



GNTA REPORT

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Sandy Hits Home

It has been more than two and a half months since Sandy struck, and yet many of us are still dealing with the devastation. The GNTA Financial Aid Fund has donated \$6,000 to our members so far, and our Financial Aid Committee is still accepting requests. NYSUT and the Long Island Teachers Benevolent Fund are also offering financial assistance. For more information visit our website at www.gnteachers.net. Our Benefit Trust Fund legal advisers also offer this advice:

Recovering From the Aftermath of Superstorm Sandy

By Mirkin & Gordon, P.C.

On October 29, 2012, the Tri-State area was devastated by Superstorm Sandy. Extensive flooding and wind damage has caused billions of dollars worth of damage. Dozens of counties were declared to be federal disaster areas which triggers the availability of federal disaster assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Small Business Administration (SBA).

The recovery and rebuilding process will undoubtedly be a lengthy one. However, here are a few tips that can make the process easier:

- Secure your home and personal property from further damage;
- You can dispose of unsalvageable items but be sure to document any damage and loss via photographs and/or video. Try to locate documents that evidence your ownership and the costs/value of lost or damaged personal property;
- Contact your insurance carrier as soon as possible to make a claim for your loss and fully cooperate with them in investigating and processing your claim;
- Seek financial assistance from FEMA and/or the SBA to assist you in rebuilding, replacing non-covered losses.

Financial assistance available from FEMA is not intended to fully restore or replace your home. Instead, it is only intended to provide funds to make your home safe and habitable. Generally, FEMA aid does not have to be repaid and is not considered income. You can begin the process online at disasterassistance.gov or by calling 800-621-3362.

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Did You Know...



Stands for **B**uilding **C**urriculum **G**roup. This subcommittee of BRC acts as an advisory panel to its building's principal. Each BCG is expected to "plan, review, evaluate and then make recommendations to the principal with respect to curriculum proposals" as well as approve conference attendance for a building's faculty. See Article 13 in the contract for more information.



The number of school days by which a tenured or probationary teacher must receive a copy of any written classroom observation. It is understood that signing the document does not mean you agree with its findings, only that you have received it. See Article 42D-E in the contract for more information.

April 1st

The date by which a teacher must be notified if his/her position has been eliminated for the following school year. See Article 57A in the contract for more information.

The President's Report

 **By Sheila Scimone**

Rarely have we, as a faculty, experienced such a difficult fall as this one just past. We began the year with a mandate from New York State changing the way we're being evaluated as professionals, a change over which we have only partial control. Early in the fall, we were informed of a proposed change in Board policy regarding tutoring that would affect many of us. Then came Superstorm Sandy, which touched all of our lives to varying degrees and will continue to have ripple effects through February at least. And finally, right before the holiday break, we heard the horrifying news of the shootings in Newtown, Connecticut: an incident which was all too imaginable to us as teachers and which is likely to have repercussions on our professional lives for years to come.

In every instance but the last, I've received countless emails and phone calls from people offering their opinions, insights, and suggestions. I've visited every BRC and had frank, thoughtful discussions about these and other issues. And while I was somewhat aware of this before, this fall has proven to me that ours is a union of incredibly intelligent, thoughtful, committed professionals. Very few of us accept change without question, and that's our strength.

Despite general accusations to the contrary, we as a teachers union do not wish to stand in the way of change IF change leads to progress. Questioning change ensures that our information is complete. This enables us to challenge the thinking of those who propose the change (unless the "powers that be" are functionaries of New York State!). And that challenge results in decisions that have been carefully considered, so that even if we disagree with the final form the decision takes, we can take pride in the role we've played in shaping it.

Few things are worse, professionally, than feeling impotent in the face of events that affect our work lives. You have many opportunities, both individually and through GNTA, to be heard on the issues that originate here in our own District. Keep showing up at BCG, BRC, SDM, and DA meetings. Keep those emails and phone calls coming in! But I also hope that you'll direct some energy toward those in power outside Great Neck. Let your state legislators and the Governor know your opinions on matters that affect education in New York. And I'm sure you're aware of the national debate on guns as a result of the Newtown massacre; I hope you'll raise your voice on that issue, too.

It's natural to be overwhelmed by the enormity of complex problems we face every single day, and it's far too easy to believe that speaking up is an exercise in futility. Who's listening, anyway? However, way back in the fifth century (BCE), Euripides said, "But this is slavery, not to speak one's thought." That's every bit as true now as it was then.

In this new year, here's to re-committing ourselves to speaking our thoughts!

It's Your Pension

 **By Jennifer Snyder**

At this year's New York State Teachers Retirement System's Annual Meeting, the delegates were charged with the task of becoming "Ambassadors to our Pension System." We need to educate ourselves in order to be prepared to have conversations about our pension systems with each other and with our friends who work in the private sector, those without defined benefit pension systems. We need to educate people about the fact that 75% of New York retired teachers remain in New York after retirement, and that those people continue to live, shop, and enjoy what New York State has to offer. In doing so, our retirees put over \$10 million dollars back into New York's economy each year. Equally important is the need for us to be aware of the specifics of what is happening to public pension systems in surrounding states. This is a critical step for us in order to defend against attacks on our system here in New York.

As an attempt to provide each of you with the facts with which to enter into discussion about our Public Pension we have published a variety of links on the "Retirement" page of the GNTA website at www.gnteachers.net. These links contain information regarding how public pension systems work, the history of NYSTRS, how the system compares to other systems, how public systems have changed in the last three years, what you need to know as a member of the system, and how to make the system work for you. Additionally, we have linked to videos of each of the workshops offered at the Annual Meeting so you can watch them online. Regardless of where you are in your career, you benefit from being educated on your pension system.

Education News

In his recent State of the State address, Gov. Cuomo proposed a slew of initiatives including:

- A competitive grant program for schools that develop initiatives to improve student achievement that include extending learning time by at least 25 percent.
- A plan for the state to invest in full-day pre-kindergarten, beginning with highest-needs students.
- A plan for high-performing "master teachers" to receive \$15,000 in supplemental income annually for four years to teach other teachers.
- Increased penalties for illegal gun purchases, use of guns on school property and for those who engage in violent and serious drug-related gang activity.

Mark Your Calendar



- ☒ **Martin Luther King, Jr. Day:** Monday, January 21 (Schools Closed)
- ☒ **Delegate Assembly Meeting:** Thursday, January 24 - 4:00 p.m. at South High School
- ☒ **Board of Education Meeting:** Monday, January 28 - 8:30 p.m. at North High School
- ☒ **Presidents' Day:** Monday, February 18 (Schools Closed)
- ☒ **Revised Calendar:** February 19-22 - Schools Are Open

Remembering Newtown



You can help rebuild and restart classrooms across Newtown, Connecticut with a donation to **donorschoose.org**. Contributions received will give Newtown teachers the ability to design and fund classroom-specific projects and buy needed materials. Projects could include, for example, books and shelves for a reading nook, art supplies for a mosaic, seeds and soil for a memorial garden, or other teacher-generated projects.

Visit **www.donorschoose.org/newtown** if you'd like to help.



The GNTA News Blog

For the most up-to-date GNTA news, visit our new News Blog on the Web. While we continue to keep you informed with our quarterly newsletter, *The GNTA Report*, if it affects our members, you will hear about it first at **www.gnteachers.net**.



We welcome your feedback about the *GNTA Report*:
jdaszenski@greatneck.k12.ny.us

On a Personal Note

Congratulations to...

-  Esther Weiner (EMB) and Howard Weiner on the engagement of their son Michael to Jamie Adler.
-  Corinne O'Connell (NH) on the birth of her daughter, Kelly Lynne Tortorice, on 12/12/12.
-  Dawn Luisi (EMB) and Matt Luisi on the birth of their son, Declan Warren Luisi.
-  Kelly Spence (SH) and Bill Spence on the birth of their son, Gehrig William Spence, on 9/18/12.
-  Kathryn Villecco (EMB) and Jason Villecco on the birth of their son Justin Michael Villecco.
-  Linda Musmeci (SM) on the birth of her grandson, Ryan Andrew, to Eleanor and Scott Musmeci (SH 1998) on 11/14/12.
-  Ellen Siegel (EMB) on the marriage of her daughter Jill to Avi.
-  Patty Lovell (LV) on the publication of her second picture book, *Have Fun, Molly Lou Melon*, in October 2012.
-  Dr. Sheri Lederman (EMB) on receiving the Dissertation of the Year Award from Hofstra University.
-  Kaitlin Verneuille (EMB) on her engagement to Mike Loos.
-  Susan Becker (JFK) on the marriage of her son Scott (SH 1993) to Angela Withun on 11/3/12.
-  Kristin Ippolito (NM) on her marriage to Anders Kirleis.

Condolences to...

-  Janine Robinson (NH) and Julianne Risi (PV) who recently lost both their father and mother, William and Dolores Robinson.
-  Joseph Rutkowski (NH) on the passing of his father, Joseph Rutkowski, Sr., on 11/22/12.

Recovering From the Aftermath of Superstorm Sandy

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Federal disaster assistance will not duplicate coverage provided by insurance whether flood, homeowners/renters or auto insurance. In some instances, FEMA will provide emergency funds if your insurance company does not pay your claim within thirty days. However, those funds would have to be repaid to FEMA if your insurance company subsequently covers the loss.

Be aware that a "public" adjuster is generally retained by your insurance company to assess the damage for which they will pay under the policy. However, you can retain an "independent" adjuster to assess the damage and negotiate an appropriate settlement with your insurance company. An independent adjuster collects a percentage – generally 5-8% – of your insurance settlement. This contingency fee schedule usually generates a higher return/payment from your insurance company.

Under the Fund's Legal Plan you may schedule an appointment with an attorney to discuss your legal needs arising from the storm.

GNTA's 75th Birthday

This May the Great Neck Teachers Association will celebrate its 75th birthday. A planning committee is already hard at work on a commemorative event, so expect details soon. We may be turning 75, but we've never been stronger.

Need More Than Two Personal Days?

Did you know that you can now use sick days as personal days should you require more than the two (2) personal days guaranteed by the contract? With the Superintendent's approval, and in keeping with the contract's guidelines, you can use sick leave for personal leave if necessary. See Article 34 in the contract for more information regarding personal leaves.

You can get the Personal Leave Application form from the GNPS website at **www.greatneck.k12.ny.us**.

We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.

- Martin Luther King, Jr.