



## **PCT PLEDGE**

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### **WHERE ARE WE GOING**

By PCT President Morty Rosenfeld

Our district is befuddled by ambiguity. On one hand, we have a central office and Board of Education that profess a desire for cooperation between labor and management coupled with an understanding that without such a partnership nothing very positive will be accomplished. We have too a seeming consensus that high stakes testing is a menace to quality education that requires our combined efforts to defeat. Our Board crafted and adopted a policy statement strongly opposing the testing regimen in New York and called upon our elected leaders to change that system. Our Superintendent is on record as saying that the testing program of our state is tantamount to child abuse. We are literally bathed in high-blown sentiments.

Yet conditions in our workplaces deteriorate daily. Programs show up in our schools that we have had no hand in selecting. Staff is cut and those remaining are told that they have to pick up the work of the missing. Cut the enrichment program and simply announce that elementary classroom teachers will add these lessons to their day. Agree to an APPR program and an observation scheme, and then unilaterally decide on pop-in observations that were specifically rejected in those negotiations. Implement the Common Core Standards and hire consultants to tell people what to do. The list of the authoritarian mismanagement of the district grows daily.

While they claim to be against as much testing as we have, an attempt to institute an SAT prep course that no one on staff thinks is appropriate, and, instead of questioning their own judgement, have the Superintendent call the staff hypocrites who simply want to protect their private tutoring businesses. Out of the clear blue, announce mid-term examinations in our middle schools, exams that students have not been told about and which have not been written. Don't even consider how those exams are to be marked without a high-school style exam schedule. Then there's the reluctance to accommodate the children whose parents will opt them out of the state tests, parents with real commitment to ending the scourge of high stakes testing in our state, parents willing to take a stand for what they believe.

While we don't know where the leaders of our district wish to go, PCT members have a clear

agenda that they are organizing around. We will tenaciously resist a command and control management of our district. We will demand that we be treated respectfully and permitted to practice our craft in dignity. We will continue to work with people of good will who seek meaningful improvements in our district and state. We hold out our hands to administrators who are tired of being intimidated and fearful, whose desire for self-respect is stronger than their careerist impulses. In short, together or alone, we will do what we have done since our pioneers first formed this union. We will stand up for dignity and respect.

### **WEINKRANTZ TO FILL TREASURER'S POST**

PCT Treasurer Lori Stitt having announced her resignation at the December 9, 2013 meeting of the PCT Executive Board, the Board pursuant to the Constitution, appointed from its ranks Kennedy High School SRC Rep Jane Weinkrantz to serve until January 9, 2014 when there will be an election to fill Stitt's unexpired term ending on June 30, 2013.

To run for Treasurer, a member must submit a nominating petition to the PCT Office by January 9, 2014. Petition forms are available from building SRCs. The election to fill the unexpired term of Treasurer will take place on January 31, 2014. Should there be only one candidate for the office, the Constitution provides for the PCT Secretary to cast one vote for Treasurer at the next meeting of the Executive Board.

### **KUDOS TO OUR GUIDANCE DEPT.**

In an environment in which our work is to say the least underappreciated, it was heartening to see our district's Guidance Department write to Superintendent Lewis taking her to task for hiring a counselor from her former district to give parents a presentation on internet safety and cyber-bullying. After detailing for Lewis the presentations they had successfully done in the past, they went on to tell her, "We are insulted and offended that you do not value your own district employees enough to afford us an opportunity to display our expertise. What message does this send to our community? How could someone from another district have their finger on the pulse of our district-wide families better than we?"

This slight is but the latest example of a top-down management style that is motivating broad resistance from the staff.

### **FINAL DAYS OF VOTE/COPE DRIVE**

The officers of the PCT have announced that December 20<sup>th</sup> will be the last day of this year's PCT VOTE/COPE drive. NYSUT's VOTE/COPE year ends on December 31, giving

the PCT a few days to get our collections to Albany.

Members can get a very good idea of the importance of their political action contributions from the following information we learned today. A bill has been introduced in both houses of the New York State legislature that would effectively establish a private school voucher system in our state. At a time when state aid is a diminishing percentage of what it takes to run our district, the siphoning off of millions of dollars to support private and parochial schools would clearly further erode our ability to maintain our existing program, let alone add some much needed things. This bill must be defeated, and our political action dollars will be dedicated to that cause. How much we will be able to do on this and other issues is directly related to the generosity of our members.

To stimulate that generosity, the PCT will give a Protesting Testing tee shirt, designed by PCT Vice-President Warren Jacobson, to any member who donates at least \$10 beyond the recommended contribution of \$40 for Teacher Unit members and \$20 for Clerical Unit members. Remember, 40 percent of every dollar you contribute comes back to the PCT for our local initiatives.

### **SICK LEAVE BANKS**

While working to help members of the Clerical Unit donate sick days to a unit member in very difficult circumstances, the PCT learned that there are many members who do not understand the contractual sick leave bank benefit in both the Teacher and Clerical contracts.

Over the years, we have both through negotiations and management of the Welfare Fund put together a multi-faceted income protection plan for when members fall seriously ill. Here's how it works.

To begin there is accumulated sick leave. PCT members accrue 14 days per year which can be accumulated over one's career.

Members who through illness use up their accumulated sick leave, are entitled to **borrow** up to 28 days of Extended Leave from the district. The controlling word here is **borrowed**. These days must be paid back from one's accumulated sick leave that is accrued upon one's return to work. Those days are paid back at the end of one's work year with members never being left with less than 3 days of accumulated leave.

Sometimes, 28 additional sick days are not enough to get an ill member through a serious illness. After the 28 days have been borrowed, members can come to their unit's Sick Leave Bank, a bank of days made up of days deducted from each member of the unit according to a formula spelled out in the contract. The Sick Leave Bank, administered by a committee of members of the unit, can **grant** up to

50 days of additional sick leave. The key word here is **grant**. These days **do not** have to be paid back. There is a life-time cap of 90 days on withdrawals from the Sick Leave Bank

In the unusual but nevertheless experienced circumstance that a member is unable to return to work even after the grant of 90 days from the Sick Leave Bank, the Welfare Fund provides short-term and long-term disability insurance at no out of pocket cost to the member. Each policy provides a percentage of one's earnings.

Taken together, members can see the very significant degree of income protection provided through the contract and Welfare Fund.

### **WATCH THOSE EMAILS**

In so many ways, modern media permit teachers communication opportunities unimaginable just a few years ago. With those opportunities comes the need to understand both their power and the shortcomings, especially in those communications with one's students and their parents.

This subject came up at the December meeting of the PCT Executive Board and led to the Board requesting that the *Pledge* carry a reminder to staff as to the care with which particularly email should be used.

Emails to set up meetings, report factual information, convey assignments and answer factual questions about one's curriculum are fine and reduce the amount of time phone calls have a tendency to take.

Emails that interpret student behavior, offer judgements about student's character or one's which offer opinions or insight in one's educational philosophy are to be avoided at all cost. Such emails invite misinterpretation and have a way of triggering meetings at which one is immediately put in the position of defending the contents of a written document. The sad fact is that we work in an environment in which too many parents and administrators are all too willing to second guess us. In such an environment, it is simply foolhardy to create documents that put one at greater risk.

### **UNION PPS COMMITTEE RECONVENING**

To deal with a growing number of concerns from our members working in the PPS Department, the Executive Board is reconvening the committee established a few years ago. SRC Reps are seeking volunteers.