Spearheaded by the NTA’s negotiators on a variety of fronts, the ’08 calendar year closed with extremely positive results in three major areas.

Through its Labor Management Committee and a sub-committee format, NTA leaders assisted NTA President Phil Cordella in helping to wrap up the long awaited rollout plan for walkthroughs, a new retirement incentive proposal, and a staff movement plan that recognizes the additional year of the District’s 9-12 reconfiguration plan.

**Walk-throughs**

Starting in January, teachers can expect to receive, in a timely manner, the results of the 3-5 minute data gathering walkthroughs by building administrators and directors in our classrooms focusing on instructional delivery via email or some other efficient method. The expectation is that both the District and the NTA believe professional discussions regarding topics of what and how we teach are necessary if our District is to move forward in achieving many of our goals. Part of the agreement is that an educator may also request a meeting with the data gathering administrator to discuss their findings. Meetings with administrators may only happen if the teacher initiates them. Post walkthrough meetings are voluntary and only at the teacher’s request.

**Retirement Incentive**

With the sincere desire to solve problems regarding future staffing, a Supplemental Memorandum of Agreement (SMOA) was signed by the NTA President on December 18, 2008, which now contractually allows members who are on step 15 or higher and are 55 years of age or older this school year to be given a 40% retirement incentive as additional payment based on their current contractual salary. In order to offer this new benefit to the nearly 200 teacher unit bargaining members eligible, the parties agreed to a payout option of 20% over two successive calendar years. This approach maximizes District savings while at the same time offering members who may have missed the incentive, or were formally not eligible, to now invoke this new right.

**Staff Movement**

When the Superintendent of Schools read a letter to all stakeholders at the NTA/Board Forum on December 8, 2008, describing the 2009-2010 district configuration plan, the union moved into action in order to assure everyone’s rights were protected. Prior to the announcement, Board President Runston Lewis and Superintendent Dr. Annette M. Saturnelli had meet with
and indicated to NTA President Phil Cordella that it was their desire to work with our union in addressing the situation.

What occurred almost immediately was a new SMOA signed by the parties on December 10, 2008, which does just that. The new district-wide configuration impacts mostly South Junior High staff movement in the 2009-2010 school year and then both South Junior High and Heritage Junior High teachers in the 2010 – 2011 school year. To address this, the new SMOA offers unit members at South and Heritage at the end of the next school year (2009-2010) the same standing they would have had prior to June 30, 2009 under the old MOA.

When visiting schools, it became apparent that for the greater good, the NTA’s goal was to keep all rights in place, even if they had to be delayed one year. On another note, the Temple Hill and Meadow Hill K-8 plan remains in effect and the SMOAs which provides for orderly staff movement remain in place.

On the NTA’s Labor Management Team are the chair, Jim Nee (NFA), Pat Hunter (HJH), Nancy Sparacio (MH), and Sheila Manning (TA Chair). Also attending was NTA Vice President Vicky Pittman (NFA). The NTA’s subcommittee on walk-throughs included Karen Roberts (NW & NTA Secretary), Jeanne Daley (HJH-Stewart), Dave Brown (HOH), Pat Hunter (HJH) and Sharon Minard (Fost).

One teacher at Vails Gate Elementary, starts her day with not only a fresh cup of coffee but a sense of empowering children and families in developing countries.

It’s as simple as choosing Fair Trade coffee. A trading partnership which advocates a fair price to marginalized producers who are seeking a greater equity in international trade, Fair Trade provides a negotiating market that encourages a living wage and a shift away from child labor. In today’s mass marke, a coffee bean farmer must hurdle through fourteen different steps to have their product on the shelves. That means fourteen additional people who need to make money. Savings is often found by keeping wages to workers extremely low and using child workers. In the Fair Trade market, a farmer can breeze through with just four other interactions.

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About 64% of children on cocoa farms are under age 14, meaning that the loss of an education comes at an early age for the majority of these youngsters. Children who are involved in some of the worst abuse on conventional farms are sold by their parents into the child trafficking ring believing that they will find honest work. But as soon as they are separated from their families, they are made to work for little or no money.

On a farm regulated by the Fair Trade International Monitoring System, however, abusive child labor is prohibited and farmers are guaranteed a minimum price under direct contracts. These regulations enable farmers to send their children to school and to rely on adult community workers who receive a living wage.

This November and December the Vails Gate faculty participated in a school fundraiser where they can purchase fair trade coffee and chocolate, while learning with ease how to supply their homes with these and other products. As teachers and union members we should be putting forth a greater effort to recognize the issues that children face outside of our country. Supporting the Fair Trade market increases the standard of living for these children.

With a hopeful outlook, that Vails Gate teacher, Marlayna Wiley declares, “Together we can make the NTA’s collaboration with NYSUT in this project the largest supporter of Fair Trade products in New York!”

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Children who work on conventional coffee bean farms most often work for their family farm. The farmers are trapped in deep poverty, and they have to make the hard choice to keep their children out of school in order to work. These child laborers often work with machetes and apply pesticides and insecticides without the necessary protective equipment. The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture noted that 66% of child cocoa workers in the Ivory Coast do not attend school. About 64% of children on cocoa farms are under age 14, meaning that the loss of an education comes at an early age for the majority of these youngsters. Children who are involved in some of the worst abuse on conventional farms are sold by their parents into the child trafficking ring believing that they will find honest work. But as soon as they are separated from their families, they are made to work for little or no money.

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The NTA Leadership Conference produced active learning and a worthwhile educational experience for all those in attendance.

The NTA Pendulum • February 2009

Test Results Cut From Tenure Law

By Darrell F. Kuhn

NTA members must know the new tenure laws in order to help probationary teachers. New teachers must also know the law so they can prepare properly to receive tenure.

The Governor’s 2007 budget would have required student test scores to be used in the evaluation of teachers vying for tenure. However, the State Legislature rejected that proposal, and the new law for 2008 prohibits the use of student test scores to evaluate new teachers. The new law applies to classroom teachers whose probationary period commences on or after July 1, 2008, but the law sunsets in two years.

Larry T. Waite, manager of educational services for New York State United Teachers, said at the NTA’s annual leadership conference in November that the new law requires all districts to implement an Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) to evaluate the performance of teachers. Waite said the new law doesn’t apply to pupil personnel service providers, teaching assistants, or administrative staff. Administrators are not supposed to use student test scores to determine tenure for a new teacher. “Unions have to be careful about this,” Waite said. “It could be a reason (to deny tenure), but not a stated reason. This is going to be difficult to determine unless the administrator admits it. We know it happens.”

All NTA members need to be aware and paying attention.

The Newburgh Enlarged City School District has a mentoring program, where experienced teachers act as mentors to new teachers. It is through this program that new teachers can receive information and guidance on the process.

Jennifer Lastowski, an eighth grade math teacher at Heritage Junior High School and a NTA delegate, said she’s concerned about student test scores being a factor for a new teacher getting tenure. “We don’t want students’ test scores to determine teachers’ success,” Lastowski said.

Waite said the State Legislature must do something about the tenure law when it expires. There are a number of possibilities, one of which is Peer Review. The NTA members at the conference learned some of the ins and outs of this process during a separate workshop held later in the day.

For now, new teachers will need to demonstrate the use of student assessment in their planning. The State needs to provide the district and its teachers data in a timely fashion, and teachers need to be using a variety of assessments in their classrooms to analyze and modify instruction to serve the students in a professional manner.

NTA Vice President, Vicky Pittman said, “Change is difficult. When a person understands the situation, it makes the transition much easier. That’s what we’re doing here today.”
NTA Goes Green

At the November 2008, Delegate Assembly, the body voted unanimously to support a motion that addresses a reduction in the NTA building’s carbon emissions, as well as, to encourage the NTA membership’s participation in the same environmental undertaking.

Within the last few years there has been a significant effort to “go green”. One such movement has been nicknamed, Carbon Footprints. A majority of your friends and family may not even know what a carbon footprint is or how to reduce it.

Carbon Footprints are Special

Footprints offer clues about where we came from and where we’re headed. Their impressions tell us something about the animals that leave them. But while actual footprints offer details on size, weight, and speed, carbon footprints measure the impact our activities have on the environment, and in particular climate change, just by going about our daily lives. A drive to work, a flip of a light switch, and a load of laundry all rely on the combustion of fossil fuels like oil, coal, and gas. When fossil fuels burn, they emit greenhouse gases like CO2 that contribute to global warming.

Some Suggestions

• Turn it off when not in use (lights, television, DVD player, Hi Fi, computer, etc.)
• Turn down the central heating slightly (try just 1 to 2 degrees C)
• Turn down the water heating setting (just 2 degrees will make a significant saving)
• Check the central heating timer setting - remember there is no point heating the house after you have left for work
• Fill your dish washer and washing machine with a full load - this will save you water, electricity, and washing detergent
• Unplug your mobile phone as soon as it has finished charging
• Defrost your fridge/freezer regularly
• Do your weekly shopping in a single trip
• Hang out the washing to dry rather than tumble drying it
• Go for a run rather than drive to the gym

It is with high hopes, that informing NTA members on ways to reduce carbon emissions, we may all work toward a healthier future for the students we teach and the planet. If everyone were to reduce their yearly carbon contribution by 2%, total carbon emissions would be eliminated by 80% by the year 2050. Here are a few ways you can begin to work toward our global goal. The NTA has begun by turning off computers, and we are looking for ways to continue saving on the amount of carbon the building itself produces.

Economic Reality

Prompt Re-emphasis on VOTE/COPE

With economic hardships caused by financial crisis, public employees often carry the burden. However, NY-SUT’s legislative program is working to deliver relief. Your VOTE/COPE contributions aid the efforts of our lobbyist who work to improve our working conditions. With important issues on the table and uncertainty of jobs, donating now is crucial. Please make the commitment to contribute what you can. The recommended amounts are $5.00, $7.00 or $10.00 a pay period for 10 pay periods, via payroll deduction. Checks made out to VOTE/COPE and mailed to the NTA office are also encouraged.

VOTE-COPE is an acronym representing the Voice Of Teachers in Education, the Committee On Political Education. Funded entirely by voluntary contributions from members, VOTE-COPE is used to help union-backed candidates and campaign committees that support education and labor. VOTE-COPE helps strengthen political action programs on the national, state, and local levels. Patricia VanDuser heads up the NTA teacher’s bargaining unit drive while Denise Knox and Joyce Rollins lead our Teaching Assistant and Retiree’s efforts. The NTA will use much of its VOTE/COPE proceeds to pass the school budget and elect pro-educationschool board members in May. No union dues can be used for political purposes, and therefore, it’s essential all NTA members contribute to keep the hard earned rights we have in this tough economic climate.