

The Beacon

Western Region PTA®

New York State Congress of Parents and Teachers, Inc.
-Branch of the National-

March 2008

A Message from the Region Director

Hello Everyone,

Spring is just around the corner or at least it is according to the calendar! This is a great time to make final plans for your upcoming spring programs and your end of year activities. That is what your Western Region PTA members are doing. Plans are being made for the Western Region Spring Conference on May 22 at Oracle Charter School, located at 888 Delaware Avenue. Everyone is welcome to attend. We have a great evening planned that includes our annual meeting and electing our officers for the coming year. You will soon be receiving a separate mailing with all the details.

Just a reminder, if you have not already done so, check your bylaws to see when your nominating committee should be elected and your elections held. After your officers are in place, fill out the Annual President/Officer Contact Information form that you will have received from the NYS PTA. (We used to call this "Form A.") You will be able to enter the information online at the State PTA website or mail it directly to the Region Director. It is necessary to do this even if there have been no changes in your officers, so that you will continue to re-

ceive future PTA mailings.

Our Western Region website is kept current with all of the flyers and brochures regarding Region events and awards that you may want to apply for. Remember: to apply for any region, state, or national PTA Awards, including the New York State Honorary Life Award, your unit must be in "good standing". What is a unit in good standing? Your unit must:

- * Adhere to the purposes and basic policies of PTA;
- * Remit the national and state portion of dues to the New York State PTA office by the designated dates (November 1 and final payment March 31;
- * Have up to date approved bylaws according to the provisions of New York State PTA; and
 - * Pay the insurance for the current year.

Please visit the website frequently and share the address (westernregionpta.org) with your board members.

Mark your calendars with the date for Spring Conference - May 22. I am looking forward to seeing you there.

Yours in PTA,

Etta

Etta Czaja
Western Region PTA Director



Legislative Breakfast 2008

The Western NY PTA partnered with other western New York public education advocacy groups for the second year in the 2008 legislative

Breakfast. The event and important features are summarized as follows:

The Legislative Breakfast was presented by a partnership of: Erie County Association of School Board, Western Region PTA, League of Women Voters, Erie Niagara School Superintendents, WNY Association of Secondary School Principals, WNY School Business Officials, WNY Association of School Personnel Administrators, Instructional Development Advisory Board, and Promoting Partnerships in Public Education.

Legislative attendees included: Senators William Stachowski and Dale Volker, Assemblymen Michael Cole, Mark Schroeder, Jack Quinn III, and Dennis Gabryszak. Legislative assistants were sent from the offices of Senators Antoine Thompson and Mary Lou Rath and Assemblymen Robin Schiminger and Crystal Peoples.

The following topics were discussed:

3020a Reform:

The section of State Education law applies to removing tenured teachers and administrators. The most recent reported survey in 2005 by the New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA) showed the average Section 3020a proceeding takes 520 days and costs taxpayers more than \$128,000. Revisions were made under Governors Cuomo and Pataki to limit the time and money spent on the judicial process to no avail. Recommendations made by NYSSBA were specific, including:

- Establish a state panel to hear and decide Section 3020a cases;
- Authorize the dismissal of tenured personnel without a Section 3020a proceeding in certain limited circumstances (e.g. conviction of a teacher of a violent act against a child);
- Specify that teachers cooperate in investigations of

possible 3020a charges;

- Eliminate paid suspensions for all teachers while 3020a proceedings are pending, or cap the length of time that they must be paid
- Require that teachers facing section 3020a disciplinary action disclose the nature of their defense prior to the hearing.

Our questions to the legislators:

1. To speed up the process, would you agree to require that teachers cooperate in investigations of 3020a charges against them and disclose the nature of their defense prior to the hearing, the way that civil legal proceedings are conducted?

Answer in summation: This is not likely due to the standard of "Due process" in the judicial system.

2. To save taxpayers dollars, would you agree to eliminating paid suspensions for all teachers while 3020a proceedings are pending, or cap the length of time that they must be paid, and require the reimbursement of paid leave when the charge is found to be valid.

Answer in summation: This currently is a work in progress as a current bill sponsored by Assemblymen Jack Quinn III and Mark Schroeder.

3. Would you support developing an alternate automatic process to dismiss individuals in tenured positions without a 3020a proceeding when they have been convicted of a crime involving children, have had their certification revoked, or failed to obtain permanent certification.

Answer in summation: This was deferred to the Department of Education.

Property Tax Cap & Implications for Schools

The recommendation made by Governor Spitzer for a statutory school property tax cap by May of this year does not appear to address the real problem of meeting the existing unfunded mandates.

Our questions to the legislators:

As mentioned at last year's breakfast, it seems more prudent to fund the mandate. Part of the reason for tax rebates was to cushion the financial impact of unfunded or under funded mandates. How do you respond to the Governor's establish-

ment of a commission to recommend a school property tax cap? Answer in summation: Referred to as a cyclical problem.

If this tax cap is enacted, it will diminish a school district's ability to fund compliance with mandates. If the federal or state government does not fund it and the school districts are not allowed to fund it, do the mandates disappear? In other words, if Albany is going to cap how much we tax, are they going to cap how much we spend?

Answer in summation: Reports show federal/state funding varies in the area. For example, Buffalo, as a big-five district, pays only 8% of school funding and the remainder is covered by the state and federal funds. Senator Volker wondered if Albany were going to cap its spending also. Assemblyman Quinn stated that the upstate delegation would fight a cap that would hurt upstate districts.

Funding Education with Lottery Money

An additional question was raised regarding the lottery percentage that goes to K-12 education. Senator Stachowski provided us with that answer as noted below for the 2006 -2007 year.

Lottery funds are divided as follows:

- Prizes 54.7%
- Aid to Education 32.9%
- Commissions for traditional lottery facilities 5.5%
- Commissions for video gaming facilities 2.7%

® Have membership tables at kindergarten registration to recruit new members,

® Make strong efforts to get every potential member enrolled before the end of March.

® Be sure the unit treasurer sends final dues payment to arrive in state office before March 31st. Remember that two signatures are required on all PTA checks.

® Notify region membership chair if you unit is eligible for membership awards using form mailed to President or found in the resource guide.

® Return all unused and voided cards to region membership chairman on or before March 31st. Your unit will be billed for every card not returned. Check your figures.

® If all cards are not accounted for by March 31st, your unit is no longer a unit in good standing. It may delay mailing of information for the next school year including membership cards and the resource guide.

- Contractor fees, other direct expenses 2.2%
- Other operating expenses 2.0%

All lottery education payments go to K-12 education with each district's share of the lottery revenue being determined by formula. \$15 per pupil is added to textbook aid which goes to both public and private schools. Lottery aid also includes a \$10 payment for each blind and deaf student attending state supported schools.

There is a discussion in Albany about changing many aspects of the Lottery. The Governor is interested in redirecting the allocation of funds to include higher education. There is some talk about privatizing the lottery, which Senator Volker stated we can prevent. Senator Stachowski, in reference to the voice of the minority, stated that while it may appear that the minority party cannot get bills passed, it does have the power to stop legislation it does not support.

The tone of the 2008 Legislative Breakfast was of solidarity with child advocacy and support for public education in the State of New York.

Maria Eagen Associate Director

(Anne Ehrlich Beacon Editor contributed to this article.)



MEMBERSHIP: WRAP IT UP

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**Kelly Stephenson
Western Region Membership Chair**

Reflections 2007-2008

"I Can Make A Difference By..."

Western Region PTA 2007-2008 Reflections Winners

Western Region would like to congratulate our Region Reflections winners!

Literature

Senior Division

Caitlin Kubala – Williamsville North HS
Nora Serghany – Williamsville East HS

Middle/Junior Division

Inbal Fischer – Transit MA
Alexus Crispin – Herbert Hoover MS

Intermediate Division

Maya Talukdar – Maple West Elem.
Bhavana Upadhyaya – Maple East Elem.

Primary Division

Carson Dayko – Hamburg Central
Joelle Giambra – Dodge Elem.

Dance/Choreography

Senior Division

Jessica Calzi – Williamsville East HS

No Middle/Junior Winners

Intermediate

Jenna Artist – Forest Elem.

No Primary Winners

Video/Film Production

Senior Division

Nicole Favale – Williamsville East HS

Middle/Junior Division

Anthony Newberry – Hamburg Central

No Intermediate Winners

Primary Division

Emily Reynolds – Maple West Elem.

Visual Arts

Senior Division

Tracy Cheon – Williamsville North
Jason Ross – Hamburg Central

Middle/Junior Division

Jacqueline Oestreicher – Heim MS
Rebecca Searns – Transit MS

Intermediate Division

Anna Belous – Heritage Heights Elem.
Lauren Neudorf – Heritage Heights Elem.

Primary Division

Tabitha Dick – Forest Elem.
Talia Clark – Dodge Elem.

Musical Composition

Senior Division

Jason Ross – Hamburg Central
Alina Jeon – Williamsville East HS

Middle/Junior Division Teagan Faran – Transit MS

Sarah Cohn – Kenmore MS

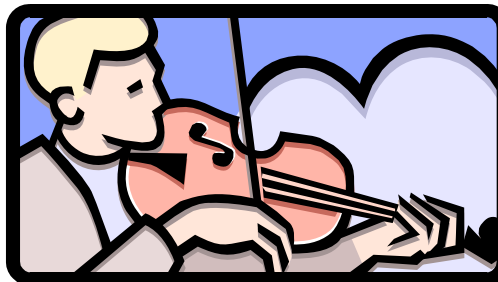
Intermediate Division

Mary Blatz – Charles Lindberg Elem.
Hana Mamnoon – Maple East Elem.

Primary Division

Luke Schriver – Heritage Heights Elem.

No second winner



Photography



Senior Division

Julie Ticco – Williamsville North HS

Middle/Junior Division

*Ethan Sachse – Hamburg Central
Giselle Binette – Kenmore Middle*

Intermediate Division

*Carmin Tronolone – Maple West Elem.
William DeRoo – Heim Elem.
Lara Bridges – Pinehurst Elem.
Matthew Aungst – Charles Lindberg Elem.*

No Primary Winners

Come join us at our annual Reflections reception n April 25 at Winchester Elementary to celebrate our winners!

**Christine Coniglio
Western Region Reflections Chair**

Your school children could be involved! Find out how to start a Reflections Program at your building. Contact us via our website: westernregionpta.org .

Issues Brief: Property Tax Caps

New York State PTA recognizes the need to examine property tax relief options for NY's overburdened taxpayer. However, imposing property tax caps on school districts has the potential to erode the long held belief in local control and undermine the ability to provide quality education for every child.

Following the announcement of the proposed 2008-09 Executive Budget, Governor Spitzer signed an executive order to establish the NYS Commission on Property Tax Relief. The Governor's charge to the Commission is three-fold: to examine the root causes of high property taxes; to identify ways to make the State's property tax system fairer; and to develop a fair and effective school property tax cap. The seven-member Commission will issue an interim report by May 15, 2008 and a final report by December 1, 2008. While the Commission's recommendations may directly impact educational stakeholders, including parents, and while such groups have been promised opportunity for input, they will not be represented at the table.

In states that have imposed property tax caps, such caps typically restrict the amount property tax revenue can increase from year to year to a low fixed percentage, a Consumer Price Index (CPI) based limit or a combination of the two. Research suggests that capping reduces the ability to provide services, makes the local revenue system more regressive, and can enhance the disparity between affluent and poor communities. The property tax cap program under California's Proposition #13 resulted in school program cuts, particularly in the areas of art, music, physical education, counseling and library services. In Massachusetts towns have had to freeze wages, lay off municipal and school employees, and close libraries and senior centers.

Caps do nothing to change the main drivers behind the higher property taxes. According to an analysis of NY's 2008 fiscal outlook, the Fiscal Policy Institute concluded the issue is not one of school district overspending. School districts statewide have responded to a heightened awareness of the need to contain costs. However, expenditures for energy, pensions and health obligations, combined with mandated costs for programs such as special education continue to escalate faster than the rate of inflation. Imposing a property tax cap does not ameliorate these expenses. In fact, the experience of other states suggests that schools would be forced to cut programs, increase class size and postpone response to facilities needs in order to ensure

(continued on page 7)

WESTERN REGION PTA® 2007 – 2008 OFFICERS

Director: Etta Czaja
Associate Directors:
Christine Coniglio
Diane DeJoseph
Maria Eagan
Patrice Freeman

Treasurer: Sue Andrijczuk
Recording Secretary: Shirley Lam
Corresponding Secretary: George Kimble

PARENT POWER

Brought to you by AutismLink

Autism United has received a statement from the Lowe's Companies that they will be no longer advertise with the CBS program Big Brother in response to a broadcast last week that referred to people with autism as "retards."

Karen Cobb, a spokesperson for Lowe's, said in a statement:

Lowe's has strict guidelines that govern the placement of our advertising. Our company advertises primarily in national, network prime-time television programs and on a variety of cable outlets.

Lowe's constantly reviews advertising buys to make certain they are consistent with its policy guidelines. Lowe's doesn't routinely advertise on the show "Big Brother" and has taken steps to ensure that our advertising isn't appearing on future shows."

Lowe's is the second largest home improvement retailer in the US.

CBS has not apologized for the incident nor have they taken responsibility for the content of their own broadcast. Autism United and a nationwide coalition of autism and developmental disability groups will be mobilizing families affected by autism to call upon advertisers with Big Brother, including Taco Bell, Saturn, Geico, and others to follow the leadership shown by Lowe's Companies and withdraw their support for Big Brother. Details of the campaign will be released later today.

John Gilmore
Executive Director
Autism United
www.autismunited.org

Roseann Brecher
Vice President of Ken-Ton SEPTSA
Visit our new web site! <http://kentonsepta.bfn.org>

The Jenkins Memorial Scholarship

In 1946, the New York State Congress of Parents and Teachers established the Jenkins Memorial Scholarship to honor Clifford Jenkins, the son of NYSPTA President Margaret Jenkins, killed in World War II. Mrs. Jenkins went on to become President of National PTA. The scholarship goes to our kids who major in education at New York's system of SUNY 2 and 4 year colleges and universities. (The details can be found at the NYSPTA website.)

The scholarship application deadline is history for this year. I would like to encourage all districts to think now about publicizing this grant at their high schools. Any student in a district with a PTA unit is eligible to apply; the PTA does not have to be at the high school the applicant attends.

This year's Jenkins Scholars will be announced in the next edition of *The Beacon*.

Anne Ehrlich
Editor The Beacon

NO DOTS

Western Region Newsletter Award—May 1 is the deadline for submitting to the editor of *The Beacon* your newsletter award entries. Check in the pages of your NYSPTA Resource Manual (or contact me anneehrich@yahoo.com) for the rules. REMEMBER: THERE ARE NO DOTS IN PTA!!!!

Random thoughts...

It has been so hard to write this column. My muse is not amusing me much lately. My kids are still grown up and in college. They continue to have no idea what they want to become but continue to become happy sane adults. My parents are still dying. The red car is still in their virtual driveway on GoogleEarth, although it is long gone from the actual one. My house is still quiet. My cat died: his little ghost is at every window, under the shrubs when I drive in at night, mysteriously still leaving hairs on every soft surface.



By the time this edition of *The Beacon* hits your brain, our naughty governor will be replaced by his lieutenant. Mr. Paterson is black and blind and a competent kind man. He will do a great job for our state. What happens to Spitzer's proposed property tax cap as he heads into the sunset with Alan Hevesi and the other smart bad boys? (Another ivy league education wasted and the ivies didn't want my sweet big-hearted son.) How would a property tax cap work, anyway? It's like saying "no matter what life costs me next year, never mind the new baby, hubby losing his job and health insurance, oil at \$150 a barrel, the tree falling through the attic, frozen pipes, broken legs, braces, brain tumors, we will not spend more than \$xxxx."

At the Board of Ed we are hearing about nearby districts' employee contracts with 12% salary increases. Most folks would be grateful for even a cost of living raise. The health insurance my neighbors cannot afford and go without will cost school districts double digit percent increases every year. Our teachers do deserve good pay and health insurance. How could we look in the mirror if our teachers were not even in the middle class? But how do we get the voters to approve this when they themselves are sliding downhill?

Our public schools have the health insurance burden in common with American manufacturing. What would be the corollary in our educational system of Ford having trouble competing with Toyota partly due to our lack of national health insurance? An ignorant old man has been often quoted as saying "Sir, don't socialize my Medicare!" If we don't start thinking hard about what is critical to our lives, we will never get out of trouble. (Honestly, I think if Hillary had divorced her bad boy, half of us would not even remember that Hillary Rodham ever shared a white house with a Clinton.) We are spending too much time with American idols and not enough with American history. We get our information from "newsmen" who ask candidates for the president of the free world whether they prefer diamonds or pearls rather than their views on racism or poverty or corporate lobbying or violence against women.

We in PTA chug along advocating for children and their edu-

cation and we will always do this until the last of us drop from old age. When the human race brings me to the edge of despair, I text my kids, I go to a PTA meeting, I watch teenagers play soccer in the mud or Sousa marches, and I ground myself in optimism and reality.

Anne Ehrlich Editor

I still want to hear from your district. I know you are doing great things out there and the rest of the region wants to learn from your successes. Call, leave a message, text me at 716-961-8986 or do the email thing: anneehrich@yahoo.com.

(Continued from page 5 Property Tax Cap)

payment of mandated expenses without exceeding the cap.

New York, with the exception of the Big Five cities, relies on the direct vote of school district residents to determine if, and how much, they should invest in educating the children of their community. To maintain balance, when voters reject a proposed school district budget twice, there is a mandated contingent budget cap placed on expenditure growth. These caps often result in residents funding programs and activities out-of-pocket, at greater cost to the tax payer.

Last year, a record 96% of communities passed school budgets on the first vote. Most likely, this reflected community trust in an energetic, newly elected Governor's stated commitment to make public education a priority for all NY. The Governor rejected the idea of imposing property tax caps that would undermine local control and directed the infusion court ordered State dollars into the adoption of a predictable and transparent foundation formula over a span of four years. Yet, it seems the promise of last year will not be met. The proposed 2008-09 Executive Budget would reduce the foundation formula commitments of a year ago and when combined with new mandates would cast doubt on future predictability and transparency provisions that were at the heart of 2007 reforms.



The Governor states that it is his intent to provide school property tax relief while not diminishing the quality of a New York State public education. To achieve this we encourage the examination of other options, such as tax circuit breakers, that offer tax relief without threatening school quality or student achievement.

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2008

WESTERN REGION PTA CALENDAR

Mar	31	Mon	Final membership payment due
Apr	25	Fri	Reflections reception at Winchester Elementary 6pm
May	1	Thu	Awards deadlines: Spotlight on Youth. Ruth Huber, PTA Unit Newsletter
May	22	Thu	Spring Conference at Oracle Charter

Summer Leadership Conference 2008 (formerly known as Summer Experience)

When: August 1st - 3rd

Where: Utica College, Utica, NY

Who: New York State PTA Members from across the state

What: NEW Minority Leaders Strand...SPECIAL PARP Components...EXPANDED Technology Workshop Opportunities...Larger Conference...Different Activities...MORE Learning, Networking and Fun!

Watch for more details as they become available and the Registration information will be here in the Spring.

BOARD MEETINGS

4/9/2008	Wed	Oracle Charter
5/15/2008	Thu	Frontier HS
6/11/2008	Wed	tba

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Etta Czaja
 Director, Western Region PTA
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