RECLAIMING PUBLIC EDUCATION FORUM

By Shahnna Allen Editor

After Governor Andrew Cuomo’s harsh and abrasive address on public education reform settled in, the reactions from the community are coming through loud and clear. Thursday March 12th at RCK saw the gathering of four esteemed and diverse panelists, amiably hosted by the endearing and, unfortunately, former Senator Terry Gipson.

The nearly half full auditorium held teachers, parents, community members and signs readied for use. The Reclaiming Public Education forum was hosted by WCT, Alliance for Quality Education, Millbrook, Pawling, Arlington and Poughkeepsie School Districts and Associations.

Each registered voter attendee in the district was offered a printed declaration expressing outrage at Cuomo’s proposals. In no uncertain terms the signed and submitted declaration sees the proposed adjustments as war on the students, public schools and education professionals across the state.

Highlights from the declaration included: Cuomo’s inadequate funding for public education (he’s shifting his interest toward Charter schools); holding what funds are available hostage in connection with certain reforms; increasing the extreme amount of testing; making public school and teacher evaluations out of house; and threatening state takeover of “failing” schools.

Gipson began the forum with some comments before introducing each of the four panelists. Continued next page

NEXT LOCAL FORUM
On Friday, March 20th from 3:30-4:30 P.M. at the Poughkeepsie Middle School Auditorium. It is sponsored by the Poughkeepsie Public School Teachers’ Association (PPSTA). The PPSTA is going to discuss Governor Cuomo’s budget and policy proposals. The following elected politicians will be there:

NYS Senator Susan Serino—District 41; NYS Assemblyman Frank Skartados—District 104
NYS Assemblyman Kiernan Michael Lalor—District 105; NYS Assemblywoman Didi Barrett—District 106

“If Gipson were Senator now we would not be in this situation.”
Pasquale Delli Carpini
WCT President
He said we are in a perfect storm that blows against public education wherein “the Governor is persistent in his effort to annihilate public education.” He further pointed out that the rules created for public schools and professionals are made by those who know nothing of education.

Fittingly a poster made by NYSUT of Cuomo’s was displayed on the podium: “He has no respect for you or your profession FIGHT BACK!” A life-sized cutout of a stoic Cuomo with arms crossed watched from the stage. Quite possibly no one wanted to put the display in his/her car for transport by the time the session ended.

The four panelists each said a few words before the floor was opened. Betsy Marshall has been a Special Education teacher in Arlington District for 15 years. Personally moved at times, she related the personal experience of witnessing and attempting to reassure two students overwhelmed with the days of testing. She watched one girl, clutching a stuffed animal push through each reading passage until she repeatedly got stuck and broke down.

When Marshall tried to reassure her that the test did not warrant getting so upset the girl related that she had been told that the test measured her teacher. “I love my teacher, but I’m not smart enough to save her.”

In another instance Marshall watched horrified as one boy nervously twirled his hair during the long testing until finally he was pulling it out in chunks.

Over the past 12 years she has watched the increase of testing with little increase in the value of education. The increased cost of testing has come at the cost of school programs and assistants, to name a few. “It [testing] has proven to be a failed idea. It is too tough for those [policy makers] to admit it hasn’t worked – it’s easier to blame the implementers: parents, teachers and students.”

No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top have failed, she concluded. Children, who develop at different rates, are expected to be taught the same material at the same time and absorb at the same rate. “Education of our children is not a business and teachers are not assembly line workers.”

Jennifer Eraca is a Millbrook teacher and an Arlington School Board member. As a third grade inclusion teacher in the early 2000s in New York she watched her job turn from teacher to test prepper and test administrator. She admits that her own four children are opted out of testing. She emphasized that she is not opposed to high standards, but the current means of measuring.
She advised the audience to harness the energy and reasons why they got involved in the profession of teaching in the first place. Parents are the greatest advocate. Silence is complacency, so please vote.

The third panelist, Ralph Coates of the Poughkeepsie School Board asked, “What happened to the creativity in our classrooms? Excessive testing has taken it out of the classroom and school buildings.”

In reference to Poughkeepsie’s threat of a “failing” school label Coates said, “Tying State aid and school aid into policy is unacceptable.” The Governor’s proposal is to take schools abrasively labeled “failures” and implement models from the state level.

Coates pleaded that the best help for struggling schools is to give those professionals, who are with the students on a daily basis, the tools needed to help. He then shared the Poughkeepsie District motto: Teamwork makes the dream work.

Billy Easton, Executive Director of the Alliance for Quality Education, wrapped up the panel commentary with an understanding that comes from outside the classroom and board meeting. As the introduction pointed out, AQE is a statewide coalition of parent and community organizations representing over 100,000 New Yorkers.

Easton, who serves as the political savvy on the panel, spends much time in the legislative hallways and organizes demonstrations at the grassroots level in order to get political attention. He addressed the elephant in the room, the cut out on the stage when he asked, “Why is he doing this?”

He answered the query by pointing out that Cuomo is interested in his own reelection and that the highest funding comes from the Hedge Fund portion. Money in schools has become a lower priority than money in his personal campaign fund.

He noted the obsession with testing and the proposal to use that testing as a measure of teacher evaluations, which would increase from 20% of an evaluation to 50%. The proposal further outlines that of the remaining 50% of the evaluation, namely 35% would be made up of evaluations by ones who have never been in the building. The suggestion is for drive by evaluators to make a business of coming into school for the sake of evaluating and rating teachers.

“Top down solutions have a track record of failure.”

FORUM on page 8
**WCT ELECTIONS**

In accordance with the WCT Constitution and By-Laws, there will be an election in all buildings on Thursday, March 26th, 2015.

The positions to be voted upon are:

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<td>President</td>
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<td>Vice President – Elementary</td>
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Nominating petitions will be available on the WCT website. Nominating petitions, containing the signatures of twenty five (25) WCT members in good standing, must be returned to the Election Committee, in a sealed envelope, no later than 4:00 p.m. on WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18TH, 2015.

Any WCT member in good standing may submit a nomination form.

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The WCT Celebrates the Master Teachers & National Board Teachers:

- Margaret Loh
- Katrina Duffy
- Mary Jane McFarland
- Mike Crocco

Not pictured: NBCT Anne Marie Dunn and Meredith Inkeles
John Jay AP & Honors Biology students attended an in school field trip with Dr. Peter Zkow, cardiothoracic surgeon from Vassar Brothers Hospital.

He discussed the rigors of pursuing a career in the medical profession with the students and offered advice and guidance. He also talked about what his job entailed and showed actually videos of procedures and surgeries that he has performed.

He also extended an invitation to our AP students to shadow him and actually watch him perform surgery. His presentation was a most informative, enlightening and exciting experience for all who attended.

Patricia Nardone Biology Teacher

FOR SALE

2 bedroom timeshare at Outer Banks Beach Club II in Kill Devil Hills, NC. I have traded this unit for vacations/resorts all over the country; also can be traded internationally. 845/494-2174
In an effort to provide students at John Jay with diverse learning opportunities, while fostering local community relations, 15 students from the Special Education Support Classes of Mrs. Lyons, Mr. Jutt and Mrs. Loprinzo planned and hosted a senior citizen luncheon for 23 members of the East Fishkill Senior Center.

The two-hour event, which took place on February 10th at John Jay High School, was funded by a Fund for Excellence in Education Grant, which was secured by Ms. Rena Finsmith, Special Education Teacher, and Mr. David Kedzielawa, in his former role as a Business Teacher.

In addition to sharing delicious food catered from a local deli, all participants enjoyed conversation, competitive games of Bingo and a snowman centerpiece raffle. Students were responsible for working within a budget to develop a catering menu, provide paper goods and small game prizes. The students were also responsible for decorating prior to the event, downloading music, greeting guests at the school entrance, distributing name tags, escorting guests to the event location, serving beverages and food, and making conversation.

Prior to the event, students had brainstormed a list of conversation starters and questions designed to help understand how today’s high school experience compares to that of the senior citizens. Both students and the senior citizens shared stories about their personal interests, hobbies and life experiences. Students were also responsible for running several rounds of Bingo.

Following the luncheon, the students reflected on the event in order to determine what aspects went well and what might be improved upon. During this “debriefing” period, students shared information about their interactions with the senior citizens.

A couple of students communicated that they felt a connection to some of the seniors with whom they had the opportunity to sit and talk. They learned that some of the senior citizens either worked in the school district, had children who attended and/or have grandchildren who are currently attending John Jay.

One senior citizen shared pictures of his motorcycle. Another shared the fact that he had to leave high school in order to earn money to help support his family. Students not only learned about the senior citizens, but also about each other. One student commented that cell phone use among students during the event was not appropriate and recognized the importance of all students taking an active role when hosting such an event.

The group determined that it will be important to better prepare some of the students prior to hosting any future events. The students suggested that we consider hosting the next event at the senior citizen center instead of the high school and also establishing a dress code for all students who will be hosting.

Hopefully, this intergenerational event is the first of many. It was a success due to the collaboration of many people, including the teachers who applied for the grant under the direction of the Assistant Director of Special Education, the students and the teaching assistants, who helped to plan and run the event, and of course, our senior citizens, including Sue Gartner, Program Coordinator, at the East Fishkill Senior Center.

We appreciate each of our 23 seniors who attended, despite the snowy morning. They are a great group of fun-loving people and we all look forward to getting together again in a couple of months, after the spring thaw.
Easton then explained that the Assembly listened and fought regarding the proposals, but the Senate, focused on looking good, he said, offered to revamp, not reject the proposals and thus support the push toward Chartered education.

Easton then offered specific advice to this specific audience: pressure from the grassroots sector is positively affecting the numbers. Attend rallies and participate in legislation. Ask others to take action, attend a forum, call a legislature or contact a State Senator. “Andrew Cuomo has done one thing for us: he’s brought us together.”

Before the floor was opened to slow and then steady stream of comments, Easton concluded with the inspiring thought: “You are the one they [Senate and Legislators] are afraid of.”

Attendees at RCK Auditorium March 12th for Reclaim Public Education Forum

Below are signs made by attendee reading:

This is what student advocacy looks like!

Gov Cuomo, you went to Cuba, but you won’t visit my classroom

We are not failing our children, don’t fail us!

Our students Our teachers Our schools ALL kids need local control
COMMON CORE DUTIES

Valerie LaRose and Donna Kart are talented teachers without classes for the next six months. No, there's no scandal behind this; the RCK English and VW math teachers respectively, have been chosen for special duties based on funds provided by the state of New York. LaRose and Kart will act as personal trainers for the teaching modules on Engage NY, tightening the Core every day.

Engage NY is a digital tank that houses the modules or scripts for each level and unit of study, guided and propelled by the Common Core standards. In order to align everyone some help is needed to coach and teach the teachers.

However, before the teachers will return they are doing what many stories do - return to the beginning. LaRose and Kart have traveled to Albany to talk to the authors of the Engage NY modules. As outlined there the pair learned that their work time is divided between 80% module enhancement and 20% parent and colleague work.

LaRose is re-writing the ELA modules for Grade 10. She can work with any teacher at any level 7-12. Meanwhile Kart, who is currently housed at Myers Corners and working with teachers there, will help crunch the numbers for Math 7-12.

In addition, Janet Warden, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, has requested that the project gather and analyze writing samples from K-12. This collection would highlight the differences, or the lack thereof, between levels.

By Shanna Allen  Editor

On May 2, 2015, WCSD is hosting a literacy conference with Penny Kittle (http://www.pennykittle.net), author and educator. The focus is adolescent literacy and it is inspiring, effective, and adaptable to any teacher's practice.

The conference includes lunch and costs only $20 for district employees; out-of-district is $35. WCSD teachers will receive in-service credit.

Visit Mylearningplan.com to enroll.
ALL WCT MEMBERS
RALPH AND JANET CAPASSO SCHOLARSHIP

The Wappingers Congress of Teachers and the Wappingers Congress of Retired Teachers are once again offering three (3) $2,000.00 scholarships to seniors presently enrolled in any public or private high school planning to attend college in September 2015. To be eligible, candidates must have a parent or guardian who is a member in good standing of the WCT.

The selection process for these awards will require the following:

- An application
- A high school transcript (including senior year classes grades)
- One letter of recommendation
- An essay
- For the finalists, a personal interview

Applications will be available in the WCT office on Monday, February 23, 2015. Please call 845-227-5065 to request an application or you can pick one up directly at the WCT office. To be considered, applications must reach the WCT office no later than Tuesday, April 7, 2015.

Finalists will be called for a mandatory interview at the WCT office scheduled for Tuesday, May 12, 2015.

Save the Date!

On September 19, 2015 WJHS will be celebrating

75 years of education and friendship.

Congratulations to Luke Rabideau and his wife Jamie on the birth of their son Ryder. He was born Saturday Feb. 14th at 7:42 am at 7lbs and 20" long.
WELFARE TRUST FUND UPDATE

As you know, the WCT Welfare Trust Fund (“Fund”) is providing a pilot coinsurance/co-payment reimbursement program to all active and retired members and their families, who participate in the Empire Health Advantage PPO and EPO Select 20 Plans, provided by the Dutchess Educational Health Insurance Consortium (“DEHIC”). Retirees must be enrolled in one of the WTF Plans.

This program provides an opportunity for you to offset the co-pay/coinsurance costs that you incurred from July 1, 2014 through December 31, 2014. Starting January 1, 2015, you may submit a claim form with a copy of your Explanation of Benefits to the Fund and receive reimbursement of up to $150 per covered family for any in-network coinsurance and/or co-payment costs incurred under the DEHIC Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield Healthy Advantage PPO and EPO 20 plan. Once the $150 is reached, the Fund will reimburse 1% of all additional in-network coinsurance and/or co-payment costs incurred during the same period.

Claims must be submitted to the Fund no later than March 31st of the calendar year following the calendar year during which your coinsurance and/or co-payment expenses were incurred (Example: Coinsurance and/or co-payment expenses incurred between July 1, 2014 and December 31, 2014 must be submitted between January 1, 2015 and March 31, 2015).

In order to take advantage of this benefit, you must follow the following easy steps. Please wait until after January 1, 2015 to request your “CLAIMS SUMMARY” as co-payments and co-insurance will apply through December 31, 2014.

1. Print the Co-pay/Coinsurance form under the FORMS TO DOWNLOAD tab on the WCT website.
2. Complete the top portion of the form, sign, date, and enter total amount submitted.
3. Call Empire at 1-800-342-9816 (this number is on the back of your insurance card). Ask to speak with a customer representative.
4. Request a “CLAIMS SUMMARY” for the time period of July 1, 2014 through December 31, 2014.
5. You will only be able to request a “CLAIMS SUMMARY” for you and any dependents under the age of eighteen. Other family members that are covered under your insurance will need to request their own “CLAIMS SUMMARY”. This is necessary due to HIPAA privacy regulations. This request can take place during the same phone call.
6. They will send your “CLAIMS SUMMARY” via standard mail. They will NOT email it to you.
7. Send your “CLAIMS SUMMARY” along with your completed Co-Pay/Co-Insurance form to the address below.

Wappingers Congress of Teachers Welfare Trust Fund
c/o Daniel H. Cook Associates
253 West 35th – 12th Floor
New York, NY 10001
6th Annual Ketcham 5K Race/Walk and 1 Mile Kids Run

**DATE:** Saturday April 18, 2015

**TIME:** 8:30am 1 Mile Kids Run for all kids under age 12 followed by the 5k race/walk at 9:30am

**KIDS RUN:** Starts at the RCK Track and Loops around RCK High School

**5K RACE:** 3.1 mile loop starting at RCK High School around Lark Oniad and finishing back at RCK High School

**PLACE:** Roy C. Ketcham High School

**RACE DAY REGISTRATION:** Opens at 8:00 am

**FEE (NO REFUNDS):** Kids Run: $5.00 (each gets a ribbon, no t-shirt)

**PRE-REGISTRATION:** Is over April 1st to pre-order t-shirts. T-shirts to pre-registrants $15

**RACE DAY:** Race day registration $20.00 & no shirt

**AWARDS:** Male: up to 18, 19-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60 and up

Female: up to 18, 19-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60 and up

RCK Alumni: male and female top finisher

RCK Faculty: male and female top finisher

**INFO:** David Budd 845-298-5100 x31045 or David.Budd@wcsdny.org

**REG:** Make checks payable to RCK Track and Field Booster Club and mail to David Budd, Roy C. Ketcham High School, 99 Myers Corners Road, Wappingers Falls, NY 12590

**RESTRICTIONS:** No Rollerblades, skateboards, bikes, dogs, showers

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A PUBLICATION OF THE WAPPINGERS CONGRESS OF TEACHERS

2537 ROUTE 52, SUITE 15
HOPEWELL JUNCTION, NY  12533
E-MAIL: wct@frontiernet.net

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BOTH NONCOMMERCIAL, MEMBER ADS (NO CHARGE/TWO ISSUES) & COMMERCIAL ADS ($5/ISSUE), THROUGH WCT OFFICE: commentator@wcteachers.org.

Checks payable & mailed to WCT
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DANIEL H. COOK  800-342-6651
MIRKIN & GORDON (LAWYERS)  914-997-1576
DAVIS VISION  800-999-5431
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HEALTH ADVOCATE  866-695-8622

DIRECTIONS TO WCT OFFICE

2537 ROUTE 52, SUITE 15
HOPEWELL JUNCTION, NY 12533

- Heritage Square complex east of Rt 376 and 52 and west of the Taconic
- Enter parking lot and make second right
- Use front entrance
- Go to 2nd floor, door at the end Suite 15