

# NRTA

**North Rockland Teachers' Association**  
Affil. w. RCTA, NYSUT & AFT AFL-CIO

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The release of the District's budget has caused anxiety and concern throughout our staff. I would like to address what I can to try to alleviate some distress. There is good news.

I returned yesterday from the Committee of 100 which is actually several hundred NYSUT members who lobby their local Senators and Assembly persons about educational issues. We are fortunate in Rockland that our legislators are also education advocates.

Top priorities included restoring higher education funding, school aid, teacher center funding and mentor-intern programs, initiating 55/25, opposition to the creation of a Tier 5, lagging pay for UUP and opposing efforts to make public employees shoulder a disproportionate share of the state's fiscal woes without taxing the wealthy.

## **Good News**

Some media reports suggest that the governor is moving toward our position on increasing the personal income tax on the very wealthy, with some reports describing a two-year income tax hike on those making more than \$500,000.

The federal stimulus funding is intended specifically to **stave off layoffs**. This should help North Rockland tremendously. There are no reports of how much will be allotted to the District but if they are looking to save three million dollars with the horrendous loss of 20 teachers, 26 TAs and CSEA, the District must appropriate whatever the stimulus package allots to staffing.

The proposed State cut of five million dollars from our District's budget has been taken off the table by the Governor. The State budget is expected to be on time which would mean that we should know where we stand with the State funds by April 1<sup>st</sup>.

## **On Going Issues**

The Lovett plant apparently is closing. This will eliminate several million from the tax base to the District. No one knows how much yet. The Mirant case steals from the budget right off the top. Due to these issues, our school district is an anomaly. The school tax is the only tax that the public can vote on and have any say about their predicament. We as educators in the District are the victims of town politics.

Many who are in jeopardy of losing their jobs have asked building reps if the union is "giving up" anything to save jobs. We have been in discussions with the Board of Education and Central Administration. We offered a concession that I believed would generate at least two million dollars per year for the next two years until we renegotiate our contract. I felt it was something that the members could sacrifice without putting their own families in harm's way. The offer was dismissed because the Board was not willing

to promise any jobs would be saved and would not negotiate anything in return for our contribution.

I find it very curious that somehow teachers are viewed as the group who can give up benefits and salary. Somehow, in the minds of others, we don't have the normal burdens of every other community member. We pay the same taxes, purchase the same houses (and have lost equity in those homes), pay for college, day care and our children's needs. We have lost savings in this economic disaster. We have male teachers who are the sole support of families with four or five children and stay-at-home mothers. In many cases, our spouses have lost their jobs and benefits and we have become sole providers.

So, the answer is no. We are not opening the contract. We will stand together and help each other through this. I advise anyone who is on the bottom of the seniority list to update your resumes. I am in contact with all surrounding districts and will pass on any job openings I hear of.

There is hope out there. We are hearing the worst right now and there is already positive news that dismisses the worst case scenarios. Please be patient, proactive and positive and the NRTA will do all we can to support our members.

In Solidarity,

Robin Brennan

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Robin Brennan, President

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