



## SHOULD TENURE BE ELIMINATED?

*Gene Goldwasser*



As retirees, we watch how schools operate from the sidelines. That doesn't mean we don't care about high stakes testing, student achievement, and teacher tenure. In fact, we are horrified that teacher tenure has become the "whipping boy" for all that ails the public schools.

Teacher tenure has been under attack for years. New legislation enacted in California has eliminated teacher tenure in that state and prompted other states to consider similar laws. It has become popular to bash teachers and tenure laws as the major reason for poor public school achievement. The argument for eliminating tenure posits that it protects poor teachers, gives teachers lifetime immunity from being fired except in the most egregious cases, inhibits supervisors from doing an effective job of weeding out ineffective teachers, and allows mediocrity to flourish.

Tenure laws also protect administrators and supervisors, whose assessments can be based on school-wide achievement levels as well as their ability to effectively manage their schools. Both teachers and administrators are protected from being fired by "whim" by central office personnel or boards of education intent on salary dumps or eliminating senior staff.

What is needed is a dose of reality. Teaching is an extremely difficult job – one that demands focus and attention to detail throughout the school day, and hours of preparation after school and on weekends. To supervise their schools effectively, administrators spend most of their school day visiting classes, conferring with teachers and parents, monitoring instruction, assessing achievement, setting goals, and interacting with students. Spending an inordinate amount of time in the office behind closed doors is simply not an option.

Tenure is an idea that should remain. Tenure laws should protect the education community from politically inspired controversies, from progressive and/or conservative boards of education, and over-eager central office administrators eager to clean house when they are hired. Tenure should not protect incompetent teachers

or administrators, and the process to separate them from their jobs needs to be streamlined and made more efficient, but tenure as a concept needs to be kept in place.

### The Mid-term Elections

The **mid-term elections** scheduled to take place in November may have a profound impact on the make-up of Congress for the final two years of the Obama administration. Should the Republicans win control of both houses, we'll probably see more legislation vetoed by the president than has been the case during his first six years. Or, will the two parties be forced to cooperate more to avoid the veto since overriding it requires more than a simple majority? Should the Democrats win both houses (a long shot), will that contribute to enacting a flood of progressive legislation that has been stymied for the past six years? Will that result prompt any Supreme Court retirements?

If the status quo remains with Republicans controlling the House and Democrats controlling the Senate, will we expect efforts to tie legislation and administration appointments to cuts in spending with the threat of shutting down the government lurking in the background? If the answer is "yes," then we're in for more stalemates and extremely partisan politics during the next several years. Not a pretty picture.

*Gene Goldwasser served as principal of several NYS elementary schools for 24 years. Since his retirement, he has been an adjunct professor at Hofstra, a coach with the Institute for Student Achievement and president of NYSRSAS.*

## Executive Board Meeting Dates

Members are welcome to attend our Executive Board meetings. They begin at 10:00 a.m. and will be held at the CAS offices, 490 Wheeler Road, Suite 280, Hauppauge, NY 11788 on the following dates:

**Wednesday, December 17**

**Wednesday, April 8**

**Wednesday, June 17**

If you are able to join us, please call 631-761-5451 so we can arrange for seating.

**OUR NEW FEATURE**  
**WHAT DO YOU THINK ?**  
**Should Tenure Laws Be Changed?**  
**If so, How?**

In an effort to expand the participation of all of the members in NYSRSAS, we're trying something new. Please give some thought to this question and tell us your opinion. Do you agree with Gene's position on page 1? Should some form of "renewable" tenure replace the current system ?

Let's start a discussion. Send a comment or short paragraph about how you feel on this issue to:

**Info @nysrsas.org**

We'll plan to print a variety of responses. Look for other questions in future issues.

**NYSRSAS**

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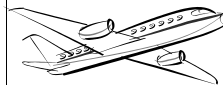
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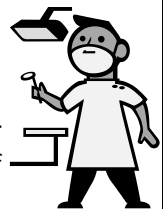
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**FROM THE DESK OF: *The Reflective Retiree***

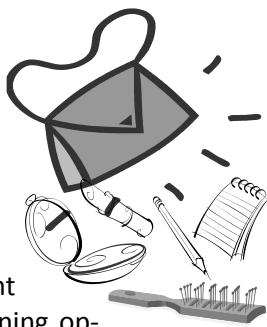
**Can't Lock It, Don't Mock It – If Only I'd Had a Pocket!**

*Corine Lipset-Huberman*



As I sit back in my chair, reflecting upon the many years of work as an elementary school principal, a thought keeps repeating itself in my mind over and over again. How high up the ladder of executive power might I have climbed if only I had had -- a pocket. "A pocket?" you ask. "What would a pocket have done for you?"

"Well," I answer, "not exactly a pocket -- but pockets. Like the kind that are found in a man's suit. Jacket pockets, including the inner pocket that a wallet with a driver's license and a credit card or two can slip into, two deep pants pockets that could hold keys, a cell phone, tissues (women don't use handkerchiefs), lipstick and a blusher that would have an inside mirror." That's about all a woman would need to carry around with her indoors. The rest of the stuff in a woman's purse are not essentials, like the discount coupons for supermarket items, the free latte coupon at a nearby Starbucks, the 20% discount card from Macy's, two for one dining opportunities, other articles of makeup, a small hairbrush, a packet of assorted plastic cards like Chico's exclusive passport number, membership cards to various professional organizations, health insurance cards, membership cards to a gym, a theatre club, a listing of sizes for 15 assorted grandchildren, etc., etc., etc. Well, you can see why women need to have a pocketbook. It's because their clothes don't come with pockets!



"Well," you ask again, "what's the problem with carrying a pocketbook?" "Oh, you've never been an executive, have you?" I queried. "A pocketbook is fine when you're going out to lunch. You can throw everything you might need for the day into it, and when you're seated in the restaurant, you just put it on the floor beside you, on the floor between your feet if you're the kind that worries about someone stealing it, or just hang it on the back of your chair if you're the type that hasn't a care in the world. But if you're a working woman who has the kind of job that takes you out of your office at a moment's notice, a pocketbook is a nuisance, a deterrent, an embarrassment!"

Take this example! A teacher has been making popcorn in a classroom to demonstrate a science principle.

The pan catches on fire and the teacher hurries outside with her class, notifying the custodian, who properly rings the fire alarm bell. Now how would it look for the principal to appear with her pocketbook on her arm when all staff and students have been told that, in the event of a fire bell ringing, they are to evacuate the building immediately without stopping to take anything with them? Of course, my cell phone was on my desk rather than in my pocket (had I been a man) and the superintendent of schools was unable to reach me when he called to ask if anyone was hurt?"



Would you like another example? Well, how about this one? A major political figure came to visit our school -- so important a figure that my office was turned over to her advance staff and several danger-sniffing dogs. I couldn't very well walk around with my pocketbook under my arm for several hours. So, of course, I sneezed at the very moment that I was to greet this "very important person" -- and no tissue available. Now, if I had been a man, I would have whipped out this dazzling, white handkerchief, Pavarotti style, and all would have been well. Don't even ask what I did instead!

Don't ask as well how I happened to lock myself out of the building one wintry day when the temperature was about 10 degrees. Don't ask about the time I stepped up to the podium about to deliver a speech when I suddenly realized that the notes I had made for my speech were not in my breast pocket because, of course, I had no breast pocket. Instead I had a breast, utterly useless for this particular occasion.



Well, I could go on and on and cite further examples of how the lack of pockets influenced my failure to significantly crack the glass ceiling. Suffice it to say that when someone says "stuff it" to me, my immediate reaction is to say -- "where?"

*Dr. Corine Lipset-Huberman has had extensive experience at all levels of education. She spent the last 19 years prior to retirement as principal of the Village School in Syosset, NY, dealing with the usual contingencies despite the lack of pockets.*

## Just Call Me Coach!

*Ken Forman*



In an interview, John Wooden, famed UCLA basketball coach, pronounced his “words of wisdom” as a result of coaching sports for over 40 years. I believe that his legendary wisdom far overrides basketball and may be applied to a variety of situations, especially educational leadership.

Let’s look at his wisdom applied to educational leadership. Surely the parallel is there, both educational leader and basketball coach work tirelessly to make people perform to the best of their abilities.

Coach Wooden said:

- *Be a good person at all times. “Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are.”*

**... “A coach is someone who can give correction without causing resentment.”**

- *Keep emotions under control without losing fight or aggressiveness. “Adversity is the state in which man most easily becomes acquainted with himself, being especially free of admirers then.”*
- *Acquire peace of mind by becoming the best that you are capable of becoming. “Don’t measure yourself by what you have accomplished, but by what you should have accomplished with your ability.”*
- *Never criticize, nag, or razz a teammate. “A coach is someone who can give correction without causing resentment.”*

I believe Coach is referring to self-responsibility. Educational leaders have a reputation to uphold as instructional and moral leaders of their school communities. If educational leaders consciously do the right thing...their reputations are unblemished and this establishes their moral character, setting a standard of expectation for teachers, students, and parents. Educational leaders with less than exemplary self-responsibility run second-rate schools/districts!

Coach Wooden offered:

- *Be a good student in all subjects, not just basketball.*
- *Be enthusiastic, industrious, dependable, loyal, and cooperative. “The player who gives his best is sure of success, while the player who gives less than his best is a failure.”*
- *Be a team player, always. “The main ingredient in stardom is the rest of the team.”*
- *Earn the right to be proud and confident. “Winning takes talent, repeating it takes character. Little things make big things happen.”*

- *Work constantly to improve without becoming satisfied. “It’s what you learn after you know it all that counts.”*

Coach Wooden is referring to those being coached. One of the major responsibilities of educational leaders is to provide students in their schools/organizations with a well-rounded education both academically and socially, not only focusing on reading, writing and mathematics but on developing youngsters’ moral character. Educational leaders have the responsibility to be the leading learner of their

**... “It’s what you learn after you know it all that counts.”**

organizations. Likewise, educational leaders look to make their staff shine, supporting their teachers as they strive for personal excellence. Educational leaders that give less than 100% all the time have doomed their organizations to failure!

Lastly, Coach Wooden offered a variety of suggestions for personal excellence:

- *Never miss or be late for any class or appointment.*
- *Never be selfish, jealous, envious, or egotistical. “Consider the rights of others before your own feelings, and the feelings of others before your own rights.”*
- *Never expect favors – or grant them. “It isn’t what you do, but how you do it.”*
- *Never waste time. “Never mistake activity for achievement... If you don’t have time to do it right, when will you have time to do it over?”*
- *Never alibi or make excuses. “If you’re not making mistakes, then you’re not doing anything.”*
- *Never require repeated criticism for the same mistake.*
- *Never lose faith or patience. “Success is never final, failure is never fatal. It’s courage that counts.”*
- *Never have reason to be sorry afterward. “Tomorrow I will try harder.”*

Be worthy of the position of educational leader. As a leader, moral turpitude is everything. It’s the standard for setting expectations for teachers, students and their parents. An educational leader’s modeled behavior should infuse into everyone in the learning community.

So, by internalizing Coach Wooden’s advice, an educational leader could and should be a successful basketball coach. Just Call Me Coach!

*Dr. Ken Forman served in various administrative positions for 27 years as well as working as an elementary school principal in Lawrence, NY for 12 years. He currently serves as adjunct professor in the Educational Leadership program at Stony-Brook University and as an educational consultant.*

**CAUSE AND EFFECT**

*Vince Deland*



As a former Biology and Chemistry teacher I would emphasize Cause and Effect relationships with my students. This presented problems for them because they were used to reacting to the effect of a problem or lab result. They learned that in order to reach a valid conclusion one had to base that conclusion on one variable. Unfortunately, in many “real-life” situations that’s not possible because there are a number of variables involved.

This is what we are dealing with today in the increase in violence in our society, especially in our schools. We need to address this growing problem not by reacting to the effects of these actions, but to the causes of them.

I believe two of the causes for this increase in violence are the loss of respect we have for each other, and the other, lack of verbal communication.

Respect, as defined in Webster’s Dictionary, is either “to feel or show loss or esteem for, consider or treat with deference or courtesy” or “to show consideration for, avoid intruding upon.”

How far have we strayed from the meaning of respect? With our children and, especially our grandchildren, it’s all about them. I call this the “I/Me Generation.” For my birthday, or Grandparent’s Day, I may receive one or two cards (out of fifteen grandchildren). My sons tell me that’s the way it is. Well, I do not accept this rationale and I let my grandchildren know how I feel.

***... “I believe . . . the causes for this increase in violence are the loss of respect . . . and the lack of communication..”***

Some of you may be shaking your head saying, sounds like my kids and grandchildren. I hope you let them know that their behavior is unacceptable and is a sign of disrespect. I wonder how much respect they have for themselves.

As for verbal communication it’s almost nonexistent. Technology has taken over. Texting is rampant and all kinds of personal information is on Facebook. Social media is taking its toll. When I am in a restaurant or diner and young people are sitting nearby, they spend most of their time texting. Sometimes they are texting each other.

I used to enjoy dinner with my wife and five children. It was a time when any topic could be raised and opened up for discussion. We all got to say what was on our mind, positive or negative. They had a forum where they could vent and release any anger or frustration built up during their day.

Today there are too many families that do not sit down and have dinner together. All parties are going off in different directions. Not many opportunities for our

kids to talk about their problems, concerns, anger, and frustration. In too many cases these built up emotions are released through acts of violence.

On Thursday, April 17, 2014, at St. Anthony’s High School in Huntington, Long Island principal, Brother Gary Cregan, expelled four students in separate incidents that he called socially offensive – display of a Confederate battle flag at a school sports event by two senior boys, and posting a photograph on social media by two sophomore girls, one in blackface along with racially inflammatory language. Here are excerpts from an editorial in Newsday on Friday, April 18, 2014, in reference to the expulsions.

*In America today, that hatred and that violent movement are what this flag most clearly stands for-the same flag that was proudly carried at a thousand Ku Klux Klan marches, cross burnings and lynchings. So when two seniors at St. Anthony’s came to a school sports event displaying that flag on April 9, they gave school officials a choice: Brush it off, or draw a line and deliver a strong message making it clear how completely unacceptable such behavior is.*

*The school did exactly the right thing, expelling the students. It also expelled two sophomores after they posted on social media a picture of one in blackface, along with racially inflammatory language.*

*Brother Gary Cregan, principal of the school said, “This is not the way we should be living as American citizens and not the way we should be living as people in America.” He’s right. Call it a teachable moment, and action needed to be taken. We cannot tolerate behavior that communicates so much hatred and intolerance in a school setting without eroding respect and common decency in society.*

If you go to the website of Frazier Glenn Cross, Jr., the alleged killer of three people outside Jewish Centers in Kansas, you will see that the Confederate battle flag is the most dominant feature in both the site’s logo and in the photos of racist marchers.

***... “We must devote time and resources to deal with the mental health of our children..”***

Many children are in need of help. We must devote time and resources to deal with the mental health of our children. They need to be heard, and we must listen. Maybe, just maybe, the result might be fewer outbursts of violence in our schools.

*Vince Deland retired from the position of West Hollow Junior High School principal in the Half Hollow Hills District and presently serves as a member of the NYSRSAS Executive Board.*

## THE DOG ATE MY HOMEWORK

Martin Mandelker



“The dog ate my homework” is a laughable excuse teachers share among themselves when joking about students’ excuses for not completing homework. As with all aspects of teaching and learning, questions arise about the relevance and usefulness of homework.

When children arrive home after a day in school, they are usually greeted by enthusiastic parents asking two questions which seem to have been passed on from generation to generation. Those being ... “How was your day?” and “Do you have any homework?” Responses to the first question range from remarks about classroom activities to accounts of social interactions among students, to experiences during recess, to travel experiences to and from school. Children’s responses to questions about homework are generally groans and remarks about assignment length and relevance. The usefulness, quantity and educational value of homework continue to be controversial. Parents often view homework as a means to stay informed about what is happening academically in class, and generally to promote better school/home interaction (as if there were no better way). Homework often becomes tedious and an event that triggers negative parent/child interaction and causes increased anxiety among family members.

As retired school supervisors, we may find ourselves approached by family members and neighbors asking our opinion of homework assignments thought to be busywork or inconsequential. Criticism and usefulness of homework has recently come under increased scrutiny. What follows are some recent findings/observations about the efficacy of homework. This information will hopefully help you respond to queries raised by family and friends.

In the January/February 2007 edition of *Principal*, education critic/pundit Alfie Kohn, after reviewing literature regarding homework, shared conclusions that:

- The positive effects of homework are largely mythical.
- Homework assignments continue to increase even though positive effects are dubious.
- No studies exist showing that homework builds character or teaches good study habits.

Homework is often just a repetition of rote behavior, and has minimal value for reinforcing learning while not extending understanding. Extending understanding should be homework’s primary purpose, not one of

teaching students self-discipline or responsibility.

Further negative homework comments have been expressed in a 1999 *New York Times Magazine* story entitled “The Homework Ate My Family: Kids and Dazed Parents Are Stressed, Why Piling On Is Hurting Students.” In 2003, *People* magazine published an article entitled “Overbooked: Four Hours of Homework for Third-graders?”

As expected, findings differ. For example, a 2003 Brown Center study on American education found that an overwhelming majority of students, depending on age, had an hour or less of homework each night. Surprisingly, even college-bound high school seniors had an hour or less or extra work a night, or less than six hours a week of homework. Furthermore, the study noted that when parents were surveyed, some believed that homework load was just about right; parents wanting more homework for their children out-numbered those who wanted less.

The National Association of Educational Progress (NAEP) data from 1984-2012 concluded that the youngest students seem to have more homework than in the past. The amount of homework for 13-year-olds appears to have lessened slightly. The report concluded that with the exception of nine-year-olds, who have experienced an increase in homework (primarily because students who did not have any, now have some), homework load since 1984 remained relatively stable.

With such mixed reports, the question remains...“How might we as retired school supervisors respond when asked to comment about homework?” Some possible responses that take into account recent literature, might include:



- Homework should be meaningful to students.
- Homework should not place any emotional burden on the family.
- Homework should not interfere with the parent/child relationship.

Students submitting incomplete homework assignments should not receive a punitive grade such as “zero,” which is two and a half times more punitive than an “F,” to the extent that the negative grade substantially impacts on the student’s image of school, desire to learn and/or self-image.

(continued on page 7)

## The Dog Ate My Homework

*(cont'd from page 6)*

- Accurate completion of homework is part of the instructional process and not the responsibility of the parent.
- Should a child be unable or adamantly refuse to attempt a homework assignment, a family argument is inappropriate. Perhaps a note from the parent to the teacher might be written, indicating that the child had difficulty with the assignment and spent an excessive amount of time actively engaged (excessive to be determined by the parent with teacher and child input) and the assignment initiated a family dispute. A request to the teacher to provide further explanation or assistance with the assignment at school could be included. A parent/teacher conference is probably necessary.

A homework assignment is part of the teaching/learning process and primarily the responsibility of the teacher, not the parent. The time-honored tradition that homework is a necessity needs to be altered to meet changing curricula demands. There is a growing feeling that with the increased application of technology, homework not emphasizing understanding and intellectual discovery is as antiquated as a slide rule.

There is little evidence showing the correlation between a reasonable amount of homework at the elementary level and academic achievement. There is some evidence, however, that a reasonable amount of

homework on the middle and high school levels does have academic benefits. However, the studies that were conducted showed correlation between homework and achievement but could not be viewed as causal in nature. The association between homework and student achievement may have been the result of another factor that influences both.



We often hear of punishment and/or incentive systems used to cajole homework completion. These are likely of limited value although, in some instances, they may work. Advising parents to resort to the old “grandma rule” -- “When you finish your homework you can have a cookie!” or the more current -- “Use your smart phone.” are not the best options.

Our responses about homework appropriateness need to be precise with emphasis on value and meaningfulness. Perhaps the time-honored joke about incomplete or ignored homework, often laughed about by teachers, is about to move away from “My dog ate my homework” to “What does this assignment accomplish?” and “Is homework in the best interest of the child, or... is it a parental obligation?”

*Martin Mandelker served as a principal in New York City and as principal of the Berry Hill Elementary School in Syosset.*

## PORT CITY PONDERINGS

*(cont'd from page 8)*

me down to the back lot where the scene would be filmed. It was a blazing hot day in August. Much to my surprise and delight, I was assigned my own trailer in which I could relax with refreshments in air-conditioned comfort while waiting to be called for my scene! Alas, the scene does not appear in the movie, a victim of the film editor’s cut.

After some ten years, I ended my career as an extra for several reasons. For one, the pay was meager, \$5.00 an hour at the time. Secondly, the hours are long, and the work can be arduous and uncomfortable. I would often get a call late in the evening to report at 6 or 7 o’clock the next morning. We extras might then wait hours before we were called to the set. If we were lucky, that day’s filming would be at one of the studio’s sound stages, and we could wait in an adjacent sound stage in relative comfort. More often, the filming was outside on location where we were subject to the

weather. Nothing like filming a summer scene on a cold winter day in light clothing with no coats or other warm covering.

Most worthwhile about being an extra was seeing and experiencing the way motion pictures are made. There was also the opportunity to observe the personalities of the many famous actors who starred in the films in which I worked. To name a few, there were the politeness and friendliness of Alan Alda, Molly Ringwald, Anthony LaPaglia, and Valerie Bertinelli, the humor of Joe Pesci, the deep concentration of Andre Braugher, and the icy aloofness of Madeline Kahn. Finally, there was the day Anthony Hopkins came on the set of *The Road to Wellville* and warmly greeted us extras with, “Good morning, everybody, I’m Tony Hopkins.”

*A former editor of the NYSRSAS Newsletter, Joe Marchese received his Ph.D degree from St. John's University. He retired as Assistant Principal of Half Hollow Hills H.S East.*

**PORT CITY PONDERINGS**

*Joe Marchese*



As a diversion from my usual articles on schools and education, I thought I'd return to the original intent of this column when I began it more than 25 years ago, to discuss some unique features of Wilmington, North Carolina, my adopted home town. Many of you might be unaware that Wilmington has a thriving motion picture industry. How and why this developed will be a matter for my article in our next issue. However, first I want to relate some of the experiences and observations derived from my work as an extra in fifteen movies during the 1990s.

We were often reminded that extras provide a feeling of reality for the actors in various scenes. They are the people walking down a street, patients in a hospital, diners in a restaurant. Most frequently they are out of focus in the background or appear for brief seconds, but if they were not there, the scene would not look right. I soon came to realize some of the reasons movies are so expensive to make. When you see a scene lasting for many minutes or longer, frequently it was short in segments of only one to three minutes. There may be fifteen or more takes of the same segment shot from different angles. After each take still photographers shoot photos of the set to make sure all props appear in the same locations for each subsequent take. The scene that appears in the finished movie consists of all the very brief takes selected by the director and combined by the editors. It may take an entire day, or more, to film one short scene. In the film *Betsy's Wedding*, starring and directed by Alan Alda, I played one of about 50 guests at

the wedding reception. That entire sequence took three weeks to film.

One never knows what he will be asked to do as an extra. In *Alan and Naomi* I was a peanut vendor, in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II* I was a shopkeeper sweeping up debris from his storefront after a disaster, in *American Experience: Simple Justice*, I was a court clerk. Sometimes, there is a real, shocking surprise. In *29<sup>th</sup> Street*, starring Anthony LaPaglia, I was one of several patrons sitting at a bar in a rough neighborhood. We extras had no idea what the scene would entail. As the filming began, I became aware of a loud disturbance behind us followed by some crashing noises. Suddenly, a human being hurtled past my head, sailed over the bar, and slammed into the bartender. A general melee then ensued all around us. I now have a much greater respect for the work of stunt men (and women).

A definite caste system exists on a movie set. The leading actors are treated with great deference, almost like royalty. Extras are sternly warned not to speak to or engage them in any way. Directors and producers are in the same category; technicians and others behind the scenes workers are next. Extras, of course, are at the very bottom. Once, however, I got a taste of the upper echelon. Working as an extra in *Household Saints* which starred Tracey Ullman and Vincent D'Onofrio, I was asked by the director if I would play the small role (one line) of an old Italian man (type casting) shopping with his wife in a butcher shop owned by D'Onofrio's character. When I reported to the studio the next day, a staff member warmly greeted me at the gate and then drove

*(continued on page 7)*



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