



President's Message

Dear Colleagues,

We've spent a lot of time this year talking about "Wellness." Like numerous other districts, Pequannock has made the idea of mental and physical health into a district-wide initiative.

Your Association has always been concerned about your physical and mental health. We sent out our first climate survey over 6 years ago, and we've sent out several stress surveys since then. Your Association realizes that "wellness" involves many things. While Yoga and mindfulness glitter jars may be excellent stress-relief tools, we know that wellness is far more than that. True wellness requires that all staff members are respected in the workplace.

We get reports from every building about members crying at work due to the frustration of dealing with unreasonable administrative demands, or feeling worthless because an arbitrary and capricious evaluation system has determined that they are "Not Effective." Even Charlotte Danielson has said her system was never meant to be used in the way in which it is now being practiced. Yes, the state has imposed new regulations, but much of what we in Pequannock are asked to do is generated at the local level.

We are frequently asked to implement new programs without adequate training and sometimes in ways contrary to the original intent of the program's creator. As a result, we are often set up to fail, which does

nothing to help our students. Often, the atmosphere is toxic.

The AFT flyer, "Respect and Dignity at Work" explains what an unhealthy (*bullying*) workplace looks like:

"...managers commonly set unreasonable goals and berate workers when those goals are not met...may publicly deny that their demands are unreasonable or that the stress created by this environment is harmful for achieving...goals..."

It further notes several examples of a bullying work environment (bullets, mine):

- "Constant assignment of trivial tasks; Assignments with unrealistic or impossible deadlines"
- "Setting up a person to fail by overloading him or her with work"
- "Excessive monitoring"

The flyer goes on to say that workers who attempt to deal with a bullying environment may have issues with their physical and mental health.

"High stress, much like [PTSD]: Unresolved, chronic stress causes physical changes in the brain that can lead to depression. Stress is also linked to high blood pressure, heart disease and (bullets, mine)

- Reduced self-esteem
- Musculoskeletal problems...
- Sleep disturbances
- Digestive problems
- Financial problems due to absence . . .
- Family problems"



Any or all of these elements constitute an unhealthy work environment. While things like mindfulness can ease some stress, true workplace wellness is achieved only in an environment in which **all staff members are free to share their opinion and are respected and trusted to do the jobs they are trained to do.** Wellness cannot exist in an environment where the rules are constantly being changed and the goals are moved further away from the starting line.

So how can we combat workplace stress?

First, we need to understand that **we are the only ones who truly care about our classrooms, our programs, and our jobs.** We live our jobs every day, and we often work late nights and early mornings. We may expect that others will notice and reward us for our dedication, but the simple truth is that many will not. **Our dedication to our students is not measured by an evaluation framework.** To achieve wellness, we must accept and understand this truth.

Second, we must take care of ourselves. I've spoken to too many staff members who come in sick or wait to schedule doctor's appointments because they don't want to miss work. That's admirable, but remember the story of the oxygen mask in the airplane: you can't take care of anyone else if you don't take care of yourself, first. If you begin to feel signs of stress as noted above, take time to address YOUR needs. If you're worried about your classroom, read my first suggestion, above.

Finally, take care of your family and of your relationships with your friends. Long after

your time in Pequannock is over, your friends and your family will and should be your focus. Don't wait until then to take care of those relationships.

Some other thoughts:

- Speak up when you feel stressed by the decisions made in your workplace. There are ways to do this without being insubordinate. Ask us.
- Ask your administrator questions about the directive.
- Explore alternate solutions to a directive which seems unreasonable. (Again, ASK US)
- If you, like many of us, have a knot in your stomach on Sunday nights, work to determine the specific issue that makes you feel this way and let us help you to address it.

We have the summer to recharge and renew. I hope you'll take some time to do just that.

In solidarity,
Lee Ann

Mental Health Resources

For free, confidential support, 24/7 - call 866-AID-NJEA (866-243-6532) or visit <https://www.njea.org/aid-njea-can-help/>

Here is the AFT flyer: https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/respect_trifold_24oct2013_0.pdf

Long but good info from NEA: <https://www.nea.org/assets/docs/Workplace-Bullying-Report.pdf>



Vice President's Message

Dear Friends,

"It's not how much we give, but how much love we put into giving."

~ Mother Teresa

The end of the school year provides me an opportunity to reflect back on the many times I asked all of you to support our Philanthropic Fund. Time and again, you responded. Maybe you have an amount automatically deducted from your paycheck, or you purchased Yankee Candles last Fall. Perhaps you donated when you wore jeans and attended a PTEA night at Sunset Pub and Grill. So many of you supported our Baked Potato Night and I was once again blown away by your generosity.

For all of this, I am grateful. At a time when your take home pay is shrinking, thanks to the unfair regulations of Chapter 78, you still dig deep and contribute. Every dollar that you donate goes to scholarships, and this year Lee Ann and I proudly awarded \$5000 to deserving graduates.

I am also grateful to each of you for your support for our Negotiations Team. Your kind words and encouragement during the entire negotiations process was deeply appreciated. If you have any questions about your retro pay (which should be arriving this week) or any aspect of our settlement, please do not hesitate to ask.

We have asked the Business Administrator to prepare corrected employment contracts for the 2016-2017 school year. Mrs. Bechtel

reports that these will be mailed to your home address. We expect to have printed agreements to all members in September.

Finally, I will miss the many members who have left our district since September. It seems that each year, more colleagues choose to leave Pequannock for reasons other than retirement. In some cases, members realize that they are not as happy in their jobs as they know they can be elsewhere. This was often the case this year, as so many fellow staff members described the bittersweet feeling of needing to find greener pastures.

Other times, excellent teachers are not asked to return for a third, fourth or even their tenure year despite true dedication to our district and highly successful teaching. When talented colleagues leave our buildings, our students suffer and we feel the loss. It is hard to feel "well" when we are constantly saying goodbye to friends. I know that many of you are looking for different jobs but would prefer to stay if only things were different. I hope you feel the support of your Association family.

There have been many changes during my 22 years working in Pequannock, but I still believe it can be one of the best educational systems in which to work. I am constantly inspired by the great job all of you do day in and day out. Thank you to our Rep Council and Consultative Committees who strive to improve the conditions in which we work and our students learn. I wish all of you a restful summer.

Ann Marie



Clockwise from top left: our members and students were out in force for the Chris Herren Story; Hillview demonstrates their love and support for their aides; Congratulations to Pat Bellas – Teacher That Rocks and Joaquin Dominguez – ESP That Rocks, awarded by WDHA FM; and PTEA at the Rotary 5K.



Congratulations to all who have retired this year!

We wish you good health and happiness as you begin this next phase of your life.

Betsy Baran

John Crown

Marge Deo

Joe DeVizio

Pat Frontera

Faye Lash

Leslie Ulrich

Rich Witte

Thank you and farewell to Dave Claeys and Donna Dericks who have served our Association in many capacities during their time in Pequannock. We will miss you both on Rep Council!