



## **PCT PLEDGE**

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## **NEGOTIATIONS**

**By PCT President Morty Rosenfeld**

Beyond any shadow of doubt, the school community would be better off if we could agree with the District to extend the current contract for at least a year. We communicated this view to the Board of Education at our meeting with them on Wednesday, December 17. We pointed out to them that it is easier to make a settlement now than after our members have gone through the process of developing a comprehensive set of demands. It's easier for the Board too in that putting together their budget is always less complicated when they know the cost of their labor contracts in advance. Boards of education are usually more comfortable explaining increases that they can attribute to mandated expenses than those they voluntarily undertake. That's just human nature.

The Board of Education promised the PCT officers that they would carefully consider negotiations immediately at their first meeting after the Winter Break.

As I've told you before, we can't sit back and assume that the Board will agree to a contract extension. To ensure democratic participation of our membership, we must go through some time-consuming, complicated steps to prepare ourselves for a regular round of negotiations. That process has already begun.

I have met with the PCT Officers and Head SRC Reps to consider the make-up of our Negotiating Committee. At our January PCT Executive Board meeting, I will recommend that the Officers and Head Reps comprise our committee. In a few cases where Head Reps cannot serve, I will recommend the appointment of appropriate individuals from the same building so as to ensure that all buildings are represented. As usual, our committee will call on people from various speciality areas as the need arises. This is essentially the same committee composition we had last time.

Members will begin their participation immediately after the holiday. PCT Secretary Judi Alexanderson has prepared Demand Questionnaires which will be distributed to the Teacher, Clerical and Substitute units the first week back from break. SRC reps have been asked to devote at least a portion of their January building meetings to talk about completing the questionnaires and to brainstorm ideas. I ask you to give these questionnaires your serious attention. Even if we do not in the end do a

complete round of negotiations, this sharing of membership thoughts on how to improve conditions in the district can have a profound influence on the work your representatives do during the course of the year.

We have begun too to study the numbers that undergird our negotiations. In making negotiation proposals, we are expected to be able to cost them out, and a substantial amount of work goes into putting that capacity in place. We also need to know what others in our area have settled for.

Our final preparation for negotiations centers on the general membership meetings of each of our bargaining units. At these meetings, the demands which have come in on the questionnaires will be presented in writing for the consideration of the membership of the unit. Items are discussed and debated and voted upon. The goal is a set of demands which each unit is solidly behind and prepared to struggle to achieve.

That's why it is essential for you to be at your unit's meeting. The Clerical Unit will meet on Wednesday, March 4, the Teacher Unit on Thursday, March 12 and the Substitute Unit on Thursday March 26. Please mark the date of your meeting on your calendar and make the necessary preparations to attend.

I continue to hope that the Board of Education will see the advantage to an early, uncomplicated settlement that allows us to focus our attention on the very important union work we are doing to improve our district. One way or another, I have every confidence that we will have a new contract in place for next year.

## **GOVERNOR'S BUDGET**

Governor Paterson's recently announced budget presents his plan for closing a budget deficit for the next fiscal year of some 15 billion dollars.

Healthcare and education take the biggest hits in the Governor's budget, education by some \$700 million and healthcare by over one billion. The projected cut in state aid to POB is approximately \$1.3 million. That these and other cuts are foolish dis-investments in the infrastructure of New York State ( See Morty Rosenfeld's latest *TeacherTalk* column at pobct.org) is beyond question. Even more ludicrous are his proposed revenue increasing measures which would be laughable except the chief executive of the state is actually taking them seriously.

The Governor presents the citizens with dozens of regressive taxes that will fall disproportionately on the poorer classes - sugared soft drink taxes - I-Pod download fees - increased gasoline taxes all of which are desperate attempts to avoid what any sensible person realizes- there must be an increase in the

graduated income tax with those earning the most paying the most to support state services.

The PCT will be actively working with NYSUT to bring about a more responsible budget. Remember, the real budget battle begins in January when the legislators return and the Speaker of the Assembly, the Majority Leader of the Senate and the Governor begin the negotiations that ultimately lead to a budget for our state.

## **EMPIRE PLAN CHANGES**

With the approaching New Year, changes to the Empire Plan are always announced, changes that oblige us to pay more, often for less. That said, the Empire Plan remains better than most of the private plans people have these days.

Members often ask why we didn't fight these changes - why we simply allow them to happen. The answer is very simple. The Empire Plan is the medical coverage provided by the State of New York to its employees. After completing its negotiations of the plan, the state turns around and says to school district and municipalities, here it is. If you want to buy in, here are the coverages and rates. The only thing the PCT negotiates about the plan is the contribution of the POB district to the premium the state charges.

As we've come to expect, the in-network co-payment has been increased from \$18 to \$20 and the out-of-pocket maximum for non-participating service providers changed from \$1650 for all of the members of a family to \$1000 for the member, \$1000 for the spouse and \$1000 for all of the covered children.

Another of the significant changes concerns Mental Health and Substance Abuse services. Effective January 1, 2009, OptumHealth will replace Value Options as vendor for mental health and substance abuse services. Recruitment for a similar network is ongoing. Enrollees in treatment before January 1, 2009 with a network provider (who is not in the OptumHealth network) may continue to receive network benefits until March 31, 2009. Enrollees are encouraged to contact OptumHealth prior to March 31, 2009 to access the transition of care benefit. Enrollees may call OptumHealth to ask to have their providers recruited to be in the network. The phone number is 1-877-769-7447.

Finally, members must pay attention to a new audit of dependent eligibility the plan will be conducting. They will begin with the state unions such as UUP and then extend the audit to participating agencies (schools and municipalities). **Every employee or retiree with family coverage will receive a home**

**mailing and will need to provide specific documentation related to the eligibility of covered dependents. Failure to respond to the audit will result in dependents being dropped from coverage.**

**There will be a 60-day amnesty period when employees/retirees can remove ineligible dependents on a current basis without claim checks although no retroactive premium refunds will be allowed.** After the amnesty period, dependent eligibility will be researched and appropriate recovery for ineligible claims will be sought.

## **403b DEADLINE**

Members are reminded that changes required by the failure of their current 403b company to sign the required information sharing agreement must be made before the start of the new year. Everyone should be informed that Vanguard and Fidelity have at long last signed and that ING has been added to the list of providers.

The PCT is exploring the addition of others to the approved list, but this will clearly not be in place by the beginning of the new year. Members are also reminded that they now have the option of a 457 plan in addition to or as an alternative to a 403b. **Members interested in the 457 option should call Mr. Brandon Herlihy at 800-422-8463 Extension 44350.** A description of the plan and the investment opportunities provided are available on-line at [www.nysdcp.com](http://www.nysdcp.com).

We are additionally exploring the creation of a Roth 403b option. Under a Roth plan, participants invest **after-tax** dollars, but the earning of those dollars are not taxed when they are withdrawn after retirement. This would be an attractive investment opportunity for at least some of our members.

More on Roth 403bs later in the spring.

## **HOLIDAY OFFICE HOURS**

**During the holiday break, the PCT and Welfare Fund Offices will be open the following days and times:**

**December 29 & 30 - 9 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.**

**December 31 - 9 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.**

**January 2 - 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.**