

## The Synergy of Three – Quality Schools, Healthy Communities, Vital Businesses

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Genesee Valley  
PTA

Monroe County  
Federation  
of Teachers

NYS United  
Teachers

Monroe County  
Association  
of School  
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Monroe County  
Council of School  
Superintendents

Monroe County  
School Boards  
Association

National Education  
Association  
of New York,  
Western New York  
Region

During a recent visit to RIT, former president Bill Clinton hit upon an essential element of America's greatness, *"The power of private citizens to do public good is greater than ever."* Both his Kennedy-esque comments and the first President Bush's "Thousand Points of Light," highlight that the foundation of this nation, its true strength, is the willingness of its people to work for, even sacrifice for, the greater good.



Tom Strining

This effort to maximize community assets for youth has inspired many to help the children of this community reach for the stars.

When young people are surrounded by adults who consistently offer messages of trust, personal responsibility and importance, they are more likely to feel capable and confident in their ability to make sound decisions. They begin to value integrity, honesty, and restraint, and develop the personal power to determine their future.

**We know that if children are to be competitive in the twenty-first century, they need a first class education.** If they are to do well in school, however, they need much support. In a very real sense, they must be guided by caring adults at home, in their places of worship, and in their communities. Thoughtful adults acting as mentors are essential.

In 1995, the Search Institute of Minneapolis, Minnesota, identified 40 characteristics that help children become successful. They range from such things as supportive families, to after-school interests, to access to quality schools, to support from places of worship, to appropriate supervision, to quality health care.

The research clearly shows that all youth, across all socioeconomic status and ethnic lines, benefit from the involvement of caring adults. In a study of the number of assets possessed by 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students, the higher the number of assets the lower the incidence of "high risk behavior, including violence, the use of alcohol and illicit drugs." Students who do well in school are almost without exception those who have caring community assets behind them.

Local involvement with the Search Institute's program began over a decade ago and it continues today through Maggie Brooks' office.

The degree to which we help lead groups such as little league, Pop Warner, swim clubs, theater or church groups helps determine the overall health of our community. As business owners or employers, we hold tremendous power to mentor, to educate youth in the value and dignity of work as well as how to build skills and manage time. As neighbors, we have the power to help let children know they are part of caring, supervised community, one that values the excitement of life that children bring.

We live in a culture of technology where our children spend increasing time in isolation in front of the television, on the Net, with i-pods or hand-held games. It is essential that if our children are to do well, we maximize their interactions with adults where positive relationships can bloom, where the attributes of productive citizenship can be honed.

President Clinton remarked, *"It is wrong to deny anyone a chance to live up to their full potential. ... your country pays a price."* Together we can make better schools simply by giving our time in meaningful ways to the children of today. **We need to increase the odds for all students by making sure that those who have the least receive the gift of our time.** Their future, our future, will be better for it.

For more information, visit the Monroe County Youth Bureau ([www.monroecounty.gov/org161](http://www.monroecounty.gov/org161)) or the Search Institute of Minneapolis ([www.search-institute.org/assets](http://www.search-institute.org/assets)).



Tom Gillett

Monroe County Education Coalition

.....Representing 60,000 Members  
.....A force in our community

## How Does a Vote Show “Caring?”

Tom Gillett, Regional Staff Director, New York State United Teachers

When John Greenleaf Whittier penned “The Poor Voter on Election Day” more than 200 years ago, he celebrated the power of the ballot in granting true equality to all voters: “The rich is level with the poor/The weak is strong today.” Whittier would likely be sympathetic to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’s school budget voters who often feel powerless against the slow but steady rise of various taxes—income tax, sales tax, energy tax, usage tax, etc.

Although our forefathers rallied against “Taxation without representation!” many Americans feel disconnected from the process and helpless in their protests against increasing taxes. Our elected officials continue to be re-elected because they are generally responsive to our interests. We are a society that makes high demands for government services, and taxes are raised to fund those services. For all of our “wants and needs,” we are one step away from direct participation in the funding process—with one gigantic exception: public school funding. And also in the case of public school funding, much of the increased costs that voting property taxpayers must bear were created by the state and federal governments who do not support the costs and do not have to submit *their* budgets for taxpayer approval.

For citizen taxpayers across the State, the May school budget vote is the single opportunity to approve or disapprove spending by their government. It is little surprise that voters are finding it more and more difficult to approve school budgets. Considering the fact that the school levy is the only tax directly before the voters, it’s gratifying that approximately 85% of the budgets are approved each year.

Think for a minute about what we’re really voting on: the transportation service which stops near our home every day in all weather and safely delivers our children to their schools; the teachers, aides and school staff who care for our children for about 7 hours each day—preparing them for tests, adjusting instruction to meet individual needs, responding to their requests, giving them what they need to lead productive, fulfilling lives. Cafeteria workers make sure food is presented and eaten (mostly) rather than tossed; school secretaries keep track of a myriad of daily details—pick up arrangements, forgotten lunch money, doctor appointment connections, etc.

When school budgets are constructed, the major portion of costs are dedicated to those various individuals from the bus attendant to the secretary to the teacher to the principal to the superintendent who provide a wide range of care for children for roughly half of their waking hours. And most districts, through athletics, enrichment and extracurricular events extend care-giving into the evening of almost every day. Band, orchestra, public service clubs, sports events, are all community assets—not just for what they teach kids about life and working together, but for the richness provided to life in the town or school district.

If there was a time to focus on the “big picture,” it must be when making a decision to continue funding the broad array of school services, most delivered cheerfully, competently and consistently day in and day out. Before the moment comes when each individual may choose to say “No” to a tax increase, consider all the capable care and protection provided to the community’s children daily from September through the end of June. School budgets votes measure how much we all care to preserve this key to community health.

