

The United Voice

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Win a \$100 Gift Certificate to Target!

Read the article on page 2.

Amy Pugh, Chisholm Life Skills, receives a \$100 Gift Certificate to Target from UTW President Larry Landwehr. Amy won the prize in our first drawing. Any UTW member can enter the monthly drawings by writing a letter or email and sending it to a BOE member, legislator, or the Wichita Eagle. See the rules for the drawing on our web site.



The '4' Campaign

Your Chance of Winning \$100 is pretty good!

Part of the '4' Campaign is an effort to educate UTW members about speaking out on behalf of teachers and public schools. Most teachers have continued a years long pattern of public silence about public schools. Face it, most UTW members are Republicans, and most of our friends and neighbors are Republican. Can we really expect a backlash against the legislators in Topeka from the folks who voted them into office? Maybe. It will take work. The average voter must find out the other side of the story about public schools and teachers. All they hear from legislators and politicians is that teachers and their unions are greedy and against reform. Where is the other side of the story coming from?

The other side of the story must come from YOU. We are not talking about an occasional letter to the editor, or a one time letter writing campaign at a Pro Rep meeting. We are talking about a sustained effort by a major-



Katie Kanngiesser, Kelly Elementary, accepts a \$100 Gift Certificate to Target from UTW President Larry Landwehr.

ity of UTW members! Hundreds and hundreds of letters and e-mails! On our web site are a few of the letters and emails already written. Go through them, and you will see that some of them are quite short - one paragraph, while others are longer and give more details about their situation.

There are two very good reasons for you to write these letters. As a group, public school teachers need to become more vocal in order to generate support for our schools and students. Second, you have a chance to win a \$100 Gift Certificate to Target for your efforts. We are giving two per month. Another positive - you can get your name in three times each month by writing a letter to a BOE member and a legislator and the Wichita Eagle.

If you click on this link, it will take you to our web site where you can read the rules for the drawing and look at some of the letters already written by your colleagues.

From the Desk of the President

The new literacy program, Read Well, was introduced quickly at the beginning of this school year. Our kindergarten teachers have been working very hard to learn and implement the program throughout the district. We have received many calls about the program and its implementation. Since weeks have now passed and teachers have had time (but not enough) to work with the program, I would like to talk with some of you about what you have experienced and how the program is 'working' for you. What are the positives and what are some of the problems as you see them?

If you are a kindergarten teacher or team and would like to help me gather data and information that will be shared with the curriculum department and other administration, please contact me at 262-5171 or llandwehr@utw-ks.org to set up a time for a brief chat. Your time is valuable so I don't plan on taking a lot of it. Thanks for your cooperation and assistance.

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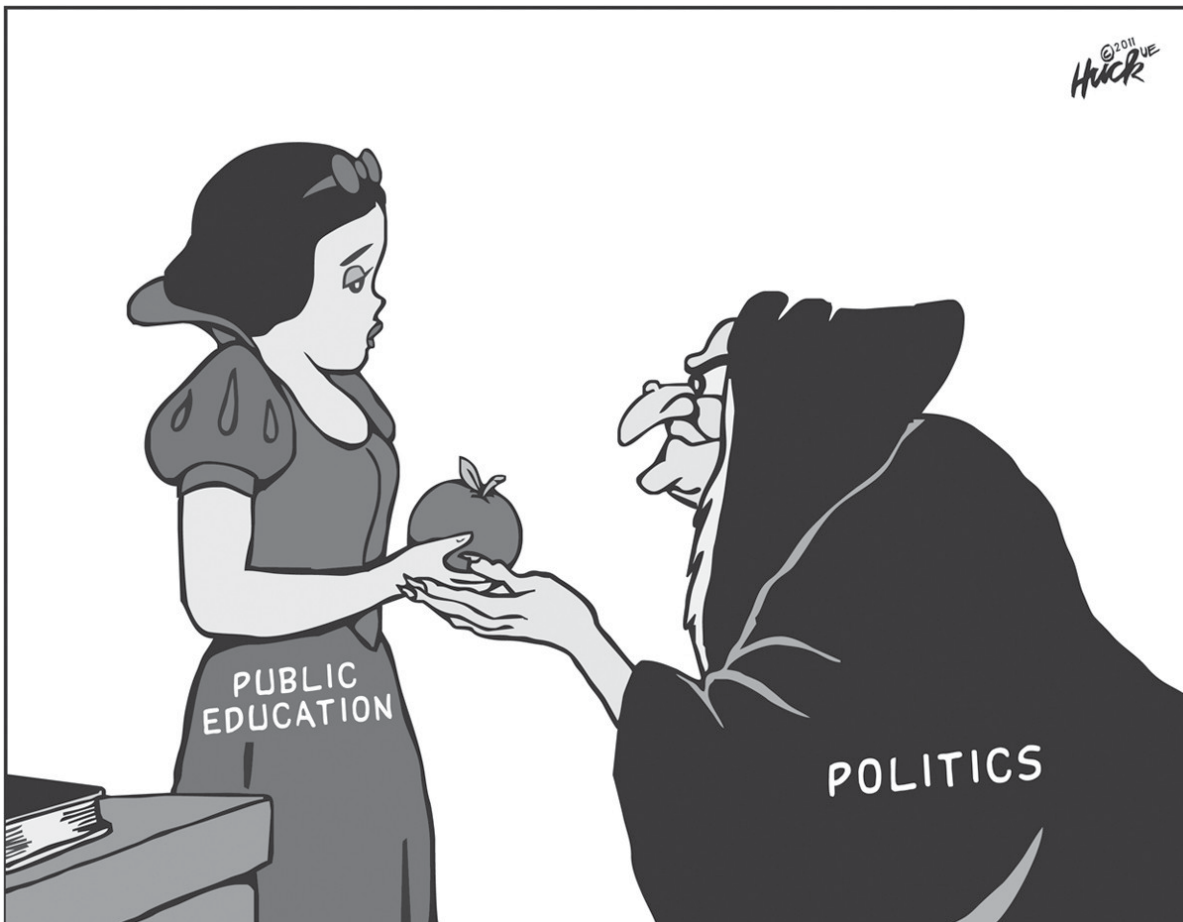


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Welcome to Friendly



My Top Ten Frustrations With Working Conditions

by Andrew Davis

ed. - Andrew is a UTW Pro Rep, member of the UTW Evaluations Committee, and a Nationally Board Certified teacher at NorthWest High School.

After nearly 25 years of teaching, many things have become clear to me, but the most basic is this: every teacher has too much to do, and we all work hard to get our work done. A kindergarten teacher's hard work is much different than a middle school math teacher's, which is much different than a high school science teacher's, but hard work is ubiquitous in USD 259. What is not ubiquitous, however, are the working conditions that make it possible to do our work in the most efficient and effective way possible. There are many reasons for this, but here are the ten reasons I most frequently encounter.

1. When leaders do not know, or choose to pretend not to know, what working conditions are, they inevitably make teachers' working conditions worse. Our working conditions consist of everything that affects our day, not just the contractual limits that prevent egregious cases of abuse. But if leaders can convince themselves that what they do has no effect on teachers' working conditions, then they can wreak havoc unrepentantly.

2. When leaders communicate so poorly that it takes excessive amounts of time to understand what they actually mean, they create unnecessary hoops we must jump through. This can range from mangling the English language so badly that we are left guessing the intent of the message, to creating double-binds in an attempt to manipulate, to providing incomplete or wrong information that just wastes our time. However it is done, poor communication equals poor working conditions.

3. When leaders use "One Minute Manager" techniques to create the perception among teachers that they have been listened to without ever having to actually respond to the teacher's concerns with actions, good working conditions are no more than a sham. We don't need leaders to feel our pain. We need leaders to actually solve problems.

4. When leaders make decisions by not making decisions, we are forced to work in a milieu of leader imposed ambiguity and ambivalence. This inability by management to act creates an ongoing ripple of negative consequences that waste time, energy, and resources.

5. When leaders fail to explore the full range of possible consequences—both intended and unintended—that follow the ebb and flow of the "new" initiatives they promulgate through the district, they inevitably make teachers' jobs far more difficult than they need to be; and when they argue that we'll just have to build the airplane as we taxi down the runway, we can be sure they understand neither their jobs nor metaphors, for such airplanes always crash and kill people.

6. That administrators arbitrarily and capriciously award supplemental contracts is not a new concern, but after four years of no raises it is especially galling; and since there is no transparent process for assigning teachers to these positions and evaluating their work, the district is awash with a fundamental sense of unfairness.

7. When leaders manage by platitude they create an environment of mistrust and the perception of incompetence. Four of my favorites are "We need to do what's good for the children," "I'm concerned about student issues, not adult issues," "If you don't care about kids then you need to find another job," and "Be the guide on the side, not the sage on the stage." All of these claims are based on kernels of truth, but taken out of their original context they become tools for shunning teachers who merely want to explore why a program or policy isn't working as well as it could.

8. When leaders get lost in the fog of forgetfulness that comes with leaving the classroom behind, they tend to blame teachers for pointing out what isn't working, which in turn creates an environment for teachers that is at best uncomfortable and at worst hostile.

9. When leaders use the word "teacher" so indiscriminately (as in "We're all teachers") that they lose sight of the special demands placed classroom teachers, they lose sight of the people they most need to support.

10. When leaders attempt to make teachers feel guilty for saying "no" to more work after they've bought supplies with their own money, given up lunches to work with students, come to work early and stayed late at an extraordinary cost to their families' well-being and their own physical health, they are engendering not only poor, but cruel working conditions.

This is just my list of concerns, and there are as many lists to be written as there are teachers to write them. I for one am unwilling to let these conditions continue to limit my ability to do my job, and I suspect that many of you agree. If so, it is time we demand conditions that let us teach students, even if we have to ignore our bosses.

What Did You Say?

Those of us in the UTW office hear from teachers across the district. We get many phone calls, scads of emails, responses are posted on our Facebook page, and we also have many conversations in the buildings with members. What do we hear from all of these members? A great deal. Sometimes what we hear is a very unique, individual situation that we assist the member with by offering advice, maybe even setting up a meeting with an administrator to solve the problem.

Many of the conversations fall into the category of “just letting you know.” That is ok, but if the situation calls for action, we are hamstrung if the member says, “please don’t tell anybody about this – I don’t want to get in trouble.” This year the calls and conversations are filled with more frustration and stress than normal. Understand, every year has stress in it for teachers.

From our perspective the level of stress is higher this year. The reasons are many. Some teachers cite the continued salary freeze as having an impact on morale and stress, many complain about curriculum related items, such as Read Well, AimsWeb is a common complaint, and the public bashing of teachers along with funding problems for public schools also adds to the stress.

When we are out in the buildings we sometimes get an opportunity to chat with the principal. Several times this year the resulting conversation has been interesting. While talking about teacher and principal workloads being out of control, it has been interesting to note that we seem to be in agreement with some of these principals. One of the points of agreement is the perception that the district is either unaware or doesn’t care about the inability of district educators and principals to effectively implement all of the mandates in a way that benefits students. From a teacher perspective that would be an obvious conclusion, but to hear some principals admit it is surprising.

The concept of getting buy-in from teachers for the need to change before making changes seems to be foreign to management in USD 259. For that reason, along with all of the others mentioned above, stress is up and morale is down. Change is necessary on some level if you want to improve student learning. But the number of changes and the lack of preparation for the changes is astounding. How many different reading programs have we have gone through in the last ten or so years? To many teachers it feels like their stress and discomfort with the newest ‘best’ curriculum is being ignored. Ignoring the stress, morale, and needs of teachers is a dangerous way to manage a school district.

Another comment that has surfaced from a number of teachers this year is – with the curriculum being so scripted, why do we need collaborative planning? Interesting question. We have many teachers working with curriculums that are almost mandating pacing and content of the lessons. We also hear from teachers that to question any of this is tantamount to being labeled a trouble maker, a malcontent. So, the message they are getting is - keep quiet, even if what you are being told to do seems to be counter-productive. No wonder stress is up.

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UTW Contact Info

Larry Landwehr, President
llandwehr@utw-ks.org

Randy Mousley, VP
rmousley@utw-ks.org

Greg Jones, UTW UniServ Director
gjones@utw-ks.org

Keith Welty, UTW Professional Staff
kwelty@utw-ks.org

Rebecca Denton, KNEA Administrative Assistant
rdenton@utw-ks.org

Melody Wade, UTW Administrative Assistant
mwade@utw-ks.org

Web site: www.utw-ks.org

Ph: 316-262-5171 Fax: 316-262-6202

Office hours: M-F, 7:45 AM - 4:45 PM

The United Voice

Keith Welty, Editor

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United Teachers of Wichita
150 South Ida
Wichita, KS 67211
316-262-5171

Larry Landwehr, President
Randy Mousley, Vice-President
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