



PCT PLEDGE

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Congress of Teachers**
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GIVE THE TEACHERS A CHANCE

By PCT President Morty Rosenfeld

Are you as tired as I of the moaning and groaning about middle schools? The fact of the matter is they aren't working very well in Plainview-Old Bethpage or anywhere else in the United States, even though good intentioned people are trying their best to improve them. In most places, there is a substantial fall off in student standardized test scores from elementary to middle school. Theories abound as to the cause of this phenomenon and its solution. From time to time, I have waded in with my own view, which, given my penchant for simplicity, boils down to teach the kids more.

We have certainly had enough talking about middle schools. While we have tinkered with the program around its edges, introducing some elements of team teaching and advisories, we haven't had any concerted action to take our middle schools apart, keep what works, discard what doesn't and experiment with new approaches, unleashing the creativity of the staff to explore different ways of improving the academic performance of our students.

Middle school orthodoxy hasn't solved the problem of weak academic performance and it won't. Blaming the teachers won't improve anything. Besides, they're already working as hard as they can. It's time to come to terms with the fact that the middle school idea as we have lived it now for too many years is a failure. We need to invent a new model, and who better to do that than the teachers who have been frustrated by the current one.

In his July 10, 1988 column *Where We Stand*, Al Shanker proposed his version of a charter school, a team of autonomous teachers **within** a school who are free to design and implement a course of study for the small learning community of students for whom they are responsible. He envisioned several such teams in a school, each striving for excellence in its own way, each sharing its successes and failures with the entire school, everyone in the school growing from the experience. Such an approach might just be the powerful engine of middle school progress we have been searching for. It might just provide the

energy needed to overcome the inertia that has us headed for mediocrity.

For years, we've had the educationists telling us what to do with our middle schools. Nancy Doda, Heidi Hayes Jacobs, Alfie Kohn - they've all passed through to the point where the staff talks about being Dodarized. Thousands of dollars poured down the rat-hole of consultancy.

Interestingly enough, perhaps the best years of our middle schools were the first few when a committee of teachers were given the responsibility to design and implement the early program. There was imagination. There was excitement. There was the pride that comes from taking control of one's own work. There was commitment to the program. What there unfortunately wasn't was a commitment from the District to support their efforts financially.

It's time to get serious about our middle schools. We can no longer afford to leave them to the so-called experts. We need to turn them over to those who really know - the teachers who work in them every day. It's time their voice was heard.

PCT MATH COMMITTEE MEETS

(The following article has been written from the minutes of the meeting of the PCT Math Committee.)

On Tuesday, November 21, the newly constituted PCT Math Committee had its first meeting. The committee was called into existence in response to the furor caused by the publication of the District's scores on the state assessments.

Representatives from the elementary and middle schools met to answer the question, "Now that we have spent 5 years with Investigations, what do we do next?"

The committee quickly reached a consensus that the problem with Investigations seems to be threefold: 1) There is not enough practice material included with the concepts presented 2) The material to be done at home (homework) is not recognizable to the parents as math, and, if a child needs help, the parents are not able to provide it. 3) Parents do not perceive their children as having basic math skills at their fingertips (or on the tips of their tongues). Furthermore, individual teachers have had to spend an inordinate amount of time gathering supplemental materials in order to provide the necessary practice for the concepts presented by the program and also the basic math skills all students need.

For next year, the committee agreed that our elementary students would be best served if we could have text books in classrooms for them to use in conjunction with Investigations. When the

original District-Wide Math Committee met prior to implementing Investigations, most members believed that the plan was to use a combination of both. Furthermore, the committee strongly urges that the District provide teachers with consumable test prep booklets for those elementary grades that have them available. These booklets would help prepare for the state tests as well as be recognizable as math when used at home.

In addition, the committee recommends that the next half day for staff development in February be used to meet by grade to share and collate by unit the supplemental work that the individual teachers have accumulated.

There was only enough time to discuss elementary so middle school issues were left for the next meeting.

BUY UNION

The AFL/CIO has declared November 24-December 3 Buy Union Week. Americans are asked to support union workers by buying union made gifts during this holiday shopping season. While its never bad to look for the union label on the things we buy, this is an appropriate time of the year to think of the plight of America's working families.

VOTE/ COPE DRIVE A SUCCESS

As of this date, the PCT VOTE/COPE drive is drawing to a conclusion. While we will continue to accept contributions, we will be transmitting the \$12,722 we have collected to NYSUT on Friday, December 1st.

While we had a very successful fund-raising drive for our first VOTE/COPE campaign having collected approximately \$21 per active member, the drive was not universally supported. The following table summarizes the percentage of the membership that contributed and the dollars per member in each of our workplaces.

SCHOOL	% Contrib.	\$PER MEM
HANC	0	0
PCT Office	100	80
Public Library	12	3.60
Admin.	21	5.60
JFK	67	21.15
Mattlin	42	14.10
POB Middle	34	11.96
Parkway	79	28.21
SCHOOL	% Contrib.	\$PER MEM
Pasadena	82	24.23
Old Bethpage	80	27.83
Stratford Rd.	94	31.49
K-Center	88	30.69

The Officers of the PCT would like to publically congratulate our extraordinary SRC Reps for their very hard work in this political action activity. It

was these leaders of our union who additionally made thousands of phone calls from the NYSUT phone-bank in Jericho on behalf of PCT/NYSUT endorsed candidates.

LAME DUCK LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Governor Pataki has called for a December session of the New York State legislature. Of key interest to the members of the legislature is this final opportunity to vote themselves a pay raise. Pay raises voted by the legislature for themselves cannot take effect until the next session.

One of the main things our lobbyists will be on guard for is a probable attempt by the Governor to again try to lift the legislative cap on the number of charter schools permitted to exist in New York. Once before the Governor linked his charter school ideas with pay raises for the members of the legislature. He's likely to try again on his way out the door.

DENTAL PLAN CHANGES

The Welfare Fund has announced several changes to the dental coverage provided by the Fund.

Effective January 1, 2007, the individual deductible will increase from \$65 to \$75. The family deductible will increase from \$195 to \$225. The deductible for orthodontics will go from \$25 to \$50.

The dental plan's deductible have not been adjusted for many years. These increases are necessitated by a very substantial increase in costs to the Fund. **None of these increases affect those members who use dentists on the Fitzharris panel.**

REMINDERS

Members who have completed enough credits this academic semester to jump a lane on the salary schedule need to notify the Personnel Office by February 1, 2007.

Members wishing to make changes to existing tax-sheltered annuity (403b) accounts or start new ones are required to notify the district by January 15, 2007.