



PCT PLEDGE

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Congress of Teachers**
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THE LESS SENSE IT MAKES

By PCT President Morty Rosenfeld

At meetings where I'm asked to speak, I'm often confronted with questions that spring from the exasperation of workers or parents with the seeming senselessness of some act of our school district or other public schools. "Morty, why does the district implement the use of a computer program for all of its special ed paperwork when we don't have sufficient computers and bandwidth to permit the work to get done?" My response tailored to empathize with their exasperation is often, "The longer I work at this business, the less sense it makes."

That answer is increasingly my answer to questions about education that arise from state and national actions. Take Governor Spitzer's budget proposals for education in New York. At first blush, there's more money, especially for urban schools. Billions more over the next four years to meet a campaign promise to meet the goals of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity law suit. More money is always good, we've all been conditioned to believe. The increased billions even comes in a new state aide formula that is more transparent than the current incomprehensible array of different types of aide. And the suburbs aren't short changed to better things in the cities.

What do you think is going to happen, however, when the billions produce no appreciable improvement in the scores on our state assessments? If schools don't improve, as measured by the current state assessments, the Governor wants the right to remove superintendents of schools and boards of education. He wants to lift the cap on charter schools, again as a threat to the public schools. He apparently thinks that he can frighten schools into becoming excellent.

Not much from the Governor about getting a new commissioner of education who knows something about educating children and who would work with the teachers of the state to stop the decline of academic standards in the state's best school districts. Nothing in his budget promotes the streamlining of state and local education bureaucracies, nothing that seems addressed at fixing anything that's broken in our schools. There is certainly nothing that directs the resources of the state to ameliorating the staggering numbers of children who begin school unprepared for its demands, even in our richest suburbs.

Good budgets are political documents that support the priorities of their writers. The message from Governor Spitzer seems to be, you education people have been saying that money is your biggest problem. Here's the money you need. Now improve or get punished.

Why would such an obviously smart person hatch a plan like that. I really don't know. The longer I work at this business, the less sense it makes.

RETIREMENT WORKSHOP

In response to a request from many members, the PCT will hold a retirement workshop on Wednesday, March 7, 2007 at 4:00 PM in the PCT Office. The workshop will deal with procedural issues related to retirement. It is not intended as a substitute for a personal consultation with a representative of the Employee Retirement System (ERS) or the Teacher Retirement System. Please let the PCT Office know if you are planning to attend.

MATH INSURGENCY?

It has been clear to the officers of the PCT for some time that there was a brewing concern in the parent community about the math program in our schools. Even after years of working with it, the Investigations program remains controversial. Concern about the program has joined to a public concern for the district's math scores which have tended to be lower than the community's expectations.

Central to the complaint of parents is their perception that their children do not have basic math facts at their finger-tips. They are put off by the answer that they often receive that students have calculators to perform these calculations. They expect their children to know the times tables and be able to do simple arithmetic in their heads. They are frustrated too by the math assignments their children bring home. Educated parents who can't do an elementary school math assignment because they don't understand the question with a program that too often makes for conflict with their children. Finally, many report that they feel obliged to hire math tutors or enroll their children in study centers like Kumon to be sure their kids develop skills that the world expects them to have.

The *Pledge* has learned that there is an internet petition circulating calling for abandoning the Investigations program in favor of a more traditional approach. Whether this is a real movement or not remains to be seen, but there

certainly appears to be a general unhappiness with math instruction in the district.

ATTENTION PCT COACHES

PCT coaches are reminded that the deadline for applying for next year's coaching positions is March 1, 2007.

Coaches are encouraged to use the following procedure to ensure that applications are received. In the recent past, there has been some confusion over whether or not applications were received.

Step 1 - Applications should be written giving specific titles, teams and season to Mr. Arthur Jonas, Assistant Superintendent for Personnel.

Step 2 - Send a copy of the application to Mr. Kevin McDermott, Director of Physical Education, at the POB Middle School.

Step 3 - E-mail a copy of your application to Tom Syrett, PCT Coaching Chair, at Savate7@aol.com.

POB GLOSSARY

We thought it might be useful to offer a glossary feature of terms that punctuate the speech of our school community and which have very different meanings in POB than in standard American English. Here are two words we often hear but which may cause some confusion.

Rigid - an adjective used to describe teachers who are committed to teaching a specific body of knowledge and who hold students accountable for mastering it.

Excellence - abstract noun denoting an academic goal of doing a minimal amount of study and achieving the highest grades and honors.

PUBLIC LIBRARY TAKES A BACKWARD STEP

The appointment earlier this year of a new director of the POB Public Library was welcomed by the members of the POB Library Association, a functional unit of the PCT. Slowly, an administration that heretofore had been palpably anti-union seemed to be setting a new direction in labor/management relations.

That positive direction abruptly changed when Director Gretchen Browne convinced the Library Board of Trustees to improve the wages of the non-union employees by \$2 per hour beyond the increase they received in July, interestingly the same increase for which the union had to bargain. With that one thoughtless action, the Director resumed the practice of pitting the PCT membership against their non-union colleagues.

The membership of POBLA will be meeting on February 7, 2007 to consider what actions to take in response to this provocation.



PRIORITIES

At a time when within a few minutes, all teachers could rattle off a long list of things that they could use to improve

the delivery of instruction, our board of education authorized the expenditure of \$3574 for our administrators to retreat to The Woodland, self-characterized on their web page as, "Tucked away on a 120 acre estate, The Woodlands embodies old world charm and elegance."

When was the last time the district provided a PCT member with a little old world charm and elegance?

BANDWIDTH AT LAST

The frustrations that PCT members have been experiencing who attempt to use the internet from their workplaces, that frustration that comes to those who sit glaring at their monitors waiting for something to happen, to all those patient members who have been given work to do that requires a fast internet connection, relief may be in sight.

The Board of Education has approved a contract with BOCES to increase the bandwidth of our internet connection five times. Action is now required by the BOCES Board. PCT members should get relief from their internet blues by next year.

HEALTH AND SAFETY TRAINING

The first hour of February's PCT Executive Board meeting will be devoted to the training of union Officers and SRC Reps in health and safety issues in the workplace. The PCT was prompted to arrange for NYSUT to do this training in response to the increasing number of questions coming to the PCT Office from members concerning workplace health and safety issues.

IN MEMORIAM

We were saddened to learn of the death of Anita Sorkin and Milton Goldberg, two retiree members of the PCT who had long distinguished careers in Plainview-Old Bethpage. Anita worked for many years at the Jamaica Avenue and Stratford Road Schools. Milt Goldberg was a member of the staff at the Plainview-Old Bethpage Middle School.