



THE EDUCATOR

Newsletter of the Arlington Teachers' Association

VOLUME 3, ISSUE V

APRIL 2013

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What is the Right Size for Arlington?

Over the last few years at Arlington we have become accustomed to the doom-and-gloom of budget season. In these times of more and more state requirements partnered with capped tax revenue it is a challenging task to manage the diverse wants and needs of taxpayers, students, parents, and employees. We are not a corporation that is simply trying to maximize profits; that would be much simpler. Our "product" is students who are empowered to be "self-directed, lifelong learners, who willingly contribute to their community, and lead passionate and purposeful lives," according to the district's new strategic plan. How do you determine a price point for that? You don't. In that way the economics of a school district are different from those of a business.

Unfortunately, there are some similarities: districts still have to deal with staying financially solvent, paying their employees, and maintaining their properties, to name a few. As teachers, social workers, and guidance counselors we don't want to think about these things. Our job is to care

about our students and to help them succeed. Even though we can understand the basic economics, it is hard for us to imagine the necessity to do things like lay off faculty and staff or close a building. To us, more adults who directly work with students and more room for them to work in is always better.

So what happens when

size."

Sure, from an economic perspective it makes sense to operate at the leanest, most efficient size that we can. But does that make it "right"? To faculty and staff we see any cuts in the budget as directly affecting the livelihoods of our friends and colleagues and taking something away from our students.

That is never "right" from a moral standpoint. It hurts us to hear that the people we work with have been "right-sized." We know that it is a euphemism for being laid off. Dr. Licopoli sees the term differently. "Right-sizing,

in the context that we are using the term, is not the noun-moral definition of the word 'right', like 'right and wrong'. We are using 'right' as an adverb, something that is exact, used to emphasize the preciseness of something. Mathematically that would mean we have the right number of staff to match the number of students. As one of the slides [in the budget presentation] displays, we have kept the ratio of staff to students virtually the same as our enrollment drops and we further excess/right-size our staff in relation to the

The "right" size for Arlington is the one that makes us the best that we can be, not one that simply keeps us in line with what we have been in the past.

economic realities dictate that cuts must be made? According to Superintendent Dr. Larry Licopoli, it is better to make those decisions proactively instead of waiting until they become necessity. He has been using the term "right-sizing" to describe this as different from "down-sizing." An internet search for "right-sizing" shows that although the term is new to Arlington it has been in use since the late 1980s in the business world, and commonly in education over the past five years. *Miriam-Webster* defines "right-sizing" as "to reduce (as a workforce) to an optimal

See Size on Page 7

NYS Budget Supports Education

Trivia Challenge

Answer the question below correctly and you could be the proud winner of ATA gear!

How many Board of Education members does Arlington have?

Last month's winners, selected at random from among the correct responses received, were **Juliet Menasche** and **Melissa Tirado** from Noxon. They correctly identified **nine** as the number of towns in the Arlington district. They will be the proud owners of ATA fleeces.

Answer this month's question and you could win ATA gear too!

Submit your answer to the above trivia question to rmchugh@acsdny.org by April 19th. The winner will be randomly selected from the correct submissions.

For the third consecutive year the New York State budget has been passed on time. In a break from previous years though this year's budget contains many items that are beneficial to education. Here are some of the details:

State Aid to Schools

The 2013-14 state budget contains an increase of \$936 million, or 4.7%, in education aid. Although this still does not bring it up to 2009-10 levels, it is about \$425 million more than Governor Cuomo's Executive budget proposal. For Arlington, this increase means that the district will be receiving about \$1.1 million more in state aid than was planned for when drafting a budget for 2013-14. At press time how this additional revenue would be allocated had not been determined.

Teacher Centers

After federal funding for them was cut in 1984, NYSUT lobbied the state government to provide for a network of centers that would enable educators to receive cost-effective professional development. Today there are over 130 of these centers in New York. Although historically Teacher Centers received over \$35 million from the state annually, in the past few years that has been drastically cut to \$10 million. The Executive budget proposal for 2013-14 did not include any

funding at all. The final state budget has granted \$14.26 million for Teacher Centers.

Pension Smoothing

Employer contribution rates to the state pension systems vary from year to year since the pension funds are dependent on the

matic spikes. This program is optional and individual districts must decide if they will participate.

APPR Rollover

One of the more controversial segments of the governor's budget (at least in education circles) has been the tying of state aid

Education Items in the 2013-14 NY State Budget:

- \$936 million increase in education aid
- \$25 million for pre-K program expansion
- \$15 million for community schools
- \$30 million increase for community colleges
- \$28 million restored for SUNY hospitals
- \$14 million restored for Teacher Centers
- \$250,000 in funding for National Board certification
- Pension smoothing plan
- APPR rollover plan

increases to Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) agreements. Last year Cuomo imposed a January 17 deadline for districts to have a state-approved APPR plan, or else they would lose any increase in state aid. While the majority of districts in the state completed their agreements on time, several, including New York City, did not. Whether or not the governor can actually withhold funding that benefits students because of the inability of adults to agree is currently being decided in the courts. Fortunately, although 2013-14 APPR plans must be approved by September 1, no school district with an approved plan for the 2012-13 school year will lose any state aid. Application of the Triborough Amendment means that any plan approved during 2012-13 will remain in effect until a new plan is submitted and approved. This new language will give locals and districts time to review data from 2012-13 before negotiating changes for 2013-14.

stock market. While the average rate of return for the Teachers Retirement System (TRS) is 10.4%, the recent economic downturn brought it to a low of -20.5% in 2009. The new pension smoothing program would allow school districts to contribute to the TRS at a flat rate over the next seven years (and the Employee Retirement System over 12) avoiding any dra-

stock market. While the average rate of return for the Teachers Retirement System (TRS) is 10.4%, the recent economic downturn brought it to a low of -20.5% in 2009. The new pension smoothing program would allow school districts to contribute to the TRS at a flat rate over the next seven years (and the Employee Retirement System over 12) avoiding any dra-

Education Law Dictates Lay-Offs *Board Candidates Sought*

A severe decline in enrollment is forcing Arlington to decide how many faculty members it can reasonably employ. Current cuts are typically in the form of a reduction in full time positions in particular tenure areas at particular levels (such as 2.2 middle school English positions, for example,) based on staffing needs.

Having your position cut does not automatically mean that you are losing your job. NYS Education Law 3013 says that "the services of the teacher having the least seniority in the system within the tenure of the position abolished shall be discontinued." By law, the most recently hired person in the tenure area has to be the one let go. This is commonly referred to as "last in, first out."

When the person in the position being abolished is not the least senior he or she "bumps" the person who is. This can lead to a lot of shuffling of people, especially when tenure area and certification are not exactly the same, as for science or foreign language. Here is a hypothetical, but realistic situation: If

the position being abolished is high school French, but the least senior person in that tenure area is a middle school Spanish teacher, what happens? This is where it gets complicated. The French teacher bumps the Spanish teacher, who loses her job, but the French teacher cannot teach Spanish, so the district has to consider its options. These may include cutting Spanish classes, or possibly finding another employee not currently teaching Spanish to reassign to that area. (See *Spotlight on the Contract*, below, for the intricacies of reassignments.)

The bottom line when laying off teachers is that the district is restricted by the state law which says that seniority in tenure area is the only factor that can be considered. No easy answers are available for those subjects where tenure area and certification are not the same, but the ATA will try to help. If you have questions about your employment being impacted by the cutting of a position contact the ATA Office at 845-454-7002 or ata4547002@aol.com.

This year the terms of current Arlington school board members Christine Baxter, Kelly Lappan, and Cindy Smith are up. Please contact the ATA Office at 845-454-7002 or ataupdate@gmail.com if you know of anyone who would be interested in running for those positions. It is a great opportunity for people who care about their children's future and their community as a whole to make a difference.

To be eligible, candidates must live in the district and not be currently employed by Arlington. In order to be on the ballot on May 21 a petition must be obtained from Central Office and returned there with 125 signatures by April 21. ATA members are available to help with that task.

*Please contact the
ATA Office at
845-454-7002 or
ataupdate@gmail.com
if you know of anyone
who would be
interested in running
for a school board
position. Signed
petitions must be
returned to Central
Office by April 21.*

Spotlight on the Contract: Involuntary Transfers

Each issue of The Educator spotlights a particular part of our contract in an effort to make our members more familiar with their rights and the terms and conditions of their employment. Until the new contract that was approved in June 2012 is published we will be featuring segments from the previous contract that will remain unchanged. If you have a section you would like to see featured, email sfalk@acsdny.org.

"It is recognized that some involuntary transfers of teachers from one building to another or reassignment within a tenure area may be unavoidable but should be held to a minimum. Notice of any such involuntary transfer shall be given to teachers as soon as practicable and, under normal circumstances, not later than June 1. When transfers are necessary to positions for which there are no previous applicants, volunteers shall be sought for such positions, and no permanent involuntary reassignment shall be made unless it has not been possible to locate an adequate number of volunteers after a good faith effort for a period of fifteen (15) days, except for emergencies. Good faith effort shall consist of notification to the Association President and to the involved teachers in the appropriate buildings. Volunteers shall be transferred or reassigned first. After the group of available volunteers has been exhausted, a teacher's area of competence, major and/or minor field of study, quality of teaching performance and length of service in the school system shall be considered in determining which teacher is to be transferred or reassigned."

Explanation: According to this provision of the ATA contract (Article VIII, page 10), teachers may be transferred to a different building or reassigned to teach a different class within their tenure area, but only after volunteers for these positions are sought. No involuntary transfers can be made unless volunteers cannot be found. If that is the case the district can select someone to fill a needed position, but only after considering a number of qualification criteria. If you have been told that your involuntary transfer or reassignment is necessary please contact the ATA Office at 845-454-7002 or ata4547002@aol.com to discuss what your rights and options are.

The Time for High-Stakes Testing is Up

Across the nation the tide has begun to turn against high-stakes testing. Although we, as educators, have seen first-hand the devastating effects these tests have on our students we have not been able to convince legislators on our own that ending the reliance on these tests is in everyone's best interest. Community organizations and school boards have joined in the fight, and progress is being made.

RE-THINKING TESTING MID-HUDSON REGION

Visit these websites for more information:

- <http://rethinkingtestingmidhudson.blogspot.com>
- <http://testing.nysut.org>
- <http://timeoutfromtesting.org/nationalresolution/>

Hudson Valley

At the local level, the New Paltz, Rondout Valley, and Kingston school boards have recently passed resolutions condemning high-stakes testing. (Arlington's board has decided to discuss the idea.) In addition, a New Paltz-based community group called Rethinking Testing has formed with the aim to "1) Educate parents and community members about how high-stakes testing hurts students, schools, and public education. 2) Inform community members about the fiscal impact of high-stakes testing on school budgets and on their school taxes. 3) Examine how high-stakes testing takes away resources from other educational and after-school programs that the local community values." (<http://rethinkingtestingmidhudson.blogspot.com>) This group hosts many events, including panel discussions and lectures. They are planning a trip to Albany on April 16 for Opt Out Day 2013 in which they will rally at the Capitol and present lawmakers with student artwork to remind them of the importance of creativity over standardized testing. More information can be found about this group at their web page or on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/ReThinkingTesting>.

New York State

Last fall NYSUT launched their Tell It Like It Is campaign that encouraged educators to share personal stories about the effects high-stakes testing has had on their classrooms. An online form was provided to facilitate sending these messages to legislators. To date almost 10,000 educators have participated. Regional forums were also held for members to meet with NYSUT president Dick Iannuzzi and talk about their experiences. Recently NYSUT expanded their efforts to include newspaper ads and an online petition for parents to sign calling for changes in high-stakes testing. Both the educator and parent forms can be found at <http://testing.nysut.org>.



Across the Nation

Many examples of revolts against high-stakes testing have been cropping up all across the nation. Last January teachers at Garfield High School in Seattle made news by refusing to give their students the standardized MAP test. Although principals ended up administering the tests the school's PTSA organized a campaign that notified parents of their right to opt out their children from the tests. A high percentage did.

On another front, the Texas state legislature passed a bill at the end of March drastically reducing the number of high-stakes tests that students in that state will be required to take. This followed massive rallies in the state capitol and years of building discontent in the state that is often considered the birthplace of the current trend in high-stakes testing.

The largest-scale anti-testing effort is perhaps an online petition found at <http://timeoutfromtesting.org/nationalresolution/> that nearly 17,000 individuals and 500 organizations have signed on to, including the National Education Association.

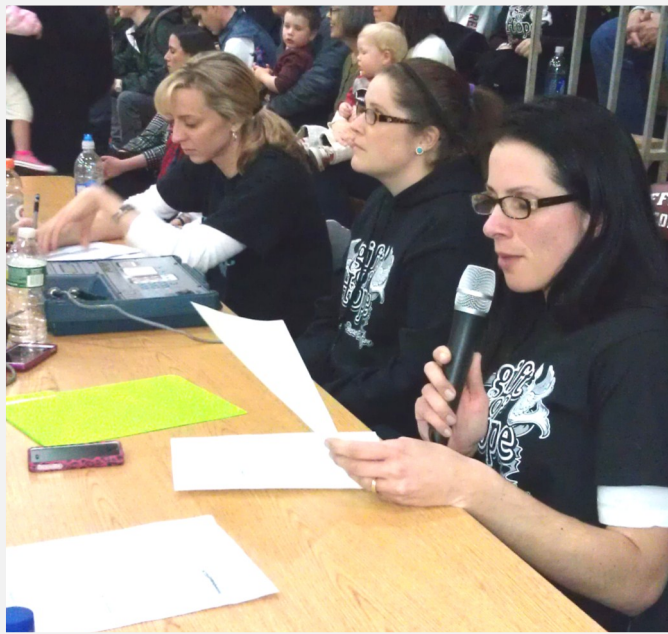
HOPE Basketball Game is a Slam Dunk for Charity



The Thomas E. Brooks gymnasium at AHS could barely contain the crowd at the HOPE basketball game on March 21.



AHS teacher Scott Cookinham (left) and guidance counselor Marc Provost are two of the game's organizers and hosts.



AHS teachers (L-R) Jenn Nilsen, Katie Nixon, and Kathy Bellino performed announcing and scoring duties at the game.



Team AMS/ASM's shirts await them before the game.

The 6th Annual Gift of HOPE (Helping Others Pursue Education) basketball game took place on March 21. For the past seven years college scholarships have been awarded to over 75 students in the Arlington School District who have suffered the loss of a parent or guardian at some point in their academic endeavors. Arlington currently has 23 graduating seniors who are eligible to receive a scholarship. Along with a car show in the spring, the faculty basketball game is the main fundraising event for the scholarship fund. This year so far over \$8600 has been raised through the generous support of the whole Arlington community. Not only did faculty compete in the round-robin tournament for the enjoyment of the audience, but numerous other Arlington employees and parents helped to make the night a success by donating food, manning concession stands, and aiding with various behind-the-scenes jobs. The night was a great example of the giving spirit of Arlington.

2012—2013 ATA Officers

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First Vice-President

Greg Nieman

Second Vice-President

Steve Hertzog

Treasurer

Kathleen Blank Cicala

Chief Negotiator

Donna Doerrier

PR Committee Chair

Kristi Bogaczyk

Community Action Chairs

Betsy Marshall

Robert McHugh

Welfare Trust Chair

Ron Higgins

Media Specialist

Sam Falk

Éminence Grise Emeritus

Robert McHugh

Senior Building Representative

ASM — Johanna Pungello

BES — Anne Schillinger

NES — Elise Pattison

VFES — Pam Goetz

OPS — Anne Marie Beesmer

Traver — Siouxzanne Harris

JDWR — Betsy Marshall

TIS — Sue Ramsden

AMS — Carmine Anastasio

LMS — Steve Bronzi

UVMS — Donna Curran

AHS — John Filor

AHS — Noreen Mills Martin

What's Going On?

"What's Going on" is a monthly feature of The Educator. It highlights noteworthy accomplishments by ATA members. Do you know of a colleague who deserves recognition? Let The Educator know by emailing sfalk@acsdsn.org. We can't know what's going on at all of your schools without your help!

Congratulations to the following ATA members for their contributions to the Arlington community and beyond.

LaGrange Middle

LMS hosted its fifth annual Poetry Slam on Thursday, March 21 under the direction of language arts skills teachers Victoria Pudney and Felecia White. This was a great opportunity for LMS students to showcase their abilities in writing and performing poetry. Each year teachers volunteer to judge this event and students compete for a variety of prizes.

English teacher Laurie Bryant's third published play is forthcoming in 2013. *Unplugged*, a comedy that first premiered at LMS in the fall of 2012, will be released through Pioneer Drama later this year.

Titusville Intermediate

In this crazy year of Core Curriculum changes, APPR, extra meetings and safety concerns, six of the 35 Titusville teachers have found a way to get some much needed time off, but not rest. Before the end of this school year, the faculty at TIS will welcome seven new babies to their families. The fun began on



Photo courtesy of elymenators.wix.com

Arlington High

Science teacher Maribel Pregnall and her student research team, the Elymenators, were recently awarded the Lexus Final Challenge grand prize for their work on Lyme disease and its connection to the loss of biodiversity. The \$30,000 prize grants the school \$7,000, the teacher advisor \$3,000, and each student a share of \$20,000 in scholarships. In the photo above, Pregnall (left) and some of her team members model the proper attire to perform tick research in.

October 21 when Jess Krajewski welcomed her son Alex to the world. On November 19, Hollis Bakke welcomed her son Logan to her family. Christmas came a little early, starting in the afternoon hours of Christmas Eve, for Michelle Boland (and husband Andrew from Noxon) as they met their new little girl Skylar. Lina Wirszyla left us on February 20 to deliver her second son, Pasha. Maternity leave began on February 25 for Jennifer Luft, who delivered her second daughter, Kelsey, on March 3. Finally, in early April I will open my home to twin boys. We

wish all the new and second time moms the very best of luck!

—Beth Plotsky

Union Vale Middle

Social worker Paula Dante launched the Ray of Hope program during the month of February. Each student received a Ray of Hope card to hand to a caring adult if he or she is feeling hopeless. The card instructs the adult on what to do: (1) Stay with the person (2) Listen, really listen (3) Get help immediately. The card also lists some hotline
See Going On on Page 7

Beekman's School Psychologist Performs for a Cause

By day Gina Noto is one of Beekman Elementary's school psychologists, but by night, like many other Arlington faculty members, she finds time for charity. Through her role as president of the Hope for Change Foundation Noto is able to combine her love of helping people with her love of performing.

Hope for Change is a Westchester-based organization that raises money for breast cancer research through theatrical productions. Noto first became involved with it when she performed in shows as a high school student in New Rochelle. She progressed to choreograph and direct, and as president is now responsible for organizing events and determining where donations will be made.

Noto strongly believes in her work; "I think what makes our organization so unique is that we provide opportunities for people who love to perform to do it for a good cause. It makes performing even more special and meaningful. We

also find ways to personally connect breast cancer to our performers by having breast cancer survivors come in and share their stories with our casts as well as dedicate our performances to special survivors or current cancer patients. We even have survivors performing with us as well as working behind the scenes of shows and the organization. It's really inspirational to speak, work, and perform with such strong women."

There are many ways others can get involved. According to Noto, "If anyone would like to sponsor a show or donate they can email me at gnoto@hopeforchange.org or visit our website at www.hopeforchange.org and donate online. We are also always looking for volunteers to direct, choreograph and



Photo courtesy of Gina Noto

Gina Noto (left) performs with another cast member in the Hope Players production of "Concert for a Cure" last January.

musically direct as well as audition to perform. More information can be found on our website or you can like the Hope for Change Foundation on Facebook!"

The organization's next event will be a performance of *Love, Loss, and What I Wore* from April 5-7 at the Westchester Sandbox Theater in Mamaroneck.

What's Going On, Continued

Continued from Page 6

numbers including the suicide prevention lifeline. These Ray of Hope cards are designed to give students a concrete way of getting help if they are emotionally distressed and in need of assistance. This effort is aimed at suicide prevention through increased reporting. In addition, students and staff who have performed an extraordinary act of kindness in the school can be nominated for recognition and each week's winners are posted on the bulletin board across from the main office.

West Road Elementary

Fifth grade teacher Diane Sizemore and her students were looking to get involved in a community project when she became aware of a parent of a West Road third grade student who is a victim of domestic violence. Sizemore invited the woman into her classroom to speak to the students about what domestic violence is and what they can

do to combat the problem. The mother has already partnered with the Grace Smith House and created an organization to fundraise and promote awareness of the issue. She makes bracelets and sells them and came into the classroom to teach the students how to make them. The students sell these and other items to fundraise for domestic violence awareness. In addition, they have "Awareness Wednesdays" when they wear purple, which is the color for the cause. The students also wrote an announcement which is read on the loud speaker in the building. A culminating event will be a school assembly in June that the domestic violence victim will speak at. In addition, Sizemore is teaching her students a dance set to the music of "Break the Chain" that portrays resiliency and strength. It will be part of a Drill Team performance that the entire fifth grade is invited to participate in during the assembly.

Size Matters

Continued from Front

enrollment."

While this definition makes sense, it begs the question, what is the "right" size for Arlington? Does the fact that we have been able to keep the staff-to-student ratio the same over the past five years mean that it is the "right" ratio? That number includes all staff, from central office and administrators to teaching assistants and custodians, yet we know that there have been cuts in some areas more than others over recent years.

We know that declining enrollment and harsh economic times are a reality that needs to be dealt with in order to ensure the future of Arlington. We just ask that it is done in a way that not only looks at what Arlington is now, but at what we have the potential to be. The "right" size for Arlington is the one that makes us the best that we can be, not one that simply keeps us in line with what we have been in the past.

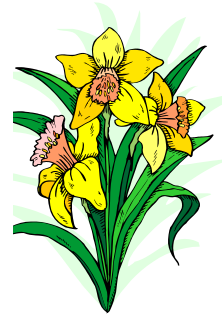
--Sam Falk, Editor

Dates to Remember



APRIL

- 6th—District Arts Fair, 11 a.m. - 4 p.m., LMS
- 9th—Board of Education Meeting, 7 p.m., AMS
- 13th—Spring Highway Cleanup, 8:30 a.m., AHS
- 16th—ATA Executive Council Meeting, 4 p.m., AHS Room 1432
- 19th—NYSUT Legislative Lobbying Day
- 23rd—Board of Education Meeting, 7 p.m., AHS
- 27th—Rebuilding Together Dutchess County



MAY

- 14th—ATA Executive Council Meeting, 4 p.m., AHS Room 1432
Board of Education Meeting, 7 p.m., CAO
- 21st—**School Budget Vote**
- 27th—Memorial Day, No School
- 28th—Board of Education Meeting, 7 p.m., CAO



Announcements

Stay informed! Like us on Facebook or check out www.arlingtonteachers.com for forms, photos, calendars, and more.

The Educator needs you! Would you like to see more information about *your* school in here? We need representatives from each school to aid in gathering information to print! Please contact Sam Falk at sfalk@acsdny.org if you are interested.

Would you like to aid in showing the positive effect that educators have on their community? Do you like to help the environment? Please consider joining the ATA's annual highway cleanup on April 13. We will meet at AHS at 8:30 a.m. to pick up trash along Route 55. Gloves, hard hats, vests, garbage bags, and pick-up sticks will be provided. Contact Deborah Pollack at LMS to sign up. The more people that help the faster the job will be completed!

Volunteers are needed to serve dinner at the Lunch Box in Poughkeepsie from 4 to 6 p.m. on April 8 and 12 and May 10 and 13. Please contact Colleen Napora at cnapora@acsdny.org to sign up.