Public Education Must Be Defended

By Diane D. DiChiara, John Jay

As a public school secondary educator there are frustrating, tumultuous days when I find myself reflecting back for the times of my own high school parochial education. I am both thankful to the sacrifices that my parents made to afford me that education, and proud to have been part of that system, after all, I am who I am in part because of that education. In those moments I remember the calm, the order, the rules, the parental support, and the students all seemingly alike (in dress, in attitude, socially, and economically) and I think “Maybe that’s the setting where I should be teaching, how easy it could be…” To my shame, I have even found myself mumbling those words to a colleague or two at the end of a particularly exasperating day.

But then I find myself on a train heading to the 35th annual NYSUT RA Convention. The collegial conversation (that there is never time for during the whirlwind days of teaching) begins and from pedagogy to unionism I find the hints of a renewed enthusiasm bubbling just below the surface. As I arrive in Washington there are thousands of delegates from across the state meeting to reflect on the year that has passed and looking ahead to the future and the work that remains. Surrounded by the delegates, union officials, and invited guests, my disillusionment totally dissolves and I am back to my roots and my beliefs in public school education. As Hillary Clinton affirmed in her eloquent speech to the delegates, “The public school system is second only to the constitution…making America a great country.” Promises to public school systems across this country must be kept and as Clinton said “the respect shortage must end.” Public school education must be defended.

Public school education guarantees the right for every child to have a fair and appropriate education. In 1976 this became law and the federal government promised to pay 40% of the bill; yet, in the 30 plus years that have since passed, this has never happened. Furthermore, as Senator Clinton reminded the delegates in 2001 when NCLB was enacted it was to be fully funded, but still is not. She also expressed that if every (continued on page 5)
Capasso Scholarship Recipients Named

We are pleased to announce that Christine Najjar, Anastasia Piliouras, and Joshua Sobrin are the recipients of the 2007 Ralph & Janet Capasso Scholarship.

The Wappingers Congress of Teachers and the Wappingers Congress of Retired Teachers award three scholarships to high school seniors whose parent or guardian is a member of the WCT. Each student will receive a scholarship of $1500.00.

A reception in honor of the scholarship recipients was held on Tuesday, May 29th at 7 PM in the library of Van Wyck JHS.

Members of this year’s scholarship committee were Catherine Kim, Marla Rohwer and Kathryn Shekitka.

RCK Students Visit Courthouse

Roy C. Ketcham’s Business Law and Sports and Entertainment Law classes visited the Poughkeepsie Supreme Courthouse to spend a day in Judge Dolan’s chambers on March 20, 2007. Students went through the judge’s daily calendar of cases and witnessed opening statements from attorneys for a Poughkeepsie drug case.

Students also watched a video on jury selection and spoke with parole officers, prosecuting attorneys, and defense attorneys.

Retiree: Robert Adam

Robert Adam has been teaching at Roy C. Ketcham High School for thirty-three years. Currently he is teaching 12th grade English but over the course of his career, he has taught in 9th, 10th, and 11th grades.

When asked what he will miss the most, Robert says, “The students. They have been my ‘teacher’ …… My colleagues. I respect their dedication, sincerity, compassion, and idealism. Like the students, they are strong men and women. I think them for what they’ve taught me.”

Robert will not miss 4:45 A.M. alarm clocks, and 7:17 A.M. attempts to make Shakespeare exciting before breakfast. When asked about future plans, Robert responds, “Stay curious.”

Dates to Know

June 11 - General Membership Meeting @ RCK
June 11 - BOE meeting
June 15 - payday
June 19 - R.A. meeting

Good News!

- Congratulations to Alan and Beth Kinney (KR) on the birth of their first child, Anna Elise. Anna was born May 8, 2007 and weighed 6lbs., 6 oz., and was 20 inches in length.
**Retiree: Tom Rogers**

I can’t believe the time has come. What’s retirement? I’m a little nervous, to be honest. I have no training in retirement. My contemporaries who are retired tell me they don’t know how they ever had time to work. I take that to mean I’ll find something to keep me busy. Only kidding. I have 7.5 grandchildren - all living locally. There are golf courses I have yet to conquer, and of course, there is the never ending “honey do” list. But at first, I’m going to do what I want, when I want, and where I want (if it is OK with my wife).

I started teaching physical education in this district in 1963. At that time there was only one high school, one or five elementary buildings. I can’t remember the ones I worked for or where I taught. In 1974 I resigned from teaching for monetary reasons, but I would not want to have 16 years later. Salaries then were not what they are today, and there was as yet, no Teachers Union. I was there when the struggle began and we were forced to strike because we wanted to be treated as professionals and paid accordingly. Some things never change. Thanks to the persistent efforts of people like Ralph Capasso, Herb Wittels, Ed Robish, and many others, today we have the WCT.

What will I miss? I will miss my friends and colleagues at Kinry Road Elementary School, my home these past four years. I’ll miss their kindness, their support, their laughter, and their motivation. I will miss how caring and supportive they are. They made me feel like one of them from day one and I have never felt otherwise since. There is no place else I would want to end my career. I will always miss my department Buddies at John Jay. We had great times together for many years.

There are a lot of things I will not miss, but I will keep them private for now. All things considered, I have had a great run. I had a great teaching and coaching career that I will always be proud of in retrospect. But for now, I’m outta here.

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**“All things considered, I have had a great run.”**

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**Get Your Union Shirt Before June 11th!**

The following shirts are in stock due to discontinued style, wrong order, or size ordered.

Please go to the WCT Office to purchase one of the below shirts. First come, first served.

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<tr>
<th>Shirt Style</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Price</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ladies very fitted tee</td>
<td>S (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ladies’ short sleeve polo</td>
<td>XL (1)</td>
<td>$29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Men’s short sleeve polo</td>
<td>S (1), XL (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ladies’ sweatshirt</td>
<td>L (1), XL (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ladies’ short sleeve denim shirt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ringer tee</td>
<td>XL (1)</td>
<td>$10.50</td>
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<td>Men’s long sleeve polo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Long sleeve tee</td>
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<td>Ladies’ long sleeve polo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ladies’ tee</td>
<td>XL (2)</td>
<td>$9</td>
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With the storm coming, our group of volunteers were uncertain the affect it would have on Kids Expo. We had fifteen WCT members who volunteered to be in the Parade Sunday, April 15 and five members who volunteered to man the DCUTC table for two hours. Not knowing everyone’s phone numbers, we did our best contacting all about the last minute cancellation of the parade. The indoor portion of the event went on and was a huge success.

Thanks to Amy Manfredi, Cathy Augello, Dana Brown, and Taryn Iorlano for helping us at the Kids Expo. A wide range of organizations were present to inform the community of available services and to offer free items like toothbrushes, band aides, lists for the babysitter, traveling medicine cups, and cookies.

The group, Walkway Over the Hudson, was present. They are building a walkway over the Hudson by preserving the Poughkeepsie-Highland Railroad Bridge. You will be hearing more about a biking event and other ways to help preserve this historic asset.

Events like this are not only important for the community, but they give us a chance to let families know that teachers, who are part of the community and their neighbors, care.

Don’t forget the projects that are in the planning stage. Members will be getting information on the Blood Drive and the Carnwarth Garden Project. Carnwarth is an ongoing project in Wappingers Falls. It was previously known as Greystone, but now has its original name of Carnwarth Farms. It is a ninety-nine acre site overlooking the Hudson. The Town of Wappingers will work with the WCT as partners in a beautification project. We will be able to put a plaque or bench with the WCT name in our section of the grounds.

This is an important time for the WCT. Reaching out to the community and working with them as partners is another avenue to gain the support we need.
child is entitled to an appropriate education then for many children that education must start at the preschool level. Clinton believes that preschool must be made available to all children. By the time a child is five, the child has “learned half of the vocabulary a child will use. For every one dollar invested in preschool education…get a seven dollar return.” The lack of funding and unfulfilled promises, what impact does this have on student performance?

The senator went on to speak about ending the “Respect Shortage.” When she visits a New York public school she always asks the teachers “What’s it like to teach here?” The answers range from “It’s like Camelot” to “There’s no sense of community.” I found this to be quite relevant to us as teachers in the WCSD. The staff across the district had just received a memo canceling “Take Your Child to Work Day” because “It is rare that a child would not already have a working knowledge of what happens within a school building and be very cognizant of what a teaching, secretarial, kitchen, or custodial career would entail.” If Senator Clinton had asked that question to a WCSD teacher, secretary, kitchen, or custodial worker what would the response have been? While this memo was later rescinded, the damage was already done. Teachers have the right to be respected as professionals, but not because more than 70% of teachers who reside in the district exercise their right to vote. Respect can best be demonstrated through action.

Furthermore, the federal government needs to respect the students. As Clinton also stated in regards to assessment “put learning, not testing, front and center.” Fair assessment needs to be used to measure “learning.” A practice used in many NYS school districts to measure secondary student achievement to fulfill NCLB requirements is to assess all students with the Regents exams. This includes the students who are “fairly and appropriately” not exposed to Regents curriculum, the developmentally disabled. This student receives an education based on life skills. What is “fair and appropriate” about the use of Regents exams as assessments for those students? What impact does this have on student performance? As Emerson said “The secret of education lies in respecting the pupil.”

Governor Spitzer was another speaker at the convention and he cautioned that we are becoming “A Tale of Two Societies.” He reminded the delegates that we are a changing nation; he described our class system as going from a bell curve to a bar bell. We cannot forget those who are not doing so well. Across NYS, 67% of students graduate in four years. In the four biggest cities the rate drops to 47% in four years and 56% in six years. Outside these cities the rates are 80% in four years and 86% in six years. He urges school districts to use the increased budget dollars, wisely. He warns that “money without accountability is a prescription for failure” and “performance is expected.” Furthermore, he agrees with Clinton about future success lying in early education.

It’s Monday and I stand outside my 3rd period classroom greeting students as they enter. I think there can be no other educational setting, but this one, for me. The noise, the energy, the differences, the a-t-t-i-t-u-d-e-s... This is America. Promises must be fulfilled. Respect must be universal. Public schools must be defended.
Let us help put you on the MAP!

In efforts to expand communications with members, NYSUT Member Benefits Trust is introducing MAP, the Member Assistance Program. Just as maps assist by providing direction, MAP team members will assist Member Benefits and vice versa.

By joining MAP, you'll be among the first to hear about new, endorsed programs and program updates. You'll receive special offers from Member Benefits or its endorsed program providers. You'll help Member Benefits test potential new programs and provide feedback. Your opinions will be solicited on new programs under consideration.

MAP is an e-mail based program. Member Benefits will not share your e-mail address with outside interests other than endorsed program providers and only under controlled circumstances. Member Benefits will oversee the frequency of e-mail communications to ensure you will not be bombarded.

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FOR SALE: 6 piece roll-top bedroom set. Mirrored headboard (queen), bureau, Mirrored hutch/dresser, 2 end tables. $200. E-mail RICKLN@aol.com for pics or call 229-5940.

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**FIREWORKS**

Friday, August 24th @ 7:05 PM. Hudson Valley Renegades Baseball game. Reserved grandstand tickets $10.00 each to benefit Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. Call Kerry @ 223-9817 for more information.

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