

# THE LAMPLIGHTER

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE VINELAND  
EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

SPRING—SUMMER 2015

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE ON CONTRACT AND PENSIONS

Dear colleagues,

Thank you to all who attended our General Membership meetings on June 2 (pension) and June 10 (contract ratification)! On Friday, all ballots were returned and the results speak for themselves:

Total Votes Cast: 879  
(81% turnout)

Votes to Approve: 816  
(93%)

Votes Against: 63  
(7%)

For the first time in three contract cycles, no member will remain frozen on the salary guide. We wish there was a more generous settlement for our veteran members, but the local economy, Board budgetary decisions, and the lack of member engagement in April prevented us from attaining it. In the last 5 years, the VEA's demographics have changed signifi-

cantly. The charts on page 4 show the number of members at each step and degree column. For the secretarial guide, it notes the number of 10 and 12 month employees by civil service title. As recently as 2007, 76% of our members were at the top of the salary guide. Those demographics created a much smaller increment cost and allowed for much greater guide improvement, so that those at the top step earned greater raises. Those days and the economy that supported them, seem to be gone for the foreseeable future. That does not mean we will not try, but the membership needs to know the difficulty of the task. With 82% of our membership still climbing through the salary guide, and our high increment costs, the team made the decision to prioritize step movement for the long-term health of the salary guide. We have

to move our members through and to the top to reduce our increment costs. By the end of this contract, we will have up to 25% at the top of the teacher guide and our increment cost will be down to about 1.86% (down from a 2.08 high). Salary guide strategy is a complex. If there is enough interest, we can host a salary guide workshop. If you are interested in the V.E.A. holding a salary guide workshop, please let your Building Rep know or email me from our website's contact page.

Speaking of workshops, next year we hope to also have training opportunities for our new Building Reps., a personnel Dept. 'frequently asked questions,' and possibly another on maximizing your pension with social security. What topics are important to you? What can we help you with? What issue or problem do you encounter in the

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## BECOME A PENSION ACTIVIST:

BECOME A PENSION ACTIVIST: (Excerpt from NJEA.ORG)

For the last 15 years, the state of New Jersey has provided little or NO FUNDING to its public employee pension funds. When Chapter 78 was passed in 2011, it increased employee contributions and reduced benefits, but it also

gave you a CONTRACTUAL RIGHT to the state's share of pension funding. It was a promise from the governor and Legislature that they would not repeat the sins of the past.

Since the law was passed, New Jersey school employees have contributed BILLIONS OF DOLLARS to

their pensions, but Governor Christie CONTINUES TO VIOLATE THE VERY LAW THAT HE SIGNED! Without the state's full contribution, the pension funds grow weaker every day. And without a dramatic increase in the state's current funding commitment, NJEA actuaries predict THE TPAF (TEACHERS' PEN-

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## REMINDERS:

- *Keep track of all sick days and personal days—Aesop is not reliable*
- All teaching staff must have 20 hours of PD hours by the end of the year.
- You must have an approved PDP prior to the end of the year.
- No personal days without a valid reason after June 1st.
- No members should disclose information in the workplace about colleagues unless disclosure serves a professional purpose or is required by law.

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## PRIDE EVENTS

The date was April 1, but it was no April Fool's Day joke for the 200 guests who enjoyed a fun evening of ethnic foods, activities, competitions and events at Landis School's 3rd Annual International Festival. The event was supported by a PRIDE/FAST grant from the Vineland Education Association (Creative Celebration III), English as a Second Language (ESL) Teachers, staff from other special subject areas, Landis families, and the student Art Club, according to Donna Grasso, spokesperson. Another highlight of the evening, according to Grasso was "Freeze Modeling" with five "creatively, courageous student models wearing eye dazzling, and amazing outfits made of newspaper or fabric. "The Fantastic Five froze

in awe everyone who gazed at their intricately designed, environmentally-minded evening gowns and accessories. These exquisite fashions made by the young Landis fashion designers, were so inspiring, it is obvious that many more fashion shows will follow." Trophies for the winning fashion designs and the winning advocacy paintings were provided by funds from VEA grant as well as a tray of African fruit, healthy ethnic foods, visual supplies, and paper decorations and products.

The 13th Annual "Food For Thought" celebration on March 13 attracted capacity crowds of parents and family members to the Casimer M. Dallago Early Childhood Center and the Almond Road Preschools. The event is sponsored in collaboration with the Vineland Education Association PRIDE Grant and Vineland Preschool Program



workplace that we can better assist with? SGOs? PGP's? Interpersonal conflict resolution? Educational law? Please let us know, as we want to help give you the resources you need on the job.

Speaking of PGP's, the VEA's Professional Growth Plan for 2015-16 includes increasing member engagement. Last year, we wanted to improve communication and believe we have done so with this newsletter and the many email alerts and messages that have gone out over the year. (If you're not receiving them, please send your updated email and the building you work in to Kathy Serrano at [kserrano@vinelandea.org](mailto:kserrano@vinelandea.org).) We've had low attendance at the general membership meetings, Board meetings, and even Happy Hours! We know you are over-worked and inundated in family and personal responsibilities too, but please tune in and step up a little more next year. If we don't, we stand to significantly lose the level of benefits that our profession has built over the last 150 years. Specifically, I'm

talking about the pension. One member remarked, "Well, I never even expected to get a pension anyway. I'd rather not pay it and invest my own money." This is very short-sighted and not backed by research and the realities of the stock market. The loss of our defined benefit pension plan will be a catastrophic event that will affect you and your family for the rest of your life. Every member has to begin now by making phone calls, writing letters, and visiting our State Legislators (email doesn't make as much of a state-

ment). We need to send the message that we're involved, informed, and will vote appropriately if our elected officials do not live up to the requirements of the law that they wrote and passed into law. This is not about the Governor or the Supreme Court anymore. Now the ball is in the Legislature's court – they write the budget and they have the power to override any line-item veto from our Governor. They can find the funds and put them into the budget, we have to give your Senator and two Assemblypersons the courage to vote to override Governor Christie's likely veto of any new tax increase necessary to fund the pension system. You've never missed a pension payment – it comes right out of your check. However, the state skipped payments for over a decade and now wants to ignore the law they signed only three years ago to put the system back into fiscal shape. You cannot stand by and ignore this issue or think that someone else will do this for you. You must play your part and accept your responsibility too. Besides writing that letter or making that phone call, consider attending a NJEA-sponsored lobby day in Trenton on June 25. At a lobby day you will be briefed by NJEA in the morning at HQ and then be walked directly over into the Statehouse to speak with legislators. This is not an outside rally with picket signs, but the hard work of professional, personal lobbying and negotiating with our elected officials. If interested you will have to register with NJEA – flyers have went out to your building Reps. and at the General Membership meetings. Please see the VEA website for more information on what you can do. You can't afford to do nothing.



Our Goal—A Ratified Contract!

visiting our State Legislators

## *ON THE WAY TO CAPE MAY.....*

Several secretaries were among VEA members that attended the Cumberland/Cape May County Overnighter in March, held at the Grand Hotel in Cape May. Despite chilly temperatures and snow covered beaches, the view, accommodations and food were awesome!

The best part of the weekend of course were the many workshops that were available and relevant to the secretaries. Those who took "School Law" not only gained very useful information on laws both in effect and proposed but also learned where to gain additional information and updates. But the highlight of this workshop was that it was presented by our very own President, Lou Russo, who expertly covered the rights of both the employee and employer in respect school law.

Another familiar face was Rena Kallio, our UniServe Representative for Vineland, who presented a workshop on Generational Organization, where she skillfully focused on the importance of understanding communication styles when dealing with the public, students and administration. One of the things that made this workshop extremely interesting was the fact that it's participants were a diverse group of different generations. Therefore, when given the same "problem" or "scenario", very different methods were used to often arrive at the same solution.

The last workshop on Stress Management had very upbeat and encouraging presenters who shared different techniques for reducing on the job stress. Since everyone experiences some level of stress regardless of position, this workshop included a lot of supportive discussion among the participants. This workshop definitely offered some useful "take aways" for our members.

Overall the Overnighter was informative and lots of fun! It's a great opportunity to not only hang out with those you know but to meet NJEA members from other districts in a relaxed, positive learning environment. We're looking forward to next year!

Pictured: (standing left to right) Cindy Casazza, Denise Ferus (sitting left to right) Kathy Lynch, Michele Abbamondi, Mil Johnson, Margie Arce and Pat Freiling.



That being said, I take this opportunity to thank all our members for the hard work they have done on the behalf of Vineland’s children and our fellow members. Thank you to our Building Reps for their assistance and work on our behalf and thank you to the Executive Committee for completing negotiations and managing the daily work of the Association. To all – please have an enjoyable and refreshing summer.

Sincerely,

Lou Russo

Staff Step	BA	BA+30	MA	MA+30	Total	Percent	Step
0	34.00	1.00	3.00	-	38.00	3.79%	0
1	28.00	-	2.00	-	30.00	2.99%	1
2	3.00	-	1.00	-	4.00	0.40%	2
3	44.00	-	15.00	1.00	60.00	5.98%	3
4	54.00	2.00	12.00	3.00	71.00	7.08%	4
5	22.15	1.00	8.00	-	31.15	3.11%	5
6	24.00	3.00	13.00	-	40.00	3.99%	6
7	23.00	2.00	13.00	-	38.00	3.79%	7
8	32.00	-	13.95	4.00	49.95	4.98%	8
9	27.00	1.00	17.00	3.00	48.00	4.79%	9
10	28.00	1.00	18.00	-	47.00	4.69%	10
11	29.00	-	22.00	1.00	52.00	5.18%	11
12	41.00	-	14.00	4.00	59.00	5.88%	12
13	36.00	2.00	7.00	1.00	46.00	4.59%	13
14	39.00	1.00	18.00	-	58.00	5.78%	14
15	55.00	1.00	19.00	5.00	80.00	7.98%	15
16	14.00	1.00	12.00	4.00	31.00	3.09%	16
17	7.00	1.00	10.00	1.00	19.00	1.89%	17
18	14.00	-	9.00	1.00	24.00	2.39%	18
19	106	4	52	15	177.00	17.65%	19
<b>Totals</b>	660.15	21.00	278.95	43.00	1003.10	100.00%	<b>Totals</b>
<b>Percent</b>	65.81%	2.09%	27.81%	4.29%	100%		<b>Percent</b>

Secretarial Staff								
Step	Gen 10	Senior 10	Princ 10	Gen 12	Senior 12	Princ 12	Total	Percent
1	1						1	1%
2	4			5			9	9%
3					1	2	3	3%
4				1	1		2	2%
5				0.71		1	1.71	2%
6				1	4		5	5%
7				1	1	2	4	4%
8					1	2	3	3%
9		7			1		8	8%
10	1	2				2	5	5%
11		4					4	4%
12	1	1			1		3	3%
13		7					7	7%
14		2			1	1	4	4%
15		1				1	2	2%
16							0	0%
17							0	0%
18		3					3	3%
19		3					3	3%
20		2					2	2%
21					1		1	1%
22							0	0%
23					1	1	2	2%
24		1				4	5	5%
25		1			3	6	10	10%
OG 1		6						6%
OG 2		3						3%
OG 3		1						1%
OG 4			1					1%
<b>Totals</b>	7	44	1	8.71	16	22	98.71	100%
<b>%</b>	7%	45%	1%	9%	16%	22%	100%	

PENSION CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

SION AND ANNUITY FUND) WILL RUN OUT OF MONEY IN 2027. (The PERS/Local fund, which is for ESP members, has funding problems as well.)

NJEA has over 200,000 members, who have contributed every penny required by law into their own pension funds. It's time for each and every one of us to tell the governor and the Legislature that it's BEYOND time to live up to their legal obligation to fund public employee pensions.

**TAKE ACTION NOW! :**

Go to NJEA.ORG log in and update your profile (log in using your NJEA membership card number and last 4 of your social security number. Then click on My Profile)

At the NJEA.ORG homepage click on

**Full Court Press on The Pension Promise** and fill in and submit the form to become a Pension Activist

Join the Great Twitter Payday Campaign:

Every 15th and 30th, NJEA members are tweeting at their legislators, at the governor and to media outlets a simple message such as, "I made my pension payment today,

@NJSenatePres. Did you?

#fundnjpension."

Visit NJEA.org for more information on how to Tweet.

Text "PENSION" to 738674 and regularly check njea.org.



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Visit the website often for news, workshops, and information.

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Please note any emails that you receive from Kathy Serrano should be read because she is our VEA secretary. Feel free to email her at kseerano@vinelandea.org with any questions you may have.

We hope you enjoyed reading the *Lamplighter* this year. If you have any suggestions with information that may be useful for our future lamplighter issues please email

rmerkel@vineland.org

Regina Merkel, Lamplighter editor

Enjoy your summer!