



## **PCT PLEDGE**

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## **DISTRICT GOALS LIKE THE US RACE TO NOWHERE**

**By PCT President Morty Rosenfeld**

Last Monday night the Board of Education decided to try something new, a public workshop for the Board to discuss their goals for the school year. Among the goals they sought to address was academic standards.

Within five minutes it became clear that no one really knew what the terms mean. It became a veritable Rorschach blot with one Board member arguing that we should be encouraging more students to take accelerated courses, another wanting to resurrect our work on International Baccalaureate while yet another had no ideas as to what it meant but wanted to know how we were going to measure it when we found out what it was. The parents sitting in my area of the room were as perplexed as I by a discussion so lacking in content.

If one ever wondered why there has been no progress in elevating the district's academic standards, the evening made the reasons manifestly clear. We are truly living in an era in which our nation has lost track of how to raise and educate our children. We're not even sure what education is other than passing tests.

Were we serious about raising our standards, we would begin with the heart and soul of any academic program - our curriculum. While the PCT has had some success in motivating District leadership to allow us to make some improvements in this area, many of them are paper improvements, our curriculum having increasingly been narrowed to the point where elementary teachers report little time for anything other than math and reading and where many feel their teaching crimped by worry over test scores. We no longer aim at developing educated people, chasing instead the ill-defined and essentially illusory goal of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills which increasingly appears to mean mastery of the latest high tech gadgets. We appear to believe that if we could just find the latest program that somehow our scores would go up and our students would be educated. It's that kind of thinking that led New York State to think that it had introduced rigor into the academic program by altering the way the state assessments are scored oblivious to the fact that we really don't know what most of those tests are testing in the first place.

If we have to have store-bought programs at the elementary level, then I cast my vote for the [Core Knowledge Sequence](#). While educated people can surely quibble with some of what E.D. Hirsch and company expect children to know, the fact is that for K-8, it lays out a sequential body of skill development and knowledge in language arts, world history and geography, American history and geography, visual arts, music, math and science. Children exposed to such a curriculum and a regimen of local assessments would improve their scores on the state tests without the heavy test prep which is taking over American education.

## **JOBS BILL BENEFITS STALLED**

In August Congress passed and the President signed legislation designed for school workers and other essential state employees from facing budget cuts mandated by state balanced budget amendments. The NEA and AFT played a major role in getting the law introduced and passed in time for the opening of the new school year. New York's congressional delegation, particularly Senators Schumer and Gillibrand were very influential in shepherding the bill into law.

The intended benefits of the law remain illusive, with many school personnel unemployed who need not be. While the federal government has apportioned the money the bill calls for to the states, our state legislature has not come back into session to pass a plan for distributing it to the local school districts. Without a definitive plan for the money, some \$620,000 in POB, our Superintendent along with others on the Island and elsewhere appear to have decided to try to hold the money for next year's budget, ignoring the intent of the legislation and expressing a complete indifference to the people who lost their jobs at the end of last school year. Should they succeed, that money that our unions worked so hard to get for their members will disappear in next years budgets with Boards maintaining that but for those dollars there would have been many layoffs at the end of this year.

The PCT continues to press the district to use the money that they know they will get to hire back the two library clericals and thereby restore elementary library services to what they ought to be. Without the unions this law never would have happened. The money it provides must be used to help the people for whom it was intended.

## **50<sup>th</sup> PLANS JELLING**

The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee is moving rapidly along with plans for our celebration for the founding of our union. Online at [pobct.org](http://pobct.org) members can find the Jerry Berger collection of articles from the 1966 strike for collective bargaining rights and the first negotiated contract on Long Island. Also there is an interview done some years ago with the late former PCT President Paul Rubin who talks with PCT Vice-President Cindy Feldman about the founding of the PCT. Slated to arrive shortly are celebratory buttons that are patterned after the one used by the founders of the PCT in their original organizing efforts. Their

slogan was *DIGNITY and STATUS*.

Our committee is also working with Hofstra University whose School of Suburban Studies is very interested in the contribution of the teacher education movement to the growth and development of Long Island communities. They hope to be shortly announcing a symposium to be held at Hofstra in the spring led by the PCT but with the participation of unionists and educators from throughout the state and nation. If things go as planned, we should be able to have a press covered event that celebrates the contribution of teachers and their unions rather than the unmitigated bashing we have been experiencing. Our committee is also working with Hofstra to provide in-service credit for participating in this symposium. More information on the symposium will be available shortly.

The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary is also planning a banquet celebration around the time of the symposium that will incorporate our yearly party celebrating the retirements of the previous year and the welcoming of their replacements.

## **VOTE/COPE DRIVE GEARING UP**

As has become our custom since the merger of NYSUT and NEA/New York, November will be the time of our VOTE/COPE collection drive. The VOTE/COPE Fund is NYSUT's political action fund comprised of the voluntary contributions of members like you. **Remember, neither the PCT nor NYSUT uses your dues dollars for political purposes.**

Very recently, Long Island NYSUT members got a chance to see clearly what their VOTE/COPE contributions allow us to do. Ginny Fields, the Democratic Assemblyperson in the 5<sup>th</sup> assembly district, you may remember, was calling on NYSUT to accept a state-wide pay freeze for its members and campaigning on her temerity to stand up to NYSUT.

Offended by her complete disregard for hard working school personnel, union activists in Suffolk County got behind Ken Mangan who challenged Fields in the recent Democratic primary and beat her by 35 votes. That tremendous victory was made possible by essentially two things; the many NYSUT Democrats who reside in the district who answered the call to come out and vote for Mangan and the political action work of NYSUT leaders in the county, their work financed by the VOTE/COPE Fund.

There are many more political battles that will have to be fought. Our dollars are vital to that effort. When your SRC Rep approaches you for your contribution, have a check for at least the recommended \$40 contribution. If you can afford it give more. If \$40 is too steep, give what you can. Just be a part of this very important union effort.

## **MOTTS STRIKE SETTLED**

The PCT has learned that the strike called by the workers at the Motts plant outside of Rochester has been settled and the union workers are back on the

job, with their wages, pension and health care intact, although the union made some concessions in other areas.

The boycott of Motts/Dr. Pepper/Snapple products is now over although many will wonder about supporting a profitable company that nevertheless sought wage concessions in bargaining. Ways must be found to stop the assault on unions and the middle class.

## **APPR**

Members have been previously informed of the new Annual Professional Performance Review enacted by the legislature, one which calls upon local unions to negotiate various elements of the evaluation process. The PCT has been meeting with the district in an effort to get this done prior to the regular negotiations. At the September meeting of the PCT Executive Board, it was agreed that we would use the Officers and the head SRC Reps as our negotiating committee for this purpose.

That doesn't mean that there isn't a role for the members in this process. The Negotiating Committee would like to hear from members with thoughts on the following issues that will have to be dealt with in these negotiations:

- 1- Locally developed student assessments in areas where there are no state tests which contribute 20% of a teacher's APPR.
- 2- Locally developed student assessments that figure in another 20% of every teacher's APPR.
- 3- Measures that can be used to evaluate special area teachers like guidance counselors, psychologists, phys ed teachers, social workers etc. that are tied to student performance.

Members should e-mail their suggestions to [pobctorg@pobct.org](mailto:pobctorg@pobct.org).

## **TRACT CENTER AWAITING FUNDS**

While there is no state funding for teachers centers at the moment, NYSUT informs us that there is still some hope that some will be provided if and when the legislature returns to Albany. In the meantime, POB Facilitator Blaise Martinelli has volunteered to keep some basic services of the center going in addition to teaching an in-service course. Hopefully, the center can return to normal soon.