



sta note

PLA Schools Fact vs. Rumor

As of today, we do not know with any certainty which SCSD schools will be identified as Persistently Low Achieving (PLA) by the State Education Department. What we do know, however, is that the rumor mill is churning and most of what you are hearing is wrong. Below is an attempt to bring some facts into the discussion:

Rumor # 1: If our school is identified as PLA by the state, all the teachers will be fired. As most of you are well aware, tenured teachers in New York State have a right to due process under Section 3020-a of the Education Law. This means that you can't be fired just because your school has been identified as PLA. Even under the new Race to the Top-driven evaluation regulations (which won't even be in

place until next year at the earliest), your right to a fair hearing hasn't been eliminated.

Rumor #2: If our school is identified as PLA by the state, our contract will be "thrown out the window."

The STA contract will not be thrown out the window. There have been some changes negotiated for the current PLA schools involving extra-time (compensated extra time), professional development, and additional teaching assignments at Fowler (also compensated) in order to meet the state's requirements for additional funding, but the rest of the contract (wages, health and dental, etc...) is still in place.

Rumor #3: If our school is identified as PLA by the state, we will all have to reapply for our jobs and if

we're not hired, we will be fired. See Rumor #1. More importantly, however, is the fact that no one has lost their job due to a school's PLA status. This is not to say that there won't be staffing changes at the newly identified buildings. A state mandated re-application process would likely be a part of the redesign process just as it was in the three current PLA schools. At this point, it is impossible to say what the extent of that re-staffing will be. That will depend on how many schools the state identifies as PLA.

The STA has been involved in the PLA process and turning around schools since we first had to do this last year. We have negotiated redesign teams that include teachers from the affected buildings in order to ensure that the new plans reflect the best thinking of the practitioners who will be charged with improving student achievement. We have negotiated fair compensation for additional work and ensured that our members' rights are protected throughout this difficult process and we will continue to do so.

Much like the new evaluation system for teachers and principals, we believe the forced turnaround of schools is a misguided mandate that does not address the real issues we face in poor urban districts every day. Nevertheless the reformers in Washington and Albany have spoken and we are left to deal with the consequences of their actions. A strong union is critical in these changing times, and the STA is here to advocate for members, protect their rights and seek opportunities to expand their professional voice.

Are You Waiting for Superman? Not Us!

An AFT Editorial

Is America ready to settle for a good education—for the few? That's the unfortunate takeaway from the recently released documentary film, "Waiting for 'Superman.'" The film, by Davis Guggenheim, shows how tragically far we are from the great American ideal of providing all children with the excellent education they need and deserve. Yet, despite Guggenheim's unquestionably good intentions, "Waiting for 'Superman'" is inaccurate, inconsistent and incomplete—and misses what could have been a unique opportunity to portray the full and accurate story of our public schools.

One can't help but be moved by the stories of the five children and their families Guggenheim follows as they encounter a lottery system for admission to the schools upon which they are pinning

their hopes for a good education. Their stories, in a very real and emotional way, drive home the point that the opportunity for a great public education should come not by chance, but by right.

But the filmmaker's storytelling falters in other key areas. The film casts several outliers in starring roles—for example, "bad" teachers and teachers unions as the villains, and charter schools as heroes ready to save the day. The problem is that these caricatures are more fictional than factual.

There are more than 3 million teachers working in our 130,000 public schools. Are there bad teachers? Of course there are, just as there are bad accountants, and lawyers, and actors. We wish there were none. There also are countless good, great and exceptional teachers working

in our public schools every day in neighborhoods across the country—although for this film, they apparently ended up on the cutting room floor. It is shameful to suggest, as the film does, that the deplorable behavior of one or two teachers (including an example more than two decades old) is representative of all public school teachers.

Guggenheim has found ways to make facts and data interesting, even entertaining. But, when certain facts don't advance his story line, he makes them disappear. The treatment of charter schools is one of the most glaring inconsistencies in "Waiting for 'Superman.'" Guggenheim makes only glancing reference to the poor achievement of most charter schools, despite the abundance of independent research showing

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that most charter schools perform worse than or only about as well as comparable regular public schools. Nevertheless, he illogically holds them up as the ticket to a good education for disadvantaged students.

We wish all schools had the wealth of resources enjoyed by the charter schools featured in the film, which are part of the Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ). The charter schools in the HCZ have what we should be fighting to have in every public school—services that help eradicate the barriers to academic success, and funding to ensure that students and teachers have the tools they need to succeed. HCZ schools receive two-thirds of their funding from private sources and one-third from the government. This private money funds staff and curriculum, as well as extensive medical, dental and tutorial services. We know students needs are met when these wraparound services are combined with high-quality instructional programs. In the end, funding these programs will make a fundamental difference for all children.

"Waiting for 'Superman'" misses two crucial points. First, we have to be committed to supporting a public school system that provides all our children with access to a great education. And second, we must focus our efforts on the most promising and proven approaches—those great neighborhood public schools that work. We've seen such success stories across the country, such as Say Yes that reduce barriers to academic success, as is done in the HCZ schools; schools that offer great curriculum, extra help for students who start or fall behind, and supports for teachers. Where the system has failed is to not

take these proven models and scale them up. The solutions aren't the stuff of action flicks, but they work.

Films like "Waiting for 'Superman'" are gripping for a reason: They connect us to real life struggles. They may even call much-needed attention to the challenges confronting many students and schools. But the attention will be misplaced, if it centers on off-base solutions and denigrating good teachers rather than on what works to improve our schools. Imagine a sequel to "Waiting for 'Superman'" released a few years from now. Would we rather stick to the cinematic model of providing an escape hatch—sometimes superior, most often inferior—to a handful of students? Or would we offer a model in which we had summoned the will to do the hard but effective and far-reaching work required to make meaningful changes to entire school systems, providing all children with the best possible choice—a highly effective neighborhood school?

The most effective solutions didn't make it into the film. In other words, Guggenheim ignored what works: developing and supporting great teachers; implementing valid and comprehensive evaluation systems that inform teaching and learning; creating great curriculum and the conditions that promote learning for all kids; and insisting on shared responsibility and mutual accountability that hold everyone, not just teachers, responsible for ensuring that all our children receive a great education.

We would urge Davis Guggenheim to follow up his film with a sequel that tells the full and accurate story about public education in this country. That would be a movie worth seeing.

For more responses to the film, go to www.notwaitingforsuperman.org

STA Snapshots...



STA School Budget Group

The STA is looking for members interested in participating in a study group which will examine the SCSD budget proposal for the 2010-2011 school year. This group will look at the SCSD budget process and proposals in the context of how these things impact our work in the classrooms. We believe our members should have an understanding and be informed about the financial decisions that shape our working lives. We also believe the STA's voice should be heard as the SCSD plans for these difficult financial times. Please join us in this important work. Interested members should call Karen (kbambacht@syrteach.org) at the STA office. Meeting dates will be established soon.

Special Ed Leadership Team

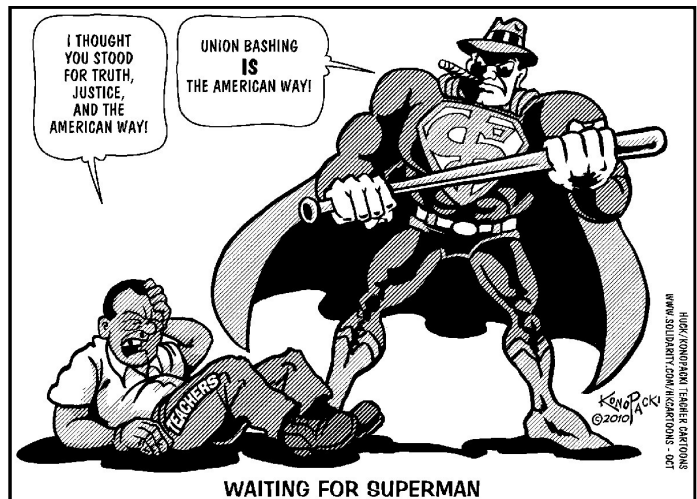
The STA and SCSD are looking for representatives for the district wide Special Education Leadership Team. It would be great if each school had a representative at the meeting. You do not need to be a Special Education teacher to be part of the committee.

Meetings are held at Lincoln Middle School on the first Wednesday of the month at 3:15 PM.

Related Service Provider Mtg

The STA is holding a meeting on November 18, 2010 for Related Service Providers. The meeting will take place at the STA Office at 3:30 PM. This meeting is being held to discuss the new Medicaid regulations and the new SCSD policies and procedures for the new regulations. If there are questions or concerns please email them to Mike Foley - mfoley@syrteach.org prior to the meeting.

2010 STA Apparel Sale - More Info Coming Soon...



WAITING FOR SUPERMAN

www.syracuseteachers.org