We are your friends and neighbors. We are parents. We are professionals who are entrusted with the education of our most precious possession—our children. Teaching Assistants are being recognized on November 18th, 2008 as New York State School-Related Professionals (SRP’s). Teaching assistants are important educators. We are all worth a living wage. Nobody defines this concept better than Debbie Minnick, a Title 1 para-educator in Ithaca, NY: “It’s like the minimum hourly wage that a person can live on without struggling, and it includes items such as food, clothing, housing, and medical care—basic costs. It’s the amount people can live on with basic human dignity, without having to go to their friends, family, the government, or the community for assistance, without having to sacrifice your family life for second or third jobs.”

According to our current contract, a brand new teaching assistant to the Newburgh school district can expect to begin with a starting salary of $21,000. Assistants that have seniority of 10 years in the district along with in-service or college credit reimbursement are just barely hitting the $30,000 salary mark. Some might wonder what a living wage for the Newburgh area is. According to the Economic Policy Institute’s basic family budget online calculator (www.epi.org), the basic living wage for the Poughkeepsie-Newburgh-Middletown area for a one parent/one child household is $50,550.

As many of us realize, costs are always on the rise. Our economy is in a recession. This affects everyone, including teaching assistants who are not presently making a living wage. Teaching Assistants shouldn’t have to lean on their spouses or family for financial support. I believe we should be able to be independent for ourselves and not have to work other jobs after school to supplement what is inadequate compensation for our positions.

The Newburgh Teaching Assistants are becoming known to the public for their good works with Safe Homes. As part of a LAP grant endowment, TA’s are expanding their community involvement. We have been mentioned in the Sentinel, the Times Herald Record and NY Teacher magazine. As an umbrella chapter of the NTA, we continue in our quest for professional development for all members. We have committed our lives and careers to this district.

NTA TAC Secretary and Committee Member Joni Mongelli stated at last year’s NTA Board Forum: “We realize that perceptions take time to change. As it stands, teaching assistants are no longer new to the Newburgh Enlarged City School District. More than 80% of NECSD TA’s have been state and federally certified and working for 5 years or more. We strive to continue to assist student and teachers as proof of what we are qualified to do.”

Teaching assistants are an important part of the children’s education in our district. We are hoping that the district values teaching assistants as important educators worthy of a living wage come contract negotiation time without TA’s having to stage a lengthy living wage campaign. Our chapter’s current contract with the NECSD is up in 2010.

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Debbie Minnick, presenter, at the 2008 NYSUT SRP Leadership Conference in Albany NY.
The Newburgh TA Chapter has applied for the LAP (Local Action Project) Grant from NYSUT. The Lap Grant allows us to reach out to our community with various types of information to help serve the children and families in our district as well as promoting community involvement. LAP Grant committee members are Sheila Manning, Joni Mongelli, Berenda Johnson, Lisa Maier (Committee Chairperson), Pat Favata, and Denice Knox. The committee would like to touch base on many projects such as increase member involvement: member recognition, and mentors; Community Coalition building: sponsor educational activities for students and parents, speakers bureau, continue to support local community organizations; Political Action/Vote Cope: mailings, phone banks, and increasing registered voters; and Communication: Expand the Grapevine distribution. These are just some of the things that the committee is working on but plans on increasing, improving, and expanding on each year after assessing all strengths and weaknesses following the first year.

This year the committee would like to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Pre-K in the Newburgh School District by sponsoring a health/wellness/fun fair in April 2009. This fair would assist the parents of pre-k students entering kindergarten in the fall with vital information on health issues such as the importance of receiving all mandatory inoculations prior to their first school year. At the health fair, the committee hopes to be able to enlist medical professionals to administer either vaccinations by medical professionals or provide clear information on where to obtain the shots easily and inexpensively. The committee would also like to provide information on eye and dental care as well as healthy living (exercise, nutrition, and disease prevention). In addition to providing the necessary health/wellness information, the committee would like this to be a fun filled event and plan on having activities such as a bouncy house, face painting, story telling, food, and music. The committee hopes to be able to give away small boxes of crayons or notebooks or some other small useful item for the youngsters with the Newburgh Teaching Assistants Association logo.

The LAP Committee thought this would be a great way to achieve many of the LAP goals. This will help to strengthen the Association's ties to the community by involving churches, non-profit and civic groups, elected leaders, social welfare agencies, and local businesses who can all donate time, expertise, information and needed services as well as help spread the word throughout the targeted communities. The LAP would also allow many of the Association's members to get involved and the Committee hopes to reach out to other unions within the school district who may be interested. This is an ambitious project for the first year but the Committee feels it would be an enormous service to the community and the children the district serves.
TEACHING ASSISTANT LIVING WAGE SURVEY

Please fill out and return by mail to Maureen Pavlik at Temple Hill Academy

1. How long have you worked for the Newburgh school district?

2. Do you feel that the responsibilities of a teaching assistant are equal to your present salary?

3. Are you single, married, divorced or widowed? (optional) Basically, is this your only source of income?

4. How many children do you support on your salary?

5. Do you now or have you ever had to work a second job to supplement your income?

6. Have you ever struggled to pay bills or purchase groceries?

7. Have you ever received assistance to pay bills from other sources (spouse, family, government) besides your TA salary?

8. Have you ever relied on a food pantry for meals?

9. Do you feel Teaching Assistants should be independent and are worthy of receiving a living wage?

10. Would you support a “living wage” campaign for our umbrella chapter of the NTA?

Please print and sign your signature below. This survey’s purpose is to assemble data only. Names will be kept confidential but are necessary as proof of a valid tally.

Print name_________________________________________ _______________

Signature__________________________________________ _______________
On June 25, 2008, under a clear sunny sky, a tree was dedicated in memory of Jean Harrison. Jean worked at Heritage for three years and was an active participant in many activities and events. Members of Jean’s family, friends, and Heritage staff gathered for the ceremony. Christine Lynch, a fellow faculty member who came to know Jean well, led the ceremony, describing Jean as a “cool chick”. She reminisced about their friendship and many local places to which Jean introduced her. The location of the tree, in front of the school, has a lovely view looking north up the Hudson River. Jean loved this view and frequently reminded everyone to notice its beauty and take it in. The stone Christine had chosen was natural field stone, inscribed with the words “In Memory, Jean Harrison, Beloved Faculty Member.” The view and the stone reflect how “down to earth” Jean really was. Jean’s humor and friendship will be missed by all.

Submitted by Martha Leonard

UPDATE ...

Gardnertown TA’s donate a Safe Homes book basket for readers of all ages.

TA’s from the Pre-K at Washington St. pose proudly behind their Safe Homes basket donation.

NYSUT SRP LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE ALBANY NY

70’s benefit dinner for disaster relief
Teaching Assistants Recognized ...

In August 2008, Teaching Assistants were recognized by an anonymous contributor in The Sentinel. The article was printed in the "In Our Opinion" section of the paper and for those that may have missed it, it read as follows:

Teaching Assistants Make A Difference

As the new academic year rolls around in just a few short weeks children are beginning to become curious about the person who will teach them for the following ten months. Children may not be thinking that there may be another person in their classroom too - a teaching assistant. Teaching Assistants have become a staple in many classrooms. Some parents are confused about their role in the classroom and some have even questioned the need for teaching assistants. The first error many people make in conversations about this position, is calling the job title teacher's assistant. They are not there to assist the teacher. They are also not babysitters or shoelace tiers. They are there to assist in the teaching process and help children learn. There are different sets of challenges that face teachers today. Today, children are tougher. Teachers also have more limits as far as disciplining students. In many school districts, there are more bilingual students. There probably are many more challenges that only those who have walked in a teacher's shoes can understand. A teaching assistant is, quite simply, necessary in certain classrooms. If there is an assistant in a classroom it does not mean the teacher is inadequate or cannot do their job. Assistants must meet a number of requirements to hold this job including passing a state assessment test as well as taking numerous professional development courses throughout their career. This year, parents are encouraged to embrace the role of teaching assistants in their children's classrooms. They are there to teach, just like children are there to learn.

A follow-up letter was also printed in The Sentinel a few days later by retired Newburgh Enlarged City School District Teaching Assistant, Sally Clinton. Her contribution read as follows:

Teaching Assistants Make Progress

I know that I speak on behalf of many teaching assistants when I say "thank you" to the author of the article in Tuesday's paper: "TEACHING ASSISTANTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE."

After 26 years and the first retired teaching assistant (June 2006) in the Newburgh Enlarged City School District, I would like to commend the author for recognizing us.

Because of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), teacher aides were afforded the opportunity to take educational courses in order to change their position to teaching assistants. On the completion of these courses we were then required to pass The New York State Teaching Assistant Skills Test. When all criteria was achieved, in 2003 the Newburgh Board of Education approved the status and change of title from teaching aide to teaching assistant. We were tenured in 2006. Teaching assistants are part of the Newburgh Teachers Association. We have our own Teaching Assistants' Chapter with a very strong Executive Board and many Sub Committees. Some of the men and women in our chapter are Building Representatives. I represented Newburgh Free Academy until my retirement. Our Chapter also has a Newsletter called "The Grapevine" which is published by The Sentinel. Teaching Assistant, Maureen Pavlik, editor of our newsletter was the recipient of a most prestigious journalism award. The Grapevine received Honorable Mention in General Excellence.

Teaching assistants are in every grade in every school. Teaching assistants also work accordingly in many different categories. Depending on the grade, there are times when a Teaching Assistant has to tie a student's shoelace as well as teach the times table. Because I was a TA at NFA, my challenge was that of a different nature. I taught as well as listened to the problems of teenage students. Besides direction from the classroom teacher, teaching assistants, just as teachers, have to "be there" for the students in every way. We are constantly learning by taking courses to further enhance our positions and/or as well as learning directly from the students. Teaching assistants get "on the job training" everyday while in a classroom.

In closing, I would like to say that it was most rewarding working with students both as a teacher aide and teaching assistant at New Windsor School and at NFA. — Sally Clinton, retired Teaching Assistant, NECSD
Okay, okay, here's the scoop.............

Are you smarter than your students?

E-mail the Grapevine within a week of publication with the correct answer to the question below. A winner will be chosen from the correct entries.

The winner will receive a USB 1 Gigabyte flash drive with the NYSUT logo on the front as pictured. Good luck!!!!

Question: Who was the tenth president of the U.S.?

E-mail the answer to: Grapevinetanews@aol.com

This contest is open to all NECSD teaching assistants with the exclusion of the Executive Committee and all Grapevine Committee members. The winner will be listed in the next edition of the Grapevine.

Congratulations to last years winner of the NYSUT logo bag: TA Lourdes Martin from Temple Hill Academy. The question was:

What is the only even prime number? Answer: 2

Amy & Gary Swartz on their wedding day, 8/31/08. Amy is TA Maureen Pavlik’s daughter.

Isabella Rose Mongelli
(granddaughter of Joni and Paul Mongelli)
pictured above at her christening (7/11/08)