

Newsletter of the AFL-CIO

Central New York Labor Council

Serving the Mohawk Valley since 1882

March 2014



It's coming... in fact, it's nearly

here! St. Patty's Day, that is. And with it comes Utica's annual gala parade down Genesee Street on Saturday, March 15. Make sure your local is among those walking with the Labor Council/Agency. Talk it up with your coworkers. It's a great chance for labor to be visible and audible. Join with fellow union members to show the solidarity of the area labor movement. Even better, bring your local's banner and also some candy to give out along the parade route. It's a great opportunity to better connect your local to the larger area labor community.

Folks will be gathering at the Council office on 287 Genesee Street around 8:00am to finish decorating the float. After that, it will be off to our spot in the parade line. If you've never been, it's a great and festive event. Spectators are usually lined up 2 and 3 deep along the parade route and they enthusiastically support every parade group and float. Truly, it's a "don't miss"



LIVE UNITED 

There's a crisis brewing in public education - We can help.

Politicians, bureaucrats, and publishers are changing the essence of public education in the name of raising

standards and it's not doing kids any favor. High stakes standardized testing is being substituted for learning as politicians, notably our governor, cast educational research aside in favor of testing, testing, testing so teachers will be more accountable and students will score higher in reading, science and math. And if you can believe it, it's starting in kindergarten. Unfortunately, education and learning don't quite work that way. Following is a reprint of an informative article by education columnist Wendy Lecker of the Hearst Connecticut Media Group that appeared in the Stamford Advocate. Since so many of us in the labor community are parents and grandparents (or will someday be parents or grandparents), this is an important issue for us all to better understand. So read on... (Note: I've added emphasis using **bold** and underlines.)

The disturbing transformation of kindergarten - W. Lecker

One of the most distressing characteristics of education reformers is that they are hyperfocused on how students perform but they ignore how students learn. Nowhere is this misplaced emphasis more apparent, and more damaging, than in kindergarten.

A new University of Virginia study found that kindergarten changed in disturbing ways from 1999-2006.

There was a marked decline in exposure to social studies, science, music, art and physical education and an increased emphasis on reading instruction. Teachers reported spending as much time on reading as all other subjects combined. The time spent in child-selected activity dropped by more than one-third. Direct instruction and testing increased. Moreover, more teachers reported holding all children to the same standard.

Is this drastic shift in kindergarten the result of a transformation in the way children learn? No. A 2011 nationwide study by the Gesell Institute for Child Development found that the ages at which children reach developmental milestones have not changed in 100 years. For example, the average child cannot perceive an oblique line in a triangle until age 5 ½. This skill is a prerequisite to recognizing, understanding, and writing certain letters. The key to understanding concepts such as subtraction and addition is “number conservation.” A child may be able to count five objects separately but not understand that together they make the number five. The average child does not conserve enough numbers to understand subtraction and addition until 5 ½ or 6. If we teach reading, writing, subtraction and addition before children are ready, they might memorize these skills, but will they will **not learn or understand** them. And it will **not help** their achievement later on.

Child development experts understand that children must learn what their brains are **ready** to absorb. Kindergarten is supposed to set the stage for learning academic content when they are older. Play is essential in kindergarten. Through play, children build literacy skills they need to be successful readers. By speaking to each other in sociodramatic play, children use the language they heard adults read to them or say. This process enables children to find the meaning in those words. There is a wide range of acceptable developmental levels in kindergarten; so a fluid classroom enables teachers to observe where each child is and adjust the curriculum accordingly.

Two major studies confirmed the value of play vs. teaching reading skills to young children. Both compared children who learned to read at 5 with those who learned at 7 and spent their early years in play-based activities. Those who read at 5 had no advantage. Those who learned to read later had better comprehension by age 11, because their early play experiences improved their language development. Yet current educational policy banishes play in favor of direct instruction of inappropriate academic content and testing;

practices that are **ineffective** for young children. The No Child Left Behind Law played a major role in changing kindergarten. Upper-grade curricula were pushed down in a mistaken belief that by learning reading skills earlier, children would fare better on standardized tests. Subjects not tested by NCLB were deemphasized. Lawmakers insisted that standardized tests assess reading at earlier ages, even though standardized tests are invalid for children under 8.

These changes have the harshest effect on our most vulnerable children. The UVA study found that in schools with the highest percentage of children of color and children eligible for free-and-reduced-priced lunch, teachers had the most demanding expectations for student performance. To make matters worse, the drafters of the Common Core ignored the research on child development. In 2010, 500 child development experts warned the drafters that the standards called for exactly the kind of damaging practices that inhibit learning: direct instruction, inappropriate academic content and testing. These warnings went unheeded.



Consequently, the Common Core exacerbates the developmentally inappropriate practices on the rise since NCLB. Teachers report having to post the standards in the room before every scripted lesson, as if 5-year-olds can read or care what they say. They time children adding and subtracting, and train them to ask formulaic questions about an “author’s message.” All children are trained in the exact same skill at the same time. One teacher lamented that “there is no more time for play.” Another wrote “these so-called educational leaders have no idea how children learn.”

It may satisfy politicians to see children perform inappropriately difficult tasks like trained circus animals. However, if we want our youngest to actually learn, we will **demand the return of developmentally appropriate kindergarten.**

This may seem an odd item to put in a union newsletter but it’s your kids and grandkids who

are affected and our NYSUT brothers and sisters in the teaching ranks who are fighting these changes in the direction being taken by public education... and they need help. They are the experts and what they see happening at the direction of the governor and the NYS Education Department is just not in the best interests of our children or our system of public education. If you want to learn more, check out *NYS Allies for Public Education* at www.nysape.org. In this area, check out *Opt Out CNY* at optoutcny.wordpress.com. You can also follow them on FaceBook. You owe it to your kids and grandkids.



But that's not all. The way in which the Common Core is being implemented is only the tip of the iceberg. Funding for public schools is really the elephant in the room. And right now there is a concerted effort to weaken public education through bare-bones funding (including the property tax cap) and the charter school movement. It amounts to an attempt to privatize public education one little piece at a time. In the name of choice, charter schools divert state funding but are not required to adhere to the mandates that public schools must follow. Choice is fine but it should require private funding, especially if to do otherwise damages the public system that serves everyone. Public schools need better (much better) funding if they are to provide the quality education our kids deserve. This is especially the case in a school district like Utica that serves an wonderfully diverse student base that speaks somewhere between 30 and 40 different languages. That diversity is something to celebrate. But in order to provide quality education in such a setting, more, not less, funding is needed. There is currently a second charter school application in the Utica school district that would further siphon funds from the district that is already reeling due to underfunding. It shouldn't be approved. The answer

is increased funding for public education, the only system that serves ALL children regardless of their needs, abilities, ethnic backgrounds, and socioeconomic status.

So stay informed about education issues. Your brothers and sisters in education need support to withstand the forces of privatization and cost-cutting that are growing by the minute. Make no mistake, the powerful monied interests that are forever attacking public schools and teachers unions want only to dismantle public education and then to profit greatly from it.

Utica's Fair Share Rally

On a blustery and cold February 18th morning, supporters of the Utica public schools and public education in general gathered in front of the state office building in downtown Utica to protest the unfair cuts to education funding and the proposed second charter school in the Utica School District.



If the cuts and the new charter school become reality, Utica will lose millions of dollars in funding from an already INADEQUATE level of funding. State Assemblyman Anthony Brindisi was on hand to support the effort. Brindisi said that charter schools should be funded with private money, not with money earmarked for public schools. Many present signed a petition opposing the new charter school in Utica. Contact Mr. Brindisi's office at (315) 732-1055 if you have questions. You can photocopy the petition on page 5 and send the signed version to Mr. Brindisi's Utica office at 207 Genesee Street Rm 401, Utica, 13501.

Children should not be a number.

A movement to end high-stakes testing in New York State and our nation. Parents need to start this revolution by opting out their children from state testing programs in order to take back public education from the corporate reformers who are destroying the education of our children.

NY AFL-CIO President Mario Cilento to meet with local leaders



Plans are presently in the works for local labor leaders to have a sit down conversation with Mario Cilento right here in Utica. The specifics are tentative at this time but Friday, March 21, is currently being discussed. President Cilento is interested to hear what are the important labor issues in the greater Utica area directly from us and we will likely hear about the **Making NY Work** initiative, the progress made to date,

and what more we can do. Once the date and time are firmed up, local presidents and Council officers and delegates will be notified by email in hopes that we can have a good crowd on hand to meet, talk, and strategize. Our Council represents over 15,000 union members in our service area and this meeting is an indication of how favorably the CNY Labor Council is perceived at the state level. So, try to make it (or see to it that someone from your local can attend) once the day, time and place are finalized.

"WHERE FREE UNIONS AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING ARE FORBIDDEN, FREEDOM IS LOST."

Guess who? Ronald Reagan

Don't forget the United Way...

It's never to late to contribute or pledge to donate. Remember that all the money that is collected by the United Way stays in the local area to help our friends and neighbors who are in need. There is probably no better way to spend your money that will have a positive impact in central New York.

It was March 1... and COLD!

America's Greatest Heart Run/Walk went off as scheduled with thousands of walkers and runners braving frigid temperatures and a blustery wind to raise money for a great cause. Union teams were out in force. Mine workers, laborers, teachers, electricians, communication workers, and others all walked for heart health. It will be a few weeks before Fran Roy has the final results in the union competitions but regardless of the final tallies, everyone had a great time. And everyone felt pleased to have lent a hand on this special annual day.



For those of us in organized labor, one of the special touches in the walk is the stop many of us make near the top of Young Avenue in New York Mills. It's there that we get to share a moment and some laughs with Council President-Emeritus Jim Cook while we sample one of his individually wrapped, local, union-made brews. Thanks to Brother Cook for continuing this refreshing tradition.

At present, we haven't been able to get all the photos that were taken of the walk. Once they are collected, there will be additional photos from the day proudly posted in the next issue.

LIVE UNITED



No New Charter Schools for Utica Petition

State Education Commissioner Dr. John King and New York State Board of Regents Chancellor Dr. Merryl H. Tisch and members of the Board of Regents:

As a stakeholder in the success of students enrolled in the Utica City School District, I/We the undersigned are concerned about recent developments in the school district, which include continuing operating deficits, rising enrollments and class sizes, the reduction of professional staff, and an increasing number of ESL and special needs students, and students from households in poverty.

I/We are also concerned that an existing charter school, the Utica Academy of Science now receives over \$1.5 million in state aid from the district.

I/We therefore stand in opposition to the planned application from the Mohawk Valley Community Charter School Initiative for a Kindergarten through fifth grade school in Utica. Were it to be approved, this plan will result in a sizeable loss of funding to the Utica City School District, at a time when the district cannot afford the loss of much-needed state aid.

I/We respectfully urge you to place this and any other proposals for Charter Schools in Utica on hold, and to instead work with us on ways to provide the Utica City School District the resources it needs to prepare our young people to succeed in our 21st Century economy.

Signature

Date

Address

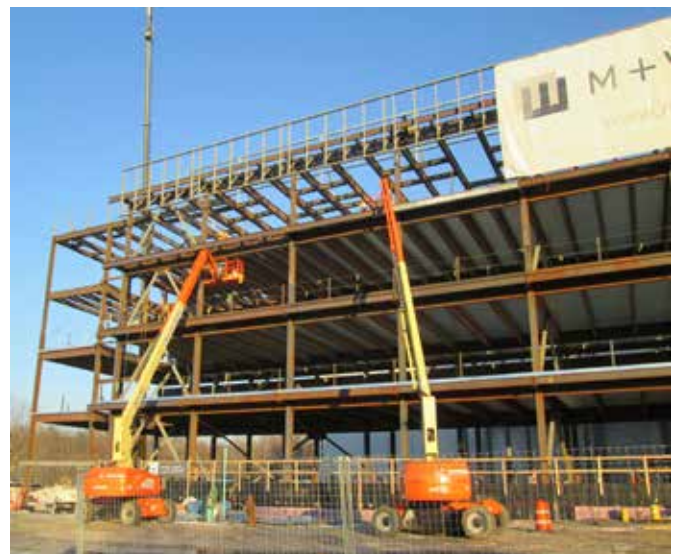
Workforce Development Institute funds OSHA Certification Training at Quad-C - Mary Jo Ferrare

Workforce Development Institute (WDI) recently collaborated with the M + W Group to provide training to members of the union building trades on the Quad-C project at SUNYIT.



Construction of the Quad-C (Computer Chip Commercialization Center) began in June, 2013. It is a \$125 million state-of-the-art cleanroom and educational facility, and is the cornerstone of the NYS public/private partnership, Nano Utica. At full build out, the Quad-C will be a 4-story structure with a multi-level cleanroom, a central utility building, an auditorium, and integrated office and laboratory space.

M+W Group, a global engineering firm, provides construction management services on the Quad-C project. Their Environmental Health and Safety Manager indicated both a lack of skilled onsite safety professionals and a need to train members of the building trades to become OSHA certified instructors for the construction industry.



In response to this need, WDI conducted a 52-hour on-site training program during January and February. The program was facilitated by the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) OSHA Institute Training Center. A total of 12 individuals, including members of the IBEW #43, UA #112, and LIUNA #35, completed instruction in safety and health standards for the construction industry (OSHA 510) as well as a safety and health outreach trainer course (OSHA 500).

These individuals are now authorized by RIT as construction trainers and are qualified to conduct OSHA 10 and 30-hour courses to local union memberships. These courses are mandatory for all building trade workers on the Quad-C and other commercial construction projects.

Workforce Development Institute is a non-profit organization established in collaboration with the NYS AFL-CIO. Its mission is to improve the lives of working families. WDI provides timely support for training, equipment, or planning to foster job growth. WDI helps keep jobs in New York State.

Notable Quotes

“If we started in 1960, and we said that as productivity goes up, then the minimum wage is going to go up the same. If that were the case, the minimum wage today would be about \$22 an hour ... So my question is, what happened to the other \$14.75?”



U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren

“I believe the playing field is rigged. Evidence of that is everywhere. Now I’ve been in the Senate for nearly a year and believe as strongly as ever that the system is rigged for powerful interests and against working families.”

“Hardworking men and women who are busting their tails in full-time jobs shouldn’t be left in poverty.”

Check out the Labor Council web page...

cnlyc.org

Labor Council sponsors 2nd Live United Hockey Night

February 21 marked the 2nd annual Live United Hockey Night at the Utica Aud sponsored by the Labor Council. An enthusiastic crowd witnessed an exciting



game that saw the hometown UC Pioneers upend the Manhattenville College Valiants by a 5-3 score. This is turning into a great annual event where the local labor community can show our solid support for the important work that the United Way of the Valley and Greater Utica does throughout the Mohawk

Valley. As always there was a great crowd and lots of money raised for a great cause.



Above, UW Board President Greg Morra, UW Executive Director Brenda Episcopo, and Labor Council Secretary Samantha DeRiso meet at center ice for the ceremonial face-off/puck drop to start the evening.

Next Labor Council Meeting:

March 27 at 6pm, 287 Genesee St., Utica

Join us if you are able.

Are you thinking about contributing to the newsletter? Do you want to write an article about a topic important to you? You are welcome to submit something for publication.

Contact: Bill Perrotti, Newsletter editor at

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