Art is the only way to run away without leaving home.

– Twyla Tharp

They may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel.

– Carl W. Buechner

You do not really understand something unless you can explain it to your grandmother.

– Unknown

The only way that someone can be of help to you is by challenging your ideas.

– Anthony de Mello

I like pigs. Dogs look up to us. Cats look down on us. Pigs treat us as equals.

– Winston Churchill

From the Region Director

Lisa Christoffel
GVPTA Region Director
director@gvpta.org

H
opefully everyone enjoyed at least some time off at the end of 2013. It’s very important to take breaks and recharge your batteries in order to perform your best. As we now re-focus on our priorities, hopefully your PTA duties feature high on that list. Some key things for your unit and for our overall advocacy efforts include increasing your membership to ensure PTA has as large a voice as possible, and helping your membership to understand everything that’s going on right now: Put it in perspective, understand what’s good about what’s going on, and understand where maybe we can do better.

There are so many things going on in public education right now, and the changes are unprecedented. We’re not in a time of continuous improvement at the moment with gradual change to effect that improvement: we’re chasing step-function improvements in our education system, in order for our children to not be left behind in this global world. Change at any rate can be painful. Change at the current rate is unsurprisingly extremely painful, and it’s affecting everyone: our children, our teachers, our families, and our administrators. The best and most effective thing any of you can do is to ensure that you have educated yourself, because that is the only way for effective advocacy to occur. The NYS PTA has launched a campaign, based on their experiences and research into what’s good and not so good about the Common Core, APPR, and student assessments. Please take the time to understand our position at Common Core: Hear our Voice: nyspta.org/pdf/Advocacy/NYSPTA_Voice_CCTalkingPoints.pdf.

For all the reasons above, it’s never been more important to “Carry the Card that Counts”, for all aspects of membership: teachers, students, families, increasing our collective voice as we advocate for our students and our public education system. Focus on each one, use resources available on the National website

- Focusing on the “T” in PTA: www.pta.org/about/content.cfm?ItemNumber=2579 and
- Why Join the PTA: www.pta.org/about/content.cfm?ItemNumber=3289

or on the NYS PTA website:

- nyspta.org/pdf/YourPTA/Membership/MembershipTheme1314.pdf

for the flyer you can use to urge all interested parties to “carry the card that counts”. Grow your membership! ■.

The overall purpose of PTA is to make every child’s potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

nyspta.neric.org/AboutPTA/
From the Membership Chair
by Kathy Giles, membership@gvpta.org

Don’t let winter put a freeze on your membership drives! January is a great time for a second push to meet your membership goals for the year. Think of upcoming events your PTA unit or your school is sponsoring and make sure you have a membership table there—sports games, school plays, concerts, family movie or game-night events, etc. are all places to make your presence known. Don’t forget to apply for our Region Membership Incentive for January, too. The Winter Showcase Award. Tell us something your unit has done well and share how you did it—a successful membership drive, a family event, a fundraiser activity, a teacher appreciation idea, etc. Entries don’t need to be long or fancy, but give enough detail so we get a complete picture. Email entries to me at KathyGiles@gvpta.org by January 31, 2014. Top two entries receive $25 gift cards. Congratulations to West Ridge Elementary PTA, who wins a $25 gift card for the December incentive for their 2-1/2 page news feature in their school newsletter “Whale Watch”. They used that publication to advertise upcoming events, to highlight and thank several volunteers, and to throw their support behind a school incentive to increase consistent attendance. Great job!

Genesee Valley Region is on pace to meet the State PTA goal of 2% membership increase for 2013-14. We need about 750 more members to tie last year’s total membership, and then we can work on meeting that 2% extra. Kudos to the 26 units who have already surpassed last year’s totals. Thanks to those who are making membership payments each month; don’t forget the State incentives you can apply for in February: Founders Day Recruitment Award, Men Matter, School Pride, and Build a Better Community Award. Explanations for all of these were included in your summer mailing packet; and they are also available on the NYSPTA.org website. Keep up the good work!

From the Reflections Chair
by Jessica Ophardt, reflections@gvpta.org, 585-781-4025

GVPTA Reflections Reception At 2PM Saturday February 8th, GVPTA will hold a reception to showcase and celebrate the work of all students who Reflections entries advanced to the Genesee Valley Region. Entries advancing to the State will be announced. The reception will be held at the Pittsford Barnes & Noble Store, 3349 Monroe Avenue.

GVPTA Book Fair Fundraiser Throughout the day February 8th, GVPTA will have a book fair at the Pittsford Barnes and Noble. A percentage of book sales, as well as, café, gift items, games and toys will go to support the GVPTA and its efforts. We will be asking for volunteers throughout the day to be at an information table as well as looking for students who may wish to showcase their musical/performing talent throughout the day.

Does your PTA take part in the PTA Reflections Program?
Any PTA/PTSA in good standing is eligible to sponsor a Reflections Program.

National PTA establishes the rules and forms used to enter the PTA Reflections Program. A local PTA may choose to advance Reflections entries to the next level of recognition. The rules, forms and resources for Reflections are available at http://nyspta.org/YourPTA/YourPTA_Reflections.cfm

National PTA is proud to announce that Mr. Tony Bennett will serve as a judge for this year’s PTA Arts Reflections program. more

Is Your Unit in Good Standing?
At this time of year, your unit should be in good standing. That means that your insurance is paid, your bylaws are current and you have made a membership payment of at least 25 members for this year.

Your unit needs to be in good standing or your students might be impacted, eg, students cannot apply for awards such as Jenkins Scholarships or Stanley Marcus Humanitarian award or participate in programs like Reflections. Also units who are part of a council cannot participate in council activities or get council funds. Don’t let your students or your unit be affected by having an issue. If in doubt check your records or contact the Region Director or Associate Director. We would be happy to work with you.

March is PTA Advocacy Month
and there are many ways PTA members can become involved in advocacy.

NYS PTA’s annual Legislation/Education Conference provides current information on hot topics and long-standing issues. Presentations and panel discussions are given by New York State Department of Education officials, as well as other education and health partners, and members of the NYS PTA Board of Directors. Open to all interested PTA members, this Conference offers specific advocacy training and ways of accessing resources that can benefit the local PTA and school community. They also hold a Lobby Day the Monday immediately following Leg Ed (March 3, 2014 this year) where those who choose to stay go in to Albany to meet with senators, congressmen, and aides and deliver the message(s) PTA feels are most important to be heard, usually around funding or budget allocations, but also other topics/issues pertinent to public education. Look for your notice in the mail, and please consider attending this very informative and worthwhile conference.

My Overview of Common Core State Standards
Susan Brown
GVPTA Associate Director
SusanBrown@gvpta.org

In 2010 to combat the budget shortfall, legislators asked the education department to apply for a Race To The Top grant. When the state received the roughly 700 million dollars we agreed to do an assortment of things which have been lumped together under the name Common Core but which really represent a variety of initiatives. What exactly is the Common Core? How does it affect us and our children? How does it impact our schools?

As the graphic illustrates, there are a series of interwoven components that people think about when Common Core is mentioned. First the CCSS or Common Core Learning Standards (CCSL). These were put together by representatives selected by the nation’s governors. International learning standards were consulted. Generally the goal was to prepare all students, regardless of where they live, for college and career, an admittedly controversially defined description. The writers will tell us our old standards were a mile wide and an inch deep, but the new standards reverse that; they are a mile deep and an inch wide. While this is a bit of hyperbole, they did reduce the content load per grade level and increase the depth of understanding required per grade level. Is there still too much information in the standards to cover in a year? Probably. Are they more unified and cohesive than the old standards? Yes. Each state that adopted them was allowed to modify the standards with up to 15% more information. In New York the ELA standards added a strand for literature.

The differences. In ELA there is a renewed focus on nonfiction. By the end of 5th grade, half of what students read should be nonfiction. Not just ELA, but across all subjects. If you include what they read in science, social studies and the limited reading of math, that allows room for lots of literature to be read. By the end of high school, the reading demand should be only 25% literature, but again consider that students take one English class and as many as 6 other classes in which reading occurs. Also remember that the idea of literacy encompasses visual media such as posters, documentaries, and movies or clips that are shown in these classes. ELA should similarly involve more discussion of “readings” and more writing, both traditional text and other media such as posters, power points and speeches.

Math has also undergone a shift. Major changes in math include a focus on fluency—math facts. For example, by the end of grade two, students should be able to quickly and accurately complete all addition and subtraction facts. They also include an emphasis on understanding and explaining how answers were found. With real world problems, students are being asked to find the answer and be able to share how they found it. Concerns exist around some of the restricted formats being allowed as demonstrations of understanding, but students have been asked to show how they arrived at an answer for years in New York.

Modules. If we move around the diagram in a counter clockwise rotation, the next part is the modules. The New York State Department of Education is proud of the fact that for the first time ever, resources have been provided for teachers to implement the standards. These resources are the modules. The modules are available at www.engageny.org. Every person from the state that I have heard speak about the modules has this to say:

- they are not a curriculum (even though that is how they are listed on the website),
- they are not supposed to be followed religiously, but used as a resource to pick and choose from,
- the modules do include errors and books that many parents, teachers and districts object with,
- and they are not required by the state.

Teachers and districts are running scared and following them closely because they have not had enough time to develop new materials and cannot budget for new texts that may be aligned to the CCSS. Modules are still being released, which presents a challenge to teachers trying to implement them. They have not had adequate time or training to know what is ahead in the curriculum so scripts is what, in many places, they have become.

On to the assessments. New York State has been assessing students since 1866. Elementary students have had various types of assessments since the 1960’s. There are no new testing requirements. The tests remain the same in number and roughly—the same in duration as those begun under 2006’s NCLB. Arguments against the NCLB tests have existed since they were proposed. The good about the tests—they have increased awareness of concerns and interventions in subgroups such as students
with disabilities, English Language Learners, and students in poverty. The bad about the tests—nationwide, only nominal improvements have occurred with these groups. The assessments occupy approximately 1% of the school year for grades 3-8. The problem is with the test prep that occurs in schools which increases scores to a degree, but then scores stagnate. Students are subjected to extensive test prep rather than high quality instruction. Further, the tests are designed to assess students in the middle. Struggling learners who are receiving instruction below grade level cannot be assessed at their instructional level (there is a proposal before the Federal Department of Education to get a waiver to enable this), and students who are accelerated in some parts of the curriculum are not able to be tested with above grade level tests. Additionally, our tests continue to best assess student socioeconomic level. They are designed to take a snapshot of student performance, not student growth or teacher ability, yet these are what we infer from them. Although field testing is used to help develop tests, they are not assessed for validity or reliability, key features in robust test development.

**Teacher, principal and district assessment** is the final major component of the Common Core package. APPR’s evaluate teachers 20% on state tests, 20% on local measures of student performance and 60% on other measures such as teacher observations. Although this seems straightforward, the difficulty is that many teachers work in untouched areas, student performance is the combined value of all education and experiences, and student measures like test anxiety, health and mobility greatly confound test scores. Each district has negotiated with their staff what constitutes local measures of assessment and what to do about teachers in untouched areas. As time passes these local measures are likely to undergo interesting changes as portfolios, computerized tools and other measures are designed to assess student progress.

The reason teachers, principals and districts are so concerned is that the ante has been raised. After two years of ineffective ratings, teachers and principals are eligible for expedited firing, and districts are subject to state sanctions. Although students are supposed to be isolated from the stress and the assessments are not meant to be an assessment of the students themselves, teachers whose ratings determine if they have a job are going to pressure students to do their best. Principals will enact measures such as providing breakfast on test days to ensure no hungry child cannot perform to his best which establishes a precedent for student and parental concern. High schools who are squeezed by the concept that they need to increase graduation rates while ensuring that every student who graduates is able to be college and career ready will pressure students to perform. Pressure equals stress for the students. It is inevitable.

**So what?** Many people are concerned about the impact of the CCSS, modules, assessments and APPR on their children. Become educated by learning what you can about the movement in general and about your districts implementation in particular. Resources like [pta.org](http://pta.org), [engageny.org](http://engageny.org), [parconline.org](http://parconline.org), [corestandards.org](http://corestandards.org), and [commoncoreworks.org](http://commoncoreworks.org) are among the many websites available to help you understand what is going-on both statewide and nationally. Talk to your child’s teachers, principal and district about implementation of the programs. If you have a concern, advocate. You can talk to teachers, principal, superintendents and school boards about your concerns. You can write, call, email and otherwise communicate with our state and national decision makers. NYS PTA’s capwiz program can help you connect with legislators for your community. Commissioner of Education, John King’s, contact information is available at [http://usny.nysed.gov/about/commissioner_king.html](http://usny.nysed.gov/about/commissioner_king.html). You make a difference.

If there is more information that you need or desire to communicate regarding a particular concern, I can be reached at [ptasusanb@gmail.com](mailto:ptasusanb@gmail.com) and [SusanBrown@gvpta.org](mailto:SusanBrown@gvpta.org). ■

### Common Core Webinar Series

National PTA has created a four-part webinar series designed to educate parents on the Common Core State Standards and empower them to support the transition at school and at home. The webinars highlight three key principles:

- We need **clear, consistent and rigorous standards** across the country to ensure all students—regardless of their zip code—graduate with the higher order thinking skills needed for college and careers.
- The standards reflect the **relevant knowledge and skills** that young people need to succeed in college and to build and maintain an American workforce that can compete in the global economy.
- National PTA’s **goal is for parents to be knowledgeable** about the standards and new assessments and to support them every step of the way as states transition to the standards.

CCSSI Webinars are available on the National PTA website. [www.pta.org/advocacy/content.cfm?ItemNumber=3894](http://www.pta.org/advocacy/content.cfm?ItemNumber=3894)

1. **Common Core State Standards Overview**
   An in depth look at the history of the standard
2. **Mythbusters**
   An overview of the biggest myths surrounding the standards and information that will help parents separate fact from fiction.
3. **Best Practices**
   A look at the Kentucky PTA 15th district’s work on Common Core
4. **Resource Overview**
   A summary of Common Core resources National PTA has
Region Honors Teacher, Administrator & Region Board Member

At the PTA Partnership Dinner in November, Genesee Valley Region PTA honored two of our education partners. Art Teacher Loretta Mueller of Cobbles Elementary in Penfield received the J. Ernest DuBois Educator Award for her excellence in education and her active participation in the PTA. Ms. Mueller is the unit’s Reflections chairman, as well as chairman of two other PTA Committees. Her dedication to her students, school and the PTA certainly is worthy of this honor.

Principal Dr. Kathy Zodarecky of English Village Elementary in Greece received the region’s Administrator Award for her commitment to education, children and PTA. She is an inspiring leader who maximizes everyone’s strengths and implements programs that will promote students’ success in her very family-friendly school. Dr. Zodarecky is very active in her school’s PTA, helping with the unit’s audit and fundraisers.

Region Director Lisa Christoffel was awarded the Ruberta Foster Leadership Award for her exemplary leadership at the region level. The award is named for Ruberta Foster, who was President of Pittsford PTA, Genesee Valley Region Director, NYS PTA President, and National PTA Vice President.

PTA Recognition Awards

Does your unit have a PTA member that your unit would like to recognize and honor? Information about the Honorary Life Awards can be found at nyspta.org/YourPTA/AwardsRecog_HonoraryLife.cfm. Honorary Life Award contributions support the Twin Projects, which are the Jenkins Student Scholarships and the Gazzola Teacher Fellowships. nyspta.org/YourPTA/YourPTA_AwardsRecog_Home.cfm

Does your school district have a junior or senior who demonstrates humanitarianism through their many volunteer commitments? As long as there is a PTA unit within the school district, students can apply for this award. Entry forms have been mailed to high school guidance counselors and are also available online at nyspta.org/YourPTA/AwardsRecog_MarcusYouthHumanitarian.cfm

Youth Humanitarian Award applications are due to our Region Director by January 31st.

Does your unit have a Parents as Reading Partners Program? NYS PTA has an award to honor units who have literacy-based reading programs. The applications will be available online after January 15th at www.nyspta.org and are due to our Region Director by June 15th.

The Richard Gazzola NYS PTA Teacher Fellowship is awarded to full-time teachers in PTA schools who are pursuing advanced graduate study. Applications are online at www.nyspta.org and are due in the NYSPTA State Office by June 15th. http://nyspta.org/YourPTA/AwardsRecog_TwinProjectsGazzola.cfm

For information about PTA awards, contact Mary Twardokus, Region Awards Chairman at awards@gvpta.org or call 585-657-7722.

Today’s PTA Members Save Money with Exclusive Benefits

Did you know as a National PTA Member, you have access to exclusive discounts on a variety of services and products? Here is an update on the current offers available to you. more info www.pta.org/members/content.cfm?ItemNumber=3409

The Voice of NYS PTA

For thoughts and commentary from the President of the NYS PTA, Lana Ajemian, on topics of interest to our membership see:

http://nysptapresident.blogspot.com/

“Thank you for your swift and diligent response to our action email last week. Our combined voices sent more than 8,000 messages to the US Secretary of Education, NYS Commissioner, Board of Regents and state legislators to lobby for a call to action with regard to Implementation of the Common Core.”

NYS PTA Information

NYS PTA Publications (Fast Facts, Our Children) http://nyspta.neric.org/YourPTA/YourPTA_Publications.cfm

Advocacy http://nyspta.neric.org/Advocacy/advocacy_home.cfm

Advocacy Newsbriefs http://nyspta.neric.org/Advocacy/advocacy_newsbriefs.cfm

Legislative Program http://nyspta.neric.org/Advocacy/advocacy_legislativeprog.cfm

Where We Stand - includes current Resolutions and Position Papers

For NYS PTA issues sign up for Capwiz and then Take Action with CAPWIZ
If you have any questions or need help with anything PTA, please contact an Associate Director or the Region Director.

---

**GVPTA Executive Committee**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lisa Christoffel, Region Director</td>
<td><a href="mailto:director@gvpta.org">director@gvpta.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley Arena, Secretary</td>
<td><a href="mailto:secretary@gvpta.org">secretary@gvpta.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill Ehrlinger, Treasurer</td>
<td><a href="mailto:treasurer@gvpta.org">treasurer@gvpta.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Brown, Associate Director</td>
<td><a href="mailto:SusanBrown@gvpta.org">SusanBrown@gvpta.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary Elling, Associate Director</td>
<td><a href="mailto:GaryElling@gvpta.org">GaryElling@gvpta.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gail Gligora, Associate Director</td>
<td><a href="mailto:GailGligora@gvpta.org">GailGligora@gvpta.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie Hannon, Associate Director</td>
<td><a href="mailto:MaggieHannon@gvpta.org">MaggieHannon@gvpta.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleen Taylor, Associate Director</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ColleenTaylor@gvpta.org">ColleenTaylor@gvpta.org</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Additional GVPTA Contacts** are listed on the web site.

---

**Upcoming Events, Deadlines, and Reminders**

**Jan. 31 Stanley Marcus Youth Humanitarian Award Application**
Due [more info](#)

**Feb 8 Reflections GVPTA Reception**
2 PM at the Barnes and Noble store in Pittsford; plus all day book fair fundraiser for Genesee Valley Region PTA.

**March is Advocacy Month**

---

**HELP WANTED**

Do you have a few hours a month to help advocate for children? Genesee Valley Region PTA is seeking candidates for various positions on the Region Board. Please call Gene Kinney 585-586-0556 or GeneKinney@gvpta.org

---

Thanks to Ashley Arena and Colleen Taylor for organizing the GVPTA Partnership Dinner November 6th 2013 at the Ravenwood Golf Club. It was a terrific night of recognitions and conversations. Lisa Christoffel received the GVPTA Ruberta Foster Leadership Award; Dr. Kathy Zodarecky, the GVPTA Administrator Award; and Loretta Mueller, the J. Ernest DuBois Educator Award.

---

**Ontario**

Wayne GVPTA Seneca

Livingston onevoice.

Yates everychild. Monroe