



THE

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The Association of Catholic Teachers

SPIRIT

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From The President's Desk

TERMINATED TEACHER REINSTATED

In a decision dated October 27, 2005, the Diocesan Appeal Board reinstated the teacher terminated in April, 2005 for "serious neglect of duty" in the case dealing with water bottles in the classroom and what was contained in those bottles. The Board found "the penalty of discharge to be in violation of the Agreement."

The Association argued the case on three specific areas of the contract: Article I, Section 9 - no just cause for termination; Article III, Section 9a - the lack of material presented to the teacher at the time action was taken, and Article IV, Section 5a - discharge not proper because it did not meet the contractual requirements.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 2)

MEMO OF UNDERSTANDING CLARIFIES EVALUATION PROBLEM AREAS

As you are well aware, the Evaluation Procedure being used in all high schools had remained an unresolved issue between the Association of Catholic Teachers and the Office of Catholic Education for well over a year. There were several areas of concern for both tenured and non-tenured teachers that needed to be addressed before ACT could sign off on the Form as well as the Process.

On October 20th, a Memorandum of Understanding was approved by ACT and OCE "to clarify and standardize the new evaluation process and procedures to ensure uniformity as required by Article IV, Section 9c of the Labor-Management Agreement." A copy of the Memorandum should be displayed on the ACT Bulletin Board at your school.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT. . .

(Terminated teacher . . . from Page 1)

ACT also cited the fact that the teacher had been called to a meeting with the Principal without union representation present, a violation of Article III, Section 2.

The Appeal Board felt that "the ultimate issue to be determined . . . is whether or not the System's discharge of [the teacher] meets contractual requirements." The Board felt that "failure to supervise a classroom and serious neglect of duty" are "the only charges at issue here," and "the Board finds there is proper cause for some measure of discipline." The Board reinstated the teacher because termination was not appropriate. Nevertheless, "the Board has determined that the appropriate penalty is a suspension without pay through September 23, 2005."

I think it is important for all teachers to know how an arbitrator looked at the classroom situation that created the disciplinary action. The decision states, "the Board believes that conduct of students in this case is only partly attributable to [the teacher's] negligence and failure to supervise." "Even adolescents have responsibility for their actions. [The teacher's] negligence may have created an atmosphere of opportunity, but is not responsible for the smuggling of contraband into the school or its distribution or consumption."

Thankfully, the teacher is back in the classroom. However, one thing this incident has taught all of us is that we must be extremely vigilant in our classrooms.

There is also a very important message here for every teacher in the Secondary School System. Contract language was tremendously important in getting the teacher his job back. Our contract contains due process language that is very clear and very strong. As we prepare for contract negotiations, we cannot lose sight of the need to maintain these clauses as well as other provisions that make our Labor-Management Agreement the model that it is for Catholic school contracts across the country.



Rita, Irene, Ghany, Joe and Tara

FROM THE PRESIDENT. . .
(EVALUATION) . . .from Page 1

Some sections of the Memorandum are reprinted below:

#8 "A teacher's personal life shall in no way be subject matter for the evaluation process."

#9 "Sources of Evidence, cited in the modified PDE 426. . . are to be teacher generated and not sought out by the evaluator. Tenured and non-tenured teachers are free to offer an evaluator any materials that they feel would be in their best interest to supplement the evaluation."

#10 "Tenured teachers' lesson plans cannot be solicited by the evaluator."

#11 "Comments on the Summary Sheet under Professional Development Areas must reference only direct observations within the categories enumerated in the Evaluation Form. Hearsay is not to be considered as part of the evaluation. Should observations from outside the classroom by one of the teacher's evaluators warrant addressing, they must be discussed with the teacher within a reasonable period of time if they are to be considered part of the evaluation."

You should also be aware that Article III, Section 8 of the Labor-Management Agreement gives a teacher the right to answer any material placed in the personnel file and the answer will be attached to that material.

And, in answer to a great many questions, **the 4-Minute Walk-Through is not part of the Evaluation Procedure.**

The grievances concerning the uniformity of the evaluation process and procedures have also been resolved. In part, the resolution states "All schools received the same information and materials regarding the new evaluation process. In addition, the training sessions held for the administrators were presented in a uniform manner. If there are any exceptions to this, the Office of Catholic Education is not aware of them. However, the Office of Catholic Education recognizes that there may be instances where the new evaluation process and procedures were not followed exactly."

The Association and the Office of Catholic Education will continue to monitor the new evaluation process and procedures to insure that the provisions of the Labor-Management Agreement are upheld."

As with all new procedures, there will undoubtedly be some glitches as we go through the first year of tenured teacher evaluation. If teachers have any questions or experience any problems with the Evaluation Procedure, they need to let their Senior Delegates or the ACT Office know. We will work with you to answer the questions and resolve the problems.



ASK MR. UNION

Dear Mr. Union,

Several other teachers at my high school and I are sure there is a Santa, and, to our great surprise, we have discovered that many high school students also believe in Santa. It's probably not a problem for the students, but, is it possible that we could be fired for believing in St. Nick?

Stephen "Cap Gun" Elff
Berg High School
North Pole

Dear Mr. Elff,

This has been a problem in the past. Grinch High School in Whoville, Wyoming once dismissed two teachers for what they called "that Santa Foolishness." You could be in trouble unless you do what they did, that is, make sure your contract has a "Santa' clause."

P.S. If you guys happen to be right about this Santa thing, please see if you can get me a new set of American Flyer trains!

The following article appeared in a recent edition of the
Bucks County Courier Times.

Students create books for Ugandan kids

"With this project, they can make art that means something," Conwell-Egan art teacher JoAnne Gari said.

By **BEN FINLEY**
COURIER TIMES

Every night in northern Uganda, 40,000 children flee to shelters in fear of "The Lord's Resistance Army," a group of armed rebels who make soldiers out of the boys and prostitutes out of the girls.

"Children are often forced to kill their parents or other children," Carol Bellamy, executive director of UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, wrote in the International Herald Tribune.

"Those who are taken, some as young as 6, are used as sex slaves in the rebel force, made to work as slaves, or forced to become soldiers. The LRA believes fighting age

begins at 7," she said.

In an effort to provide comfort for the children crowded in those shelters, JoAnne Gari's art classes at Conwell-Egan Catholic High School in Bristol Township are authoring and crafting children's books.

Their effort is part of The Memory Project, a Wisconsin-based nonprofit focused on helping orphans and children living in difficult situations abroad. The Conwell-Egan students are

finishing up their books this month and sending them to Uganda, an East African country about the size of Oregon.

The books are designed for small hands. They're 7 inches by 7 inches. They're five pages at most. Each page erupts in color from colored pencils or brush strokes.

The drawings come alive in styles that rival Matt Groening of "The Simpsons" fame or a stylish Hallmark card. Each book tells a simple story. Some are with words, some without.

There is "The Journey of the Mother Duck," about a duck who leads her children across rivers and roads to safety. Another book outlines the seasons of the year.

Some students spoke humbly about their stories as if their ideas just fell out of their subconscious onto

the pages.

"I just thought it up out of my head," said 10th-grader Samantha Wallace. "I figured I'd draw a bunny because it's happy."

Seniors Kris Breault and Mike Farinella drew Rover the Dog cruising around on a Harley Davidson with flames on its sides. On the next page, Rover was scuba diving, and on the next page Rover hung from a parachute.

"We wanted to give them something they've never seen before," Farinella said. "They can make it whatever they want it to be."

Gari, the art teacher, said her goal was to make art relevant to her students.

"They can use art as a powerful tool," she said. "With this project, they can make art that means something."

Ben Finley can be reached at 215-949-4048 or bfinley@phillyburbs.com.

BLUE CROSS NOTES

Over the summer, Independence Blue Cross converted their computer system from the old *Oscar System* to what is now the MHS System. During this conversion, new identification cards were issued to all IBC members. Blue Cross began mailing the new cards in August and the process was to have been completed by this Fall.

I have heard from several members, including two ACT Staff members, that they have not yet received their new medical card. Any teacher who has not received a new Personal Choice or Keystone medical identification card should send an email to the ACT Office as soon as possible. The email address is nacst.nacst@verizon.net. Please include your correct mailing address in your email. This information will be forwarded to Independence Blue Cross as soon as possible.

If you are not sure whether or not you received your new card, here is an easy way to check. Look at the card currently in your possession. The new card lists **Caremark** as the prescription provider. If your card says Advance PCS, then it is the old card and you need to request a new one.

At a meeting on December 1, 2005, Blue Cross admitted that there were some problems with the system conversion, i.e. some members did not receive their new cards, others received duplicates, and still others received cards that dropped one or more of their dependents from the plan. They are aware of these problems and have resolved most of these issues already. If you have any unresolved issues with Blue Cross, please email or call me and I will work with IBC to correct these problems.

Teachers belonging to the Voluntary Vision Plan should have also received a new vision card.

Ginny Crowther
Benefits Manager

INJECTABLE MEDICATIONS

Please note: Injectable medications are not covered under the prescription plan. Injectable medications are covered at 100% under your medical plan. To get an injectable medication, your doctor needs to call **Direct Ship @1-800-671-5280 Option 1**. Once approved, your medication will be shipped directly to your home.

A Christmas Reflection



As events in my own life cause me to keep in perspective what is and what isn't a real priority, I find myself thinking of others and the realities that they must also be dealing with. Whether a student, a teacher or an administrator, there is a reality beyond our professional lives that is significant and meaningful to us as individuals. We do a kindness to each other just by being aware of this understanding. How we see ourselves and others, how we work and love and how we measure and judge one another are all affected by our ability to see our humanity as a common sharing in both its joys and its pains.

What better season than this to offer as a birthday celebration present our commitment to remember each other's spiritual life and needs beyond the grind of our daily business. I would like to wish all of you a Christmas full of joy and family love. I offer those I worked for and with my sincere efforts in the future to always remember what is best about all of you.

I am still hanging in there. I would like to thank all of you for your continued good wishes and expressions of concern over the past year.

Wishing you a Merry Christmas,
Ed



The Wages Of Teaching

A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO I SPENT THE DAY AT an elementary school in New Jersey. It was a nice average school, a square and solid building with that patented classroom aroma of disinfectant and chalk, chock-full of reasonably well-behaved kids from middle-class families. I handled three classes, and by the time I staggered out the door

I wanted to lie down for the rest of the day.

Teaching's the toughest job there is. In his new memoir, "Teacher Man," Frank McCourt recalls telling his students, "Teaching is harder than working on docks and warehouses." Not to mention writing a column. I can stare off into the middle distance with my chin in my hand any time. But you go mentally south for five minutes in front of a class of fifth graders, and you are sunk.

The average new teacher today makes just under \$30,000 a year, which may not look too bad for a twentysomething with no mortgage and no kids. But soon enough the newbies realize that they can make more money and not work anywhere near as hard elsewhere. After a lifetime of hearing the old legends about cushy hours and summer vacations, they figure out that early mornings are for students who need extra help, evenings are for test corrections and lesson plans, and weekends and summers are for second and even third jobs to try to pay the bills.

According to the Department of Education, one in every five teachers leaves after the first year, and almost twice as many leave within three. If any business had that rate of turnover, someone would do something smart and strategic to fix it. This isn't any business. It's the most important business around, the gardeners of the landscape of the human race.

Unfortunately, the current fashionable fixes for education take a page directly from the business playbook, and it's a terrible fit. Instead of simply acknowledging that starting salaries are woefully low and committing to increasing them and finding the money for reasonable recurring raises, pols have wasted decades obsessing about something called merit pay. It's a concept that works fine if you're making widgets,

but kids aren't widgets, and good teaching isn't an assembly line.

McCourt's book is instructive. Early in his 30-year career, he's teaching at a vocational high school and realizes that his English students are never more inspired than when forging excuse notes from their parents. So McCourt assigns the class to write excuse notes, the results ranging "from a family epidemic of diarrhea to a sixteen-wheeler truck crashing into the house." Pens fly with extravagant lies. You can almost feel the imaginations kick in.

The point about tying teaching salaries

No school administrator should ever receive a percentage raise greater than the raise teachers get. Neither should state legislators.

to widget standards is that it's hard to figure out a useful way to measure the merit of what a really good teacher does. You can imagine the principal who would see McCourt's gambit as the work of a gifted teacher, and just as easily imagine the one who would find it unseemly. Tying raises to pass rates is a flagrant invitation to inflate student achievement. Tying them to standardized tests makes rote regurgitation the centerpiece of schools. Both are blind to the merit of teachers who shoulder the challenging work of educating those less able, more troubled, from homes where there are no pencils, no books, even no parents. A teacher whose Advanced Placement class sends everyone on to top-tier

colleges; a teacher whose remedial-reading class finally gets through to some, but not all, of a student group that is failing. There is merit in both.

The National Education Association has been pushing for a minimum starting salary of \$40,000 for all teachers. Why not? If these people can teach 6-year-olds to add and get adolescents to attend to algebra, surely we can do the math to get them a decent wage. Since the corporate world is the greatest, and richest, beneficiary of well-educated workers, maybe a national brain trust might be set up that would turn a tax on corporate profits into an endowment to raise teacher salaries. Maybe states and communities could also pass regulations with this simple proviso: no school administrator should ever receive a percentage raise greater than the raise teachers get. Neither should state legislators.

In recent years teacher salaries have grown, if they've grown at all, at a far slower rate than those of other professionals, often lagging behind inflation. Yet teachers should have the most powerful group of advocates in the nation: not their union, but we the people, their former students. I am a writer because of the encouragement of teachers. Surely most Americans must feel the same, that there were women and men who helped them levitate just a little above the commonplace expectations they had for themselves.

At the end of his book McCourt, who is preparing to leave teaching with the idea of living off his pension and maybe writing—and whose maiden effort, "Angela's Ashes," will win the Pulitzer—is giving advice to a young substitute. "You'll never know what you've done to, or for, the hundreds coming and going," he says. Yeah, but the hundreds know, the hundreds who are millions who are us. They made us. We owe them.



PHOTOGRAPH BY CHARLES TARRANT FOR NEWSWEEK



**Merry
Christmas**

AND

**Happy
New
Year**



**From
Rita, Irene, Ginny, Joe and Tara**