



WEEKLY WARRIOR

Webutuck Central Schools

194 Haight Road, P.O. Box 405

Amenia, New York 12501

October 29, 2010

School Reform – Ready, Set, ????????

In his article in the *New Yorker*, Nicholas Lemann attempts to elicit a reasoned discussion on the current status of public education and its many current reform movements. I have included excerpts from his article below.

A hundred years ago, eight and one-half percent of American seventeen-year-olds had a high-school degree, and two percent of twenty-three-year-olds had a college degree. Now, something like fifty million Americans, about one-sixth of the population is sitting in a public-school and twenty million more are students or faculty at an institution of higher learning. Education is not mentioned in the Constitution, but the world's first system of universal public education is one of the great achievements of American democracy.

Like democracy itself, it is loose, shaggy, inefficient, and full of redundancies. It serves many varied groups that see its purpose differently. But, by the fundamental test of attractiveness to students and families, the system is, as a whole, succeeding. Enrollment in charter schools is growing, but so is enrollment in public schools. Measures of how much American students are learning compared to the past, and students in other countries—are holding steady, for the most part, even as more people are going to school. So it's odd that a narrative of crisis is currently so persuasive. There is a lot of attention on the school-reform movement in the national press. And, from any of these sources, it would be difficult to reach the conclusion that, over all, the American education system works quite well.

The school-reform saga arises from the identified low quality of the education that many poor, urban, and minority children get in public schools. This problem isn't new. It drove Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind, and Barack Obama's current education reform ideas. The gap in achievement between minority and white children narrowed during the seventies and eighties, and has been mainly stuck since then, but it's misleading to suggest that the gap is getting bigger.

It should raise questions when an enormous world system takes on the characteristics of a stock TV drama. In this story, there is a villain, the teachers' unions, and heroes, including the Harlem Children's Zone; Teach for America, the Knowledge Is Power Program; and Michele Rhee, superintendent of schools in Washington, D.C. And, there is a clear perceived answer to the problem—charter schools. While, the details of this story are generally accurate, they are made to imply too much. For example, although many charter schools in this narrative are very good, the data does not show that charter schools in general are any better than regular public schools. Similarly, the implication that abolishing tenure would somehow immediately increase student learning—is a popular, but clearly unproven assumption.

The story line on education reads like a Noah's Ark view of life: a vast bureaucracy looks so ineffective that it must be washed away, so that we can begin anew using finer, higher principles. One should treat any perception that something so large is so completely broken with suspicion, and consider that it might not be true especially before acting.

We have a lot of recent experience with breaking apart large, existing systems with less than rousing success. We deregulated the banking system. We tried to remake Iraq and Afghanistan. In education, we would do well to appreciate what our country has built, and to try to fix what is undeniably wrong without declaring the entire system to be broken. We have a moral obligation to be precise about what the real problems in American education are, while resisting simple ideas that would destroy what exists without any assurance that these reforms would solve or even improve them.

So what does all this mean for us here at Webutuck Central as we continue to look for improvement? While it is not within our power to change the overall system of public education in the United States or even New York, we do have the power to address our shortcomings here at home. We have the ability and responsibility to work together to ensure that every student has access to a comprehensive, rich, and aligned curriculum, that we work to consistently increase the capacity of our instructional staff, and that we continually evaluate our success, strengths and weaknesses with the goal of constant improvement. In short, we must be, on all levels, **“COLLECTIVELY COMMITTED TO EXCELLENCE”**

Have a Great Week!

Steve Schoonmaker

Quote of the Week!

“Excellence can be attained if YOU.....

- **Care** more than others think is wise.
- **Risk** more than others think is safe.
- **Dream** more than others think is practical.
- **Expect** more than others think is possible.”

Author Unknown

Wellness Committee

The Webutuck Central School District Wellness Committee, under the leadership of Mrs. Katy McEnroe, will hold its first meeting of the new school year on October 27th at 5:00pm in the Webutuck Elementary School Library. This will be the second year of the revitalized and reconfigured Wellness Committee serving all of the children of the District. The Committee is an appointed group of community members, faculty and staff, and administrators charged with researching and developing ideas and focal points to provide to the Board of Education for consideration and possible implementation.

The areas of focus are varied and equally important to meet the desired result of well rounded children. Mind and Body Fitness with lifelong recreational activities, nutrition and proper food choices and options, drug/alcohol education and good decisions, self esteem and matters of character education, and many more are areas to be explored and discussed.

The Committee is a working group of people who have a desire to improve the lives of every child and are always seeking input or ideas of areas to address. If you have any concerns or suggestions please address them to the Wellness Committee, c/o Webutuck Central School District, 194 Haight Road, P.O. Box 405, Amenia, NY 12501.

HIGH SCHOOL HAPPENINGS

We've got another busy week ahead at Webutuck Jr./Sr. High School. The fall sports are in their last few weeks and our teams continue to find success on the field. Last week the boys' soccer team won their division with a win over rival Millbrook. They played well against state-ranked Ellenville in a hard fought loss in Marlboro on Saturday, October 23rd for the league championship. We wish them much luck in next week's Sectional tournament. The cross country team is competing this week in the MHAL championship running in Ogden Mills State Park in Staatsburg ---good luck!

Several Webutuck students have earned special recognition by being selected to this year's Area All-State as part of the All-State Chorus. Congratulations to:

Lucas Keasbey (Senior)
Gabriella Johnson (Senior)
Amber Smith (Junior)
Alexandra Coffin (Junior)

These four talented young adults were selected from among the best high school vocalists in all of NYSSMA Zone 10, which covers every school district in Columbia, Dutchess and Putnam counties.

The festival will take place during the weekend of November 19th and 20th at Beacon High School, with the concert taking place on Saturday the 20th at 2:00 P.M.

On Monday, October 25th Mr. Moran and the T.E.A.M. club (T.E.A.M. - Teens Encouraging Athletes to be Mentors) took a trip to the Astor Head Start program in Millerton to spend the morning working with the children who attend and receive services there. Our students spent the morning volunteering as they worked with preschool age children reading and working on various arts and crafts projects. The students who attended this event were:

President-Madelaine Trotter
Treasurer-Victoria Cullinan
Estefani Reyes
Meagan McCoy
Brooke Dahoney
Cobi Adrian
Jeanne Boyd
Shane Lyle
Caitlyn Coon
Kate Boeding
Danielle Stoetzner
Matt Matteo
Shayne Robert

Vice President-Alura Penny
Secretary- Allison Flinn
Shane Corcoran
Hannah Kitchen
Brian Christofel
Arianna Evans
Shannon Woods
Carol Haviland
Tommy Nethercott
Alejandra Rivera
Andrew Shultz
Alexis Derenzis
Amber Smith

I think we can all be proud of the work our students and athletes are doing both on and off the field. Their efforts are greatly appreciated and help to shine a positive light on our school and the surrounding communities. Our students, your children continue to "do us proud".

Intermediate & Elementary Events

During the 2009-2010 school year, a committee was formed to review and update our current report cards. It was noted that each grade level, K-6, had a different report card, grading system, and format. The committee spent time gathering report cards from several local school districts and reviewed each one. Both the rating systems and descriptors were analyzed. The committee decided to adopt the NYS reporting method of a 1, 2 3, 4 grading system. By using this system it is our hope our report cards and skills assessed, will align more closely with the NYS assessments. There are many districts who have adopted this model.

Next, staff looked to develop a common format in an attempt for report cards to appear similar year to year. Once this was decided upon, the committee worked diligently to vertically align the skills and descriptors in the hopes that report cards will present a profile of each child's learning.

The new grading system translates to the following:

- Level 4- Excels at grade level-Demonstrates high level of understanding
- Level 3- Meets grade level expectations-Demonstrates understanding and applies learning
- Level 2- Meets some grade level expectations-Demonstrates partial understanding-Requires additional assistance and practice
- Level 1- Not meeting grade level expectations-Requires significant assistance and practice

We are hoping the new report cards become a useful tool for all and will allow for more individualized grading.

We welcome your feedback and want to work together to create a reporting system which meets the needs of all.

Do not confine your children to your own learning for they were born in another time.

- Hebrew Proverb