



## **PCT PLEDGE**

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## **OUR FOCUS**

By PCT President Morty Rosenfeld

At every SRC meeting I have attended this year, I have tried to focus our members attention on two almost existential issues for public education - the need to end New York's obsession with the Common Core Standards and the threat posed to public education and public services in general by the property tax cap.

While our members teach in a district in which the leadership understands the corrosive effect of the state's ever increasing number of tests, the fact of the matter is try as they may, the state's testing regime will further narrow the curriculum over time with more and more of the instructional program focused on test scores. While our Superintendent and Board of Education spoke on opening day about not letting testing consume the district's educational program, Plainview-Old Bethpage can't win the testing battle on its own. The tests and the scores on them are stupidly tied to teacher evaluations and are additionally the subject of constant media attention. Just this weekend *Newsday's* front page was about test scores. The more these high stakes tests proliferate, the more teachers will teach to them and the more school districts will compare themselves on the basis of them. We will either end the reign of the testocracy over our public schools, or teaching will cease to be a creative endeavor and education little more than training for joyless employment.

Unless testing is returned to its appropriate position of informing instruction, instruction will increasingly be driven by corporate scripted programs that require few teaching skills or imagination. The art of teaching and education itself will succumb to the dark age of the datagoths.

But testing is only one part of the attack on public education. The property tax cap is as dangerous. Foisted on us by an unscrupulous governor, a democrat no less, it will starve our schools into mediocrity. Districts like Plainview-Old Bethpage can glimpse the future by observing what transpired in much of Suffolk County last year where many districts were forced to cut programs, increase class size and layoff experienced teachers. If we just look at POB's new hires this year, many of them were cut from Suffolk districts last year. There is a financial tsunami coming from east to west on Long Island. We will either change this law, in part by finding an equitable formula for financing public education, or we will watch the jewels of Long Island, its public

schools, wither and die. Until the tax cap can be repealed, boards of education are going to have to find the courage to put up budgets that pierce the tax cap and build pro-public education coalitions to achieve the super-majorities necessary.

Testing and tax cap. These are the two issues that must guide much of what we do politically this year, and probably some time to come.

## **GETTING ON KING'S CASE**

SRC Reps will shortly be distributing form letters to Regent Tilles calling upon him to work with the Board of Regents to remove Education Commissioner John King who has clearly lost the confidence of teachers and administrators throughout the state.

This political action effort is being coordinated with other NYSUT locals on Long Island and grows out of a meeting a week ago in which local presidents jumped at the suggestion to start putting the heat on Dr. King.

Members are asked to add their name and address to **one** of the letters, one from the point of view of a teacher, the other from the vantage point of a parent/teacher. Address the envelope to Regent Tilles, add the postage provided and give it to your SRC Rep for mailing. It's an easy enough way to register your dissatisfaction with the way King is managing New York's high stakes testing and the roll-out of the Common Core Standards.

This letter campaign is just one of the many actions the PCT will be asking members to take to aggressively push back against the education leaders of our state.

## **CLERICAL UNIT VOTES THEIR OUTRAGE**

Their nerves still frayed from the protracted negotiations leading to the worst settlements in their history, members of the Clerical Unit of the PCT (CUPCT) met on September 12 to consider their reaction to the news that for the first time in the history of the POB School district, management had negotiated a separate contract with the confidential clericals who are precluded from belonging to our union by Civil Service regulation. Broken by management's action was the historical link between the salaries of CUPCT members and the confidentials. Particularly galling to CUPCT members was how much more the Board gave to them than our members. They unanimously passed a motion expressing their outrage at their unequal treatment.

CUPCT President Janet Rutkowski brought the members motion to the monthly meeting of the PCT officers and the Superintendent of Schools. Janet carefully explained the history of the treatment of confidentials since the advent of the CUPCT. Her remarks were met with, "I don't understand what you're saying," from Dr. Lewis who was clearly indifferent to the thoughts and feelings of the CUPCT

membership. Her attitude was clearly that the Board could do whatever it wished for the confidentials. It was really none of our business.

The officers will be discussing this situation with the Board of Education at their meeting towards the end of October. Their message is summed up by PCT President Morty Rosenfeld's comment on the Board's action. "The Board has made it infinitely more difficult to settle the next CUPCT contract. They have broken a system that will need to be fixed."

## HEALTH BUYBACK UPDATE

PCT members who buy-back their contractual health insurance coverage because they are covered by the Empire Plan through a spouse or domestic partner are anxiously awaiting the outcome of the PCT's law suit against New York State for promulgating a rule against such transactions. Legal advice to the PCT suggested that this law suit was necessary even though in another legal action our union got the Public Employee Relations Board (PERB) to declare health insurance buyback a mandatory subject of collective bargaining and therefore beyond the legal power of the state to declare invalid.

New York State initially responded to our legal action by arguing that our action was untimely, that we had passed the deadline for filing. Our lawyers argued successfully that we were in fact timely in that we filed almost immediately upon learning of the change in the regulation. The court ordered the State to answer our charge which they have now done and which our lawyers have in turn answered. Unless there are issues of fact that the court is unsure of, the judge will render a decision soon on the basis of the papers filed by both sides. Should there be issues of fact, a trial may have to be held.

There is good reason to believe that we will have a decision before January when the buyback payments are slated to cease pending the outcome of the lawsuit. Having won the legal battle at PERB and the court having been informed of PERB's decision, we are reasonably confident that we will prevail in the court.

## RECORD NUMBER OF GRIEVANCES

PCT Grievance Chair Judi Alexanderson has handled more grievances this September than in the previous 10 years combined. It's as though the management of the District forgot that there is a contract between the District and the PCT when they made the schedules of many staff members. The administrators appear to have forgotten that teachers are entitled to a lunch period when food is served in the school cafeteria, that they get travel time when they move between school buildings and that the contract calls for preparation time.

As of this writing, almost all of these grievances have been resolved in favor of our members, although some of the solutions are imperfect. Some have had all of their contractual time restored. Others will receive money for the time lost in that there was simply no way to schedule the appropriate time without completely disrupting the schedules of many teachers and students. To take these

grievances to arbitration would take months during which our members would be without any relief.

## OPT-OUT MOVEMENT GROWS

Faced with a growing number of parents contemplating opting their children out of the state's high stakes test, the PCT is seeking to allay the fears expressed by some parents that if they keep their kids from the test, teachers will hold their opting their kids out against them. We have put the following message on our Facebook page and in Morty Rosenfeld's blog. Morty also spoke at a recent meeting of the Opt-Out Long Island group at the local library. Our message is a simple one.

*The teachers in Plainview-Old Bethpage are working with parents and other supporters of public education to end the damage being done to our schools by state mandated obsessive high stakes testing. We invite all in the community to join the effort to end this scourge that is destroying education in New York.*

*We know that many parents either have or are considering opting their children out of these tests. The decision to keep children from taking these examinations is a personal one. We do not presume to tell parents what to do.*

*We wish to assure you, however, that should you choose to opt your children out, we will respect your decision and continue to teach and treat your children in the professional, respectful manner we always have. We will not allow these unnecessary examinations to come between us and your children.*

The PCT has also ordered bright green wristbands for our members to show our support for the right of parents to protect their children from the scourge of high stakes testing. Watch for their arrival in your building.

This past summer, the National Education Association voted a new business item which calls for support of the right of parents to opt their children out of high stakes testing. The item came from the rank and file who are frustrated with what high stakes testing is doing to their profession and the lack of bold leadership from our national unions on this issue. Interestingly, you would never know the item was passed reading NEA literature published since the July meeting.