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# Open Line

Affiliated with the AFL-CIO, AFT and NYSUT Local #115

Vol. 8 No. 4

December 2004

## Teacher of the Year

The nomination/application form for the 2006 New York State Teacher of the Year Award is available online. You can get to it through [www.nysut.org](http://www.nysut.org) or by going directly to [www.highered.nysed.gov/kiap/TEACHING/TOTY2006.pdf](http://www.highered.nysed.gov/kiap/TEACHING/TOTY2006.pdf).

In its 36th year, the Teacher of the Year program is affiliated with the National Teacher of the Year program administered through the Council of Chief State School Officers and sponsored by leading education associations. Every nominee is recognized at the state level with a certificate from the Commissioner of Education. NYSUT is one of the organizations that annually honors the winner; the Teacher of the Year award presentation is always a highlight of the RA.

### Nominations are due Jan. 14, 2005.

NYSUT Leader - Nov. 19, 2004

Manhattanville College has established a program named "My Soldier." Check out how you can make the season brighter for a man or woman serving in the armed forces far from home for the holidays.

[http://www.mville.edu/MYSOLDIER/MYSOLDIER\\_REGISTRATION.HTM](http://www.mville.edu/MYSOLDIER/MYSOLDIER_REGISTRATION.HTM)

New  
Items

NYSTRS

SCSD

POMCO  
NYSERS

Vision Trust

Flex Plan

**United We Can  
Achieve Our Goals...**  
This year, more than ever-  
give to  
**VOTE-COPE.**



Contributing through payroll deduction is practically painless. Having education-friendly legislation is more important now than ever before.

SRPs

## "Thanks for All You Do"



Honored

When I began planning for School Related Professionals Recognition Day, I knew we would have to "toot our own horns" and celebrate each other. I have come to realize that peer recognition is the most genuine and makes us feel the most appreciated. Receiving the following comments from my peers certainly made me feel appreciated and I am confident that they felt the same.

### Thanks for all you do!

*The SRP celebration at the STA was such an uplift to our day. The room was decorated so nicely. The food and drink was so delicious. Our special gifts were so nice. Nancy Peluso and the committee did a great job making the SRP's feel special and important. It was so nice to sit and chat with our friends. A great time was had by all in attendance.*

--Ann Rush (LeMoyné)

*It was wonderful to be recognized as a paraprofessional. Everyone who attended seemed to be enjoying themselves. I want to thank everyone who made this celebration possible...great job!*

--Elizabeth Gersbacher (Porter)

*Being honored in our profession with a special day of recognition has been a long time coming for teaching assistants. That certainly has not been the case at Salem Hyde. The teachers have been very thoughtful throughout my years - even gave us a surprise celebration sometime back. On SRP Day, November 18th, I was made to feel appreciated, proud and valued at a reception hosted by our union. Through the conversations amongst each other, I could tell I wasn't the only one feeling that way.*

*We listened as our union leader gave us praise for our daily commitment to children. While enjoying the delicious food we became lucky winners of raffle prizes.*

*I would like to thank Kathy Hartman and Sue Webb for their part in this celebration. A special thank you is extended to our union president, Nancy Peluso for her hard work and commitment in making this celebration possible.*

*From this time on we have our own special day as do so many others in many different professions. SRP Day was a long time coming. I truly appreciate it finally arriving.*

--Judy Tremaine (Salem Hyde)



Teaching Assistants sampling some of the goodies served at the SRP celebration.

## Vision Trust Update

Members with dependent children between the ages of 19 and 25 will receive a form to certify that the child is attending an approved institution of higher education and is financially dependent upon the member. This form is separate from the one they receive from Employee Benefits for the Health and Dental plan. These forms must be returned to STA no later than January 1, 2004 to maintain coverage. Students who have withdrawn from school or graduated will have their coverage terminated January 15, 2004. Coverage for over 25 students will terminate on their 25th birthday.

Children of members may apply to continue coverage under COBRA. Contact Ed O'Rourke at the STA office for information on COBRA benefits.

--Ed O'Rourke

On November 18th I went to the SRP Recognition Day Party at the STA office. It was great that the Union acknowledges and appreciates all our hard work. Some days are very long. Thanks to Nancy Peluso and her staff. It was nice to meet with other TA's and share ideas and have fun.

--Barb DeMarchi (Salem Hyde)



Nancy Peluso and Bernie Perry

Thursday, November 18<sup>th</sup> was School Related Professionals Day in New York State. I'm sure that there were many celebrations around the state, but I only know about one of them. Syracuse Teachers Association Unit 8 President, Nancy Peluso, was kind enough to invite me to their celebration at the STA Office on that Thursday evening. It is not often that I get to meet the leadership in a large gathering so I was excited that I received the invite. I completely enjoyed the opportunity to chat with a number of the members there and to speak to the group about how much we appreciate the great work they do with the students in the Syracuse City School District. Thank you very much, and please invite me back next year.

Bernie Perry, Regional Staff Director  
NYSUT Syracuse Regional Office

*It's always wonderful to see all the people from the different schools and to socialize with everyone. The best part is the gift of sharing...smiles, laughter, stories and a great meal. What we all have in common... educating our children the best we can.*

--Diane Scimone (Lincoln)

## Inside

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- NYSTRS Conference

The officers and directors of the STA Executive Board and our staff wish you peace and joy this season.

The STA Office will be CLOSED Friday, December 24, Monday, December 27 and Friday, December 31



## From the President's Desk...

The time between Thanksgiving and New Years is often a hectic and stressful season for folks. The family gatherings we look forward to carry with them lots of extra work that we would not trade but that tap into our energy reserves. So, as an antidote for all of that winter activity, why not think about summer?

No, I'm not crazy! Many education professionals take time in the summer for trips associated with their practice. In some instances there are opportunities to apply for funding to support professional study like Fulbright scholarships. [http://www.cies.org/us\\_scholars/](http://www.cies.org/us_scholars/)

### Contract Updates

Building Reps attending the December Rep Assembly have a copy of the Memorandum of Agreement that details our clarified agreement with the district on the Unit 1 contract. (This was posted on the STA listserve and 1st VP **Kevin Ahern** has posted a summary at [syracuseteachers.org](http://syracuseteachers.org) for your viewing.) Reps also have a detailed listing of how the work is continuing with finance and personnel staff.

If you have questions about any of the elements talk it over with your building rep for clarification. If you need additional information send questions via e-mail to me at [mckenna@syrteach.org](mailto:mckenna@syrteach.org). I'll respond to the questions with STA listserve messages periodically. Kevin Ahern, **Heather Sponenberg** and I will continue to work with the district until all problems related to implementation of the new contracts are resolved. This includes getting the 4 new contracts printed and out to members in the new year.

### STA Listserve

I'll be putting things out periodically on the listserve. By subscribing to the listserve you will get late breaking information first. All Chief Reps and Reps should sign up. You may use your school or home e-mail address. However if you have an account with Yahoo, Hotmail, etc., you need to adjust the spam filter to allow mail from STA. If you do not use your mailbox or if you wish to be removed from the listserve please call us at x4526. If you change your address, please notify us as soon as possible so that you do not miss out on any important news from STA.

*Enjoy the vacation and remember to  
take some time for yourself!*

*Happy Holidays, Kate*



## Just For You Too...

### ELA Assessment Trends: 4<sup>th</sup> Grade, 1999-2004

This February, fourth grade students will take the New York State English Language Arts Assessment. This will be the seventh 4th grade ELA assessment given to evaluate whether or not students are meeting the New York State English Language Arts Standards. The hard work that many teachers and students do in classrooms across the city of Syracuse is

not always reflected in the assessment scores. In part, this may be due to a mismatch between what is being learned and what is being assessed. The intent of this article is to neither criticize nor support the ELA assessments, but to examine trends in the types of questions and prompts used, and to ask if mismatches still exist between instruction and assessment.

For folks not familiar with the assessment, the test is divided into two books: Book 1 and Book 2. Book 1 contains twenty-eight multiple-choice questions followed by four options, one of which is the right answer. Students are allowed 45 minutes (unless they have testing accommodations) to complete Book 1. Book 2 contains short-response and extended-response questions. Three questions address a passage the teacher reads aloud twice; students have 30 minutes to complete their responses. One prompt asks students to write a story; students have 30 minutes. Four questions address several texts students must read; students have 60 minutes to read and to respond.

Clearly, students must pace themselves. They must be strong enough readers, listeners, writers and thinkers to be able to accomplish any combination of these tasks within the allotted time. This assessment is not about curling up with a favorite book or writing multiple revisions about a self-selected and much-loved topic.

Book 1 passages include fiction, nonfiction and a variety of genre: folk tales, fairy tales, biography, poetry, letters, articles, and interviews. All we can assume from past assessments is that students will be expected to read and comprehend a variety of texts, most of them nonfiction. However, when we examine questions that have appeared over the past six years, more informative trends appear.

Book 1 multiple-choice questions are matched to sub skills for three learning standards (Information and Understanding, Literary Response and Expression, and Critical Analysis); half, or more than half, of the multiple-choice questions since 1999, with the exception of 2001, were matched to sub skills in Standard 1, Reading for Information and Understanding. The only two sub skills that have consistently been evaluated since the first ELA assessment, 1999, are also from Standard 1: identify main idea and identify supporting details. For the most part, students read nonfiction and respond to questions that attempt to evaluate how well they understand the informational content of the passages.

Standard 3, Critical Analysis and Evaluation, is also, for the most part, assessed through questions about nonfiction. The only exceptions I've noticed, when reviewing multiple-choice questions from 2002 thru 2004 (prior to 2002, Book 1's were secured), were in the 2002 assessment: students were asked two questions about a poem they read. Since 1999, 65% of the multiple choice questions were matched to sub skills in either Standard 1, Information and Understanding or Standard 2, Critical Analysis and Evaluation – the highest % in 2002 (75%) and the lowest in 2004 (61%) - and all of these questions, with the two exceptions already mentioned about poetry, were in response to reading nonfiction. Clearly, Book 1 privileges the reading of nonfiction and the ability to locate, make inferences about, and, to a lesser degree, evaluate and critique the information read in these passages. Later, I discuss how this also holds true for Book 2.

Sub skills for Standard 2, Literary Response and Expression, have been evaluated through an average of 35% of the multiple-choice questions – the highest % in 2001 (43%) and the lowest in 2000 and 2004 (11%). The majority of these questions were in response to reading poetry. If our comprehension work with students is, for the most part,

*continued on page 4*

## KEVIN'S NOTES...

### Good Teaching Is No Accident



**Frank McCourt**, a classroom teacher for thirty years before writing *Angela's Ashes*, said that he had been teaching fifteen years before he felt truly comfortable in a classroom. I suspect that may be a bit of an exaggeration, but the point is well taken: Teaching is a profession that takes years to master. New teachers, those of you with less than five years in the field, should take comfort in McCourt's words because your best is yet to come. Veteran teachers already know that feeling "comfortable" is a result of many less than comfortable classroom experiences and a few memorable successes. What we can all take from the great novelist's confession, however, is that good teaching is not an accident.

Good teachers tend to do remarkably similar things when it comes to instruction and, fortunately for us, they are also a very caring lot who like to share. Because of these things, a quick trip around the world wide web can produce some very helpful examples of best practices in the teaching profession. Below are some descriptions of excellent sites where good teachers are sharing their best practices with veteran and new teachers alike. The truth is we can always use a little help making us these feel a little more comfortable in our classrooms.

**Middle Web's First Day of Middle School page:** ([www.middleweb.com/1stDResources.html](http://www.middleweb.com/1stDResources.html)) This is particularly good for new teachers. Features a New Teacher SOS section, a link to the Department of Education's New Teacher Survival Guide, and Ellen Berg's **Classroom Management: Looking for Answers.**

**Teachers.Net Gazette** (<http://teachers.net/gazette>) is a great site for all teachers, but its most useful feature is a monthly column by **Harry and Rosemary Wong**, perhaps the most renowned teacher educators in the country. Their observations and practical advice define the essence of good practice. A must read for everyone.

**Teachers Helping Teachers** (<http://www.pacificnet.net/~mandel/>) "The original education site written by teachers for teachers..." is still one of the best sites for teachers. Features teacher created, classroom-tested lesson plans, ideas for classroom management, and a great educational resource page.

**IT Learning Materials** (<http://www.itlearningmaterials.com/newteachers.htm>) Although it's described a New Teacher Resource, this page is filled with links to some excellent for all teachers. A couple of examples:

**Classroom Routines and Procedures:** Establishing clear classroom routines and procedures are necessary for ensuring that your classroom runs smoothly.

**Behavior Management:** Do you need help? Find out by taking the Online Quiz to see if you are effectively managing your class! The quiz will even suggest appropriate resources for areas of weakness. From Teaching Social Skills to Bully-proofing Your Classroom, these resources will give you information and interventions for improving behavior in your classroom. Maintained by Teachervision.com from the Learning Network, Inc.

After visiting these sites, it was great to see how much continuity there is in this community of teachers. When talking about their best practices, good teacher describe so many common themes in terms of classroom management, lesson design, relationships with students — the fundamentals of quality instruction — that it almost seems as if they've all sat around the same teachers lounge, discussing what they love to do. In a way, the internet has created a kind of cyber lounge for all of us. I hope you find some of these sites useful.

### Update on Middle-Level Education

The Board of Regents will not be making a decision on the draft Middle-Level Implementation Strategies in November. The issue of teacher involvement and union sign-off on Models B and C has generated a great deal of controversy. NYSUT has expressed its concerns regarding Models B and C and will continue to urge the Regents to delay consideration on the strategies until SED staff has prepared the criteria for applications for Models B and C. NYSUT will also continue to urge strong teacher and union involvement.

*--NYSUT Leader*

## sta Open Line

The Open Line is published monthly September to June at STA, 909 Butternut St., Syracuse, New York 13208. Tel. (315)472-6374. STA is affiliated with NYSUT, AFT and AFL-CIO.

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**Retirement Information...****Your Benefits Are Secure**

STA sent NYSTRS Delegates to the annual conference where **Sheila Salenger** was re-elected to the Board of Directors. If you are close to retirement (and even if you're not), the following information should be of interest to you.

The System administers a **defined benefit plan**. You can be assured that those payments *will* be there at retirement. In these times of turbulent stock prices and shrinking 401(K) plans, that's an important distinction to grasp. A **defined benefit plan** provides you with a specific benefit that is based on factors such as your age, years of service and final average salary. Once your benefit is "locked in", it can never be taken away or diminished. NYS is the only state with a constitutional guarantee that those benefits will not be lowered!

Compare that to the millions of Americans in **defined contribution plans** who must alter their retirement plans or even take on additional work because their benefits are determined by the returns of their investment portfolios. In the past few years many of these portfolios have shrunk considerably, resulting in lower retirement benefits.

Although the New York State Teachers Retirement System (NYSTRS) fund has been impacted by short-term market fluctuations, current and future benefit payments to members are not affected. You should have peace of mind knowing that the benefits you have will be there for you in the future.

If the state holds a Constitutional Convention to look at changing the way NYS is handling the budget, they could also be looking at changing the Retirement System that we all rely on. I suggest a no vote for a constitutional convention should this be put on a ballot for next year.

**Note:** *Tier Equity Legislation to be re-introduced in Spring 2005*

*For those people in Tiers III and IV there are bills in the NYSUT Legislative Program that have been introduced (but not passed) for Tier equity. These include: 55/25 retirement as permanent law; eliminating 3% contribution; final average salary 2% after 30 years of service (same as Tiers I and II); prior out of state service credit; final average salary can be 3 or 5 years.*

--Roberta Ripberger  
NYSTRS Delegate

**Worth Looking At!**

**ING Unsung Heroes Awards Program** - If there's one thing winners of the ING Unsung Heroes awards program have in common, it's the smiles. The smiles of the students who, thanks to these outstanding programs, are having fun while learning. The smiles of the 100 educators who each collect \$2,000 to fund innovative projects. And the even bigger smiles of the top three winners, who receive an additional \$25,000, \$10,000, or \$5,000. If you have a special project - an existing one or one that you envision - that helps students reach new heights, fill out an application (see your Chief Rep).

**Robert G. Porter Scholars Program** - 2005 - Four-Year \$8,000 Postsecondary Scholarship Application is now available. Program eligibility: Must be an AFT member's dependent (STA members are automatic members of AFT); graduating high school senior; parent or guardian must be an AFT member for at least one year; no full-or part-time AFT staff, state or local, may apply. This must be **postmarked no later than March 31, 2005**. Your Chief Rep has the application or you may call the STA office at x4526.

**NYS AFL-CIO Scholarship** - AFL-CIO will award a four-year scholarship to a 2005 graduating high school senior who intends to pursue a career in labor relations or a related field. The scholarship will be for \$2,000 a year for four consecutive years for a total of \$8,000. In addition, the winner will be given an opportunity to work for the NYS AFL-CIO, as a paid intern, when such positions are available. Call STA x4526. **The deadline is April 15, 2005.**

**STA Scholarship** - not available until March 2005.

**Unit 7...****What's Cookin'?****Please Remember...**

If anyone has any health or safety concerns, please call me at Henninger (x4358). I have been attending the Health & Safety Committee meetings at the District office and have found the committee to be very helpful.

The other day I called Nick DiBello (Facilities) to tell him that one of our school's kitchens was extremely cold and it was difficult for the staff to work with their coats on. The very next day the situation was corrected.

LouAnn Coleman, President

**Haven't gotten mail on the listserve lately? Did you change your address and forget to send us the new one? Do you use a yahoo or hotmail account? If so, you must empty messages frequently to leave room for new mail. Thanks.**

--Kate McKenna



*Caring for Children...  
We Make A Difference*

*May Your  
Holiday Season  
Be Filled With Health,  
Happiness and Peace!*

## **Labor Relations Summary**

by STA Labor Relations Specialist  
**Heather Sponenburg**

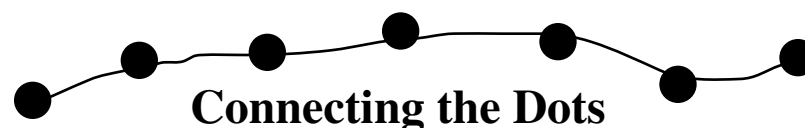
I am pleased to have joined STA as your new Labor Relations Specialist. For my first *Open Line* article, I thought it would be a good time to discuss the relationship between the Union, STA Members, and the School District.

The Union represents its members in matters that implicate terms and conditions of employment. This means that we negotiate your contracts including salary increases, health benefits, time off, and hours of work. We also enforce your contract. When your principal or other administrator violates your contract, we can file a grievance on your behalf to stop the offensive conduct. We cannot regulate your principals' behavior. We cannot make principals and other administrators act professionally and treat you with the respect you deserve. However, we can help you ascertain whether your principal has acted in an inappropriate manner. We can advise you how to file a complaint to the District about his/her behavior.

The Union has no power to punish or remove a principal from duty. Principals have the same protections under the Education Law that teachers have; an independent hearing officer may only remove them for incompetence.

You are also part of this relationship. You must read your contract and know your rights. Challenge actions that violate the contract. If you acquiesce to conduct which violates, or arguably violates the contract, you may create a past practice that benefits the district. Raise issues in a timely manner. Pursuant to the contract, you have 30 days from offending conduct within which to file a grievance. We strive to maintain all of our contractual time limits.

If you question any action, decision, or behavior look at your contract and see if there is a violation. If so, contact your building representative for guidance. S/he will help you decide if the conduct violates the contract. If in doubt, your representative will contact us for further guidance. If we can help you in any way, we will.

**Connecting the Dots**

We hear a lot these days about team building, sense of community, and belonging. Easy to write on paper, easy to say but difficult to put into practice. There are many different reasons, real or imagined, that make people feel part of a community or remain alienated. Those of us who are new to a building try to muddle through an existing building's culture and try to find acceptance or tolerance. What hurdles must be overcome? Prejudice, misconceived notions, misinformation and distrust of the "outsider" are just a few to overcome or maneuver around. If we feel that as adults, imagine how that "new student" in your class feels until they're accepted or feel connected to their new surroundings. What effect does this have on student achievement? Is this feeling of connectedness important? Cornell researcher, Janis Whitlock, at the 23rd Annual In-Service Conference sponsored by the State Ed Department and NYSUT, presented new research on this topic. Whitlock's session, "Connectedness Matters" looked at youth perceptions of life at school. The study looked at developmental supports in school and in the community. Safety, positive relationships with adults, meaningful roles, engagement and positive expectations and how they affected academic performance, mental/emotional health, and social and civic engagement were carefully studied in schools. In the community 'developmental support' included all of the aforementioned variables with the addition of police reliability. In a nutshell the data showed that the older you get, the less connected you feel in school and in the community.

The key principles of youth development were positive outcomes, youth voice and participation, youth-adult relationships, community involvement and engagement, long term involvement, focus on cross agency and sector collaboration, sensitivity to developmental needs and capacities, and inclusion. What does all this mean for educators?

It means that we must be skillful at fostering positive youth development, which translates into: safe places, attachment to family or other caring adults, connectedness to community, opportunities to learn and practice a range of social, cognitive and life skills, high expectations, and clear standards and boundaries. Now the question becomes, "what do I do to help students feel more connected?" Available resources, helpful links, and free downloadable activities may be found at:

[www.actforyouth.net](http://www.actforyouth.net)  
[www.whatkidscando.org](http://www.whatkidscando.org)  
[www.soundout.org](http://www.soundout.org)

--Lilli Rastegar  
Teacher Center Policy Board Member



## Together We Stand...

We are all members of the Syracuse Teachers Association Union. Whether you actively participate is totally an individual decision that each of you make. Please realize this, the Union is working for all of our best interest. They take our concerns and turn them into positive actions. The Union fights for our contractual rights. Not just pay and benefits, but for terms that will enhance teaching and enhance the learning of our students. Many of us take for granted the contract that we have, and expect that it will always be there for us. However it takes the work of all of us to keep this contract and to improve upon it. Our contract also cares for those who have retired. I know that our retirees appreciate our efforts to keep them with health care coverage, a benefit that is costly to the district but highly beneficial to all of us

(some districts do not have this!). I know that some of us give up our unencumbered lunches to help students. It is our choice to do that, imagine if it wasn't, and teachers were told to monitor their students while eating lunch.

*To rephrase  
John F. Kennedy's statement:  
Ask not what the Union can do  
for you... Ask what you can do  
for the Union?*

Why am I writing this article? I am concerned that people are not aware that the Union depends on all of us. We all need to help each other in this Union. In today's climate of me, me, me, where are we headed? When we held our election over 3000 ballots were sent out, less than a thousand returned. When I attend Representative Assemblies (RA's) not every school is represented. The Union needs everyone! Find out who your building rep is, talk to them, become a building representative. Volunteer to work on committees. Become involved. **We need every one of you!**

--Jay Guss, Teacher at Lincoln

## ELA Assessment

*continued from page 3*

in response to reading fiction, and if our conversations are, for the most part, concerned with literary elements, then trends from the past six years of ELA assessments show there is a mismatch between classroom instruction and these assessments. Further, when we do discuss literary elements, keep in mind that poetry has held a significant place in past assessments to evaluate Standard 2. Last year, more than half of the multiple-choice questions, used to evaluate sub skills for Standard 2, were in response to reading a poem.

In Book 2, the writing section of the assessment, students are asked to complete five short responses and three extended responses. Students are asked to write a story or a personal narrative for only one extended response. The other two extended responses and all of the short responses, in Book 2, require students to locate, make inferences about, or evaluate and critique information. Book 2, with the exception of one extended response, is similar to Book 1, in that it attempts to assess how well students are able to understand and analyze information. Of course, there is one major difference: in Book 2, students must write, not just bubble in a correct answer. But aside from the method used, it is clear that the primary intent of Book 2 is to assess comprehension. Is there ample evidence that the student has understood what she has heard or read? Are opinions substantiated with relevant text support?

If most of our classroom writing instruction takes up the skills needed to write a story or a personal narrative, we are faced with the same dilemma I mentioned earlier regarding comprehension instruction that focuses too much on literary elements: a mismatch between instruction and assessment. For some short responses, students are asked to lift appropriate information right from the passages: "...in the boxes below, write three things that happened..."(listening/writing, 2004); "...what are the three things that ravens do..."(reading/writing, 2002); "...write three examples below that show Julie is curious..."(reading/writing, 1999). Other short responses ask students to form an opinion: "Describe the way James treats Sam..."(listening/writing, 2004); "What was Annie's reward?" (reading/writing, 2003); "Why did Alexandra Nechita become an artist?" (reading/writing, 2000). Students are required to support their opinions with relevant details from the text. The extended response for the listening passage asks students to again formulate and support an opinion, but they must include greater detail - a reoccurring type of question asked students to describe change over time (1999, 2000, 2002, 2004). The extended response for the reading section has always required students to write a persuasive piece, and to support their views by synthesizing relevant information from the *texts* they've just read - which usually include a variety of genre.

One last observation regarding the 4<sup>th</sup> grade ELA assessment is that some educators feel it is becoming more difficult over time - that students are now required to make more inferences than they were on earlier tests, and that the readability of some passages exceeds grade level. This poses another potential mismatch between instruction and assessment. If our struggling readers spend all of their time reading at their independent, or near independent, levels, especially if they are never exposed to, challenged by, and supported in reading higher level materials, they will be overwhelmed by the demands of the ELA assessment.

There are some clear and consistent trends regarding the past six 4<sup>th</sup> grade ELA assessments. Past assessments act as a useful tool for us to evaluate and make decisions about our instruction. If you are interested in an item map for Book 1 (1999-2004) or a consolidated list of Book 2 questions, please contact me at the Teacher Center (435-4217) or e-mail me at vsgamb88@scsd.us.

--Vince Sgambati

## Revised Math Standards Draft Available

SED has placed the revised math standards draft on its web site. There will be a one month period from November 4 to December 4 for the field to comment on the draft. NYSUT urges members to comment. The report of the SED Mathematics Standards Committee, the revised math standards, and the online survey with comments can be accessed via the NYSUT web site.

--NYSUT Leader

## Dues Schedule 2004-2005

The dues structure for the all STA units has been established for the 2004-2005 academic year. It is the responsibility of the STA Executive Officers and Board members to establish a budget for the year. **Ed O'Rourke**, STA treasurer, is responsible for setting the budget for the year with the consent and approval of the board. He presents the budget to the faculty representatives for their final approval.

The STA faculty representatives approved the budget and with it approved a new dues structure for this year. Listed below is the dues structure for the forth-coming year. (A reminder to all members that it is his/her responsibility to ensure they are paying the correct dues amount.)

STA full time equivalent (FTE) dues amount:  
**\$588.00**

Representative Assembly adopted FTE dues amount in June of 2004. Base teacher salary is \$36,366.00. Dues categories are based on total annual school-year earnings.

	Total Annual dues	Dues/Agency Fee per 21 paychecks
<b>Unit 1,7,8, 10</b>		
Employees earning \$36,366 and more	\$588.00	\$28.00
Employees earning \$28,000 to \$35,921	\$510.90	\$24.33
Employees earning \$21,000 to \$27,999	\$402.45	\$19.16
Employees earning \$14,000 to \$20,999	\$294.00	\$14.00
Employees earning \$7,000 to \$13,999	\$147.00	\$7.00
Employees earning less than \$ 7,000	\$92.76	\$4.42

**If you are going out on a leave of absence please notify the STA office to maintain your membership. NYSUT Benefits must be maintained through your STA membership.**

--David Kirby

## A Report On the New York State Teachers Retirement System (NYSTRS) Conference

The story of this year's New York State Teachers Retirement System (NYSTRS) Conference was not so much what's new, but what could be new. The only major changes in the NYSTRS system this year are: (1) a new computerized reporting system is still being installed and could cause some delays and glitches along the way, with promises of a better and more responsive NYSTRS system ahead; and (2) Federal Tax Laws have changed in a way that can cause a major impact on people who borrow money from their NYSTRS savings. Before taking a loan from NYSTRS, which is not always advisable because of the high interest rate anyway, please contact NYSTRS to ascertain whether you are going to be subject to federal taxation on the loan.

The "what could be new" is a matter of grave concern. Because the budget process has completely failed in New York State over the last several years, some legislators are introducing legislation calling for a new Constitutional Convention, twelve years before the question needs to be put on New York State ballots. While a new state constitution could conceivably be the answer to our budget woes, chances are minimal that this would be the case. Delegates to the convention would not be budget reformers, but would mostly consist of current Assembly member and senators. The attraction of collecting double salary from the state during the Constitutional Convention process will be a great incentive in getting legislators to become delegates. And what these "reformers" would come up with could be perilous for all of us. Laws governing school financing guidelines could be turned on their ear, and the retirement system would be fair game for any changes the Constitutional Convention wished to make. We could find ourselves with a large personal contribution to our own retirements; one extreme scenario calls for all New York State retirees to get one year of retirement credit for one year of service. New York State teachers and retirees do not stand to "win" under a new New York State Constitution in the current political and economic climate.

So, is this all likely? Perhaps not, if everyone works to stop it from happening. We have two opportunities to defeat such drastic changes. First, the call for a Constitutional Convention must be approved by New York State voters. NYSUT and other public service unions will work very hard to make sure that such a referendum is defeated. If the referendum passes, the new Constitution will also be put up for approval. If the state funding system for education and for public sector retirements is adversely changed, NYSUT will join other public interest groups and labor unions to help bring about the defeat of the Constitution.

Those of us who work in public schools every day know that the best way to create a good educational atmosphere is to "catch it low", dealing with problems quickly and thoroughly. Our task now is to pay close attention to news concerning a New York State Constitutional Convention. If such a bill is introduced, we must lobby the governor and our local Assembly members and senators to make sure that such a call is defeated. If we find ourselves with a referendum calling for a Convention on the ballot, we must each work diligently to make sure that New York State voters understand the implications of such a convention and register a resounding NO to the resolution.

The future of our profession and the long-term financial futures of each and every one of us are at stake.

--James Shultz, NYSTRS Delegate