



Update

Vol. 37 No. 3

Nov. 2012

What's Next? A Horde Of Locusts?

Brothers and sisters, it certainly has been an interesting start to the school year. I'm not quite sure what to make of it, frankly. Together we have been facing political challenges in the names of APPR and Tax Cap. A few weeks ago, it seemed that everyone was in opposition to us; and *Newsday's* near-daily assault just added insult to injury. And now, Mother Nature has even turned against us by unleashing her wrath in hurricane and nor'easter forms! I look around and wonder "Who can we trust?" The answer is simple...Each other. A disaster such as Sandy can have one of two effects: bringing out the *worst* in people or bringing out the *best* in people. The past week has shown me the *absolute best* in our staff.

Early on, it became clear that the wide-spread power outages would be a critical obstacle for keeping in contact with our staff. With traditional phones lines down and cellular devices dropping calls on overloaded circuits, the only semi-reliable method of contact was texting. Even with all the technology available to us, our ability to communicate was almost paralyzed! Dr. Ferrie, Ms. Nystrom and I would communicate on a daily basis. Texts were sent to the SFT's Executive Board to be forwarded to our members. Some of you are old enough to remember the Faberge commercial. "And you tell two friends, and they'll tell two friends..." Well, it worked. The word got out to most of you in a timely manner. Because many of you are in possession of "smart" phones, emails were also sent via the SFTUnity website and were further disseminated.

The Central team and I felt it extremely necessary to open our schools for the faculty on Nov. 5 to facilitate the evaluation of the staff. We needed to know who was alright, who had damage, and who was now displaced from his or her home. Although 40 or so staff members are currently relocated from their homes, I am extremely thankful that no one was seriously injured or taken from us by Sandy. I know that the faculties in all the buildings are supportive of those colleagues who sustained loss. I've heard wonderful plans of fundraising and outreach ideas to help those in need. Donations of money, food, clothing and supplies, raffles, offering places to live and simple moral support abound through each building. I know that those efforts are greatly appreciated and will continue until each of us has a warm, safe place to call home again. Sandy clearly has brought out the *best* in each of you.

Where do we go from here? Back to the classroom to do what we do best...teach! We've lost valuable time with our students. NYSUT, the Superintendent's Association and a few politicians are in the process of pressuring SED and the Governor to pardon the five days Sandy stole from us. For other districts like Long Beach, the loss of educational time is even greater. There is no telling when the decision will be made; as you know our Governor walks to the beat of his own drum.

There is still a great deal to be done. I know you will all continue the much needed support of your colleagues. I know you will be cognizant of our own students' losses and welcome those students from other districts who have been displaced. I ask that if you have not yet done so, please give your building rep your personal email so we can add you to the SFTUnity email list. Keep yourself "in the know" even if Mother Nature tries to keep you "in the dark."

Your continued patience and understanding regarding the unprecedented loss of days and parent conferences - along with the eventual resolutions - is greatly appreciated. I want to give you my sincere thanks for the high level of professionalism you all exhibited this week. It makes this President proud to serve each and every one of you.

Be safe, stay warm and may your lights shine brightly once more.

In Unity,

None of us is as strong as all of us!

"Elections 2012 - Many Victories and Some Losses for Public Education"

It has been said that in politics, nobody does something for nothing, there's always a quid pro quo involved. For NYSUT and its national affiliates, the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, this reality has been a guiding force in its political endorsement process. Party platforms, campaign rhetoric, and voting records are all scrutinized. Do you support fully funded public schools, and dedicated public school teachers, or are you anti-teacher union, pro-voucher, and pro for-profit private charter schools? The endorsements you read in the *NYSUT 2012 Election Guide* were only bestowed upon those who were deserving. The good news is that on Election Day, public education and its teachers won many victories.

Nationally, President Obama won by a larger than expected margin, and this was a big win for public education. His opponent wanted to inundate public education with voucher and privatization schemes. In addition, Mitt Romney did not believe that you, as teachers, have the right to freely associate and petition for redress of grievances, i.e., form a union. "Unions must be taken out of the equation" according to Mr. Romney. It was not surprising that he would not deign to speak at the AFT or NEA Representative Assemblies about his positions on public education and teacher unions.

In Long Island's Congressional races, NYSUT endorsed candidates – Bishop, Israel, McCarthy, and Meeks - all won. (Peter King is someone else who refuses to meet with teacher union representatives, and will not condescend to attend the Long Island Federation of Labor Congressional Night.) In addition, Senator Gillibrand was returned to the Senate.

In the NYS Legislature, many of the legislators who brought us cuts to education funding, Tier 6, and the Tax Cap have been dealt a crippling blow. While many of those who have supported us and in turn earned our support, such as Assemblyman Joseph Saladino and Senator Kenneth LaValle, were returned to office.

There were other noteworthy results across the U.S.:

- Key gubernatorial races were won in New Hampshire and Montana by strong supporters of students, teachers and education support professionals.
- In California, voters rejected Proposition 32 that would have silenced the voices of educators, other middle workers, and their unions. Voters also demonstrated their willingness to invest in public schools and colleges by voting "yes" on Proposition 30, which will stop \$6 billion in midyear budget cuts to schools and colleges.
- In Florida, voters overwhelmingly rejected two measures - one would have robbed public schools of valuable funding by placing a cap on state revenues. The other ballot measure would have siphoned away tax dollars intended for public schools for vouchers for private and religious schools.
- In Maryland, in a strong show of support, voters fended off an attempt to repeal the Maryland DREAM Act, which allows students of immigrants—who have graduated from high school and have been accepted into a public university—to receive financial aid.
- Michelle Bachmann narrowly won her congressional seat in Minnesota. Bachmann has compared assaults on teachers' unions to President Reagan's efforts against the USSR and Abraham Lincoln's fight against the Confederacy. She has also pushed to get rid of the Department of Education and routinely opposes anti-bullying legislation. "I think for all of us, our experience in public schools is there have always been bullies. Always have been, always will be," Bachmann said in an address to the Minnesota State Legislature.
- An amendment was voted through in Illinois that will require three-fifths approval by the General Assembly, city councils and school districts that wish to increase the pension benefits of government employees and officials.
- Millions of dollars from outside organizations funded and succeeded in passing a Georgia amendment that will create a private state commission that will directly license charter schools with very little oversight.

Yes, there were losses. However, one thing that is certain is that teacher activism helped achieve the victories in NYS and elsewhere. Every phone bank, every labor walk, and every rally helped us reward the friends of public education, and made an example of a targeted few who opposed us. Well done! However, it's not over. As always, our ongoing responsibility is to monitor the performance of those who have been elected, to make sure that they fulfill their promises to public education and to its devoted teachers.

In unity,

Tom Cook

Legislative/PAC Co-chair