



## **PCT PLEDGE**

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## **BEWARE THE DANGERS OF FACEBOOK**

**By Ray Tesar**

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Last summer, a good friend of mine tried yet again to convince me that it would be a good idea to sign up for a Facebook account. Although most of my close friends had opened up such an account many years ago, I remained the one person in my social circle that resisted the temptation to do so. My biggest fear was that any of the thousand plus students in our school system could conduct a simple search of my name and gain much insight into my personal life. On this particular summer day though, my friend explained to me that I could simply set my profile to a “private” setting, thus blocking all would-be spying students from accessing my on-line information. I finally caved in.

To be honest, the first few days after opening my new Facebook account were very exciting. Almost immediately I started receiving requests from old high school and college friends that I had lost touch with over the years. It was only about ten days after I opened my account however when the inevitable happened; the requests from former and present students started rolling in. Immediately my first impulse was to shut down my profile, but that would place me in the awkward position of having to ignore these students’ requests. Although I felt my students’ “friendship requests” were blatantly inappropriate, it didn’t feel right to just simply ignore their inquires. I found myself denying their requests by writing the standard “thank you but this is not appropriate” reply. This in return was followed by a common student response; “All my other teachers are my friends so why can’t you?” It was then that I realized that having one of these on-line accounts places teachers in a no-win situation.

Many readers of our *Pledge* may not be familiar with some of the recent cases of teachers being disciplined for having objectionable content on their on-line profiles. In fact, the *Washington Post* recently published an article questioning the point at which teachers are judged by the standards for public officials. In an April 28, 2008 column entitled “When Young Teachers Go Wild on the Web,” the question was raised as to whether teachers can be disciplined if their private websites contain questionable content. The article goes on to describe the stories of many young teachers who placed risqué pictures of themselves in social situations on their profile for all to see. In fact, even if the

teachers didn’t provide any of the objectionable content themselves, their profiles may have still contained messages posted by their friends that consisted of less than scholarly slogans.

The article then attempts to raise the question whether these types of pages matter so long as teacher performance is not hindered and if students, parents and school officials don't ever see them? In some states such as Florida, Colorado, Tennessee and Massachusetts, teachers have been removed or suspended for social website postings, and some teachers unions have begun warning members about racy personal websites. On November 12, the Associated Press reported that several teachers in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district were suspended with pay for comments about their employer and their students on their Facebook pages. According to Michael Simpson, assistant general counsel for the National Education Association, teachers caught with inappropriate websites could in fact receive a suspension for a first-time offense. Simpson also states that if teachers attempt to claim free speech protection under the First Amendment, the U.S. Supreme Court recently ruled that governments can fire employees if their speech harmed the workplace's mission and function.

Stories like these illustrate that many teachers may not truly appreciate the full range of consequences that may occur after posting on-line information about yourself. Please keep these ideas in mind next time one of your friends attempts to solicit you into joining an on-line social network like Facebook. You never know who may be watching.

## **EXEC BD APPROVES NEGOTIATIONS CALENDAR**

While the Officers of the PCT continue to pursue an extension of the existing contracts with the District, our union must be prepared in the event that effort fails.

To deal with the possibility that we will have to undertake a full round of negotiations, the Officers of the PCT recommended and the Executive Board adopted the following calendar for the preparations for negotiations.

## **2008-09 NEGOTIATIONS CALENDAR**

- |                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| November 18, 2008 | Exec Board approves calendar.   |
| December 2008     | <i>Pledge</i> article on negotiations.  |
| January 5, 2009   | Contract Demand Questionnaires given to Head Reps. - due back January 30, 2009. |

January 13, 2009	Exec. Board appoints negotiating committee.
February 10, 2009	Exec. Board approves demands.
February 26, 2009	Negotiating Committee meets 3:45 PM at the PCT Office.
March 4, 2009	Clerical Unit General Membership Meeting to approve demands - 4:00 PM place to be determined.
March 12, 2009	Teacher Unit General Membership Meeting to approve demands - 3:45 PM place to be determined.
March 26, 2009	S U P C T G e n e r a l Membership Meeting to approve demands - 4:00 PM at the PCT Office.

PCT members are asked to take note of dates of the membership meetings of their respective units and to make the necessary arrangements to enable them to attend.

Should there be an acceptable offer by the Board of Education to extend the existing contract, the members of all units will be informed and immediate membership meetings called to entertain the Board's offer.

## **GOVERNOR'S BUDGET SLASHING FOILED**

As this edition of the *Pledge* was closing, there appeared to be every indication that Governor Paterson's calling of a special session of the legislature was not going to produce the mid-year budget cuts to education that he wanted. The Governor's proposed cuts would have cost POB in excess of \$1,000,000.

For the time being, we have been spared the budget axe due to the extraordinary efforts of our NYSUT lobbying efforts in Albany and our state organizations work with a coalition of organizations concerned with education and health care. These are the kinds of efforts that are funded by your VOTE/COPE contributions.

Those efforts are really just beginning, however. Over the weeks ahead, our state and national organizations will be working full-speed to prevent the erosion of our public schools as a result of the current financial crisis. That work with the Congress, New York State Legislature and in the media will take millions of dollars. Just last spring, NYSUT spent \$2,000,000 fending off a property tax cap that would have certainly meant there would have been fewer PCT members working in our schools.

SRC Reps are currently conducting the 2008-09 PCT VOTE/COPE fund-raising drive. The Officers of the PCT have asked the membership to make this the best VOTE/COPE drive yet. This is an extraordinary year. We must have an extraordinary response to it.

## **TEACHERS TO TAKE CHARGE IN DENVER HIGH SCHOOL**

The PCT is not the only education union looking to have teachers take charge of their work and become true professionals. The Denver Classroom Teachers Association in response to a challenge from their district to create innovative schools has proposed a math science high school completely run by teachers on democratic principles. Their proposal is supported by the Superintendent Michael Bennet who responded to the proposal with, "Everybody needs to be a leader, I think this is gonna be a great example of a way to think about it differently and I applaud the teachers that brought it forward." The Board of Education is expected to approve the proposed school which is expected to open in September.

## **GETTING READY FOR PARENT PORTAL**

One of the utilities contained in the District's Infinite Campus student management system is the so-called parent portal that permits parents to access a pre-determined amount of information contained in the system.

The subject of how much student information parents should be able to access came up at the November meeting of the PCT Executive Board.

It was decided to have SRC Reps recruit one member from each building to form a PCT committee to study the issue and make a recommendation to the Executive Board on the parent access parameters we should seek.

Members interested in serving on this committee should volunteer to the Head Rep in your school.

## **FOR SALE**

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## **CREDITS WANTED**

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