



SPEAK OUT

ISSUE 3

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2005

From the President: By Barbara Shapiro

Standards For Our Association



All too often, teacher unions are much better at articulating what we are against rather than what we are for. That, in turn,

has been much more conducive to reactive rather than proactive behaviors and practices. Recently, the Teacher Union Reform Network (TURN) hammered out "standards" meant to guide the union's actions on behalf of its members, institutions and students. I am very interested

in knowing your reaction to these standards and whether PDTA should formally adopt them. If, as an Association, we agree that these standards have merit, then we need to reflect them in our policies, allocation of union resources, negotiations and our union's priorities.

The Teacher Union Reform Network agreed that responsible and responsive teacher unions are committed to:

- the preservation and improvement of public education.
- democratic and transparent practices, ethical and fiscal responsibility, equity, social justice, self determination,

fairness and due process, tolerance and honoring dissent.

- promoting union solidarity and the dignity of all work and all workers

- the right of collective action and collective bargaining.
- improving on an ongoing basis the terms and conditions under which both adults and students work and learn.
- taking responsibility for teaching quality and ensuring that teachers are empowered at the school and classroom level.
- collaboration with all other stakeholders as equal partners in public education and involving families and communities in students' learning.

What do you think? Please e-mail me with your thoughts, ideas and concerns regarding these standards.

- organizing members by promoting quality and creating ways for excellent practitioners to become union leaders.

- expanding the scope of collective bargaining to include instructional and

professional issues and involvement of teachers in educational decisions.

- considering students' learning as our primary goal and taking professional accountability for students' progress.

What do you think? Please e-mail me with your thoughts, ideas and concerns regarding the above standards. We have the opportunity and the responsibility to represent the collective wisdom of our members in shaping our policies and decisions. We can best do that by reaching consensus on standards for ourselves and then using these standards to guide our behavior. I look forward to hearing from you!

As we enter that special time of year between Thanksgiving and New Year's. I wish each of you a happy and healthy holiday season. I thought you would enjoy the following Thanksgiving message.



An Educator's Message Of Thanksgiving

I am thankful that I am an educator. As an educator, I have the power to educate, to inspire, to challenge, to comfort, to reassure, to ennoble. The scope of my influence is incalculable; each of my students leaves my classroom changed in some way by what I did and said. I am thankful that I have been entrusted with that responsibility. I am thankful that I love what I do.

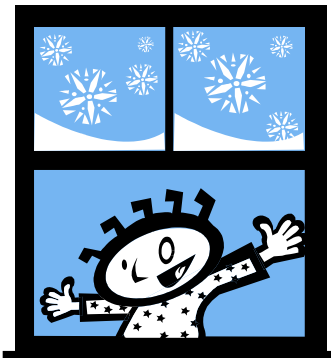
I am especially thankful for:

- the administrator who trusted my judgment and supported my decisions.
- the substitute, who, without complaint, turned sometimes sketchy plans into exciting lessons.

Educator's Message, cont'd. on p. 2

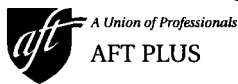
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Student Loan Consolidation

AFT members can lock in a fixed interest rate and cut their monthly student loan payments by half or more. Learn more about the program today by calling an AFT-dedicated loan counselor at **800/936-4976** or visiting **www.aft.org/aftplus/consolidation**. Brought to you by CFS affinity services. All participating lenders are equal opportunity lenders.



11/05

Know Your Contract: By Brenda Gibson Retirement Letter & Career Award Plan



Professional Staff* considering retiring at the end of this school year need to closely examine Section 1-6 (pg. 6) of our contract as it relates to qualifying for the Career Award Plan.

To be eligible for the award monies, Professional Staff must submit a written letter of retirement to the Personnel Office no later than **JANUARY 15, 2006**. You must be at least 55 years of age on the date of retirement (career award plans allow employees to benefit whenever they retire after the age of 55, unlike retirement incentives), and must have been employed an equivalent of **TEN** full-time years or more in the Pittsford Schools immediately preceding retirement.

If you meet these conditions, you will receive a payment of \$40 per day of accumulated personal and family sick leave to a maximum of 200 days, plus \$400 per year of service. The maximum payment is \$20,000.



Remember, you may make the decision to retire after January 15, but you will not be eligible for the Career Award Plan.

*The SRP Career Award (Article 27) is automatic upon retirement. You do not need to contact the District.

The NYS Teachers' Retirement System Update



NYSTRS' 2005 Annual Delegates Meeting was held November 13-14 at the Saratoga

Springs City Center. Over 600 delegates, including Dan Sanfratello, Lynn Smith and Tom Zieno, attended the meeting.

Good News! The retirement system is still adequately funded with assets of over \$84 billion.

If you are planning to retire in the next ten years, attend a consultation session. Our retirement system has created a number of retirement options; some give the maximum monthly check, while other options ensure a spouse or beneficiary receives a pension payment in the event of the retiree's death.

To maximize your highest average earnings from which your retirement will be calculated, you need to know what extra

pay is creditable and what is not. Further for some tiers there is a limit that one may increase one's creditable salary per year.

You can see that planning for retirement requires research and accurate information.

To attend or learn more about upcoming sessions call NYSTRS at (800) 348-7298, ext. 6100.

Until that time, however, visit NYSTRS.org and review PowerPoint presentations on the following topics: [How You Can Get the Highest Pension Possible—Legally!](#), [The Two Biggest Decisions You Must Make When Considering Retirement](#), and [The Impact of a Divorce on NYSTRS Benefits](#).

Educator's Message

cont'd. from p. 1

- the student who struggled but refused to give up.
- the creative colleague who freely shared her best ideas.
- the party at which no self-described

expert expounded on my "high pay and short hours".

- the student who suddenly "got it".
- the unexpected absence of my most disruptive student.
- the colleague who covered my class for five minutes so I could run to the

restroom.

- the volunteers who baked cupcakes, chaperoned field trips and provided enrichment activities.
- anyone who, at any time, for any reason, remembered to say, "Thank you for being a good teacher!"

SRP Newslink: By Karen Shield



On January 11, 2006 we will be holding a New York State Employees' Retirement System Workshop at the Teacher Center on Marsh Road at 3:45 p.m.

The workshop will be open to all District SRPs who are interested in learning more about how the ERS works.

Arlene Hanley, our NYSUT ERS Consultant, will lead the workshop. Arlene has been out to Pittsford before to hold similar informational workshops, and has been very well received. Many of you may have spotted Arlene at our PDTA Benefits Fairs as well.

Some of you may be thinking of retirement soon and others may view it as something far in the future. Whatever

your situation may be, it doesn't hurt to be well informed in advance of your retirement. It makes good sense to understand your retirement system and the benefits it offers you.

This is an opportunity for everyone to get their questions answered!

Please go to the Teacher Center website to enroll now.

Health and Safety: By Linda Khalil

The Flu and You...It's for the Birds!



It's that time of the year when all types of germs seem to mount their attack on students and staff alike. This year media attention has also heightened concern regarding the possibility of a global flu pandemic caused in part by the "bird flu". I have included some information below which might assist you in planning your defense for the coming winter

season.

Symptoms of flu

The flu usually **starts suddenly** and may include fever (usually high), headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle aches. Some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions, are at high risk for serious flu complications. The flu and the common cold are both respiratory illnesses but they are caused by different viruses. In general, the flu is worse than the common cold. People with colds are more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose. Colds generally do not result in serious health problems, such as pneumonia, bacterial infections, or hospitalizations.

Sharing flu

The flu spreads in respiratory droplets caused by coughing and sneezing and occasionally a person may be infected by touching something with virus on it and then touching their mouth or nose. You may be able to infect others beginning one day **before** getting symptoms and up to seven days **after** getting sick. That means that you can give someone the flu before you know you're sick as well as when you are sick.

Avian Influenza (Bird Flu) or for those in the know...H5N1

Bird flu is an infection caused by avian (bird) influenza (flu) viruses. These flu viruses occur naturally among birds. Wild birds worldwide carry the viruses in their intestines, but usually do not get sick from them. However, bird flu can make some domesticated birds, including chickens, ducks, and turkeys, very sick and kill them. So far, spread of H5N1 virus from person to person has been rare and **spread has not continued beyond one person**. However, because all influenza viruses have the ability to change, scientists are concerned that the H5N1 virus could one day be able to infect humans and spread

easily from one person to another. Most cases of avian influenza infection in humans are thought to have resulted from **direct contact** with infected poultry or contaminated surfaces.

What can I do to protect myself against the flu?

The best way to prevent this illness is **by getting a flu vaccination and washing your hands**.

There are two types of vaccines:

1. The "flu shot" -- an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is given with a needle.
2. The nasal-spray flu vaccine -- a vaccine made with live, weakened flu viruses that do not cause the flu.

About two weeks after vaccination, antibodies develop that protect against influenza virus infection. Flu does not usually peak in our area until January or February, so getting a flu shot in November or December will still be helpful in providing immunity.

Due to supply issues, the District was unable to hold a flu clinic this year. You should contact your primary care physician or the Monroe County Health Dept Flu Information Line:

(585) 753-5600 or <http://www.monroecounty.gov> to obtain the most current schedule of Flu Vaccine Clinics. **Warning:** If you plan on obtaining your vaccination at a grocery or drug store, call before you go. Several clinics have been cancelled at the last minute due to lack of vaccine.

Antiviral Agents for Influenza

Four different influenza antiviral drugs (amantadine, rimantadine, oseltamivir, and zanamivir) are approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the treatment of influenza; three are approved for prevention. All four have activity against influenza A viruses. However, sometimes influenza strains can become resistant to these drugs, and therefore the drugs may not always be effective. If you think you have flu infection, you should contact your primary care physician within 48 hours of experiencing symptoms to discuss whether taking an antiviral might shorten the length or decrease the severity of your illness.

Sources:

<http://www.health.state.ny.us/diseases/communicable/influenza/index.htm>

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/gen-info/avian-flu-humans.htm>



Check Your Paychecks!

If you pay your PDTA dues by payroll deduction, the deductions began with the November 22 paycheck.

Not only should you check your pay stub to make sure everything is correct, but Payroll often puts important notes in the envelope or on the pay stub itself. It is important for everyone to check your payroll envelope for information on a regular basis, even if you have direct deposit.

Last Year for Educator Deductions



Remember to save your receipts from your annual out-of-pocket purchases of books and classroom supplies. These expenses may lower taxes for 2005.

The deduction is available to eligible educators in public and private elementary and secondary schools. To be eligible, you must work at least 900 hours during the school year as a teacher, instructor, counselor, principal, or aide.

Educators may subtract up to \$250 of qualified expenses when figuring adjusted gross income, regardless of whether they itemize.

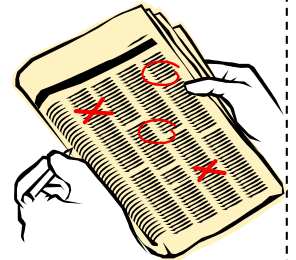
Under current law, the deduction is scheduled to expire at the end of 2005.

PDTA Members May Use Speak Out Too!!

Classified Ads: Do you have something to sell? A car, a bike, golf clubs, etc...Consider placing a short classified ad in *Speak Out* (Free to Members). We currently distribute to over 750 PDTA members.

Letter to the Editor: If interested, attach your letter to an email and send it to the address below.

Pictures Wanted: We would love to use photographs to reflect you, our members, and what is happening at your work site. Please identify the people in the photo and location. You may even include a caption.



Submission Guidelines: Please submit all text files (in "MS Word") and picture files (in ".jpg") electronically to the address below. The issue deadline is Friday after the monthly Representative Assembly meeting.

Email: bret_burrows@pittsford.monroe.edu

PTSA Grants Available to Teachers!

PTSA is a non-profit organization whose main purpose is child advocacy and parent education. As such, we may provide funds to groups whose activities support our goals. Although PTSA cannot provide general operating funds, specific items and projects resulting in enrichment to students can be funded, including parent education, mailings, speakers, etc. Each requesting organization must apply by October 15 for the fall programs and April 30 for the spring programs. This grant is meant to provide funding for start-up programs and is not a source of yearly funding of on-going programs.

Below is the criterion for funding a program or project:

- Program addresses both district and PTSA missions.
- Programs directly impact students.
- Projects or events are not part of the district's regular educational program.
- Programs are new, rather than on-going.
- Programs are not otherwise funded.

Funds should be sought only when other funding is unavailable at the building level.

For further clarification or questions, please contact the PTSA via their website.

PDTA Survey Raffle Winners

There was a terrific response to the PDTA survey: 410 surveys were completed. The lucky winners of the \$50 raffles were Gail Shears (PMS-West), Holli Englerth (PMS-East), Jill Richards (PR), Denise O'Neill (MC) and Linda Lamontange (PR). Barb Shapiro will report on the survey findings in the next issue of *Speak Out*.

About Our Members:



Congratulations to Stephanie Tranquill (MHS) and Rana Bryan (PMS-West) on the births of their daughters, to Greg Bishoping (TR) on the birth of his son, and double congratulations to Becky Nunn (TR) on the birth of her twins!



Best wishes to Leah Menchel Taylor (MC), Laura Yalmokas (PR), Crane Gunther (MHS) and Maryellen Tuzio (SHS) on their recent weddings.



We wish Eileen Scoville (SHS) and Julie Barker (MHS) a speedy recovery as they recuperate from surgery at home.



We send our sincere condolences to Barb Manchee (PMS-East) on the passing of her son, Alex. It is with sadness that we announce the passing of retirees Anita Boags and Jim Wittig.

New Member: By Caren Glassman

Keeping Parents Informed

Although there are different marking periods for the elementary, middle and high school, please remember to keep your parents informed of any changes in a student's performance as well as any successes or improvements. Remember that an open line of communication is important in viewing our parents as partners in the educational process.

District Abbreviations

I'm sure by now some of you may have already experienced the "Alphabet Soup" used in the district. I just thought I would highlight a few:

COT (Central Office Team) is responsible for overall leadership and implementation of policies and procedures across the School District. The team reports directly to the Superintendent.

DPT (District Planning Team) provides input to the Superintendent regarding plans for continuous improvement across the School District.

PTC (Pittsford Teacher Center) provides on going training opportunities for staff. Part of the PTC is the Instructional Media Center.

SDC (Standards Design Committee) coordinates the standards work across all disciplines K – 12. They recommend new initiatives and instructional standards budgets to ILC.

ILC (Instructional Leadership Council) is responsible for making recommendations on curriculum and instruction.

ILT (Instructional Leadership Team) is a building level team responsible for the creation and management of school policies and goals.

PST/SST (Pupil Service Team/Student Services Team) is the building level team that provides recommendations for students who are referred by staff members or parents. They meet dependent on building needs.

AIS (Academic Intervention Services) provide services for at-risk students.

CSE (Committee on Special Education) decides on classification for special education students or refers students back to the building for further action.

PDTA (Pittsford District Teachers Association) is the Union which represents Professional Staff and School Related Professionals. Each building has representation on the Executive Committee and Representative Assembly which meet monthly.

And let's not forget the ever popular **TGIF**. (Thank God it's Friday!)



Homeowner Tips for Surviving Freezing Weather

Heavy snow and bitter cold can lead to serious problems for property owners, including frozen pipes and home fires. To help ride out the winter's storms, MetLife® Auto & Home offers a free brochure, "Surviving Severe Cold Weather," which explains how to avoid much of the distress and inconvenience that winter weather can bring. The brochure is available by calling MetLife at 800-638-5433.

"The best defense is preparation," explained Bob Smith, Vice President and Chief Claim Officer of MetLife Auto & Home. "Most winter insurance claims that we receive are related to frozen pipes and downspouts, ice dams on roofs, and frozen tree limbs that fall on vehicles and homes. Experience has shown us that some of these problems could have been prevented, which is why it's important to take precautions to ensure the safety of your property and, most importantly, your loved ones."

Tips to avoid damages from winter weather:

- Keep sidewalks and entrances to your home free from ice and snow.
- Keep the house heated to a minimum of 65 degrees.
- Keep cupboard doors open below sinks.
- Turn on hot and cold faucets enough to let them drip slowly.
- Identify the location for the main water shutoff in your home.
- Keep garage doors closed.
- Remove dead tree branches that could damage your house.
- Close flues in fireplace when not in use.



In addition, according to the National Fire Prevention Association, nearly two-thirds of all residential fires occur during the winter months. From too many lights plugged into an outlet to a portable-heating device placed too close to curtains or a blanket, there are many opportunities for a fire to start. Many of these fires could be prevented simply by considering some basic issues of home fire safety. To help property owners rekindle their knowledge of the basics, MetLife Auto & Home offers a free brochure called "Up in Smoke!," which is also available by calling 800-638-5433.

MetLife Auto & Home is endorsed by New York State United Teachers Member Benefits. For free, no-obligation auto and home* insurance quotes that include special group rates**, call 800-GET-MET 1 (800-438-6381). Please have your current policies on hand when calling.

* Home insurance is available in most states to those who qualify.

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Coverage, underwritten by MetLife Auto & Home, is available in most states to those who qualify. In Texas, real property policies are provided by Metropolitan Lloyds Insurance Company of Texas, Irving, TX. In Texas, auto policies are provided by either Metropolitan Property and Casualty Insurance Company, Metropolitan General Insurance Company, Metropolitan Casualty Insurance Company, Metropolitan Direct Property and Casualty Insurance Company, all of Warwick, RI, or GAINSCO County Mutual Insurance Company, Fort Worth, TX, through an arrangement with Metropolitan Property and Casualty Insurance Company. In some instances, special arrangements for coverage have been made with other carriers.

MetLife Auto & Home is a brand of Metropolitan Property and Casualty Insurance Company and its Affiliates, Warwick, RI. L0301CV0U(exp0107)MPC-LD

For information about this program or for information about contractual expense reimbursement/endorsement arrangements with endorsed providers, please call NYSUT Member Benefits at 800-626-8101, e-mail benefits@nysutmail.org, or visit www.memberbenefits.nysut.org.