

nysut.org | May/June 2022

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**UNITED**  
A UNION OF PROFESSIONALS

# PUBLIC SCHOOLS UNITE US



**IN A DIVIDED NATION, OUR  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE WHERE  
ALL STUDENTS, PARENTS AND  
EDUCATORS COME TOGETHER  
AS A COMMUNITY.**

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THIS ISSUE OF NYSUT UNITED CONTAINS IMPORTANT INFORMATION REGARDING THE NYSUT MEMBER BENEFITS TRUST'S: (i) SUMMARY ANNUAL REPORT; (ii) SUMMARY OF MATERIAL MODIFICATIONS; AND (iii) NOTIFICATION OF AVAILABILITY OF PRIVACY NOTICE (PAGES 29, 30). PLEASE READ AND RETAIN THIS ISSUE FOR FUTURE REFERENCE.

## NYSUT UNITED [May/June 2022, Vol. 12, No. 5]

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# Union activism delivers in state budget

By Ned Hoskin  
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Addressing many of the proposals in NYSUT's Future Forward Task Force report, the enacted 2022-23 New York state budget moves us a step closer to finally keeping the promise to fully fund Foundation Aid, addresses the teacher shortage and includes needed resources for higher education.

Thanks to NYSUT's advocacy, the fiscal plan increases support for pre-K and expands funding for mental health services. It also provides more for SUNY and CUNY and community colleges, as well as relief for SUNY hospitals.

NYSUT and the house of labor won big as the budget also begins to fix the deeply flawed Tier 6 pension plan, and includes long-deserved bonus compensation for health care workers in education and health care settings who have sacrificed so much during the pandemic.

"This budget delivers historic resources for education, continues

the promise to fully fund Foundation Aid and ends the TAP Gap, all critical steps years in the making," said NYSUT President Andy Pallotta.

"It provides funding to hire mental health staff to support students at every level and to bolster professional learning for educators through teacher centers and implicit bias training," he said.

"But redefining public education as a system that truly supports every child is unceasing work, which is why we'll continue fighting for dedicated funding for community schools that would deliver transformative supports for families in every community," he said. (See article, page 5.)

The pension reform "that will ensure public servants in Tier 6 have access to a high-quality, fair pension," Pallotta said, is not only more equitable, it is critical to tackling the shortage of educators.

"This gives us yet another tool for attracting the next generation of teachers, School-Related Professionals and public employees into state and local service.

"Significant resources for SUNY and CUNY mark a step toward transformational change for our public higher education system," Pallotta said. The promise to cover debt service for SUNY hospitals, "the backbone of the state's pandemic response," he said, is essential for continued quality public health care for New Yorkers.

There is much more work to do. "The legislative session is not done yet, so neither is our work," Pallotta said. "We will continue to advocate on behalf of our members and those they serve as we strive to move our state and our future forward."

The \$220 billion spending plan represents an increase of 1.7 percent over the executive budget and 3.8 percent over last year's enacted budget. Here are some highlights:

## School Aid

A total school aid amount of \$31.2 billion, marking the second year of the three-year phase-in of the Foundation Aid formula. Each school district receives at least a 3 percent increase in Foundation Aid.

## COVID-19 grants

NYSUT has relentlessly emphasized the need to address the social-emotional needs of children striving to emerge from the pandemic. The budget allocates \$100 million for school districts and BOCES to address student well-being and learning loss.

These grants can be used to employ mental health professionals and expand school-based mental health services or other evidence-based mental health supports for students and school staff.



EL WISE NOISETTE

President Pallotta, center, speaks at a news conference with lawmakers and activists to advocate for funding to hire mental health professionals in schools.

## COMING UP



**May 2-6**  
National Teacher Appreciation Week

**May 5-6**  
In-district Committee of 100 meetings

**May 6-12**  
National Nurses Week



**May 7**  
NYSUT Professional Issues Forum on Health Care

**May 9-11**  
School-Related Professionals lobby days



**May 12**  
Health Care Lobby Day

**May 17**  
Statewide school budget and school board voting

**VOTE YES**  
**May 17** ON YOUR SCHOOL BUDGET

**June 3**  
Primary voter registration deadline

**June 18-26**  
Primary Election early voting

**June 28**  
Primary Election day

**GET YOUR VOTE ON!**

Please note, some or all of these events may be conducted as virtual meetings in compliance with COVID-19 and social-distancing guidance.

## ON THE COVER

Cover by Mark Sharer

Continued on page 4...

# Union activism

... Continued from page 3

There's a further \$10 million for student mental health support grants to school districts.

## Implicit bias

Funding was increased to \$1.25 million for the "Many Threads, One Fabric" NYSUT-led implicit bias training for public school educators.

## Teacher centers

The union's support boosted funding by nearly 50 percent to \$21.4 million for teacher centers and \$368,000 for National Board Certification.

## Community Schools

The fiscal plan continues to provide \$250 million in community school funding as a set aside through Foundation Aid.

## 4201 schools

Nearly \$106 million goes to 4201 Schools; \$900,000 each goes to the NY School for the Deaf and the Henry Viscardi school; \$500,000 each for Mill Neck Manor School and the Cleary School; and \$150,000 for the St. Frances de Sales School for the Deaf.

## Minimum wage

\$17.2 million for increased salaries for staff in 4201, 4410, Special Act and 853 Schools that are covered by the increased minimum wage law.

## Universal Pre-K

\$125 million for expansion of universal pre-kindergarten and funding for full-day kindergarten.

## School meals

\$34.4 million for the school meal program.

## Teacher residency

\$30 million for teacher residency programs, \$25 million for the **Teachers of Tomorrow** program and \$2 million for the **Teacher-Mentor Intern Program**.

## School bus driver training grants

\$400,000 per school year to school districts, BOCES or to contract with not-for-profit educational organizations for bus driver training.

## HIGHER ED

### SUNY and CUNY

\$892 million in state aid for SUNY state-operated campuses and \$729 million for CUNY senior colleges.

### Community Colleges

Using 2021-22 as the base year, the budget establishes a 100 percent funding floor for CC Base Aid, which amounts to a \$3.8 million boost for SUNY CCs.

### TAP expansion

Expands TAP to \$1 billion and includes community college part-time students as well as students in non-degree

programs leading to employment; at long last, eliminates the TAP Gap by fully funding TAP tuition credits beginning in fiscal year 2023.

## Mental health

CUNY and SUNY get \$2 million each for mental health services.

## Full-time faculty

\$106 million to be divided equally between SUNY and CUNY to fund new full-time faculty positions at senior and community colleges.

## SUNY hospitals

\$67 million for debt service.

## Modernization

The budget also makes SUNY hospitals eligible — along with community colleges and state-operated campuses — to receive a portion of \$60 million allocated to SUNY to modernize operations. CUNY receives \$40 million.

## Expansion of nursing programs

\$3 million to CUNY and \$2.6 million to SUNY to expand nursing programs.

## LABOR

### Earnings cap

Suspends the wage cap through June 2023 for public retirees who return to work in school districts and BOCES.

## Public pensions

Changes to public pension plans include reducing employee vesting requirements from 10 years of service to five years of service for Tiers 5 and 6; and excluding overtime from the calculation when determining the employee contribution payment for Tier 6 members during COVID-19.

## HEALTH and SAFETY

### Recruitment and retention

The budget provides bonuses to front-line health and mental health care workers who earn \$125,000 or less and, due to NYSUT lobbying, expands covered titles beyond nurses to include therapists, psychologists and social workers, and more, and includes educational work settings. Also establishes a Nurses Across NY program.

### School-based health centers

\$1.9 million for school-based health centers.

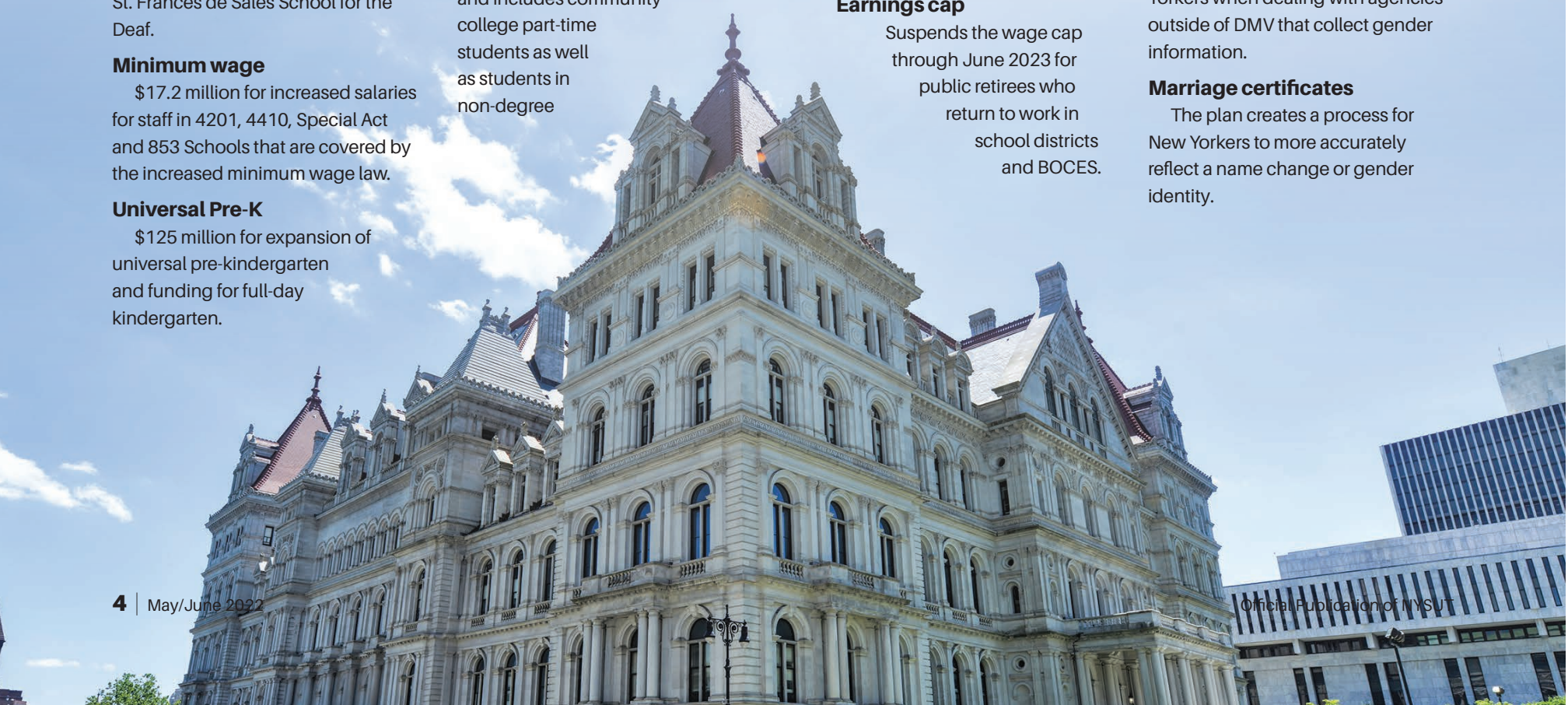
## SOCIAL JUSTICE

### Gender options

It provides an "X" option for transgender and non-binary New Yorkers when dealing with agencies outside of DMV that collect gender information.

### Marriage certificates

The plan creates a process for New Yorkers to more accurately reflect a name change or gender identity.



# Local unions host lawmakers to showcase community schools

By Ned Hoskin  
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Standing with students, parents, school officials and legislators while visiting several public schools across the state this month, NYSUT called for a \$100 million state investment to dramatically increase statewide the number of community schools, a game-changing model that helps students and families address the deeply rooted challenges they face that have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

The additional funding was not included in the enacted 2022-23 state budget, but the union continues its advocacy for this initiative.

“Getting back to ‘normal’ isn’t good enough for our students — it’s time we demand a public education system that truly supports every child,” NYSUT President Andy Pallotta said. “When children face poverty, when their families face food insecurity, when they don’t have access to health care or social services, they don’t come to school ready to learn in the first place. That’s where community schools change the game, helping students and families thrive.”

During lawmaker visits to West Hertel Academy and Lydia T. Wright schools in Buffalo, members of the Buffalo Teachers Federation and officials highlighted why expanding the number of community schools is a cornerstone of NYSUT’s Future Forward campaign, and how Buffalo’s community schools

demonstrate that.

Syracuse features community schools with a wide array of services. At Dr. Weeks Elementary School, Syracuse TA leaders and officials saw the school’s on-site health center, community closet and Parent and Community Room used for adult education seminars and other neighborhood events.

At Saranac Lake’s high school and an elementary school — where the Saranac Lake TA represents staff — the community school program underscores why the program is so critical. Since its inception four years ago, the district has been joined by 20 community partners to deliver

dedicated specifically to creating more community schools and hiring crucial community school coordinators could double the number of districts utilizing the model statewide.

Legislative allies are standing with unions and school communities in advocating for that funding.

“Buffalo’s community schools have been transformational for our students and families,” said state Sen. Sean Ryan, D-Buffalo.

“Today’s schools and educators are doing more than ever to provide supports that haven’t traditionally been part of public education,” said state Sen. John Mannion, D-Geddes. “We need to invest in more commu-



On site at West Hertel Academy, officials highlight why expanding the number of community schools is a cornerstone of NYSUT’s Future Forward campaign, and how the success of Buffalo’s community schools underscores why that is so critical.

services ranging from internet assistance to a weekend food program to before- and after-school child care to telehealth, dental and eye care.

Replicating this success requires a significant infusion of state resources. Statewide, fewer than 300 out of more than 700 school districts utilize the community school model. New annual state funding of \$100 million

nity schools so students and families have the best possible environment for learning and success,” he said.

Buffalo, Syracuse and Saranac Lake are just a few of the stops NYSUT has made to highlight the success of community schools. More information on the union’s Future Forward campaign is available at [futureforwardny.org](http://futureforwardny.org).



The 2022 school budget and board votes are more important than ever.

Since before the days of COVID-19, national anti-union, anti-public education organizations have been trying to advance a partisan agenda and weaken support for public schools.

The anti-public ed activists “are encouraging their followers to run for local school boards to push out pro-public ed members and undermine public trust,” said NYSUT President Andy Pallotta. “This is a direct threat to districts and the budgets that support public education in our communities.”

That’s why it is critical for NYSUT members, their families and supporters in the community to put forward and support school board candidates who share the union’s positive agenda. (See article page 16.)

May 17 is the statewide school budget and board elections in districts outside of the Big 5 — Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Yonkers and New York City.

**Get more information and pledge to vote:**

[PublicSchoolsUniteUs.org](http://PublicSchoolsUniteUs.org)



# Steering toward respect

## Lisbon bus drivers secure salaries, improved pay, benefits

By Liza Frenette  
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**T**he school bus drivers and bus monitors of the Lisbon Association of Non-Instructional Employees have sealed the deal on a new contract that provides salaries rather than hourly wages, pay increases and improved benefits.

The contract is a testament to union power to help with the nationwide shortage of school bus drivers and improve the working conditions of members.

“The district had problems filling all the positions. Some (bus drivers) were thinking about leaving prior to this, but have since decided to stay,” said Royal Taylor, president of the Lisbon ANIE union.

Prior to this contract, drivers and monitors were paid by the hour,

which meant they had no income during holiday breaks and spring breaks. Most of them were laid off during the pandemic.

“It is hard to go through Christmas and other holiday shutdowns without a paycheck. Having a salary now is really helpful on the finances as there is no holiday on the car payment and mortgage,” Taylor said.

The three starting salary bus driver position categories are \$21,000 for drivers working four hours per day, \$31,500 for six hours and \$42,000 for eight hours. Bus monitors will now earn starting salaries of \$11,004 for four hours per day, \$16,505 for six hours and \$22,008 for eight hours.

Additional bus runs for sports, band, field trips, any scholastic, extra-curricular or other trips are at an hourly rate. The contract also secures improved meal rates for those drivers. Previously, drivers have had to scramble hard to find a meal at \$6 for

breakfast, \$8 for lunch, or \$12 for supper. Under the new contract, drivers secured a flat \$20 per meal.

The contract also includes procedures to fairly distribute extra bus runs; establishes layoff and recall procedures for the first time; and provides access to a comprehensive health insurance plan and the ability to maintain health insurance in retirement.

The Lisbon ANIE has 28 non-instructional categories of job titles, including food service helper, bus driver, cleaner, monitor, cook, custodial worker, custodian and keyboard specialist.

The union established itself as the bargaining unit for the bus drivers and monitors, and then negotiated from September 2021 to February 2022 to secure this contract under the guidance of NYSUT labor relations specialist Robert Smith.

### NYSUT supports statewide leaders in primaries

The statewide union endorsed U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer, Gov. Kathy Hochul, Attorney General Letitia James and Comptroller Tom DiNapoli for re-election.

Gov. Hochul and Sen. Schumer must first overcome primary challenges.

New York primary elections are slated for **June 28**. **Early voting** runs from **June 18–26**. Check with your county boards of election for locations and times.

Sen. Schumer has long been an ardent supporter of the work of NYSUT members. The now Senate majority leader has always credited NYSUT’s support as key to his first race to knock off teacher-bashing incumbent Sen. Al D’Amato in 1998.

“We’re proud to call Sen. Schumer a friend of NYSUT members and organized labor across the state and country,” NYSUT President Andy Pallotta said.

NYSUT’s endorsement of Hochul is the union’s first endorsement for a gubernatorial candidate since 2006.

“Gov. Hochul has met the challenges we face head-on from day one of her administration, proving she has what it takes to lead New York through the pandemic and to new heights,” Pallotta said.

“She demonstrated her commitment to listening to the needs of our members during the state budget process, and we look forward to working with her to build on our high-quality public education, higher education and health care systems.”



From left, bus drivers Theresa Kroger, Janet Schembry and Dominic Testani, all members of the Lisbon Association of Non-Instructional Employees local, recently secured a new contract that improves pay and benefits.

PHOTOS PROVIDED



# Union takes lead on statewide implicit bias training

By Kara Smith  
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**N**YSUT's implicit bias train-the-trainer workshop is a game changer.

"This is union-led social justice work," said J. Philippe Abraham, NYSUT secretary-treasurer, whose office leads social justice initiatives for the statewide union. "We want participants to really understand what implicit bias is, how to recognize it and move beyond any biases they may have."

The union received a \$1 million state grant last year to tackle the important work of raising awareness of implicit bias, defined by Ohio State University's Kirwan Institute as holding "negative attitudes about people who are not members of one's own 'in group.'" These preferences can cause us to discriminate against people who are different than us — whether we do so knowingly or not. NYSUT's groundbreaking work was recognized by the state with an additional \$1.25 million dollar grant in the recently enacted budget to expand the union's implicit bias training program statewide over the coming year.

The union will offer virtual and in-person trainings, the first of which was held in early March.

"The goal is to have everyone dig deep and immerse themselves in the training," said Abraham. He noted that a big part of the training is learning how to diffuse conflict, understand the power of language and how our words are perceived by others and to learn the importance of active listening.

Deb Rothar, a Half Hollow Hills Teachers Association executive board member completed the virtual

training and was able to assist with NYSUT's first in-person offering. The training is powerful and has different dynamics depending on the setting, Rothar said. In person, she believes that people share more and are will-

Microaggressions & Stereotypes," a series of workshops that raise awareness about the role of implicit bias in classroom dynamics. NYSUT hosts the train-the-trainer workshops in conjunction with the National Education



In early March, NYSUT trained a new cadre of union members to lead a series of workshops that raise awareness about the role of implicit bias in classroom dynamics. It was the fifth training session and the first held in-person.

ing to "get more vulnerable" when they can talk informally, or offer physical comfort when someone needs it.

And she appreciated the support. "It was very intense for me," she said noting that one woman of color's personal story moved her to tears. "Hearing about what others have gone through was sometimes uplifting and sometimes heartbreaking.

"When a person sitting in front of you" shares a deeply personal experience it fosters a connection with them and builds empathy, she explained.

The union is preparing a new cadre of members to lead "Sticks & Stones: Understanding Implicit Bias,

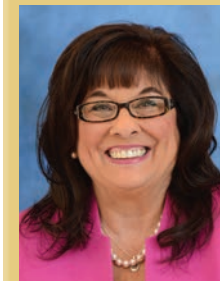
Association.

Once trained, participants are asked to plan at least two implicit bias trainings in their area. "We provide all the necessary help, including workshop materials, assistance from other facilitators if needed, even food upon request," said Abraham noting that, so far, nearly 100 NYSUT members are trained workshop leaders.

To learn more about future train-the-trainer sessions, or schedule an implicit bias workshop for your district, visit [nysut.org/implicitbias](https://nysut.org/implicitbias). To learn more about NYSUT's social justice initiatives, visit [nysut.org/socialjustice](https://nysut.org/socialjustice).



## Sandie Carner-Shafran, a lifetime of activism and leadership



Whether she's volunteering at a drive-thru food bank, making masks for frontline workers, helping

establish a women's committee in her local, or helping to deliver truckloads of books to local school children, Sandie Carner-Shafran, Saratoga Adirondack BOCES Employees Association, is the consummate unionist. Fellow members know that her leadership is something they can count on, and that she's devoted to improving her profession, her community and her union.

A NYSUT Board member, Carner-Shafran's other union roles have included serving as a NYSUT Retiree Advisory Committee member, serving on NYSUT's School-Related Professionals Advisory Committee and serving on the AFT's Program and Policy Council. Carner-Shafran is also a policy board member for the Greater Capital Region Teacher Center.

Her lifetime of service hasn't gone unnoticed. She's received the prestigious AFT Albert Shanker Pioneer Award, NYSUT's SRP of the Year Award and now the NYSUT Legacy Award, thanks to the gratitude of SABEA members.

"Sandie, we cannot thank you enough for all your years of service and support," said Jo James, SABEA president. "We are thrilled to have this opportunity to honor you!"

To honor an in-service or retiree activist from your area, visit [nysut.org/legacyfund](https://nysut.org/legacyfund).

# NYSUT officers look to next 50 years

By NYSUT United staff

In his address to delegates at the 50th annual NYSUT Representative Assembly, President Andy Pallotta acknowledged the union's great past and future potential.

"We stand on the shoulders of giants!" he said, urging all the retired members in the audience to stand.

"I've been around long enough to agree with history teachers who say: 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it,'" he said, emphasizing the celebration of 50 years as New York State United Teachers.

Pallotta announced a new statewide initiative called "Our Legacy, Our Future" that will document, preserve and share NYSUT's history. Most importantly, he said, it will include opportunities for leaders and members to share their personal memories and stories.

Two years into the pandemic, he said, "this second year ... seemed even more challenging than the first.

"This year we are fighting to press the pause button on APPR for another year," he said.

Pallotta also reported that NYSUT is fighting for repeal of the receivership law. "This miserable law," he said, takes "a school that is struggling and makes things worse."

He thanked all NYSUT members and leaders for "doing everything you have done, for getting our kids back in the classroom safely."

Pallotta said the teaching profession faces many challenges in the next 50 years, and the union will lead the way in facing them.

He also announced a new NYSUT campaign to "Fix Tier 6!" noting that after the flawed Tier 4 was enacted 40 years ago, labor worked for 24 years for tier equity, and won. More than a third of the membership is in Tier 6. "It won't be quick or easy, but

that fight begins today." (See page 3 for Tier 6 gains in the newly enacted budget.)

Executive Vice President Jolene T. DiBrango had two simple words for RA delegates: Thank you.

"For some of you, you've heard these words a lot over the past two years for the awe-inspiring work you've done to serve New York's students and patients," DiBrango said. "For some of you, you haven't heard those words nearly enough."

DiBrango thanked members for embracing the union's Take a Look at Teaching initiative, which aims to diversify the profession and encourage more people to consider careers in education. She noted NYSUT activists have successfully advocated for changes to the state's certification process.

She praised members of the NYSUT Women's Committee, under the leadership of member co-chairs Aisha Cook and Leslie Rose. "NYSUT

must remain strong," he said.

Gross announced a new SRPs Rising initiative, aimed at helping SRP locals become stronger and more active. He also singled out NYSUT's health care professionals and mental health support staff. "They have been asked to do Herculean tasks with little time to prepare and many times without necessary resources."

NYSUT will continue to press for appropriate staffing of nurses, psychologists, social workers and counselors in hospitals and schools. And for members, the union will be launching NYSUT Lifeline, with trained peer counselors staffing the phones five days per week to take confidential phone calls.

Secretary-Treasurer J. Philippe Abraham announced that, "There will be no dues increase for this year," noting that the union remains fiscally strong and continues to offer members value through its Member Benefits programming.

"In the coming months, NYSUT Member Benefits plans to launch, on a pilot basis, a no-cost legal program to help members who fall in the lower portion of the salary scale," he said, explaining that making quality legal advice available to members is important during contentious times.

Abraham also highlighted NYSUT's social justice initiatives, including the "Many Threads, One Fabric" series and the new Social Justice Academy.

"Throughout the 50-year history of this organization, we have made great strides, while enhancing the professions in which our members serve," said Abraham. "The future of this union is bright!"

For full coverage of the RA, including each of the NYSUT officer's remarks, visit [nysut.org/ra](https://nysut.org/ra).



EL-WISE NOISETTE

From left, NYSUT Second Vice President Ron Gross, Executive Vice President Jolene T. DiBrango, President Andy Pallotta, Executive Director Melinda Person and Secretary-Treasurer J. Philippe Abraham pose with a billboard promoting NYSUT's Public Schools Unite Us campaign.

women are working to ensure that all students learn about the impact women have made in our society," DiBrango said.

Second Vice President Ron Gross praised NYSUT's retirees for forging ahead and not letting the pandemic stop their fierce advocacy.

"The bond between in-service members and retirees





## “Not for Ourselves Alone:” The Sandy Feldman Outstanding Leadership Award



### Debra Penny

For 28 years at Staten Island’s PS 32, Debra Penny was a passionate elementary school teacher, beloved by students, parents and colleagues.

Penny, who is the treasurer of United Federation of Teachers, has put that same kind of dedication into her union work — serving in many positions with the UFT and as a NYSUT board member.

Penny cares deeply about safeguarding the retirement benefits for both current and future union members. Using the expertise she gained after years as a UFT pension specialist, Penny was elected in 2016 to serve as a trustee of the New York City Teachers’ Retirement System Board. She is now chair of the city’s TRS Board. She was out front successfully advocating for a death benefit for public employees who died due to COVID-19.

On the national front, Penny serves as the co-chair of the American Federation of Teachers Trustee Council, and as a member of the National Council on Teacher Retirement and the National Council of Public Employee Pensions. In recognition of her fiduciary achievements, Penny has been named to the National Association of Securities Professionals’ Wall Street Hall of Fame.

Penny began her union work as a UFT chapter leader. She rose through the ranks as a UFT educational liaison, a special representative and political action coordinator on Staten Island, going on to become the borough representative in 2012. “Her knowledge, work effort and compassion motivate her each day as she serves both active and retired unionists,” said UFT Vice President Anne Goldman, who nominated Penny for the NYSUT honor.



### Dawn Sherwood

With a career spanning four decades, former Hempstead Classroom Teachers Association President Dawn Sherwood is known as a great educator and unionist.

As a high school history teacher, Sherwood collaborated with colleagues to bring relevant, real-world opportunities beyond the classroom. She is well known for imparting not only her knowledge of historical events but also thought-provoking sayings that many people in HCTA called “Dawnisms.”

Sherwood has worked tirelessly to build community coalitions to support students and families. She organized monthly dinner meetings with a team of parents and educators to share challenges, priorities and common ground. She spearheaded immigrant law sessions to assist undocumented members of the community. Under her leadership, the HCTA Community Outreach Committee hosted annual health fairs, book drives and clothing collections. When charter schools first applied to open in Hempstead, Sherwood quickly mobilized HCTA members and the community to demand equality and accountability.

Sherwood began her union service as a building rep; she quickly moved up to grievance chair, first vice president and president. She completed leadership training through NYSUT, AFT, AFL-CIO and the Cornell Industrial Labor Relations School. She also guided HCTA through NYSUT’s Local Action Project and groundbreaking work on an educator evaluation system.

Since retiring, Sherwood continues to stay active in the HCTA and is vice president of the Hempstead Educator Retiree Association. “Dawn is an amazing educator, unionist, colleague, leader and friend,” said HCTA President Nicole Brown.

## Humanitarian Award



### Matthew DiStefano

Sachem Central Teachers Association member Matthew “Dezy” DiStefano is the winner of NYSUT’s inaugural Humanitarian Award. DiStefano died in January 2020 from a rare

form of kidney cancer.

DiStefano was honored for his inspiring work in creating the DezyStrong Foundation, which has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to help defray the cost of cancer treatments for patients battling the disease and to make families as

comfortable as possible in their time of need.

SCTA member Matt Rivera said when DiStefano learned of his diagnosis, “His response was to find a way to help other people. That’s the kind of person he was. It’s his most important legacy.”

The impetus for the Humanitarian Award came from a resolution passed by the SCTA, which asked NYSUT to consider creating an award to recognize members who make significant humanitarian contributions to their communities and inspire others to do the same.

“I’m incredibly proud of NYSUT for taking the time to recognize there’s a need for this award and creating it, not just for Matt, but for educators across the state who should be recognized for their

good work,” said SCTA President Phil Barbera, who spearheaded the push for the award’s creation.

DiStefano’s work galvanized not only the Sachem community, but also attracted the support of professional sports teams and collegiate and high school athletic programs throughout the country. Recently, the DezyStrong Foundation Infusion Suite was opened at Huntington Hospital on Long Island to help make patients more comfortable while undergoing treatments.

“It means so much to my family,” said DiStefano’s wife, Jennifer, of the Humanitarian Award. “It’s something that Matt would be so humbled (by) and be even more motivated to continue to keep going.”



## School-Related Professionals Members of the Year



### Rosemarie Thompson

Rosemarie Thompson grew up in Jamaica and migrated to New York City as a child.

"When we came to the United States and resided in the Bronx, I had to start fifth grade ... I had great teachers who supported me. And I met a good (school) counselor, and I wanted to become a school counselor through him," Thompson recalled, smiling.

And true to her word, that's just what she became.

Thompson has worked as a school counselor for 24 years.

"You have to love children and be dedicated and flexible. Every generation changes and you have to move along with those changes as an educator," Thompson said. "What I love about our school is we're very nurturing. We provide a very safe space (for students). We see our students for who they are."

Thompson, a member of the United Federation of Teachers, has been an active unionist throughout her career, serving as a chapter delegate and eventually rising to the citywide position of chapter leader for school counselors.

"A union is one big family. We try to always be on the same page so that there is strength in numbers," she said. "As a school counselor you try to teach right from wrong, and I believe in doing right by people."



### Lois Emerick

Lois Emerick, longtime president of the North Babylon Paraprofessional/Cafeteria Aide chapter, knows that knowledge is power. So in her three decades as a union leader, she has worked tirelessly to provide meaningful training for members.

Emerick, a high school special education para, has attended numerous NYSUT and AFT trainings and brought them back to her chapter. She negotiated

specialized training for her unit members who work with students with severe behavioral needs, as well as additional stipends for that training. "In order to do your job well, you need to have the best tools in your toolbox," she said.

In the last round of negotiations, Emerick started open bargaining for her unit to increase transparency and get more members involved. She also serves as an action representative for her building — always looking for opportunities to give back to the community.

"During the pandemic shutdown, Lois reported to work every day to hand out groceries, school supplies and meals to hundreds of families every day," said Kathryn Dein, president of the North Babylon Teachers Organization. "Lois is a tremendous asset to the NBTO and to the children and community of North Babylon."

## Retiree Members of the Year



### Veronica O'Connor

Veronica O'Connor is the definition of NYSUT's "daytime army" of union retirees. The Retiree Council 15/16 president participates in Committee of 100, serves on NYSUT's statewide Retiree Advisory Committee, and is the retiree representative for the Pelham Teachers Association, which keeps Pelham retirees informed and involved. She also serves as a delegate to the Westchester-Putnam Central AFL-CIO

Labor Council, and to the COPE Convention for the Pelham TA.

O'Connor was instrumental in amending RC 15/16's constitution and by-laws and, during the COVID-19 shutdown, transitioned smoothly from in-person to virtual meetings and programs, creating an extensive database of retiree contact information through virtual registrations. O'Connor also encourages member contributions to NYSUT's Disaster Relief Fund.

Throughout her years of union activism she has worked tirelessly, phone banking, lobbying and attending rallies and other events, to help the statewide union elect local and state leaders who support public education, social justice and human rights.

In 2016, O'Connor received NYSUT's Community Service Award. In 2018, the American Federation of Teachers recognized her 50 years of leadership and advocacy with its Living the Legacy Award.



### Barbara Waldmann

When Barbara Waldmann was growing up, she took a job at a factory along with her sister to earn money for college. It wasn't long before she knew something wasn't right. Conditions were deplorable, and the safety of workers was in jeopardy every day they were on the job.

Though just a teenager, Waldmann took it upon herself to look at the contract that covered the union employees and then met with the shop steward, telling him something had to be done. They stopped the factory's knitting machines until working conditions improved. It took just 48 hours before their demands were met.

"That was the beginning of my activism," said Waldmann, who went on to teach for 38 years in New York City public schools.

Now retired, Waldmann's activism has hardly subsided. In fact, it's grown.

A member of the United Federation of Teachers, Waldmann during her retirement has campaigned in numerous states for pro-labor candidates, fought back against anti-union threats, advocated for pro-labor causes, and rallied for the right for workers to organize.

"I think being retired, the union has given me an opportunity to develop parts of myself that I don't even think I knew I had," she said. "Working collectively, we can do so much. I'm just a union person. It's in my blood."



# NYSUT AWARDS

## Higher Education Members of the Year



**Jean Grassman**

A member of the Professional Staff Congress for two decades, Jean Grassman has been a health and safety coordinator with the local since 2009. In that role, she helped build and maintain a robust infrastructure of campus-based health and safety representatives on all of the CUNY campuses. She has advocated before the New York City Council, in labor-management meetings with CUNY, and within

the PSC where she works to define health and safety priorities and ensure technical assessments are conducted.

Since the winter of 2020 when news of COVID-19 began to emerge, Grassman tirelessly led the PSC efforts to keep campuses safe in the face of the pandemic. Her informed guidance, and the organized pressure from her committee, helped win union representation on all campus reopening committees and the right to walkthroughs, which undoubtedly contributed to CUNY's own measured approach to reopening over academic year 2020-21 and the 2021 fall semester.

She has given confidence to thousands of PSC members who know that the union has been active and vigilant in holding CUNY accountable to its obligation to keep the workplace safe.



**Norma Chrisman**

Norma Chrisman has been the president of the Mohawk Valley Community College Professional Association since 2013, representing faculty and non-teaching professionals. She is the first non-teaching professional to serve in this role.

Active in the union from the day she was hired, Chrisman has stepped up to serve in many roles, including on the MVCCPA Grievance Committee and

Executive Board. She has worked as the web developer and webmaster, and the database manager for the union and the PA Benefits Fund. A longtime member of NYSUT's Higher Education Policy Council, she is also on the Community College Conference Planning Committee.

When COVID-19 struck in March 2020, Chrisman, as manager of educational technologies, had to ensure that all MVCC courses were available to faculty and students on the Blackboard Learning Management System. She and a handful of faculty (who were already teaching online), worked to train any faculty who had never used, or had limited knowledge of, the technology as they made the rapid transition.

An ultimate team player, when the union calls, Chrisman answers, "What do you need me to do?"

## Health Care Professional Members of the Year



**Sandra Nin**

Distinguished nurse and unionist Sandra Nin credits two guiding forces in her life: her father, a member of the International Longshoremen's Association, and UFT Vice President Anne Goldman.

"I remember sitting at the table as a little girl listening to my dad," said Nin. He told stories of how the union came in and helped.

Nin started her career at the height of the AIDS epidemic. She worked 15 years in critical care before transitioning to an RN instructor. Still, what she experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic was "unprecedented." The death toll was staggering. Nurses worked endless hours on little sleep. Uncertainty, stress and exhaustion were constant.

Through it all, her union was there, with protective equipment, food and much-needed support. "We never felt alone," said Nin, a Federation of Nurses/ UFT member.

The support a union provides is something Nin learned early in her career when nurses went on strike. "(Goldman) educated you about what was going on outside your own hospital ... and on the need to go out and have a voice."

Nin has fought for better wages, nurse/patient ratios and ending mandatory overtime. "I'm very passionate about nursing. ... I found through the union we're able to help communities, and the patients in hospitals, for better outcomes."



**Mary Brooks**

Mary Brooks was a person you could always count on to work tirelessly and unselfishly to help better the professional lives of her colleagues. She managed her union and her professional responsibilities as a physical therapy assistant at Western Suffolk BOCES with diligence, grace and humor. Brooks passed away last October.

As president of the Alliance of School Based Health Professionals for 31 years, Brooks was known as a patient, considerate and thorough chief negotiator who always sought to represent and resolve her members' concerns with the employer. Brooks co-chaired blood drives and coordinated the union's annual participation in NYSUT Making Strides Against Breast Cancer walks. After the tragic death of her adult son Johnny, Brooks helped organize walks to benefit "Shatterproof," an organization dedicated to ending the addiction crisis.

According to a colleague, "One of the most special things about Mary was the depth of her love and devotion to the students she treated. She was well known for taking the most challenging students and, thanks to her wealth of knowledge and skillful hands, she was able to work wonders to make a real difference in their lives."

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# UNION WORK: Delegates set course for the future

**F**rom violence prevention to climate control to support for community schools, more than 1,500 Representative Assembly delegates approved a wide range of resolutions to guide the union's

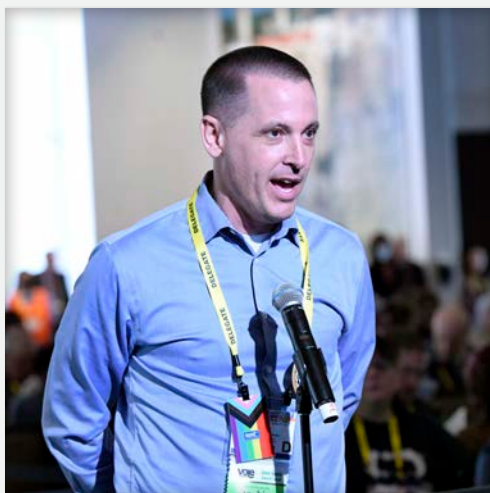
advocacy in the coming year. Many of the resolutions call for state funding and programs to make NYSUT's Future Forward initiative a reality. These include resolutions to hire more mental health staff and

school nurses; and calling for shorter, developmentally appropriate grades 3-8 state assessments.

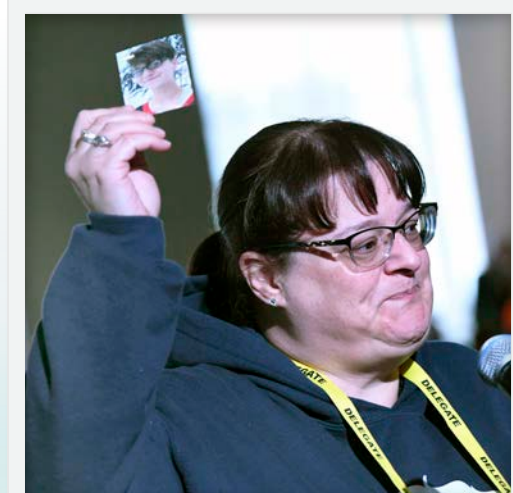
Delegates approved three special orders of business: one in support of the people of Ukraine; one calling

for federal funding to address school and community violence; and a third urging NYSUT to defend LGBTQ+ students and educators.

For complete coverage of RA actions, go to [nysut.org/ra](https://nysut.org/ra).



Declaring receivership penalties are destroying our schools, Kenmore TA's Jeff Orlowski says it's unfair to blame teachers when a student fails a state assessment, especially when research shows they are racially biased. "You're not blaming the doctor whose patient dies of COVID!"



Holding a photo of her transgender son, Tanya Forget-Truesdell of Edwards Knox Service Employees Association speaks in favor of a special order calling for NYSUT to defend LGBTQ+ educators and students. The order condemned the recent wave of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation such as Florida's "Don't say gay" bill that prohibits classroom discussion about sexual orientation or gender identity.

United Federation of Teachers member Janella Hinds speaks passionately on behalf of a resolution calling for NYSUT to provide assistance and raise awareness about the dangers of domestic violence, intimate partner violence and sexual assault.

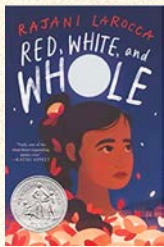


Lia Council, Yonkers Federation of Teachers, speaks on the need to continue work to diversify the teaching profession. "In most regions fewer than 5 percent of educators are teachers of color. ... Teacher diversity is important for all students."



Calling for urgent action to address the school violence crisis, Buffalo Teachers Federation President Phil Rumore offers a special order of business advocating for federal funding to hire more staff and provide support. "The worst thing?" he asked. "Our kids are afraid to come to school."

**Red, White, and Whole**  
**By:** Rajani LaRocca  
**Recommended by:** Caryn Friedman; White Plains Teachers Association



**Suitable for:** Grades 4–8

**Why I chose it:** The main character, Reha, is torn between the two worlds she lives in as a first-generation Indian American in 1983. During the week, she attends school, dances to pop music and rushes home to watch MTV. On the weekends, she visits her family and participates in cultural activities. Her world is turned upside down when her mother, a phlebotomist, is diagnosed with leukemia. In this powerful book in verse, Reha takes the reader on her journey through her mother's illness as she makes friends, explores love and takes care of family obligations.

**What I like best:** The book resonates as a quick but powerful read for many students. The author uses figurative language to help bring Reha to life and convey her emotions as she deals with complex relationships and immense challenges. Students are able to connect with one or more of the issues presented in the book.

**How teachers can use this book:** I used this novel as part of a book club unit that featured books in verse. The descriptive language used throughout helps the reader to visualize the events and connect to the book emotionally.

**About the author:** Rajani LaRocca was born in Bangalore, India, and immigrated to the United States as a baby. A primary care physician, she credits books for inspiring her to pursue medicine and for motivating her to want to live in two different worlds. Her book has won the New York Public Library Best Book of 2021; the *Washington Post* Best Book of 2021; and *School Library Journal* Best Middle Grade Book of 2021.

"Check it Out" features books recommended to teachers and parents by school librarians and other educators. Have a recommendation? Send suggestions, along with your name and local union, to [united@nysut.org](mailto:united@nysut.org).

## Retiree with roots in Ukraine shares history, spreads message of hope

**By Liza Frenette**  
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**Y**ou could say that retired teacher Oksana Kulynych goes back to Ukraine every day. She tracks the grim news or gives presentations to students so they can learn more about a country being invaded by Russia in a horrific military attack.

Kulynych is a Ukrainian-American born in New York City to parents who were refugees during World War II from what was then Soviet Ukraine. Through them, she knows a lot about war and displacement.

She visits high schools and colleges to educate students about the roots of Ukraine's beauty and about its suffering. Kulynych, a member of the United Federation of Teachers, taught special education in the Bronx for decades, and served 10 years as director of the School of Ukrainian Studies. She has led workshops for teachers and presented at National Council on Social Studies conferences, teaching about the Holodomor genocide, a man-made famine lasting from 1932–33

under Stalin's Communist rule.

The students she visits ask what they can do to help as they witness the first military invasion against a sovereign European nation since World War II.

"I tell them, 'Become active in your government. We can do that here; we have a democracy.' I tell them, 'When you see an injustice, when you see wrong, remember that one person can make a difference. Speak out when you see that,'" Kulynych said.

Panagiota Arenas, Yonkers Federation of Teachers, hosted Kulynych for a visit to her 10th grade Global History and Geography class. Arenas said the visit "hit home" for students.

"We're studying WWII and they were able to make comparisons."

Students are learning about the severe harm of totalitarian rule, autocracy and censorship. Between this war



Oksana Kulynych

and the pandemic, they are living history, Arenas said.

Her students collect medical supplies and boots for Kulynych to deliver; and write letters to American officials, urging them to do more, said Arenas.

Kulynych said Russia's illegal invasions of Chechnya, Georgia and Crimea in eastern Ukraine have allowed their totalitarianism to grow.

"Nobody stopped them, and they just kept getting stronger and stronger," she said. "We need to recognize the signs to stop genocides from happening."

Her own family history is a snapshot of a country that has been under siege again and again. Her maternal grandparents fled Ukraine when Russian communists invaded. Her father fought in the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, battling Soviet Russians and Nazi Germany.

Kulynych has been to visit Ukraine twice, once when it was still under Communist rule.

"When I came back to the U.S. I wanted to kiss the ground," she said. "We have freedom here."

### RESOURCES

Delegates to NYSUT's annual convention passed a special order of business in support of Ukraine. Donations to the NYSUT Disaster Relief Fund, [nysut.org/Ukraine](https://nysut.org/Ukraine), will be donated to humanitarian agencies helping the people of Ukraine.

The American Federation of Teachers offers free resources for educators teaching about Ukraine. Visit [nysut.cc/ukrainelessons](https://nysut.cc/ukrainelessons).



# Online event celebrates state's new NBCTs

By **Sylvia Saunders**

sylvia.saunders@nysut.org

**C**hallenging. Humbling. Empowering. Those were some of the words used by the state's newest National Board Certified Teachers to describe their journey earning the nation's highest credential for teachers.

Yonkers teacher Christine Heidelberg called the process "reinspiring," just when she needed it most.

After 17 years in teaching, the pre-K educator was struggling — especially with the pressures of teaching during a pandemic.

The reflective and supportive National Board experience gave her just the jumpstart she needed. "Through this process I've gained so much affirmation and knowledge," Heidelberg said. "I'm excited for the future for myself and my students."

In an online celebration including teachers from around the state, NYSUT, State Education Department and National Board officials congratulated New York's 51 teachers who completed the rigorous process in 2021.

"This is the beginning of a journey ... to serve as change agents," said Peggy Brookins, president of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. "Your board certification is a tool to leverage change."

She urged NBCTs to advocate on issues, mentor novice teachers and support colleagues to pursue the national credential.

NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene T. DiBrango said the union has been a longtime supporter of National Board Certification. "We know the value NBCTs bring to our profession."

And as we face a teacher shortage, DiBrango said the rate of turnover for NBCTs is three times lower than the general population of educators. She urged the new NBCTs to step up as leaders and take new teachers under their wings to help them get through those first difficult years.



Among those joining the celebration, clockwise from top left: National Board for Professional Teaching Standards President Peggy Brookins; NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene T. DiBrango; NBPTS Board member and Educolor founder José Vilson; and Yonkers NBCT educator Christine Heidelberg.

New York is now home to 2,224 National Board Certified Teachers, who have completed the voluntary performance-based assessment process that includes a portfolio, student work samples, videos and analysis of a candidate's teaching and student learning.

Nearly 300 districts have locally negotiated incentives for NBCTs, such as salary step increases, stipends or release time. NYSUT supports candidates with regional writing institutes and support groups through teacher centers.

NYSUT also advocated for the state's Shanker grant, named in honor of the legendary union leader Albert Shanker, to help educators cover application costs. About 84 percent of the Class of 2021 NBCTs

were supported by the Shanker grant, which defrays a candidate's \$1,900 fee for all four components — plus provides districts with up to \$500 per candidate for supportive services, such as hiring a substitute to cover classes during release time.

"National Board Certification is an

investment in learning that enriches the teachers who complete the experience and benefits their students and colleagues as well," State Education Commissioner Betty Rosa said. "I am proud of the work these extraordinary teachers have already done and of the work they will continue to do as mentors and leaders in their schools."

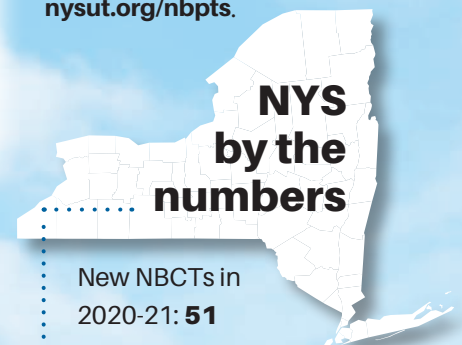
Other speakers included Board of Regents Chancellor Lester Young Jr., Regent Roger Tilles and NBCT José Vilson, a former New York City teacher who is an NBPTS Board member and founder of Educolor, an organization dedicated to race and social justice issues in education.

"National Board is the way for us to elevate the profession to the one that we deserve," Vilson said. "I know

it was hard. I tried it three times. Look closely at the five standards we've mastered. You may be hundreds of miles apart, but you are interconnected now as a learning community."

Vilson noted that at a time of pandemic, economic uncertainty, and difficult conversations about race, gender, class and sexual orientation, it can be tough for educators to focus on the positive. "We get to be those beacons for the profession when right now it might feel real dark," he said. "You're building the profession that teaches others to look forward forever and a day."

To see the list of new NBCTs and watch the online celebration, go to [nysut.org/nbpts](https://nysut.org/nbpts).



New NBCTs in  
2020-21: **51**  
Renewed: **83**  
Total NBCTs: **2,224**  
Current candidates: **693**

## Top school districts

Number certified:  
New York City: **299**  
Schenectady: **77**  
Arlington: **71**  
Wappingers: **57**  
Rochester: **45**

## Current candidates

New York City: **212**  
Yonkers: **30**  
Newburgh: **22**  
Manhasset: **13**

Source: National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

# PUBLIC SCHOOLS UNITE US

## NYSUT campaign celebrates public schools as powerful uniting force in our communities

By Kara Smith  
kara.smith@nysut.org

It's no secret that school boards have become the next front lines of the culture wars. Well-funded, anti-public school forces are trying to disrupt and defund public education by pitting teachers and parents against each other. All over the state, divisive, anti-educator school board candidates are on the ballot.

To push back against this division, NYSUT is launching "Public Schools Unite Us," a campaign to counter misinformation and anti-educator movements statewide.

**We believe that our public schools belong to all of us. They belong to the students who learn, the hardworking families who support them and the educators and staff who ensure that children from every background have the opportunity to lead fulfilling lives.**

### It's not us versus them

Pro-privatization groups backed by billionaires like Betsy DeVos and the Koch family, are pushing the divisive, teacher vs. parent narratives in an effort to stack community school boards with anti-public education candidates. "When anti-public school forces work to disrupt our students' education, we must stand up together — educators, parents and community members — to support a public education system that meets the needs of every student," said

NYSUT President Andy Pallotta.

The "Public Schools Unite Us" campaign highlights public schools as the center of our communities and celebrates the traditional partnership between educators and parents, which supports and strengthens public education.

One example is the nearly decade-long partnership between the Buffalo Teachers Federation and the Buffalo Parent Teacher Organization. In 2014, with Buffalo City Schools on the verge of going into receiver-ship or being converted into charter schools, parents and educators worked together, through the newly formed BPTO, to rally community support.

The BPTO launched "Buffalo Schools: Believe!" a campaign that highlighted the strength of Buffalo public schools and fostered collaboration between parents, educators and the community.

"I saw how important it was for average people to get more involved in the politics of public education," said BTF Executive Committee member and BPTO Co-Chair Eve Shippens. She advocated for public schools at board meetings and spent the summer of 2015 as a community door-knocker, having face-to-face conversations with voters to rally support for Buffalo public schools.

The work paid off. In 2016, Buffalo flipped its anti-public education, pro-charter school board to one that supports public education; they gained even more seats in 2019. "We don't always see eye-to-eye with the

school board, but they are dedicated to having the best schools Buffalo can offer," said Shippens. Under the new board, graduation rates have increased, and a policy requiring the district to consider decisions through an equity lens has been put in place.

The BPTO continues to nurture positive school-community relationships. "Our main goal is to work together to do good work for our children and see our students succeed," said Buffalo parent Danielle Grzymala, BPTO co-chair. Monthly meetings include public forums, often with district curriculum experts who answer questions from community members and clarify what's taught in the district. Programs like its culturally and linguistically responsive initiatives, which ensure that district teachings reflect Buffalo's diverse population, often garner questions. "When people don't understand, that's when they push back — we bring both sides together to promote understanding."

### Building communities

The growing network of community schools across the state exemplifies the important connection between public schools and the communities they serve. Community schools address the academic needs of students and coordinate care for students and families in need, becoming a hub for services like preventive medical, mental and dental care. They also offer food banks and provide job assistance. NYSUT is advocating for more annual state funding to expand the number of



A NYSUT ad campaign urges viewers to get out the vote May 17 in support of strong public schools and pro-public education school board members.

districts using community schools.

In the Albany City School District's network of seven community schools, services range from after-school programs, a weekend Feed and Read program, a food pantry and a community laundry. District community schools also provide workshops to help parents and guardians learn to become advocates and facilitators for their children's education and offer extended day programs, and hands-on STEM opportunities, to empower and encourage students. Programs like these send a valuable message to community members, explained Pallotta. It lets them know that their public schools offer resources they can tap into when they need a helping hand.

Since the Saranac Lake Central School District's community school program began four years ago, it's linked with 20 community partners to provide internet assistance; a weekend food program; before- and after-school childcare; and telehealth, dental and eye care. The program also offers a weekend backpack program and monthly food, shelter, utility, health care and other assistance through Community Connections of Franklin County.

Community schools show us what happens when educators and parents join together to solve problems and educate students, explained Pallotta who called on educators, parents and community members to keep up the momentum and protect what's been years in the making.

### Staying united

"The ongoing hardships due to the COVID-19 pandemic remind us how central public schools are to our communities — strong schools build strong communities, in both good times and bad," said Pallotta. He encouraged members to contribute to VOTE-COPE, NYSUT's voluntary, non-partisan advocacy fund, to support the union's efforts to protect public education and worker rights.

"We've got school board elections coming up in May and it's important that we all work together — educators, parents and community members — to protect public education from those who are trying to divide us," said Pallotta. Electing the wrong representatives, those who are anti-public education, could reverse years of progress. "In a nation divided, our public schools are a place where unity can and should happen."

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■ Make sure your fellow educators know how important it is to vote in local elections this year.

■ NYSUT members can make a voluntary contribution to VOTE-COPE to help support pro-education candidates.





# NYSUT fighting for Regents exam safety net

By Sylvia Saunders

sylvia.saunders@nysut.org

In a year fraught with learning disruptions, NYSUT is urging state education officials to extend the “safety net” for students who don’t pass the Regents exams, but meet all other graduation requirements.

“We urge you to do what is fair and equitable for the students,” NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene T. DiBrango wrote in a letter to the commissioner and Regents. She noted schools have been dealing with multiple interruptions due to COVID-19 absences, severe staff shortages and transportation challenges.

“After a full year and a half of remote and hybrid learning, this school year has been difficult for our students to adjust to,” DiBrango said. “Students are overwhelmed socially and emotionally, and we have all seen the increase in mental health

issues because of the isolation, trauma and other effects of the pandemic that many students endured.”

NYSUT is asking SED to extend the safety net approved for both 2020 and 2021, allowing Regents diplomas to be

issued without the required Regents exams.

In 2020, the Regents exams were canceled entirely after school buildings shut down statewide due to the pandemic.

In 2021, SED canceled most Regents exams, except four that were federally required. Exams were administered to a small number of students, but a passing score was



EL-WISE NOISSETTE

NYSUT Board member Joe Najuch, Newfane TA.

not required to pass the course for graduation. In December, SED canceled the January 2022 exams, saying they could not be safely, equitably and fairly administered across

the state. The Board of Regents modified graduation requirements so students would not be adversely impacted by the cancellation of the January exams.

Extending the safety net again will allow teachers and students to focus on the work of teaching and learning, confident that students who meet all other graduation requirements will not lose their chance to earn a

diploma, DiBrango said.

At NYSUT’s Local and Retiree Council President’s Conference in early April, a number of local union leaders told Commissioner Betty Rosa they did not think their students were ready for the Regents exams in June — academically or emotionally.

Newfane TA’s Joe Najuch told the commissioner he’s always looked forward to seeing how his students do on the Geometry Regents Exam — but not this year.

“I don’t think my students are ready,” he said, noting many students are traumatized and have been in and out of school due to COVID-19. Many of his 10th and 11th grade students have never taken a Regents exam.

“We are continuing to look at this issue,” Rosa said, noting that the federal Department of Education rejected New York’s request for a testing waiver. She said SED will administer the Regents, but it’s unclear what will happen with the results.

## SRPs vital to student mental health support

By Liza Frenette

liza.frenette@nysut.org

Brandon Beauchamp often played “bus driver” during school recess.

Sometimes he would hang out with Mrs. Schaffer, a teacher aide who supervised recess.

His go-to person was Mrs. B., the lunch lady. He would bring in a plastic bag full of 100 pennies and buy warm, chocolate chip cookies from her in the morning.

“It gave me something to look forward to,” Beauchamp told a meeting of School-Related Professionals at a pre-RA Conference.

SRPs play an important role as a safe connection for many students, said Beauchamp, director of the School Mental Health Resource and Training Center. “They knew about how I was handling things.”

Half of all mental illness presents by age 14 and suicide is the second leading cause of death among 14–18 year olds, he said. It is important to look at the context behind students’ behaviors, and SRPs need to be included in the team approach to the health and safety of students.

“We have to allow them a space at the table,” he said.

For many students, the SRP who serves them lunch, drives them to and from school, or handles their

questions in the front office is a safe connection.

“You’re a trusted person,” said social worker and health advocate Mary Moller. It is equally important for SRPs to pay attention to their own health.

Self-care, she said, can be as simple as drinking enough water on a daily basis, taking regular walks, replacing screen time with quiet and getting professional help if needed.

“A lot of the pandemic stress we’re



ANDREW WATSON

From left, Brandon Beauchamp, School Mental Health and Resource Training; Patricia Zuber Wilson, associate commissioner, Office of Addiction Services and Supports; and social worker Mary Moller present on mental health for SRPs.

feeling is something we won’t even fully realize until a few more years,” said Ron Gross, NYSUT second vice president, whose office coordinates SRP initiatives for the union.

# Regents dump edTPA for teacher certification

By **Sylvia Saunders**  
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In a big win for the union and aspiring educators, the Board of Regents voted to get rid of the controversial edTPA requirement for teacher certification.

NYSUT hailed the move, saying the educative Teacher Performance Assessment has been a discouraging barrier for aspiring teachers ever since it was adopted in 2014. The onerous exam, administered by the testing giant Pearson, costs \$300 and requires candidates to submit a detailed portfolio of materials on planning, instruction and assessment, including classroom video footage.

“If we want New Yorkers to take a look at teaching and reverse our teacher shortage, it’s critical we remove unnecessary barriers like the edTPA that stand in the way of high-quality future educators joining the

profession,” NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene T. DiBrango said.

During NYSUT’s Take a Look at Teaching summits around the state, numerous students and educators said completing the edTPA was so consuming and stressful that it ruined the student teaching experience. Candidates were so focused on completing the rigid requirements that they were missing out on quality learning time with both their host teacher and supervising college faculty member.

DiBrango noted NYSUT, together with higher education affiliates the United University Professions at SUNY and the Professional Staff Congress at CUNY, have been leading voices in pushing back against the edTPA.

“These requirements have done nothing to improve the quality of teaching or support aspiring educators,” DiBrango said. “Instead, they’ve

piled costly exams on prospective educators’ plates and diminished the essential student-teaching experiences that prepare you to manage your own classroom.”

Since 2019, five states have dropped edTPA as a licensure requirement, DiBrango noted in a letter to the Regents. There are currently only 11 states, including New York, that require a commercial performance assessment for certification, and six of those states allow options other than edTPA. DiBrango said there has been no compelling evidence that suggests edTPA correlates with better preparation for new teachers. Research has questioned the edTPA’s scoring process and reliability. Other studies have suggested edTPA may prevent diverse candidates, especially English language learners, from gaining certification. Costs for multiple submissions can add up to several hundred dollars;

college officials said some candidates simply chose to teach in other states. The Regents received nearly 200 comments — overwhelmingly in support of dropping the requirement.

Instead of the edTPA, the state will now require teacher preparation programs to integrate a multi-measure teacher performance assessment into the candidate’s student teaching, practicum or other clinical experience. It would be tied to the state’s teaching standards and culturally responsive-sustaining education framework. Programs will have until Sept. 1, 2023, to develop or choose an assessment and update their curriculum.

There will be no edTPA required for current candidates, who will still be required to complete the rest of the certification requirements, including coursework, student teaching and a series of other exams.



## Planting seeds

With help from a NYSUT Grow-Your-Own grant, the Long Beach Classroom Teachers Association has created a Take a Look at Teaching Club to introduce high school students to the teaching profession. Recent club activities include interviewing educators, looking at what skills pre-K students have and need to learn, choosing age-appropriate books and visiting a pre-K class for a read-aloud. At left, high school freshman Matthew Nuñez works with Lido Elementary pre-schoolers.

GYO grant recipient and club adviser Elizabeth O’Brien said upcoming activities include local college visits and more elementary school visits before the end of the school year. Long Beach is one of about three dozen local unions awarded GYO grants. The union-led initiative is funded through a three-year \$675,000 grant from the National Education Association.

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# Buffalo school finds success with mindfulness practices

By **Liza Frenette**  
liza.frenette@nysut.org

**A**s a teacher abroad, Clarice Proeschel learned how to communicate with others despite a language barrier. At the community school in Buffalo where she teaches art, she follows a similar principle, using concepts of yoga to communicate with students struggling with social-emotional barriers.

At Dr. Lydia T. Wright School 89, Proeschel teaches grades 4–8, introducing students to a diverse group of artists. But that’s the pedagogy part. Then there is the social-emotional learning. Proeschel said during the pandemic, students lost “a lot of basic skills, simple skills, which we’ve had to build up.” They struggle with attention spans, being around other students and teacher authority. There are a lot of conflicts, she said.

If a particular class is disruptive, Proeschel will have students do some breathing exercises and get out of their seats for yoga movements.

She uses yoga’s mindful techniques for everyday situations. Art class sometimes begins with 10 minutes of silence or quiet music, dimmed lights and focus on breathing. Students will be asked to think about how they perceive the art-making process, how to stay focused and how to not judge the process of their art.

Employing the breath, she said, is a basic skill that can be used to become aware of one’s state of mind. If a person stops when they are angry and checks in with their body, they might realize their heart is beating fast and their breathing is hard. When they are like this, they are apt to make reactive decisions.

By focusing on the breath, not the problem, and pausing, they can come to make a choice for a next step that will serve them, not hurt them. Students often have a hard time controlling their impulses, she said.

School 89 has a mindfulness room, which includes a supply of yoga mats. During the common

advisory period in the middle of the day, Proeschel sometimes takes groups of girls into the room for some talk time and then yoga. She hopes to do some outside yoga with students as well.

“They love it. It’s fun. They enjoy moving,” she said.

The school hosts a monthly Saturday Academy for students and families, and Proeschel holds yoga classes there, as well as some art classes. She is a certified children’s and adult yoga teacher and a trauma-informed, community-based yoga instructor.

The school also implements restorative practices to help with student conflicts — who was harmed and how to move forward — and to redirect the cycle of students fixating on what separates them.

NYSUT’s Future Forward initiative calls for the state to dedicate new annual funding of \$100 million for more community schools. Visit [futureforwardny.org](http://futureforwardny.org) for more info.

## Teacher taps into emotional benefits of letter writing

If you’ve ever been happily surprised to find a personal letter or card in your mailbox, then you know the feeling that students and educators at New Paltz and other schools are experiencing with in-school postal systems.

The “Wee Deliver” in-school postal program was launched in 1990 by the U.S. Postal Service to help improve elementary students’ literacy skills.

In a pandemic environment, educators like fourth-grade teacher Melissa Feldmann are tapping into the concept’s social-emotional benefits as well.

Students can write to their peers, to teachers, and to staff members to build or maintain a social connection. Some write to teachers they had last year, or the lunch lady, or friends they made who no longer share the same classroom.

“There is a lot of excitement about writing letters,” said Feldmann, New Paltz United Teachers.

If a student is introverted, it is an outlet for them to express themselves. If a student is resistant to writing, the idea of sending a letter provides motivation.

Each class has an address and hallways have “street” names. Two students deliver the mail. Teachers provide regular time for letter writing.

Each week there is a theme for the mail: writing to cafeteria workers; to specialized teachers such as physical education, music and art; to bus drivers; or to former teachers. They can also write to teachers they will have next year in order to get to know them a bit. The project helps students with writing skills and with emotional outreach. In a letter, they can share feelings with a friend or sibling in another class.

“It helps to build a continued sense of community,” Feldmann said.

As a young student, Feldmann took part in the Wee Deliver project, so she knows firsthand how the program generates joy and helps students learn about how a post office works.



Clarice Proeschel, Buffalo Teachers Federation, leads a yoga session.

# Public health issues focus of forum

By **Liza Frenette**  
liza.frenette@nysut.org

**N**ow that some corporations have been held accountable for their role in the opioid epidemic that they helped induce, it is time for communities to tap into settlement money.

“A lot of work is being translated to the community and street level,” said Michael Kink, one of the presenters on tap for NYSUT’s Professional Issues Forum on Health Care.

Kink, executive director of the Strong Economy for All Coalition, a labor-community coalition focusing on economic fairness and income inequality, will discuss the overdose

crisis, the opioid profiteers and how to fight back to save lives.

Opioids’ reach doesn’t end at the school door. In fact, the State Education Department and the state Department of Health encourage schools to implement opioid overdose prevention programs and make available free cases of Narcan for each high school in the state.

Many of NYSUT’s hospital nurses, school nurses and home care nurses, along with school counselors, social workers and psychologists, work with students or patients who are struggling with opioid addiction or have a family member who is addicted.

These professionals “are recognized as trusted leaders that people and community rely on,” Kink said.

His group and End Overdose New York, a coalition aimed at saving lives and destigmatizing addiction, provide background on the opioid epidemic and are working to roll out more effective health services — including safe injection facilities.

“We’re looking at this as part of a public health movement.”

## Public health crisis

Overdoses now kill more people each year than traffic accidents, suicides and homicides combined, according to End Overdose NY.

Kink has worked with the American Federation of Teachers in states where the opioid epidemic has made devastating impacts. Some restorative actions have succeeded

in holding corporate pushers accountable. In 2021, \$26 billion was awarded to a host of states, including New York, from a manufacturer and pharmaceutical distributors. And in a March 2022 civil case resolution, Purdue Pharma and the Sackler family agreed to pay \$6 billion for their role in the opioid epidemic.



## REGISTER NOW!

Visit [nysut.cc/pif522](https://nysut.cc/pif522) to register for the free online Professional Issues Forum on Health Care scheduled for May 7. NYSUT attendees can earn Continuing Education Unit (CEU) credits for their attendance.

The site includes information on the full list of sessions.

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# Union retirees respond to pandemic challenges with increased participation

By Liza Frenette  
liza.frenette@nysut.org

**N**YSUT is ready to resume its retiree tours, which have been paused since the COVID-19 pandemic took hold.

"We will be visiting retiree councils and finally getting a chance to really be with you," said Ron Gross, NYSUT second vice president, at the ED 51-53 retiree meeting. "We're ready to do the tour wherever you want us to be."

NYSUT President Andy Pallotta thanked retirees for sharing their stories on the new historical documentary that premiered at the NYSUT Local and Retiree Council Presidents

Conference. "This is something we're going to continue to work on," he said.

While NYSUT celebrated its 50th anniversary at this year's RA, retiree councils are celebrating 30 years of existence.

"When I think of retirees, I don't just think of the past, but of your central roles in building the future," NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene T. DiBrango told the roomful of retired members.

"Thank you for building it. You built what we have today," said J. Philippe Abraham, NYSUT secretary-treasurer.

NYSUT retirees continue to find ways to get and stay involved in communities, elections and labor.

Florence McCue, ED 51-53 at-large-director, encouraged retirees to become involved in central labor councils and area labor federations.

Loretta Donlon, one of the first three people to represent retirees on the NYSUT Board of Directors, encouraged retirees to get involved in local school board elections and in reforming the state's Tier 6.

Thomas Murphy, UFT retiree chapter leader, shared with the gathering that the UFT reached out to more than 60,000 retirees during the pandemic by phone calls, texts or e-mails to personally ask: "How are you doing?" Many of them said, "You're

really just calling to ask how we are?" he reported.

"It was a good project for all of us," he said.

Murphy said that while the last two years have been stressful, the question is "Do you look at problems or at opportunities? How could we not be optimists? We go into the classroom and see the future!"

An example of opportunity is with the change in meetings since the pandemic. UFT retiree meetings in the past have had 200-350 people, he said, but the last meeting on Zoom drew 4,500 people.

"It defies geography, time and place," Murphy said. "Now, our opportunity is, how do you both?"



## DID YOU KNOW?

NYSUT Retiree Services consultants are resources for retired members, retiree councils and in-service locals on NYSUT retiree matters.

**Janet Goddard**, RC 1, 2, 3, 44  
716-634-7132

**Louise Ortman**, RC 4, 46  
716-664-7425

**Peter Randazzo**, RC 5, 6  
585-454-5550

**Anne Marie Voutsinas**, RC 7, 8  
315-431-4040

**Ruth Shippee**, RC 9, 10  
518-783-7977

**Mark Padgett**, RC 11, 45  
607-786-5742

**Sheryl Baker Delano**, RC 12, 13  
845-339-4450

**Ellen Pincus**, RC 14, 15-16  
914-592-4411

**Claire Zatorski**, RC 17, 18, 19  
516-496-2035

**TBD**, RC 20, 21, 22, 23  
**TBD**, RC 43



Members of the RC 43 TRIF Clearwater Unit donated a bench to the Butterfly Garden at Egan Cottage in honor of the charitable work of Fred and Betty Egge. The garden is part of the Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranch in Safety Harbor, one of a network of residential child-care campuses throughout Florida that houses needy children. Egan Cottage has been a charitable project for RC 43 Clearwater Unit members for more than 14 years thanks to the couple's advocacy.



From left, Pat Puleo, RC 16; Samantha Rosado Ciriello, Yonkers Federation of Teachers president; and Florence McCue, ED 51-53 at-large director, celebrate at the Maria Hadala Memorial Gymnasium. The space was renamed in honor of Hadala, a physical education teacher and former YFT building rep and activist.



Jane Kauffman, RC 2, left, received the NYSUT Legends Award at the Western New York NYSUT Retirees' fall luncheon. Joining Kaufman at the event are NYSUT President Emeritus Tom Hobart and Williamsville Teachers Association President Michelle Licht.

PHOTOS PROVIDED



## Quotable



### Becky Pringle

We must reclaim public education as a common good, and transform it into something it was never designed to be: racially and socially just — and equitable. ~ NEA President

### Janella Hinds

We can teach our children how to be in healthy relationships ... how to be respectful and how to love with kindness and honor. ~ United Federation of Teachers

### Thomas DiNapoli

Working people win when unions are stronger. ~ NYS Comptroller

### Joe Cantafio

It's a shame that health care is linked to employment. (Health care) is a priority. It is a human right and a civil right. ~ West Seneca TA

### Randi Weingarten

You're the antidote to division, anger and scapegoating. We choose hope over fear. Aspiration over anger. That's who we are. That's who NYSUT is. ~ AFT President

### Dora Leland

We are charged with caring for other children. We need support (Paid Family Leave) to care for our own. ~ Horseheads TA



## QUESTIONS FOR...

# Joe Alati

BOCES United Professionals

**1. You're a longtime local union leader and collision repair technology teacher at Monroe 1 BOCES. Somehow you've found the time to serve on your local school board, too. What made you want to run for the Honeoye Falls-Lima School Board?**

After I served several years on the district's budget advisory board, some board members suggested I should run for the school board. I've always believed we need to give back to our communities. I also believe if you don't like something, get involved. We have no license to complain without trying to improve things we don't like.

**2. What was it like when you first joined?**

I was already familiar with the other board members from being on the advisory board. The school board was a bigger commitment of time than I expected, but I didn't mind because I was happy to be operating and influencing at this level. The school board meets twice per month, with reading before meetings. Some may think they will be able to influence what is happening in their child's specific classroom.

It's not like that. The board members don't run the schools but certainly influence the direction the district goes in, as well as how and where money is allocated within the district. It is more of a 30,000-foot view, which can have a lot of value to the district, the students and certainly teachers.

**3. How has your background as an educator helped you serve as a board member?**

Often, I felt like I was a translator. Board members come from many walks of life. Most are from the business world. I was the only educator on my board for nine years. Other board members often thanked me for offering the teacher's perspective on a policy decision because otherwise all they heard was the administrator's or parent's point of view.

**4. What advice would you have for other educators who are thinking about running for the school board?**

Be the teacher's perspective. On occasion you may have

to be their voice even though that is not "officially" your role. I've sat in board meetings where the teachers were speaking out about a policy and they were being dismissed by the administration that kept trying to move the meeting along; trying to silence the teachers. As a board member, I was able to put a stop to that and let the teachers be heard. As educators, we are there for the kids. However, a teacher's voice is way too often dismissed or ignored. To me, if administrations listened to teachers more, schools would be far more evolved than they are.

**5. Voter turnout is historically very low for school board races and budget votes. What would you tell fellow NYSUT members about the importance of voting in their local school board elections?**

Get more involved in the district you live in. It's your community and if you have children, they either go there or went there. School boards desperately need to hear the teacher's voice, whether they know it or not.

And by all means, vote in these elections! Get to know who is running and ask questions about their knowledge and opinions of the district and education. This decides who will be making important policy decisions like drafting a proposed budget — the one that pays your salary. It's very important to vote, if nothing else. With all the divisive influences we all hear about at board meetings these days, your vote really matters.

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**Introducing the NYSUT Social Justice Academy**



Mark your calendars, NYSUT's new Social Justice Academy launches in 2023. The intensive two-part training will provide locals with the tools and resources they need to create a social justice committee from scratch or to improve an existing one. The goal is to educate members on social justice issues, inspire them to advocate for change and promote social justice initiatives.

The inaugural SJA program begins in March of 2023 and continues with a four-day program in August. For more information, email [socialjustice@nysut.org](mailto:socialjustice@nysut.org).

**RA elections results**

NYSUT Elections Committee Co-Chairs Rod Sherman, Plattsburgh Teachers Association, and Joe Najuch,

Newfane TA, announced recent election results at the 2022 Representative Assembly.

With no contested races, the following candidates were elected for 2022-25:

- **NEA State Director**  
Tom McMahon, Mahopac Teachers Association
- **NEA Alternate Director**  
Dora Leland, Horseheads Teachers Federation

**Union endorses Benaquisto for NYSTRS Board**

Juliet Benaquisto was endorsed by RA delegates to run for a three-year term on the New York State Teachers' Retirement System Board of Trustees.

Benaquisto, president of the Schenectady Federation of Teachers and a NYSUT Board member representing ED 12, was elected in October to fill the final year of former TRS trustee Sheila Sullivan Buck's term. She currently serves on the TRS Disability Review Committee.

Three teacher-members and a retired teacher serve on the 10-member TRS Board. The election will take place at the NYSTRS Annual Delegates Meeting scheduled for Nov. 6-7.



**Ernest Cleveland**  
March 19, 2022  
Beekmantown Teachers Association

**Theresa Cote** | July 4, 2021  
Central Islip Teachers Association

**Helen Marie Farrell**  
Feb. 21, 2022  
Retiree Council 12

**Robert Goldschlager**  
Jan. 8, 2021  
United Federation of Teachers

**Kenneth Kirik** | March 18, 2022  
Voorheesville Teachers Association

**Helen Lettko** | March 26, 2022  
Retiree Council 10

**William Morris** | Nov. 24, 2021  
Yonkers Federation of Teachers

**Paul Anthony Rosenberg**  
Jan. 17, 2021  
Valley Stream Teachers Association

**Ronald P. Shoup** | Jan. 10, 2022  
Olean Teachers Association

**Bruce G. Smith** | Nov. 22, 2021  
Lancaster Central Teachers Association

**Doris Steminsky**  
March 15, 2022  
Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake Teachers Association

**Paul Trombley** | Feb. 27, 2022  
Retiree Council 9

**Susan Uryniak** | May 31, 2021  
Canastota Central School Teachers Association

**Melinda Waddell**  
March 19, 2022  
Lowville Teachers Association

Obituary submissions must include decedent's full name, union affiliation, date of death, and contact info for the person submitting the notice. Fax notices to 518-213-6415; send to Julie Malec, NYSUT United, 800 Troy-Schenectady Road, Latham, NY 12110-2455; or email [julie.malec@nysut.org](mailto:julie.malec@nysut.org).



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## Why you should have a Retirement Online account

**R**etirement Online provides a safe and convenient way to review your New York State and Local Employees' Retirement System (ERS) account and conduct transactions. In many cases, you can use Retirement Online instead of mailing forms or calling.

Members can verify service credit totals, request to purchase service credit for previous public employment and monitor any outstanding loans and pay them off. You can also estimate your pension, an important part of retirement planning, in just a few steps. Simply plug in your retirement date or your age at retirement and any anticipated additional lump sum payments or service credit. If you add the birthdate for a beneficiary, you'll see the estimated monthly payment you would receive if you were to choose a pension payment option that provides a benefit for a survivor. Then you can either print or save your estimate.

Retirement Online has also made

applying for retirement easy. You no longer need to send forms through the mail, and you can upload required documents, such as a copy of your birth certificate. A big advantage of using Retirement Online to file for retirement is that you do not have to get anything notarized.

Retirees, you can print a pension verification letter and view a breakdown of your pension payment. Coming later this year, you will be able to change your federal tax withholding, update and sign up for direct deposit and view and print your 1099-R tax form.

To register or sign in, go to **web.osc.state.ny.us/retire/sign-in.php**. Sign in today to check that your contact and beneficiary information is current and be sure we have a home email address listed for you that you'll have access to before and after you retire. If you need help, visit the Tools & Tips section of our Retirement Online webpage at **web.osc.state.ny.us/retire/retirement\_online/customers.php** for step-by-step guides for registering, signing in, adding trusted devices, resetting your password and more. If you have trouble signing up for Retirement Online, call our contact center at 866-805-0990 (518-474-7736 in the Albany area).

In every issue, State Comptroller Thomas



**P. DiNapoli, administrative head of the State and Local Employees' Retirement System (ERS) and trustee of the Common Retirement Fund, provides information**

**on the System, which delivers retirement benefits to many NYSUT School-Related Professionals and other support staff. If you are an ERS member with a question of general interest, email [united@nysut.org](mailto:united@nysut.org).**

**For immediate assistance, call the ERS Contact Center toll-free at 866-805-0990 or 518-474-7736 in the Capital District.**

### NYSUT ERS consultants

Most NYSUT School-Related Professionals\* belong to the New York State and Local Employees' Retirement System (ERS). Contact any one of our consultants for assistance.

Tarrytown Region:

Trudi Davis | 914-592-4411  
**[trudi.davis@nysut.org](mailto:trudi.davis@nysut.org)**

Nassau/Suffolk Region:

Karen McLean | 518-625-1966  
**[karen.mclean@nysut.org](mailto:karen.mclean@nysut.org)**

North Country/Potsdam Region:

Cheryl Rockhill | 518-240-8890  
**[cheryl.rockhill@nysut.org](mailto:cheryl.rockhill@nysut.org)**

Syracuse Region:

Virginline Woodall | 518-617-0268  
**[virginline.woodall@nysut.org](mailto:virginline.woodall@nysut.org)**

\* Certified teaching assistants belong to the state TRS.

## When retiring early is an option



**Q:** I have a September birthday. Do I have to work until I'm 55, or can I simply leave at the end of the previous school year and begin collecting my pension after my birthday arrives in September?

**A:** Yes, you can retire and wait to collect. However, because you'll lose a year of service credit and possibly lower your Final Average Salary, your pension will be less than if you had waited an additional year. Also, a word of caution — if you work elsewhere after your last day of district employment and your first day of retirement, you could jeopardize your beneficiaries' eligibility for your paragraph two death benefit. Retiring before you officially turn 55 could have serious ramifications, so you should schedule a New York State Teachers' Retirement System video consultation before making a final decision. Call 800-348-7298, ext. 6100.

**Q:** I've consulted with my NYSTRS representative, filled out my retirement application and I'm about to submit it to NYSTRS. Should I send it by certified mail or by regular post?

**A:** The easiest way to file your application, provided you're at least age 55, is online through your MyNYSTRS account. Log in to your account and navigate to My Retirement > Application for Retirement. If you prefer submitting a paper copy, retirement applications should always be sent by certified or registered mail, and you should

request a return receipt. Since retirement applications must be received by NYSTRS one to 90 days before your effective retirement date, having proof of the date it's received is important. And remember, if you are seriously ill or injured, you should file a disability retirement application as soon as possible. Contact your NYSTRS representative for information about filing for disability retirement, 800-348-7298, ext. 6010.

### Did you know?

The New York State Teachers' Retirement System has thousands in unclaimed funds and abandoned accounts. To see if you're owed a refund, visit **[secure.nystrs.org/unclaimedFunds/unclaimedfunds.aspx](https://secure.nystrs.org/unclaimedFunds/unclaimedfunds.aspx)**.

### NYSUT TRS consultants

TRS members with questions may call their teacher-members on the New York State Teachers' Retirement System Board of Directors:

David Keefe • 516-741-1241  
(Retiree Representative)

Juliet Benaquisto • 518-807-7085  
**[juliet.benaquisto@nysut.org](mailto:juliet.benaquisto@nysut.org)**

Beth Chetney • 315-431-4040  
**[beth.chetney@nysut.org](mailto:beth.chetney@nysut.org)**

Eric Iberger • 518-376-4333  
**[eric.iberger@nysut.org](mailto:eric.iberger@nysut.org)**



# Maintain your NYSUT membership in retirement

**T**aking the time to plan ahead will help to make the stressful transition from active work to retirement an easier process. If you are currently enrolled in NYSUT Member Benefits-endorsed programs and would like to continue participation, you must maintain your NYSUT membership as a retiree. This can be accomplished in one of two ways: **1. Continue membership within your local if retiree membership is offered.** Contact your local to find out if any retiree membership requirements are in place. You must comply with these retiree membership requirements to continue your membership in NYSUT and our national affiliate American Federation of Teachers (AFT). **2. Continue as an at-large member of NYSUT through the retiree council in your region.** Contact your local to ensure you will be reported as retired to NYSUT. This will provide you with membership in



the retiree council in your region along with NYSUT and the AFT. Retiree membership is not automatic

for the National Education Association (NEA); you may choose to join this national affiliate as a lifetime retiree for a one-time fee of \$300. At this time, as a current NYSUT member or retiree participating in NEA Member Benefits, you do not need to purchase retiree membership with NEA. For information about joining NEA National and/or an enrollment form, contact NYSUT Retiree Services at 800-342-9810.

If you are a non-lifetime NEA retiree member or know someone lost from the NEA/NY rolls, contact NYSUT Member Records at 800-342-9810 to learn more about joining NYSUT and NEA as a retiree.

For questions about establishing retiree membership, you may reach out to the following membership departments:

- **United Federation of Teachers** members: 212-598-6855.
- **United University Professions** members: 800-342-4206.
- **Professional Staff Congress/CUNY** members: 212-354-1252.

- **All other NYSUT** members: 800-342-9810.

If you have questions about maintaining NYSUT membership or would like further information about NYSUT retiree programs, contact the NYSUT Retiree Services Consultant (RSC) serving your region.

You can also find this info at [nysut.org/members/retirees/retiree-services-consultants](https://nysut.org/members/retirees/retiree-services-consultants).

- **Buffalo area** (RC 1-3, 44): [janet.goddard@nysut.org](mailto:janet.goddard@nysut.org) or 716-634-7132
- **Jamestown area** (RC 4, 46): [louise.ortman@nysut.org](mailto:louise.ortman@nysut.org) or 716-664-7425
- **Rochester area** (RC 5-6): [peter.randazzo@nysut.org](mailto:peter.randazzo@nysut.org) or 585-454-5550
- **Syracuse/Utica area** (RC 7-8): [annemarie.voutsinas@nysut.org](mailto:annemarie.voutsinas@nysut.org) or 315-431-4040
- **North Country/Capital District** (RC 9-10): [ruth.shippee@nysut.org](mailto:ruth.shippee@nysut.org) or 518-783-7977
- **Southern Tier** (RC 11, 45): [mark.padgett@nysut.org](mailto:mark.padgett@nysut.org) or 607-786-5742
- **Greater Capital District/Mid-Hudson area** (RC 12-13): [sheryl.delano@nysut.org](mailto:sheryl.delano@nysut.org) or 845-339-4450
- **Orange, Rockland, Putnam and Westchester counties** (RC 14-16): [ellen.pincus@nysut.org](mailto:ellen.pincus@nysut.org) or 914-592-4411
- **Nassau region** (RC 17-19): [claire.zatorski@nysut.org](mailto:claire.zatorski@nysut.org) or 516-496-2035
- **Suffolk region** (RC 20-23): **TBD**
- **Florida** (RC 43): **TBD**

## Payroll to pension deduction

Moving from payroll deduction of NYSUT Member Benefits-endorsed programs to pension deduction is NOT immediate nor automatic. Following the steps below should help to ensure a smooth process.

- 1.** Contact Member Benefits at 800-626-8101 when you have your definite retirement date. Subsequently, Member Benefits will communicate that information to each plan administrator of programs you participate in.
- 2.** Call each plan administrator of programs you participate in to verify your mailing address so you can be billed at home once payroll deductions stop. Member Benefits can provide you with the contact information for plan administrators if needed.
- 3.** If you do not receive a bill for each program you had on payroll deduction, contact the applicable

program administrator to verify a bill was mailed to your correct address. All discounts provided through payroll deduction will continue for up to one year with direct billing; pension deduction offers the same discounts as payroll deduction.

**4.** Make sure to pay each bill you receive. You must be on home billing for at least one billing cycle so your pension system has time to put your permanent monthly pension benefit in place. Even though you may be receiving a monthly pension benefit, this does not mean your permanent benefit has been finalized. Deductions can only be taken from the permanent benefit; this can take up to six months. **Note:** You must be receiving your permanent monthly pension benefit from the New York State Teachers' Retirement System, New York City Teachers' Retirement System, New York State & Local Employees' Retirement System, New York City Board of Education Retirement System, or receive income from a monthly lifetime annuity from TIAA to be eligible for pension deduction of Member Benefits-endorsed programs.

**5.** When you receive the bill for the next premium, it should include a Pension Deduction Authorization Form. Complete and sign the form and send it back with the bill to the plan administrator in lieu of payment. If you do not receive a Pension Deduction Authorization Form with your second bill, contact Member Benefits for one to be sent to you.

Upon receipt of your Pension Deduction Authorization Form, the plan administrator will transmit the details to Member Benefits regarding pension deduction of your program(s). Member Benefits will then submit this information to your pension system to start the deductions with your next monthly benefit. This process must be done for each program you participate in. Contact Member Benefits if you have any questions along the way and allow time for each of the steps above to be completed.

If you have any questions about continuing Member Benefits-endorsed programs or the pension deduction process, please visit [memberbenefits.nysut.org](https://memberbenefits.nysut.org) or call 800-626-8101.

*For information about contractual endorsement arrangements with providers of endorsed programs, please contact NYSUT Member Benefits.*

## SUMMARY ANNUAL REPORT FOR NEW YORK STATE UNITED TEACHERS MEMBER BENEFITS TRUST

This is a summary of the annual report of the New York State United Teachers Member Benefits Trust, EIN 22-2480854, Plan No. 503 for the period September 1, 2020 through August 31, 2021.

The annual report has been filed with the Employee Benefits Security Administration, as required under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA).

The Board of Trustees of the New York State United Teachers Member Benefits Trust has committed itself to pay certain vision and other claims incurred under the terms of the plan.

### Insurance Information

The plan has contracts with various insurance companies to pay certain claims incurred under the terms of the plan. The total premiums paid for the plan year ending August 31, 2021 were \$72,785,894.

Because they are so called “experience-rated” contracts, the premium costs are affected by, among other things, the number and size of claims. Of the total insurance premiums paid for the plan year ending August 31, 2021, the premiums paid under such “experience-rated”

contracts were \$52,996,548 and the total of all benefit claims paid under these experience-rated contracts during the plan year was \$17,399,320.

### Basic financial statement

The value of plan assets, after subtracting liabilities of the plan, was \$54,121,640 as of August 31, 2021, compared to \$46,018,334 as of September 1, 2020. During the plan year the plan experienced an increase in its net assets of \$8,103,306. This increase includes unrealized appreciation and depreciation in the value of plan assets; that is, the difference between the value of the plan’s assets at the end of the year and the value of the assets at the beginning of the year or the cost of assets acquired during the year. During the plan year, the plan had total income of \$17,136,932 including employee contributions of \$4,269,172, realized gains of \$1,594,909 from the sale of assets, earnings from investments of \$2,945,790, and other income of \$8,327,061. Plan expenses were \$9,033,626. These expenses included \$5,263,052 in administrative expenses and \$3,770,574 in benefits paid to participants and beneficiaries.

### Your Rights to Additional Information

You have the right to receive a copy of the full annual report, or any part thereof, on request. The items listed below are included in that report:

- an accountant’s report;
- financial information and information on payments to service providers;
- assets held for investment;
- insurance information including sales commissions paid by insurance carriers; and
- information regarding any common or collective trusts, pooled separate accounts, master trusts or 103-12 investment entities in which the plan participates.

To obtain a copy of the full annual report, or any part thereof, write or call the office of Mr. Jeffrey Hartnett, who is Plan Administrator, Trustees of the New York State United Teachers Member Benefits Trust, 800 Troy-Schenectady Road, Latham, NY 12110-2455, 800-626-8101. The charge to cover copying costs will be \$9.60 for the full annual report, or \$0.15 per page for any part thereof.

You also have the right to receive from

the Plan Administrator, on request and at no charge, a statement of the assets and liabilities of the plan and accompanying notes, or a statement of income and expenses of the plan and accompanying notes, or both. If you request a copy of the full annual report from the Plan Administrator, these two statements and accompanying notes will be included as part of that report. The charge to cover copying costs given above does not include a charge for the copying of these portions of the report because these portions are furnished without charge.

You also have the legally protected right to examine the annual report at the main office of the plan (Trustees of the New York State United Teachers Member Benefits Trust, 800 Troy-Schenectady Road, Latham, NY 12110-2455) and at the U.S. Department of Labor in Washington, D.C., or to obtain a copy from the U.S. Department of Labor upon payment of copying costs. Requests to the Department should be addressed to: Public Disclosure Room, Room N-1513, Employee Benefits Security Administration, U.S. Department of Labor, 200 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20210.

## NYSUT MEMBER BENEFITS TRUST SUMMARY OF MATERIAL MODIFICATIONS AND NOTICE TO PARTICIPANTS

(Plan No: 503; I.D. No.: 22-2480854)  
Dated: March 2022

The following is a summary of important changes made to endorsed benefit programs since the publication of the New York State United Teachers Member Benefits Trust Summary Plan Description in March 2021 and the subsequent NYSUT Member Benefits Trust Summary of Material Modifications and Notice to Participants dated March 2021. Please retain this information until a new Summary Plan Description is issued to you.

### Trustees News

Carolyn Kube was appointed as a new Trustee of the NYSUT Member Benefits Trust at the December 2021 NYSUT Board of Trustees meeting (replacing Thomas Tucker). The current list of Trustees of the Member Benefits Trust includes Chairperson J. Philippe Abraham, Secretary Roderick P. Sherman, Loretta Donlon, Matthew Hill, Ms. Kube, Thomas McMahon, Kevin

Peterman and Angelina Rivera.

### Legal Service Plan, Group Access Legal Service Plan & Group Prepaid Legal Service Plan

Participants who need assistance for new legal matters arising in the State of Florida should contact the National Legal Office of Feldman, Kramer & Monaco, P.C., rather than the Glantz Law firm.

### Personal Property & Liability Insurance Plan

Farmers Property & Casualty Insurance Company completed its purchase of the Auto & Home book of business from MetLife in April 2021. The Farmers Insurance Choice platform offered by Farmers GroupSelect allows NYSUT members to choose from multiple highly rated insurance carriers, featuring competitive prices and savings for stand-alone or bundled auto and home policies.

Special group rates, coverage and

discounts offered through this program are available in most states to those who qualify. Eligibility guidelines and financial arrangements remain the same.

NYSUT members who purchase auto, home or renter’s policies from Farmers GroupSelect receive access to identity protection services through Farmers’ service provider CyberScout at no additional cost.

The phone number for this program remains 866-697-8822 and mailing address remains P.O. Box 671, Warwick, RI 02887.

Member Benefits has an endorsement arrangement of 5.5% of total premiums for this program.

### Financial Arrangements

Financial arrangements between the NYSUT Member Benefits Trust and the providers of the following endorsed programs have changed:

The Group Vision Care Plan & Group Voluntary Vision Care Plan, which are provided and administered by Davis Vision, are self-insured by Member Benefits for groups with guaranteed rate contracts, meaning total premiums collected and claims paid are pooled annually. At the end of the plan year, any surplus funds revert to Member Benefits. For the last 10-year period, a surplus equaling 14.09% of paid premiums has resulted.

As of January 1, 2022, Member Benefits has an endorsement arrangement of 27.5% of annual participation fees for the Legal Service Plan.

As of January 1, 2022, Member Benefits has an endorsement arrangement of 13% of annual participation fees for the Group Access and Group Prepaid Legal Service Plans.

Sincerely,  
**Board of Trustees, NYSUT Member Benefits Trust**

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- Childhood Grades 1-6 Individual Pathway Certification
- Middle School 5-6 Extension Certificate
- Gifted Education Extension Certificate
- Educational Technology Specialist Individual Pathway Certification
- Students with Disabilities 1-6 Individual Pathway Certification
- Students with Disabilities 7-12 Individual Pathway Certification
- Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) Individual Pathway Certification



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## PRIVACY NOTICE

NYSUT Member Benefits  
800 Troy-Schenectady Road  
Latham, NY 12110-2455  
800-626-8101, Plan No.: 503;  
EIN: 22-2480854

### Notification of Availability of Privacy Notice

As required by 45 Code of Federal Regulations Part 160.520(c)(1)(ii)] In the course of providing you with access to health benefits, Member Benefits has access to information about you, which may be considered protected health information (PHI) under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) regulations. As a participant of Member Benefits,

you were previously provided, either through publication in the *NYSUT United* publication or USPS mail, with a Privacy Notice describing our privacy practices, legal duties and rights concerning your PHI.

If you would like to receive another copy of our Privacy Notice, you can download a copy from our website at **memberbenefits.nysut.org**, or you can contact Member Benefits' Privacy Official Betsy Porter at 800-626-8101 or by submitting to the above address a written request for a copy.

Sincerely,

**Board of Trustees,  
NYSUT Member Benefits Trust**

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Where Knowledge and Values Meet

## Faculty Association of Suffolk Community College

The Faculty Association of Suffolk Community College launched a wellness series during this spring semester to help members deal with the many stressors from the pandemic.

Using its own faculty and non-classroom members as instructors, the FA hosted weekly yoga sessions led by member Lisa Melendez, professor of library services. A session on using practical mindfulness to help manage anxiety was hosted by member Evan Haun, coordinator of mental health services. Several biology faculty held sessions on COVID-19 vaccines and the future of the pandemic, as well as another session on how to use lifestyle modifications to thrive.

"We are grateful to our members who graciously volunteered to host these workshops for their colleagues," said FASCC President Dante Morelli.

## Rochester Teachers Association

The Health and Safety Committee of the Rochester Teachers Association took the lead in advocating for improved ventilation systems in every school in the

district. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the RTA paid for an industrial hygienist to evaluate the systems in each building.

"I was on more roofs and in more basements!" said Margaret Sergent, co-chair of the RTA committee, who joined the industrial hygienist on walk-throughs. "The district, based on our reports, put MERV-13s (air filters) in every school."

In addition, filters were put in each school nursing suite and isolation room.

"We always have to look for the union to do what is best for teachers, students and families," said RTA's Maureen Doohan, committee co-chair.

The committee, working with district personnel, also made sure each classroom got cleaners, cloth masks, and then, this past year, N-95 masks. Speech and language students and teachers received paper robes, face shields and clear masks as well.

The RTA, led by President Adam Urbanski, also worked with administration and custodians to make sure all desks were six feet apart, and that plexiglass dividers were installed for students where teachers requested them.

Share news about your local's union or community events at [united@nysut.org](mailto:united@nysut.org); include LIA in the subject line.



### It's an honor

**Lisa Drance**, North Babylon Teachers Organization, received the Rod Marriott Award from the New York State Theatre Education Association.

**Stacy Johnson**, Buffalo Federation of Teachers, a bilingual school psychologist, received the New York Association of School Psychologists' Friend of Children Award.

**Joe Ryan**, Nanuet Teachers Association, was inducted into the Manhattan College Hall of Fame. Ryan has served for 30 years as a coach at Manhattan, guiding athletes

to 62 MAAC championships. He also served as head track and field coach for Guyana at the 2008 and 2016 Olympic games.

**Lawrence I. Scott Jr.**, Kenmore TA, was selected as the Frank Plumeau School Psychologist of the Year by the New York Association of School Psychologists.

### In print

**John Adriance**, Albion TA retiree, has written *Nixon, Congress, and the Drug Abuse Office and Treatment Act of 1972*. **Patrick Adriance**, Jefferson Lewis Hamilton Herkimer Oneida BOCES Professional Association, is the illustrator. The book is a case study of the enactment of the law and the first six years of its implementation.

**Mary Brookman**, Fort Plain United Federation of Teachers retiree, has published *Once*, a suspense book about the loss of family farms.

**William Hill**, Edwards Knox Service Employees Association, has published *Hiking the Trail to Yesterday*, volumes I and II. The books focus on the hikes and histories in northern New York.

**Janice Shiarella McGrath**, Newburgh TA retiree, has written *Home: Four Plays*. The plays are "Murdering Marlowe," "Home Free," "The Parish" and "Outage."

**Erin O'Brien**, United Federation of Teachers, has published *Jasper's Journey*, a children's book about her rescue dog.

Kudos recognizes the accomplishments of NYSUT members. Have good news you'd like to share? Email [united@nysut.org](mailto:united@nysut.org); include Kudos in the subject line.

## IT'S WHAT WE DO

### Amy Tiu, Kings Park Classroom Teachers Association

Kings Park High School teacher Amy Tiu has loads of experience with puppy love.

Not because she keeps going through that teenage-wonder craze of first love, but because she's in love with actual puppies.



PROVIDED

She's on her 13th one.

Tiu is a longtime volunteer puppy raiser for the Guide Dog Foundation, which pairs trained dogs with people who are blind or visually impaired. Tiu's job is to raise the puppy for about 14-16 months before the animal gets handed over to a trainer.

Her present pup is Rudy T.; and the young female comes to class daily just as Tiu's other puppies have. It's all part of exposing the puppy to as many situations as possible.

"The kids get a dog the whole school year," she said. "It teaches them guide dog etiquette. When she's wearing her yellow vest, they know not to engage her or touch her."

Tiu is grateful that former superintendent Mary DeRose allowed her to make that first dog a part of life at school. Now the dogs are part of the fabric of Kings Park. Students have raised funds to sponsor dogs and to support the organization.

The Guide Dog Foundation was formed after World War II. Tiu joined the ranks in 2005 at a time when she was wondering how she could leave her mark in her community. She was inspired by a teacher colleague with a visual impairment who has a guide dog.

For more info about Tiu's work, visit [nysut.org/itswhatwedo](http://nysut.org/itswhatwedo).

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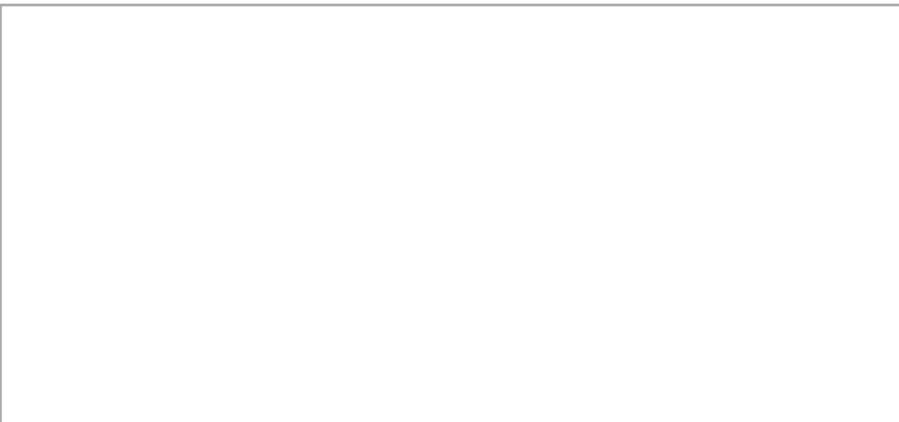
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