The History of the WCT

The Wappingers Congress of Teachers, as we now know it, grew out of the New York State Taylor Law which gave teachers the right to negotiate. Up to 1967, the Faculty Association would meet with the school board and would be told what the raises would be. During those years, the average salary grew from approximately $3800 for a beginning teacher to a high of $8300. There was no contract, only an agreement. In 1967-68, Natalie LaMoyne Robisch was the first chief negotiator of the Faculty Association. Those negotiations resulted in the first legally binding contract between Wappingers teachers and the Wappingers Central School District.

Two local unions developed. The NEA (National Education Association) represented one; the AFT (American Federation of Teachers), the other. Only one could be recognized for negotiations. In 1973, NYSUT (New York State United Teachers) was created by the merger of New York State’s NEA and AFT affiliates. In Wappingers, the two local unions also merged and became the WCT (Wappingers Congress of Teachers). Since that time, the WCT has been fighting to preserve, protect, and improve our members’ benefits.

The Union on All Levels

District Level: Wappingers Congress of Teachers (WCT) the Representative Assembly consisting of all senior and junior build representatives, committee members, and Executive Board members.

Building Level: a senior building representative and junior building representatives (based on the number of members in the building).

Grade Level: three Elementary at Large, three Secondary at Large, a VP of Elementary, and a VP of Secondary - since elementary and secondary issues are so varied, these members bring insight and expertise to the Executive Board.

State Level: New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) - a federation of approximately 1,300 local unions representing more than 600,000 people statewide.

National Level: American Federation of Teachers (AFT) - founded in 1916 to represent the economic, social and professional interests of classroom teachers with more than 3,000 local affiliates nationwide, 43 state affiliates, and more than 1.4 million members.

International Level: American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) - a voluntary federation of 56 national and international labor unions represents 10.5 million members.
Back-to-School Night - Tips from NYSUT for Getting Off to a Good Start

If you're a little nervous about that upcoming “Open House,” “Back to School,” night or “Parents as Partners,” you’re not alone. New teachers call it one of the scariest parts of their new career. Truth be told, even some of the most accomplished teachers find it challenging. “I’ve been doing it more than 20 years and I still can’t eat dinner that night,” confessed one longtime Long Island teacher. “It’s one thing to deal with the kids. It’s quite another to face a roomful of parents.”

Barbara Egan, a staff member in the union’s Education & Learning Trust, says it’s important to view the “Open House,” “Back to School,” or “Parents as Partners” night for what it is: a fresh start and a perfect way to kick off a productive and enjoyable year. It probably will be the first contact you have with many parents. If you teach at the secondary level, it may be the only contact you have with them.

New York Teacher interviewed several experienced classroom teachers, including ELT instructors, for their strategies on how to make the evening a win/win situation for you and the parents. Here are some suggestions to keep in mind.

Send out invitations; let students help prepare. Enlist your students to help you prepare displays, select work for folders, write a short note to their parents, or act as hallway hosts during the open house. ELT instructor Donna Christmas, a longtime science teacher at South Colonie Middle School (near Albany), says teachers there work in teams to personally call and invite parents. Others boost attendance by sending personal invitations or postcards hand-addressed by students. Some districts arrange for older students to offer babysitting so more parents can come.

Don’t “wing it.” Rehearse what you’ll say. Practice an opening and a closing — many people don’t do that. Prepare an outline or checklist of areas you want to cover. Plan how you’ll keep track of time. Elementary teacher Julie Burnetter, a member of the Shenendehowa TA in Saratoga County, plays soft background music, and when the tape goes off, she knows she has five minutes to wrap up. If you’re limited to 10-15 minutes, be sure to time yourself at home.

Meet parents at the door. Don’t sit at your desk. Make parents feel welcome — be sure to thank them for coming, use a warm voice, make eye contact and remember to smile. To add a personal touch, you might display “day in the life” snapshots or make a video showing students at work in the classroom.

Outline your goals. This is the perfect opportunity to explain your policies and expectations. Jay Krass, a teacher in North Salem, Westchester County, suggests explaining the curriculum and major themes, plus your expectations for homework, attendance and behavior.

Recruit parental support. Be sure to remind parents their support and involvement is important. This is a great time to recruit volunteers for various activities and schedule parent-teacher conferences, if applicable. Have sign-up sheets available. This will save you time later.

Allow time for questions. Discourage “personal conferences.” Give parents a chance to ask general questions but be sure to firmly say “tonight is not the time for personal conversations about your child.” Kindly explain you’re still getting to know the kids — and tell parents the best way and time you can be reached to discuss any individual concerns. This avoids that huge line-up of parents at the end of the evening!

Give parents something to take home. Be selective, whether it’s a brief course outline, general district information or a union brochure on how to help children with reading. Several teachers suggested sending a follow-up letter to all parents, including those who were not able to attend.