We are NOT…all in this together
Our Self-Imposed Crisis

Anne Arundel County’s electorate sent a clear and ominous message to elected officials almost two decades ago in the fall of 1992. Nearly three-quarters of those who visited their polling places voted “yes” to an artificial cap on total property tax collections and they did so in the face of a stern warning that such a restriction was certain to choke public services, even those critical services such as police, fire and education. The message received by every elected official and hopeful candidate from such an overwhelming margin was: “We don’t care about services. Just don’t tax us!”

To further darken our local public revenue picture, local elected officials have applied that message beyond the issue of property tax collection. They fear the local income tax rate also. So, as a county electorate, we have frightened our elected legislators from doing what’s necessary to provide for our safety, education and quality of life. Mr. Leopold and others point fingers at the sluggish return from a stubborn recession. If we were in economic positions of Prince George’s or Montgomery Counties, Mr. Leopold might be correct. But those counties and most others are exerting far more effort than Anne Arundel to provide adequate revenue. They clearly are having difficulty, but they are spreading the pain over a much wider scope by ensuring that everyday citizens are paying their fair share. By their vote in 1992 and in the persons that they have elected to office since, Anne Arundel County’s electorate has willfully restricted the two primary sources of public revenue.

Anne Arundel has a self-imposed artificial cap on total property tax collections of 4.5% over the prior year or the rate of inflation as defined by the consumer price index (CPI), whichever is lesser. Such an arbitrary restriction generates a budget that is deaf and blind to actual needs. Our county sits with the third lowest local income tax rate in Maryland (a fact that precluded any chance of a successful application for a waiver of Maintenance of Effort). If the County Council adopts the Leopold budget, Fiscal Year 2012 will become the third year that the budget gets balanced by forced contributions from police, firefighters, and public school educators who will again subsidize the services they provide to those who live here.

The pending layoffs in the county government don’t need to occur. Our school system can be funded appropriately. These drastic actions are being taken as a matter of choice. When so much has to be taken from so few, any claim that we are all in this together is both hollow and absurd.
This has been a year of strong political opinions and unfortunately of some significant damage to both education and educators.

Anyone who has worked with, raised or played with children knows that not all children arrive at school with an equal set of skills and/or experiences.

Educators spend their lives faced with several major challenges. On one hand we are expected to level the playing field for all children, while on the other we are expected to meet the needs of each individual child. In addition to closing the achievement gap, we are instructed to work so that all students continue to grow based on their abilities.

If this sometimes sounds like an episode of Mission Impossible, well it just might be.

In our professional lives, those who maintain that we are expected to “be there for the children” conveniently ignore the fact that many of us have our own children and grandchildren who also have needs.

We are expected to be mindful of others during these tough economic times while living on wage and benefit packages that have, in many cases, actually shrunk over the past years.

In all of this we are expected to suppress our feelings and emotions “for the greater good.”

"We don’t know what challenges the next few months will bring, but rest assured that we will continue to not only identify those challenges but to create ways in which to deal with them.”

As we approach the end of the school year, there are many who are trying to decide whether this is the year to retire or change careers. Our retirement eligible members are weighing the longer working hours and increased responsibilities against the fact that they are probably not only going to see a wage increase, but that they will also have to increase their retirement contribution by 2% just to keep the benefits they already have.

With all of this in mind, it is helpful to remember that we entered education to work with children. Fortunately, there are schools where the leadership does all that it can to protect teachers and others in the building from the excessive stress levels we seem to be dealing with all too often. Several of you have stopped to explain how the loss/retirement of a really good principal is going to have a negative impact on your school culture. One of the lessons we all eventually learn is that even outstanding principals experience the same type of burn out the rest of us do.

One bright light on the horizon appears to be the fact that many politicians are beginning to realize that “No Child Left Behind” is an unworkable model which needs to be fixed before every single school in the US shows up on the “Needs Improvement” list.

We continue to do all that we can for each of you as an individual as well as for the collective good of the organization.

It is important, however, to keep in mind that TA AAC is an organization of over 5,500 members who sometimes need to act as one in order to protect the rights of all.

We don’t know what challenges the next few months will bring, but rest assured that we will continue to not only identify those challenges but to create ways in which to deal with them.

Keep up the good work.
From Contentia this month . . . *A Bone of Contention*

TAAAC contends final grade sheets/report cards are due *June 15, 2011* for all grade levels.

The Negotiated Agreement stipulates: “Grade sheets/report cards for the final grading period will not be due until the last teacher work day for teachers using computerized report cards.”

In the settlement of a grievance instituted last spring on behalf of ten elementary school teachers, a voluntary agreement was reached: “The Board agrees to abide by the due date for elementary computerized report cards for the final grading period as stated in the Negotiated Agreement.” TAAAC contends that all elementary schools use computerized report cards. Grades are, in fact, entered on the computer. Therefore, final grades are not due until the last teacher work day – for both elementary and secondary.

*The Associate Superintendent for the Office of School Performance disagrees.*

Despite the agreement signed by both parties on December 14, 2010, the Associate Superintendent for the Office of School Performance informed TAAAC on April 26, 2011 that he will not abide by that written settlement. He contends that elementary report cards are not computerized in the same sense as secondary report cards. Furthermore, he threatens to pull out the old report cards from the warehouse forcing elementary teachers to write out their final report cards by hand despite the clause in the Negotiated Agreement stating: “Automated Reporting: The Board and TAAAC agree that automating interim reports, comment sheets, and report cards at the elementary level is a mutually shared goal.”

Surely this is intended to punish teachers for daring to grieve the issue – another contract violation. “**No reprisals:** Neither the Board nor any member of the administration shall take reprisals affecting any party in interest by reason of participation in the grievance procedure.”

TAAAC expects that a memo from the aforementioned associate superintendent will soon reach principals informing them of an elementary report card due date in early June.

TAAAC intends to reinstitute this grievance and take it to arbitration. We are looking for additional grievants to add to our list from last June. We will seek a remedy of double per diem pay for all hours worked to complete report cards during personal planning time, non-paid duty-free lunch, and before or after the official work day. Reconstruct your records from last year and maintain careful records this year should you be required to complete your final grades before June 15, 2011. Contact your UniServ Director immediately to discuss how this contract violation may have impacted you.

**Notice to K-5 teachers**

Participation in the training for the Macmillan-McGraw/Hill’s Treasures 2011 comprehensive reading language arts program is **voluntary**!

**Substitutes**

The school system is having difficulty obtaining qualified subs for all schools on a daily basis despite having some 1500 substitutes on the roles. Thus, many Unit I members are asked to cover classes, sometimes on a frequent basis. The Negotiated Agreement states: “Except in an emergency which occurs during the school day, no teacher shall be required to take a class for another teacher unless the teacher requested to take the class is given a reduced schedule or work load within the next five (5) work days.”

We recommend that when you are requested to sub for another teacher’s class that you ask at that time for a response as to when in the next five work days you will be given the reduced schedule or work load. If you don’t get the appropriate reduction, contact your UniServ Director to discuss the handling of this contract violation.
Laura Groo
Teacher of the Year

TAAAC member Laura Groo is pictured with husband Steve Groo, reacting to her selection to Teacher of the Year. Laura moved to Maryland from Flagstaff, Arizona, where she earned her Master’s Degree in Education at the Center for Excellence in Education at Northern Arizona University. After four years at Matthew Henson Elementary School in Prince George’s County, she took a 13-year break to work as a full time volunteer and parent, developing cultural arts programs in her local schools and teaching after school drama classes. Groo has been using arts integration to teach 6th grade Language Arts at Southern Middle School for the past eight years, where she has collaborated with colleagues to develop a cross-curricular service learning project with Kenya Connect. This summer she will be returning to Eastern Kenya to provide professional development and model 21st Century teaching and learning skills to her student’s pen pal partner school.

ATTENTION TEACHERS!!

The TAAAC Minority Affairs/Human Relations Committee needs your help. Due to an overwhelming response from students for participation and the limited number of questions available for presentation, the TAAAC Multi-Cultural History Bee has been cancelled for the last two years. The Committee is interested in revamping and modifying this event to maintain the enjoyment of and the cultural awareness associated with this worthwhile activity.

We need teachers to sacrifice one of their non-duty summer days to join other TAAAC members in formulating new and challenging questions and answers for the Bee. The date is still yet to be determined, but will probably be one day in July (and the TAAAC office is air-conditioned!). The meeting(s) will most likely be 4-6 hours in length and lunch can be provided if the meetings are held during lunch time. The dates will be announced in May or June.

Please plan to join us to ensure the History Bee will be held this year and we can continue the tradition of diversity education for our students. RSVP to the TAAAC office at 410-224-3330 if you can help the Committee with this time-consuming effort.

NOMINATIONS OPEN

The TAAAC Nominating Committee is accepting nominations for a MSEA Delegates. Nomination forms will be accepted until the June 1, 2011 Association Representative Council meeting.

Name __________________________________________________________
Address _________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
School ___________________________________________________________
Phone (H) ____________________ (W) ____________________
email ___________________________________________________________

I would like to place my name in nomination for the following position(s):

☐ MSEA Delegate
(1st time delegate yes/no)

“Education is a social process.
Education is growth.
Education is, not a preparation for life; education is life itself.”

- John Dewey