

GTA TODAY Jan/Feb 2010

By Don Pallozzi

Race to the Top: A Federal Grant of up to \$700 million was applied for by New York State. Districts submitted proposals to State Ed by January 19, 2010. If approved 50% of the money will be made available to select districts based on their grant application. The District estimates that we would be eligible for somewhere between \$500,000 - \$1,000,000. The grants will be awarded on a point basis and districts will receive points for various items including Union sign off. Districts may submit their proposals without Union endorsement but obviously would not receive any points for Union endorsement. We choose to endorse a significant part of the application however we would not endorse the item stating that we would use data to inform compensation, promotion and retention. The grant application made it appear that each item would be subject to collective bargaining. The Greece application was returned by the state, last week, because we said we are not interested in signing off on the item mentioned above. In hind sight, it appears that the process to use collective bargaining and choice in which items we would endorse was not genuine. Once we exercised our right to opt out of an item the grant application was returned to the District with the expectation we would change our position. With no Superintendent in place for next year and strained relations between the current administration and Association I can not, in good conscience, sign off on an item that says we will bargain what is essentially merit pay and data driven promotions and retention. I don't know if the District will be in consideration for the grant money without our endorsement. Given the finances of our District this was a difficult decision but to hold the grant money over District's heads to force unions to bargain merit pay is extortion. If you want further details on the grant or the process please contact us.

Certification Reminder from Kim O'Connor: Effective February 1, 2010 the NYS Department of Education will no longer be printing initial, provisional, time extensions, renewals, supplementary, transitional or TA Level I and II certificates. They will print professional, permanent and TA Level III and Pre-Professional certs. SED is directing candidates to the TEACH website at <http://www.highered.nysed.gov/tcert/teach/> for the certification information. As a reminder GCSD does not subscribe to a BOCES regional certification office so when applying for your certificate, request the NYS review of your credentials. Should you have questions, please contact Kim O'Connor in Human Resources at Kim.O'Connor@greece.k12.ny.us.

Intent Forms: The use of Survey Monkey to complete transfer requests does not change the contractual obligations but does require an additional step to rank order preferences. Any change in your original intent can be submitted to Kelly Semple until June 30, 2010. In the past the District asked that this be done in writing and they would not accept an e-mail. E-mail is now accepted. This may prove to be an exceptionally confusing year for transfers and will require those requesting transfers to follow the process closely to ensure that the contract is followed. As we progress through the process this spring if you believe that your transfer rights have been violated please contact us. Mistakes have been made but when we are aware of the error we have been successful in rectifying those situations.

Teachers' Center: NYSUT has a great tool for us to send faxes to Joe Robach and Assemblyman Relich (or you can choose the senator and assemblyperson from the district you live in). They have one electronic letter to save teacher centers. Here is the link below. I would appreciate it if you could take 5 minutes to follow the instructions below to send the lobbying fax electronically. It is quick and easy. I need your support in order to keep funding for teacher center programs. I would appreciate it if you could have the GTA reps send it out to teachers and teaching assistants in the buildings. Thank you in advance for your support. (I have also

attached PDF directions)

http://www.nysut.org/cps/rde/xchg/nysut/hs.xsl/contactelectedofficials_14500.htm

Congratulations: The Stuff a Bus campaign set another record, collecting 11,209 pounds for the Greece Ecumenical Food Shelf. We have received a letter of thanks from the program coordinators. They believe our donations will get them through March and into April. ARHS was over the top collecting 3,215 lbs. Olympia came through with their personal best at 2,173 lbs. Pinebrook narrowly edged Longridge 792 -722 with and Athena Middle collecting 865 lbs to take honors among our middle schools. Thanks to all students and staff that helped to make this such a success.

Budget Cuts: On the Friday prior to the February Board meeting I sent the following letter to each Board member:

The Superintendent approached all bargaining units and asked that we consider freezing our pay. Our initial response was no. After attending the Westridge meeting I'd like to propose a few things that I hope will generate some interest.

Historically we have never supported cuts to program or schools. Even as a last resort it takes years to recover what is lost. Losing a school takes longer. We have always believed cuts need to occur as far away from the classroom as possible.

In keeping with that thinking I would ask you to demand the RASHP Consortium release a significant portion of the \$37 -\$42 million dollars held in reserve to the contributing districts. This money was collected by artificially increasing health care rates with a goal to self fund. They opted not to self fund and renewed with Excellus last year. I don't know what an appropriate reserve is however one thing Steve and I agree on is that this money is tax payer money and should be returned to the districts. I'm sure Lou Alaimo can give you an exact accounting of our contributions. Just a guess would put our share between \$2 and 4\$ million dollars. This would go a long way toward closing the budget gap - if not this year certainly next.

I ask you to consider an Administrative restructuring. Postpone the Superintendent search, appoint an interim and save the salary and benefits. This would be adequate to save Westridge and then some. Additionally investigate the organization of Assistant Superintendent's. We operated this District in the Ray Page days with Ken Graham, Bernadette Skopjak and George Kisha. There could be substantial savings there. It would be easier to rebuild the leadership structure than to reestablish a school.

Consider a professional development moratorium. If BLISS and the other initiatives come out of the budget rather than grants there are more savings.

On behalf of the staff and students please consider these actions before we eliminate programs.

We need to make our position known to the Board. The majority of the proposed cuts are in the classroom – that has to be unacceptable. Make your beliefs known to the Board. The Board has asked the Superintendent to cut an additional \$6 million from a budget that has little to cut. The Unity Committee letter writing campaign will be active in getting information to membership – please make your voice heard.

Board Elections: The deadline for petitions is April 19, 2010. If you know of a potential candidate please contact that person or have them talk with me. This is a critical election.