DO NOT BELIEVE THE HYPE ON ESSA, STATE MORATORIUM

BY DARRELL KUHN

At face value, the Every Student Succeeds Act appears to look pro-teacher. It takes away the federal mandate that students’ standardized test scores be used to evaluate teachers.

In reality, ESSA is nothing more than a glorified smoke screen.

Stacy Moran, president of the Newburgh Teachers Association, said that under ESSA, the states do not have to use test scores to evaluate teachers, but it does not say they cannot. Moran said that ESSA still supports Receivership, where school districts must identify and intervene in the bottom performing five percent of its schools with no consideration given to the lack of funding and socioeconomic levels of the children served.

“I don’t believe ESSA went far enough to fix the problem of over-testing our students,” Moran said. “It didn’t fully address the faulty implementation of the Common Core curriculum.”

In December of 2015, President Barrack Obama signed ESSA into law. Under ESSA, the states must adopt academic standards for their public school districts, but the federal government cannot force a state to choose a particular set of standards, such as the Common Core.

However, states still have to give standardized tests in English Language Arts and math in grades 3-8 and use the data to hold districts accountable for students’ outcomes. Local scores can still be used to evaluate teachers.

NEW YORK STATE

Adding smoke to the smoke screen was the New York State Board of Regents’ December decision to eliminate the use of state tests to evaluate teachers until the 2019-20 school year. This vote came immediately following the release of the recommendations of Governor Andrew Cuomo’s NY Common Core Task Force. This continued p2

WELCOME BACK NTA LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

BY MATT BARBERO

With forty-four participants, this very successful leadership conference was Newburgh’s first since 2012. Led by Newburgh Teachers Association President Stacy Moran and Angela Pace, the NTA’s Labor Relations Specialist, the conference covered everything from hypothetical situations regarding union policy and diplomacy, to legal issues and the future of the NTA.

The conference opened with a question and answer session in which many poignant issues were addressed and many rumors regarding our rights were dispelled.

The searching of students’ bags by teachers, submission of grades below 50 percent, as well as Newburgh’s past practices clause, were all hot topics which were thoroughly examined as part of the discussion session. The session educated our union leaders in policy, as well as in tact and diplomacy.

Pace answered many legal questions. Grievances, arbitration, past practices, bargaining, and many other issues were covered continued p4

INSIDE

IT'S YOUR UNION! IMPORTANT 'SAVE THE DATES' HOLIDAY DELEGATE PARTY
DELEGATE ASSEMBLY HOLIDAY PARTY A SUCCESS!

BY MATT BARBERO

The evening began with mention of the Local Action Project, Department of Community Engagement's Warm Coats from Warm Hearts clothing drive. Newburgh Teachers Association President Stacy Moran went on to recognize a display of union unity with the officers, the delegates for the teachers, the substitute teachers chapter chairperson, the teaching assistants, and the retirees present.

The focus of this delegate assembly was the presentation of the William G. Riley Profile in Unionism Award, presented for outstanding leadership. Awarded to Ellen Hart, former Newburgh Teachers Association treasurer and Nationally Board Certified teacher; Hart was acknowledged not only for her efforts as a mentor within our ranks, but also for the five years spent as the NTA treasurer: As our treasurer, Ellen stood out and is best known for updating the NTA's accounting practices.

During an interview, Hart reflected on her time spent teaching and as NTA treasurer: "Something very important to me was the time I spent pursuing my National Board of Professional Teaching Standards certification. It's a rigorous process but an extremely rewarding one. It is all about the use of knowledge, of learning to help students grow and develop," said Hart.

Hart did not stop with NBPTS certification, but continued to study in order to become a NBPTS Candidate Support Provider. Hart stated that she furthered her certification in order to assist other teachers on their journey through the NBPTS certification process.

An acknowledgment of our Newburgh Teachers Center Coordinator appointee, Beverly Browne-Fazio, was announced during this assembly. With the office being empty for two years, we wish Beverly luck in her new appointment and look forward to a new age of involvement and many new programs becoming available to our staff members throughout the district. Along with the award and introduction, the officers, building delegates, retirees, substitutes, and head delegates were all recognized individually by name, and all were recognized for their dedication and hard work in representing our members throughout the year.

Later in the program, the following members were recognized for receiving tenure: Dena Botsford, Carol Caccitore, Kimberly Ludwick, Cynthia Panessa-McGraw, Alissa Sanchez, and Kathleen Workman. We wish them luck throughout their careers in Newburgh.

The evening was a success, with delegates and officers catching up on business, as well as being given a chance to socialize and wrap up the year. Reflecting back on the year, many challenges, changes, and improvements are behind us, and many lie ahead. A new NTA president and NTC coordinator; new principals in many of our schools, and of course a new contract are some of the changes that we have faced.
ESSA, STATE MORATORIUM from cover

Moratorium only applies to the state ELA and math standardized tests in grades 3-8. The state Regents exams are not part of this moratorium for the Newburgh Enlarged City School District because it does not have state-provided growth scores.

"We are still being evaluated based on the Common Core," explained Moran. "For example, an eleventh grade English teacher has 40 percent of his or her evaluation based on the new Common Core ELA Regents exam. Therefore, the students' progress is predicated on the two years of the faulty implementation of the Common Core."

Christine McCartney, an ELA teacher at the Newburgh Free Academy North Campus, said that everybody wants the best teachers in the classroom, but using state exams to evaluate teachers is ludicrous. Any great educator, according to McCartney, knows that motivating students through punitive measures only works to extinguish intellectual curiosity. It is no different for adults.

"Creating a culture of fear and intimidation does not encourage professional growth, but rather test prep activities and quick fixes," McCartney said. "Providing teachers with time in their day to collaborate and have meaningful discussions about what is happening in their classrooms is what reignites the passion to teach. If we want to see the best teachers in every classroom, time, support, and professional development is what we need."

Janet Bisti, the lead ELA teacher at South Middle School, said that postponing the use of the ELA and math standardized tests in grades 3-8 for teacher evaluations is a step in the right direction, but only if the Board of Regents uses that time to develop a better evaluation system for both teachers and students. If this assessment is truly to be used for teachers' growth, Bisti explained, then its results should be made available to teachers so that they can analyze the data provided by the scores, including the standards being addressed, the phrasing and vocabulary of the questions, and the students' responses.

"This is the first year in my four years of teaching seventh grade that we have been allowed to look at and discuss the questions from the prior year's assessment and really determine where our students are struggling and, therefore, better inform instruction," Bisti said. "Prior to this year, we were not even allowed to discuss the test questions that were asked among teachers."

Moran said the moratorium does not stop the implementation of the new teacher evaluation system that is currently under development. As far as teacher evaluations go, Moran wants to see them done within school districts.

"I would like to see the return of local control for all decisions regarding teacher evaluation," said Moran. "Until this curriculum issue is overhauled and fixed by actual educators and adapted to the needs of the local population, a true moratorium should be extended indefinitely."

THE FUTURE...

CONGRATULATIONS: NTA
PRESIDENT STACY MORAN
RECOGNIZES TEACHERS FOR
EARNING TENURE AT THE
DELEGATE ASSEMBLY
HOLIDAY PARTY AT
STEAK & STEIN.

Photo by Matt Barberio
GIRLS VARSITY SQUAD MAKES A PLAY AGAINST CANCER

BY DARRIEL KUHN

The Newburgh Free Academy girls varsity basketball team contributed to an important cause through the game they love.

On January 10, the team took on Clarkstown North at Dominican College of Rockland County in the Children’s Cancer Foundation’s Love Holds Life Game. According to its website, Love Holds Life is a not-for-profit organization whose purpose is to help children in the New York Metropolitan Area and the Hudson Valley Region who are battling cancer and their families by providing financial support for their medical treatments and expenses not covered by insurance. It also states that in the past, the foundation was able to save families struggling through these situations from losing their homes, cars, livelihood, and even from going bankrupt.

The game was a fundraiser specifically for Hudson Valley children fighting this battle.

NFA Girls Varsity Coach Rick Desiderio said that this was the second year of the tournament at Dominican College, and his team participated both years. His team raised $300 for the cause this year by soliciting donations from the community.

"I think it is a great cause," Desiderio said. "Giving back is one of our responsibilities as an athletic team that is blessed enough to play the game we love."

Even though Newburgh lost the game 51-32, Desiderio said that he and his team are honored to play in this event. It is something that he and his team plan on doing every year.

"We will play as long as the games are played somewhere in the region," Desiderio said.

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NTA LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE continued

by Pace during this workshop. Not one to mince words, Pace told us that the contract may be intimidating and imposing, but it is also a living document. Towards the beginning of her discussion, Pace made several points clear regarding the treatment of grievances. Representatives were to do the following PRIOR to filing: 1. Talk to the principal first. 2. Write everything down. 3. Adhere to timelines.

Pace’s realistic way of presenting left little to the imagination to the representatives, as many of our concerns were addressed prior to being asked. The APPR/SLO process became a major bone of contention.

Going all out as she worked through lunch, Pace reviewed information regarding Cuomo’s policies such as private school tax credits and charter school funding. During the afternoon session, case studies and hypothetical situations were reviewed in which the union representatives debated their interpretations of the scenarios, and were critiqued on their answers.

Another issue of concern to Pace was the effect of Political Action Committees (PACs) on education. With big money behind charter schools, the Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) does not apply to charter schools, even though these schools operate using taxpayers’ money. Charter schools generally don’t provide health benefits to teachers, nor do their teachers operate under a contract.

This conference was particularly interesting to me as it was my first. It was quite an education for me as I was able to gain an understanding of what our union representatives do for us on a regular basis. Even if someone is not a union representative, the leadership conference is an excellent learning experience for any teacher in our district.

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CASINO ROAD TRIP

WHO?
All NTA Members and their guests (no one under 21 please)
WHAT?
A trip to Mohegan Sun in Uncasville, CT
WHEN?
Saturday April 30, Meeting in the Newburgh Mall Parking lot at 10:00 am. Leaving Mohegan Sun at 6:30 pm to be back to Newburgh by 9:00 pm.

The fee is $21.42 per person to cover the cost of transportation. The casino is giving each participant an incentive package at the door, including a $15.00 meal coupon that can be used towards the restaurant or for a free buffet and a $10.00 money voucher to be used on wheel or table games.

Space is limited, so please reserve your spot by filling in and returning the reservation form available at www.newburghata.com to the NTA Office no later than Friday, April 1. If you have any questions, please call the NTA Office at 845-362-8120.