject to laws of libel.

3. Members of the WCT may place articles adhering to the Canons of Journalism concerned with WCT positions, policies, and issues of interest to teachers in the Commentary Section. (For both Letters to the Editor and the Commentary Section, the writer’s name and WCT affiliation shall be attached, and an editor’s note shall accompany these sections indicating that “The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the official views and policies of the WCT.”)

Reprints of articles from the WCT COMMENTATOR are allowable only with the permission of the WCT President.

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The WCT COMMENTATOR advertising policy as adopted by the Executive Board is as follows:

Noncommercial (Personal) ads for WCT MEMBERS only will be run for two issues at no charge.

Commercial (Business) ads for WCT MEMBERS only: guaranteed placement for half of the school year, $35.00 per half year payable Sept. 15th and Feb. 1st or $5.00 per issue.

For prompt placement of advertisements and articles in upcoming issues of the WCT COMMENTATOR, e-mail the information to commentator@wcteachers.org. Information can also be sent to the editor at the WCT Office. Do not send articles or ads through the GroupWise e-mail system.

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