



ADVOCATE

Ontario-Montclair Teachers Association

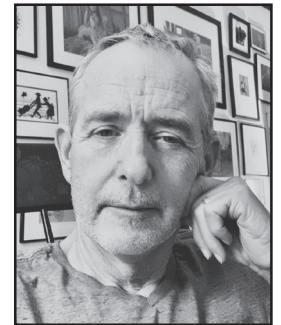
October 2019

IMPORTANT DATES NOVEMBER

- 1st OMTA Fall Social (Tentative)
- 4th OMTA EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING
- 7th OMSD BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
- 11th VETERANS DAY – NO SCHOOL
- 18th OMTA REP COUNCIL MEETING
- 21st OMSD BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
- 25th – 29th THANKGIVING HOLIDAY – NO SCHOOL

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

This lengthy article is about how I view my role as President of the Ontario-Montclair Teachers Association. As stated previously, I am an introvert doing an extrovert's job. Some view me as a rabble-rouser because of my words at board meetings. However, my intent is not to simply antagonize people. There is a lot of thought behind what I try to do.



First, I never really entertained being the head of this association until late in my career. It wasn't until I was in my 19th year, and at Vernon Middle School, where I was an art teacher, when I felt a need to have a say in what we as teachers do (At least from my perspective). We should have a say in the policies and programs that affect our students and our profession. As mentioned in the last Advocate, we have this right contractually.

It was at a staff meeting, when an individual talked about their concerns regarding Ontario-Montclair School District's Promotion Criteria, or the lack of, and the placing of academic and/or social expectations on our middle school learners. I was in agreement with this particular individual's thoughts. How was it acceptable at the time that a student can "walk" at promotion with three F grades and three D grades? The District did not require a GPA (and still doesn't), nor did it want to look at the citizenship scores as dictated by OMSD's teachers in order for a student to participate in 8th grade promotion. Some in the District said that citizenship scores were "subjective." I agreed, and subsequently asked then why do we have teacher evaluations? Granted, I know that promotion is not graduation, but promotion in some regards signifies that the students who walk across the stage and given a certificate are ready and prepared for high school. At least that's my assumption.

So, I wrote up a nice little diatribe speaking about the OMSD's promotion criteria. It was well received by Board Member, Sam Crowe and a Promotion Criteria Task Force was created, and the three Fs were changed to two. In some respects, this was a Pyrrhic Victory.

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Message from President Continued from Page 1

I became a semi-regular speaker after that. I was doing what I believed the right thing. I was doing what I believe association presidents should do. This is not a criticism of the presidents before me. Everyone has their own style of doing things. I chose to use the lectern to inform the board and cabinet of items that affected our profession. I believe if our board members are not going to school sites and having discussions with teachers about our students, then how else will they get the information they need to make those important decisions for our classrooms? Is this an unfair assumption of what school board members should be doing? I don't think so, but if you are a school board member shouldn't you be taking an interest in what teachers do, and what they experience in the classroom? That's why I now make sure to invite them to the Pizza with the President lunches I schedule with your site representatives.

Which brings up my role as president. Number one, my role is to try and represent each and everyone one of the members of Ontario-Montclair Teachers Association. I know some disagree with me in a variety of ways, and I will respect those criticisms. I cannot be everything to everybody. I know full well I am not perfect, nor do I try to be. I have made mistakes, and I will own up to them. For those of you who disagree with my decisions or actions, you will have the opportunity to choose a new president early next year.

Second, being a staunch union person, I take my role as president and activist very seriously. One of the key tenets of union activism is "Agitation". Think of agitation as an anticipatory set to engage your students. Agitation can be initiated as a positive or a negative action. It is up to the members of the audience (readers) to decide if it's positive or negative. Hence, this is indicative of what I choose to put in the Advocate at times. Believe me, sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night thinking, "Did I make a mistake putting that sentence or article in there?" You the members can disagree with me, but I want teachers thinking about their profession in another light. For some of you, this is your occupation; for others of you, your vocation. No judgement here. I know our teachers are extremely active teaching and interacting with their students (and their parents) to ensure their students' academic and emotional needs are being met.

So yes, I will agitate... Sometimes like the "Heavy Duty" cycle on the washer, and other times the "Delicate" cycle. The simple surveys I ask our reps to administer are certainly agitating members. Yes, the questions are overtly simple, but because they are simple, they elicit responses. Speaking of agitation, the comments I hear about anonymity re: the surveys really intrigue me. Members are really worried about their names being divulged; being identified in this district; why is this? (Yes, this is rhetorical.)

We are now entering the period where we are going to begin bargaining with the district. This gets some of our members fired up, and rightly so. Our members have strong opinions on a lot of issues

re: contract. Some members want real systemic change. However, you can't make real change without sacrifice. Teachers know this. I know a lot of teachers who will give up their weekends, or stay up until the wee hours of the morning sacrificing their time to get their lesson plans just right, or grading papers so that their students can see the results of their efforts right away. These actions invoke change among your students because you sacrificed the time to prepare and nurture your students' academic achievement. Thank you.

So, what does this have to do with bargaining, of changing the contract? Well, last year when we were bargaining a couple members made the assertion to me that because United Teachers of Los Angeles, and Oakland Educators Association were successful in their strikes, we here in Ontario-Montclair Teachers Association will gain leverage at the bargaining table. No. This is not true. Those of us who know teachers in Los Angeles and Oakland, know how hard the hundreds and thousands of teachers (and their supporters) worked and sacrificed to make those changes in their respective districts. Those teachers earned their pay increase, earned lower class-sizes, earned limits on testing, earned the addition of more nurses and more counselors, earned hard caps on special education caseloads, by sacrificing their time and energy to show up at school board meetings and union meetings and plan for change. It's easier to plan for change when members are *also* interested in their profession and interested in those who control their profession. The first step in making change is showing up.

We have rep council meetings every month. Everyone is welcome at our representative council meetings. It is free to come and listen to what is being said and talked about. That is why the meetings are listed on the front of every Advocate. The only stipulation is that you won't be able to vote or participate, but you can listen. What a lovely problem it would be to have people overflowing our OMTA office. The executive board meeting is the one that is closed. That's when we plot to take over the world or plan holiday food drives.

John Egan, OMTA President 

OMTA Office Hours

Will change to

8:30 am to 4:30 pm

beginning December 2nd

Normal hours of

9:00 am to 5:00 pm

**will resume in January when we
return from Winter Break.**

INSTRUCTIONAL ROUNDS SURVEY

The second survey we sent out to members really focused more on classroom practice, and a current practice that has manifested throughout all schools everywhere recently, which is Instructional Rounds. This practice, which I experienced while at Vernon Middle School, can take different forms, most notably the number of people in the room, and the titles of the people in the room. With this survey, I didn't get the sample size I had hoped. Although it was almost half our members, I was hoping for more of a response from our representatives this time around.

Instructional Rounds I know creates a lot of anxiety for our teachers. For example, teachers contact me asking if they can call in sick on these days. Also, for many teachers, Instructional Rounds does feel like an evaluative process. You have a variety of people, administration and teachers, some you know, some you don't know, observing you while you interact with your students. Of course, those people are going to come out of a classroom with a judgment regarding what they observe. What's really concerning is that the teaching is not authentic, because we as teachers are prepped ahead of time as to what our guests are looking for. So, we deviate from the authentic instructional flow we've created for our students, to change midstream, so our guests can see this whole other thing that is not truly happening in our classrooms. My own personal experience was me observing one administrator, who I won't name, behind my desk looking at other things besides me teaching my students. There is no place for that in Instructional Rounds.

There are External Rounds, which includes administrators and teachers outside of your school site observing and evaluating (I'm entitled to my opinion), and we have Internal Rounds which involves people you know from your school site pretty much doing the same thing. Just because the observers are not writing their observations down and being recorded as an official document doesn't mean the individuals aren't evaluating your instruction. They are forming opinions on a moment in time that you're teaching a lesson that's been created specifically for these Rounds, whether external or Internal. And while I'm on my high horse, the term itself, "Problem of Practice", is a problem because it implies there is a problem in the class that is being observed. Again, this is my opinion.

I have no issues with teachers, administrators, board members, etc. coming into classrooms to watch teachers and their students. I think it a wonderful idea that every teacher visit every classroom at their school site and witness their colleagues working their magic

and teaching unimpeded of a mandated lesson; to witness possibly students you have shared or had previously and bereft of foreign people in suits with clipboards crowding their classroom. Do teachers need to improve their practice? Yes, but you don't do it by coming into the class pointing district flashlights on teachers and their instruction and fostering anxiety. Creating fear in teachers (and some students too) is not conducive to a productive learning environment. I don't know if this skill has left OMSD but, are principals still walking solo into classrooms and hanging at the back quietly watching the student engagement, then finding a safe time to approach the teacher, and ask, "Can I make a friendly suggestion?"

Do you find value in Instructional Rounds?

Ayes: 54 Nays: 343 Abstentions: 70



WHAT WONDERFUL THINGS ARE YOU DOING IN CLASS?

I would like to initiate something new this year. I would like to visit classrooms, so I can see all the wonderful things that are being taught and accomplished by all your students. If you are comfortable with a visitor and there is something you are excited about that your class is doing, being academic or elective, I would



enjoy seeing it! My goal is not to stay long and/or disrupt your teaching; it's simply to pass along the good word to others. If you're interested in having me as a visitor, drop me a line; give me a call with at least three dates & times. And most important, notify your administrator that I'm coming.

Thanks, John Egan

president@myomta.org 909-986-2414

P. S. I'll bring a little something for your students

THE NEA REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY 2019

by Lisa Eckersley

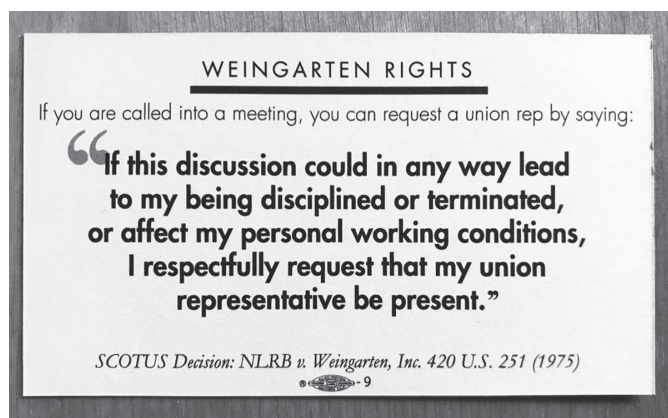
This past summer, I had the opportunity to attend the NEA Representative Assembly in Houston, Texas. I applied for this opportunity because I was interested in learning more about CTA and NEA and my role as a Site Rep. When I walked onto the convention hall floor, the sight was overwhelming! All 50 states represented totaling over 8,000

Educators. NEA includes all the following Members as Educators:

- **Classroom Teachers** – Pre-Schools to University Graduate Programs
- **Educational Support Professionals** – Clerical Services, Custodial & Maintenance, Food Services, Health & Students Services, Para Educators, Security Services, Skilled Trades, Technical Service, Transportation
- **Higher Education Faculty & Staff**
- **Specialized Instructional Support** – Counselors, Social Workers, School Psychologist, Nurses, Speech Language Pathologist, Librarians
- **NEA Retired**

- **Aspiring Educators** – Over 50,000 members in 1,100 campus chapters across the nation belong to the program
- **Administrators**
- **Substitute Educators**
- **National Council of Urban Educational Association**

I do not consider myself a political activist, so it was very interesting and impressive to see how an RA operated at the local and national level. If you want your voice to be heard, this is the place for the opportunity. I would encourage all members to attend at least once during their career. 🍏



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