



PCT PLEDGE

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POLITICAL PAYBACK By PCT President Morty Rosenfeld

It has taken almost two years, but the opposition to high stakes testing and the Common Core State Standards aligned to them grows stronger daily. This being an election year for our state legislature and governor, we are already seeing bills introduced, some significant others eye-wash, calling for some change in New York's education policy. If, as I suspect, the number of children being opted out of the state tests grows significantly, we hear our elected representatives proposing more substantial changes.

Our state union has not been immune to the anger of our membership over their support for much of the testing regime, the Common Core State Standards and the linkage of those tests to teacher evaluation in the APPR law that NYSUT supported. Current NYSUT leadership is being challenged by an opposition slate that is against APPR and the Common Core State Standards as they are being implemented in our schools. Their opposition has caused the current leadership to do an about-face, asking the NYSUT Board of Directors to pass a motion opposing the Standards as they are being implemented and calling for the ouster of Commissioner King.

The tide does seem to be turning, and PCT members can be proud that we were out in front of these issues when it wasn't very popular to do so.

Yet, there is much more to do. It will be very hard to fix the testing and Common Core problems without changing U.S. education policy. Many of the tests we are fighting are mandated by federal policy, a policy that began with the Bush administration's No Child Left Behind and which has been made substantially worse by the Obama's administration's Race to the Top. Our political leaders in Albany accepted the federal dollars that came with Race to the Top and are now stuck with the tests that are central to that program.

To get the changes in federal policy we need, we are going to have to move our national unions, the NEA and AFT, to end their unqualified support of the Obama administration, particularly its education policy which is the worst in my lifetime. Just as we have begun to work at the state level for the ouster of King, we must also build a movement that makes it impossible for Obama to continue to support Arne Duncan. If you've been reading AFT publications, we can detect Randi Weingarten beginning to shift political ground. She's not deaf to the political winds blowing in NYSUT, an affiliate that makes up 600,000 of the AFT's 1.5 million members. Sad to say, the NEA leaders seem to grow more politically stupid by the day, President Dennis Van

Roedel recently tightening his embrace of the Common Core. While there will be a new president in July, there is as yet no sign Lilly Eskelsen Garcia holds a different point of view.

While there are still many battles to fight before we have sane education policies in our state and nation, I'm encouraged that if we continue to be politically aggressive, we can, in the end, prevail.

VICTORY IN HEALTH BUY-BACK SUIT

In May of 2012, the New York State Civil Service department issued a policy memo indicating that participants in the NYSHIP Empire Plan who received a buy-out of their health insurance and who were covered by a spouse by the same plan elsewhere would no longer be permitted to receive the buy-out. While the state issued the memo in May, it wasn't until September in the course of our contract negotiations that the PCT was informed of its existence across the negotiating table, the District seeking to remove the buy-out language from our contract.

The PCT did three things in response. We negotiated a continuance of the benefit through January 2014, pending the outcome of the legal remedies we were about to take. First we went to The Public Employees Relations Board (PERB) claiming health insurance buy-backs are a mandatory subject of collective bargaining which the state had no right to abridge by memo, and we filed a lawsuit in the Supreme Court Albany claiming that the state had no right to interfere with this collectively bargained benefit and other points of law.

We very quickly won our case at PERB. On January 15, 2014, we learned that we had prevailed in the Supreme Court as well. Judge Michael Lynch ruled that the policy memo declaring the end to the buy-out was now null and void.

Of course the state may decide to appeal this decision to the Appellate Division. We are advised by counsel, however, that with both a Supreme Court ruling and a favorable PERB decision, the State has a heavy lift in any appeal it may decide to bring.

Unless the State appeals and gets a stay of Judge Lynch's order, the buy-back will remain in effect. Watch the *Pledge* for developments.

POLITICAL ACTION COORDINATORS

The PCT Executive Board has endorsed a recommendation from the Officers to appoint one or more Political Action Coordinators in each of our schools. This is being done to introduce a personal element in our political action activities.

Until now, calls to send faxes, write letters, sign petitions have been sent by PCT President Morty Rosenfeld via email. The simple fact is that every member doesn't open their email daily. It's also true that at the end of the school day, even if we check our email, it takes a real push to engage in one more activity after a day of work and family.

The theory behind the building political action coordinators is the application of the personal touch to our union's work. We are hoping to have coordinators engaging you on the importance of the political issues the PCT is advancing and reminding you to take the action we have decided to do. This is an election year. If we are to succeed in turning the battle to save public education, muscular political action is going to be required. Tax cap, APPR, Common Core Standards, high stakes test, these and more issues are literally robbing us of our profession. We must do a better job of fighting back.

Want to be your building's Political Action Coordinator? Talk to your SRC Reps today.

LEGISLATIVE BREAKFAST HUGE SUCCESS

On Saturday morning, February 1, 2014, the PCT along with the administrator's union and the Syosset Teacher's Association and Syosset and POB PTAs held a joint legislative breakfast on the issues of high stakes testing, the property tax cap and the Common Core State Standards. Congressman Steve Israel, State Senators Carl Marcellino and John Flanagan and Assemblyman Chuck Lavine were present to answer the questions of some 300 parents and teachers from our two communities. Very interestingly, a contingent of citizens from elsewhere on the Island, picketed against the Common Core on Washington Avenue for all coming to the breakfast to see.

The most significant take-away from the event was the stark contrast in the positions of the legislators since the same event last year. Where last year legislators tended to hide behind the fact that it is the state's regents who make the state's education policy, this year the legislators were much clearer in their criticism of the commissioner with Carl Marcellino stating, "I don't trust him." Senator Flanagan, Chair of the Senate's Education Committee, vowed that if the Regents don't fix the testing problems and the poor implementation of the Common Core State Standards, the Legislature will.

What none of the legislators seem to get, however, is that so long as any part of a teacher's evaluation is tied to her students' results on state assessments, we will have teaching to the tests and the narrowing of the curriculum that come with it.

This being an election year, it seems quite probable that the views of our elected representatives will continue to evolve so long as parents and teachers keep the pressure up.

SIT AND STARE

At the last meeting of the POB Board of Education, the Board reached a consensus to direct the Superintendent to come up with a procedure for dealing with those students whose parents choose to opt them out of the state assessments soon to be upon us. The PCT along with a growing number of parents opposed to the state's testing regime has been strongly advocating for such a procedure. This advocacy is just a small part of our efforts to end the scourge of high stakes testing in our public schools. This procedure should be in place soon so that the expected increase in the number of students refusing to take the tests can be reasonably accommodated. To encourage the Board to adopt a

procedure, the PCT volunteered to arrange for teachers to supervise those not taking the tests.

EARLY DISMISSAL

Snow events during this brutal winter have put the need for an early dismissal policy high on the PCT's agenda. During a recent storm, some of our members spent as much as 5 hours to get home. PCT Vice-President Nina Melzer has been in touch with Dr. Lewis who has agreed to seek a way for us to deal with the fact that many of our current staff live far from POB. Watch the *Pledge* for developments.

IN MEMORIAM

Past CUPCT President **Lillian Feigenbaum** has passed away after a long and difficult illness. Lillian's long and distinguished career in Plainview-Old Bethpage was multifaceted - from PTA officer to District Clerk to Principal's Secretary at the Parkway School to President of the Clerical Unit of the PCT. Most of her adult life was spent working for our school district in some capacity. In all that she did, she distinguished herself by her competence, commitment and high ethical standards. All who ever worked with her remember her with the greatest respect. Lillian was a powerful advocate for the under-appreciated members of our Clerical Unit without whose work almost nothing would happen. Her wise and practical counsel will be sorely missed by our union.

We also learned of the passing of former PCT Vice-President Helen Cohn, a founding member of our union. Retiree member Joe Marcal remembers Helen.

It is unfortunate that those of us who teach and work in Plainview often do not know our fellow teachers on different levels. I did not get to meet Helen until I retired 19 years ago. As leader of the retiree unit, Helen was a true activist. Her concern for the students, school employees, people of the U.S. and the world was unbounded. Among the things she fought so hard for was a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for our retirees. She was concerned with so many things. When she would start a sentence with "You know Joe," I knew she wanted me to do something for someone. About two months ago while speaking to her it was "You know Joe so and so could use a phone call. She can't get around so well. See what you can do." That was Helen. She, who lost her sight while living in MA, was still deeply concerned with the needs of others. Helen was deeply devoted to her family, devoted to the employees of Plainview (past and present) and always concerned with human issues world wide. She was a true humanitarian who lead a meaningful life on earth.