Dear Colleagues,

As public employees, almost all conditions affecting our professional environment, our working conditions and our pension rights are determined by the New York State Legislature, the Governor, and the U.S. Congress. If we wish to have a positive influence on our professional future, we must take an active role in the political process.

NYSUT offers each of us an opportunity to participate in our own future by supporting the 2009 VOTE/COPE campaign. VOTE/COPE is the political voice, a non-partisan political action arm of New York State United Teachers, funded entirely by voluntary contributions from members. Legislators in Albany and Washington know the strength of our efforts and our ability to elect candidates and campaign committees that support education, labor, and social justice.

Thanks to members’ voluntary donations, VOTE/COPE has won a permanent cost-of-living adjustment for retiree pensions; gained pension enhancements for Tiers 3 and 4 members – including the elimination of the 3 percent contribution after 10 years of service. Through this political process, VOTE/COPE has campaigned for periodic early retirement incentives. In addition, it helped protect the Social Security system from privatization schemes that threatened our livelihood in retirement. Over the years, we have also gained more of a voice about the decisions State Education and Regents make on professional and educational issues. The reinsertion of a five-year time frame to get a Master’s Degree is one example.

Endorsements are made by the NYSUT Board of Directors following a thorough procedure which includes a statewide endorsement conference involving the participation of local presidents, a statewide political action committee, and NYSUT’s Legislative Department. Incumbents’ voting records on important education and labor bills are given great weight in considering possible endorsement. Following NYSUT’s Endorsement Conference, the Board of Directors acts on the final recommendations of the Political Action Committee.

(continued on page 2)
and the Executive Committee. It is important for us to keep in mind that VOTE/COPE does not favor any political party over another. Endorsements are made based solely on candidates’ voting record.

In 2008, NYSUT-backed candidates from the White House to Congress and throughout the state house won races that will change the direction of the state and the nation. These candidates – on both sides of the aisle – who have demonstrated their support for labor, for public education and for health care will help steer us through the tough days ahead.

As we endure these turbulent economic times, districts in every corner of the state are going to face an uphill battle to pass school budgets again this year. Increasing energy costs have exhausted precious extra taxpayer dollars, including that of our own members. This burden could be a factor in the May 19th school budget vote and the election of school board candidates.

The 2009 legislative session will be pivotal in continuing efforts to maintain and improve educational programs. NYSUT will work diligently to provide adequate funding for public education. Our participation in VOTE/COPE will give NYSUT the resources necessary to attain the above mentioned goals. Your support for the 2009 VOTE/COPE campaign is critical to add to NYSUT’s record of legislative successes. A great deal has been achieved, but much needs to be accomplished. Your contribution demonstrates your understanding of the importance of political action and the vital role it plays in our professional life.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

In solidarity,

Pasquale Delli Carpini
Pasquale Delli Carpini
WCT President

[Information obtained from NYSUT VOTE/COPE Literature]
When conditions are tolerable, very few of us are motivated to change them. What follows is a summary of some of the changes to the law that have occurred over the last few decades. Many were reactions that were spawned when school employees felt angered, aggrieved and compelled to act.

- Once there was a time when we could not bargain a contract. Then came the Taylor Law.
- Once there was a time when bargaining reached a certain stage the school board would solely determine the final result (legislative hearing). They no longer can.
- Once there was a time when no employee had to contribute to their retirement. Then came the NYC/NYS fiscal crisis and Tier III.
- Once there was a time when your social security payments would be deducted from your pension. Now this can’t happen.
- Once state aid increased only in even (would you believe, election) years. Since 1980 it has increased regularly except in economic downturns when any decrease has been minimized.
- Your right to due process and just cause was regularly attacked. Now it rarely is.
- Once there was a time when the district could change your working conditions (step payment, insurance, etc.) when the contract lapsed. Then came the Triborough Law and now they can’t.
- Once when you were a ten month employee, you couldn’t receive unemployment for the summer but only were granted 5/6 of a year credit towards retirement. Now you receive a full year’s credit.
- Once an attack on any school employee could be swept under the rug. Now it is a felony.

We have worked hard to lobby for those bills that affect education, labor and our individual rights. We have endorsed candidates regardless of party based on their support of those bills in those areas. Future accomplishments rely on each member’s understanding of and support of this process. Your contributions to VOTE/COPE make it happen. If you haven’t contributed, please join us. If you have, thank you for making a more effective voice for yourself and your co-workers.
MetLife Teacher Survey: Positive Signs and Red Flags

By: Mike Rose
Reprinted from the AFT LeaderNet News - February 25, 2009

MetLife’s 25th annual Survey of the American Teacher traces a path of progress for the profession but raises some important red flags for the future, particularly in urban education.

Released Feb. 25 at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., MetLife’s widely watched gauge of educator, administrator and student attitudes reveals that the teaching corps’ passion for the profession burns brightly and across the board—an astounding 98 percent of teachers surveyed in the report say they love to teach. And rates are rising for teachers who say they are satisfied with their careers (62 percent of respondents, up from 40 percent in 1984), and for those who deem themselves well prepared for the classroom (two-thirds of teachers today, up from 46 percent a quarter-century ago).

Particularly encouraging is the rise in teachers who would advise students to follow in their footsteps: Three-quarters of teachers participating in the silver anniversary survey said they would encourage a young person to become a teacher, up 21 percent from 1984.

“The AFT always has worked to ensure teachers are respected and appreciated as professionals. The MetLife survey shows that good progress has been made,” AFT president Randi Weingarten said following the release of the report. She noted that most educators feel positive about their careers, their schools, the level of support they receive from colleagues, their relationships with parents—and, most importantly, their students.

But there are important caveats that must not get lost in the MetLife results, Weingarten warned. Urban schools’ teachers are less likely than their suburban counterparts to rate their schools’ disciplinary policy as excellent (61 percent versus 74 percent). Similar disparities between urban teachers and their rural and suburban counterparts were evident when MetLife surveyed teachers about adequate classroom resources, good parent involvement and high-quality academic standards. Only 45 percent of urban teachers rate academic standards in their schools as excellent, compared with 60 percent of teachers in suburban districts. More than two-thirds (67 percent) of urban teachers report at least one out of four of their students pass through their doors not fully prepared to learn at grade level; only 23 percent of suburban teachers cited this problem.

“The findings reinforce our most recent call for national standards to improve schools and help students reach those standards, we also must be committed to providing teachers and kids with the supports, and teaching and learning conditions, that are necessary,” Weingarten said. Those supports include a strong core curriculum, properly aligned assessments, job-embedded professional development, and a safe and orderly environment, she added.

The MetLife survey includes a national sample of 1,000 public school teachers in kindergarten through grade 12. Also surveyed were 502 principals, along with an online survey of 902 students in grades 3-12. The latest survey finds:

♦ Two-thirds of teachers say their jobs offer an opportunity to earn a decent salary, up from 37 percent in 1984.

♦ Growing numbers of teachers report that poverty is a learning hindrance for at least a quarter of their students, with half of today’s teachers pointing to poverty as an impediment, compared with 41 percent in 1992.

♦ Twenty-two percent of teachers say a lack of facility with English hinders learning for at least a quarter of their classroom, with 30 percent of urban teachers citing this problem.

♦ Fewer than half of teachers (48 percent) say that standardized tests are effective tools for tracking their students’ performance, while 79 percent of principals believe that standardized tests help teachers track performance.
Brinckerhoff Places in LEGO League Tournament

By Gregory Renino

Wappingers elementary and junior high school students, along with a private entry, competed in a FIRST LEGO League Tournament on January 31, 2009 at Van Wyck Junior High School. The Brinckerhoff BroncoBots placed second overall, as well as earning The Best Robot Design award. Van Wyck J.H. placed third. RoboRexasaurus took first place. Fishkill Plains earned The Best Project Award and Oak Grove won The Teamwork Award. Gayhead Elementary won Best Robot Performance and came in fourth place overall! The first, second and third place teams are moving on to compete with other placing teams from around the area. They competed at Dutchess Community College on February 28th for a chance to move on to the nationals in Georgia and Ohio.

“FIRST LEGO League (FLL) is an exciting and fun global robotics program that ignites an enthusiasm for discovery, science, and technology in kids ages 9 to 14 (16 outside of the U.S. and Canada). Each year FLL teams embark on an adventurous Challenge based on current, real-world issues. Guided by a team coach the kids:

• Research and solve a real-world problem based on the Challenge theme
• Present their research and solutions
• Build an autonomous robot using engineering concepts

Using the yearly Challenges, FLL entices kids to think like scientists and engineers, provides a fun, creative, hands-on learning experience, teaches kids to experiment and overcome obstacles, builds self-esteem and confidence, and inspires kids to participate in science and technology.”
(http://www.usfirst.org)

This year’s Challenge theme was Climate connections.

WJHS Students Send Greetings to Recovering Veterans

By: Claudia King

Students at Wappingers Junior High School nearly doubled the number of “thank you” and “get well” cards to recovering Veteran’s in December of 2008. “The American Red Cross distributed 979 cards made by WJHS students to recovering men and women wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan,” said Kathleen Snowder of team 7-2.

The 7-2 team of teachers, Kelly Barnum, Rosellen Hardt, Paul Ibsen, Melissa Wyant, Kathleen Snowder, the foreign language/ESL department and teachers in the Social Studies and English departments all gave students the opportunity to show their gratitude for their service. Some of the cards read: “Thank you for protecting us,” “America loves all of you,” and “Thank you for fighting for our country. You must really be a brave person.”

Since the number of cards doubled this year, Snowder and the team consider this initiative to be a huge success.
VW SLT Has Tea for Seniors

By Theresa Chirico

On October 28, 2008, the Van Wyck JHS School Leadership Team hosted their 2nd annual Tea for Senior Citizens under the direction of Mrs. Theresa Chirico. Forty one seniors from the Wappingers Senior Citizen Center attended. Also, in attendance, were Steven Shuchat, Principal VWJHS, Terrence Thompson, Assistant Principal, VWJHS, Christopher Barrie, Assistant Principal, VWJHS, James Daley, Assistant Principal, VWJHS, and Dr. Cheryl Thomas.

The seniors were served culinary delights by the students of VWJHS. They were entertained by the students’ choir and band under the direction of Mr. Richard Weinrich and Ms. Andrea Burgers. This event proved to be a wonderful afternoon for all.

Letter to the Editor

Many thanks to the WCT Welfare Trust’s law firm of Mirkin & Gordon!

We wish to express our sincerest appreciation to attorneys Michael Heffernan and Arthur DiBerardino. Their superb legal skill helped make the sale and closing on our New York house while living out of state run smoothly from beginning to end. We were able to receive prompt responses to our questions and concerns via telephone and email. Legal documents were delivered to us in a timely manner so as to fulfill contractual deadlines.

We also wish to send our thanks to paralegal Sandy Amato for her help.

MaryRose and Frank Fabiano, retired.

Congratulations, Retirees!

The following people will be honored at the April 24th dinner:

Linda Adams – RCK – Science teacher
Deborah Dvorkin – EV – grade 1
Jo-Ann Fury – DO – Technology Integration Teacher
Joan Kavanagh – FP – Grade 1
Roni Maschas – MC – Special Ed
Ellen Metzger-O’Shea – FP – Art
Bernadette Murphy – WJ – Math
Susan Stillerman – OG – Bridge Teacher
Robert Gonyea – retired July 2008
Robert Isler – retired July 2008
Leanne Hassett – retired February 2009
Wappingers Congress of Teachers Recognition Dinner

Honoring 2009 Retirees, Members with 25 Years of Service, & Members Receiving Tenure

Friday, April 24, 2009
6 PM - 11 PM
Arbor Ridge, Hopewell Junction

Cocktail Hour, Open Bar (all evening)
Dinner Choice: Chicken Marsala, Prime Rib, Salmon
Cake & Coffee

Price: free for 2009 retiree / $40 per guest

RSVP to the WCT Office by Friday, April 17, 2009

Please return this lower portion of the invitation with your payment. Checks are to be made out to "WCT." Reservations cannot be accepted after Friday, April 17, 2009. Sorry for the inconvenience.

Name: ____________________________________________

Number attending: _________________ Building: ____________________________

Dinner Entrée Choice:

Chicken: _________ Prime Rib: __________ Salmon: ___________
The WCT, in conjunction with the Wappingers Congress of Retired Teachers, is offering three (3) $1500 scholarships to seniors presently enrolled in any public or private high school planning to attend college in the fall of 2009. To be eligible candidates must have a parent or legal guardian who is a member in good standing of the WCT.

The selection process for these awards will require the following:

- an application
- an essay
- a high school transcript
- one letter of recommendation
- a personal interview for the finalists.

Applications are available in the WCT office. Please call 227-5065 to request an application or pick it up directly. To be considered, applications must reach the WCT office no later than 5 p.m. on Tuesday, March 31, 2009.

Committee members are: James DeNitto, June May and Norma Najjar

Stressed about work? Having financial issues and need to talk about it? Are you having a family issue and you don’t know what to do? Or you just need someone to listen?

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(continued on page 10)
Summers’ Classified Ads  cont. from page 9

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