



NYSUT United

A UNION OF PROFESSIONALS

APRIL 2017

Dragon *tales*



2017

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of the Year**
Amy Hysick

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COMING UP

April 1

New York State budget deadline

April 4-10

National Public Health Week

April 6-7

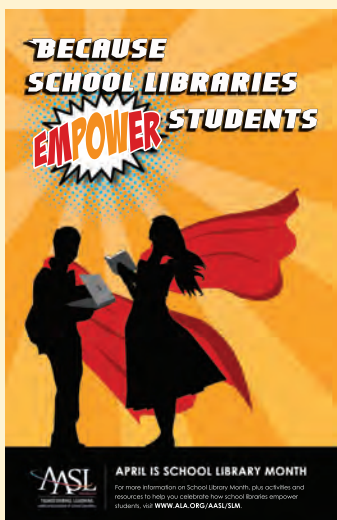
Local & Retiree Council Presidents Conference, New York City

April 7

NYSUT Board of Directors meeting, New York City

April 7-8

NYSUT Representative Assembly, New York City



April 9-15

National Library Week

April 22

Professional Issues Forum on Health Care, Albany

April 28

Workers Memorial Day

On the cover

Cover design by Dana Fournier.
Photo by Steve Jacobs.

Our battle cry must remain: SOLIDARITY FOREVER!

Three years ago, I left the 2014 NYSUT Representative Assembly as your newly elected president. I had a singular goal in mind for the subsequent three years, and I repeated it as often as I could, to as many people as I could: to establish NYSUT as a voice that could not be ignored.

As I took office, it was in the face of a hostile governor, an unresponsive Board of Regents and an education commissioner who all acted as co-conspirators in the attempt to shackle students and teachers to the dubious results of flawed standardized tests. Our battles in this arena are not entirely won, to be sure; but three years later, the Board of Regents has been transformed into a regulatory body standing strong for public education; the commissioner is now a lifelong educator with a much better understanding of what New York State students and teachers need; and even the governor has found his voice in praise of New York's educators!

All such victories are temporary, of course. As unionists, as parents, as educators, we need to remain vigilant and energized to ensure that misguided and harmful policies are not resuscitated and reinstated, the proverbial fresh coat of paint on the outhouse. We do that by remaining the voice that cannot be ignored. We do that by staying focused ... by staying ever-watchful ... and most important, as unionists, by staying together.

In a union of 630,000-plus voices, we are unlikely to ever form a choir in perfect harmony. Yet, this extraordinary diversity of opinion, these differences in approach to problem-solving, are not an impediment to our success. Far from it! They form the backbone of an organization whose respectful posture of listening to and learning from each other leads us to a stronger, more unified place.

Make no mistake: Our resolve will be tested in the months and years to come. Our enemies are well-organized, extremely well-funded, unlikely to ever give up, and their numbers appear to be growing, not shrinking, one election after another. As I write these words, the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled unanimously to uphold the legality of agency fee payments in the case, *Janus v. AFSCME*, that appears destined for the U.S. Supreme Court. If this has a somewhat familiar ring to it, it should. The *Janus* case is the next, and certainly not the last, in a legal onslaught against workers' rights. Last year it was the deadlocked Supreme Court decision in *Friedrichs v. CTA*. Now, as then, an adverse decision will present an existential



EL-WISE NOISETTE

“As unionists, as parents, as educators, we need to remain vigilant and energized.”

threat to public sector unions in New York State and across the country.

Agency fee is the tip of the iceberg. Nationally, Congress has already proposed “right to work” legislation that would cripple the union movement on a nationwide scale. Despite legislative minorities on the left in both houses of Congress, we must nevertheless fight to ensure that such legislation never reaches the president’s desk. With the proposed repeal of the Affordable Care Act, every American’s access to affordable health care is now under attack as well.

In New York State, a proposed constitutional convention in November presents a very real threat to the right to organize and collectively bargain, fundamental rights currently enshrined in our constitution. Our efforts need to be focused on voting down this convention, and keeping our constitution as it is.

Unions have provided a blanket of security for every American, union member or not, in the areas of economic well-being, access to affordable health care and a general quality of life.

Our enemies make it clear: They will eradicate unionism once and for all, given the chance. Given this stark reality, it is incumbent upon us, as unionists and as Americans, to ensure that their efforts bear no fruit. It is imperative that we stand together, as one collective voice that cannot and will not be ignored, in the tradition of every great unionist whose legacy we celebrate.

I am proud to leave NYSUT in a condition that positions us well for these great and necessary battles. And I urge every NYSUT member, in the strongest possible terms, to join your voices and continue our great collective battle cry of **SOLIDARITY FOREVER.**



5

QUESTIONS
FOR...

Judy Granger

Lexington School for the Deaf Teachers' Association

1. Lexington School for the Deaf in Queens is a so-called 4201 School. What exactly are Special Act 4201 Schools?

The State Legislature established Special Act 4201 Schools in 1947 — so named for section 4201 of Education Law — to serve the special education needs of children who are deaf, blind and/or severely physically or emotionally disabled. These state-supported, privately operated schools provide free education to all students who have been evaluated and recommended by a Committee on Special Education. There are 11 of them — eight schools for the deaf, one for the blind and two for students with emotional and/or physical handicaps.

2. Students in 4201 Schools face challenges most other students don't. What would you say is the greatest challenge your students face?

The greatest challenge for our students is developing a language. A large percentage of our students have

hearing parents who speak a language other than English at home. Most of these parents are working hard to make ends meet and they struggle to find the time to learn English and sign language. Because of this, we have many students who cannot communicate with their parents and are only learning language during the 32 hours per week they attend school.

A small percentage of our students have deaf parents. These students have learned American Sign Language as their first language. The challenge for them is to learn to read and write English.

3. The 4201 Schools are funded through a complex rate-setting process, so they don't share in the same across-the-board percentage increase provided to traditional public school districts. How does that lack of parity affect services? Is staff retention a problem?

We are affected by the lack of appropriate funding in many ways. We have less money in our budget for textbooks and school supplies, as well as for keeping our computers and other technology

up to date. We struggle to find money for key positions, such as our literacy coordinator.

Our teachers have master's degrees in deaf education and are dedicated to working with our students. Our teacher-to-student ratio is low because of our students' specialized needs, so we get to know our students extremely well. We are a tight-knit community. Unfortunately, our salaries are much lower than those at our local public schools, so some teachers have had to make the difficult choice to leave and teach elsewhere.

4. NYSUT is asking the state for a multi-million dollar fund dedicated to capital improvements and to address deferred maintenance issues at specialized schools. Tell us about your facilities.

Our school is very much in need of money for improvements and regular maintenance. The roof leaks in several places. The playgrounds desperately need repair. Our library is antiquated and needs to be updated to be more in line

with current library models. Even basic maintenance such as replacing old carpeting and painting the classrooms and hallways has been put off for many years.

5. You recently attended NYSUT's Committee of 100 volunteer lobbying day in Albany. How has the union's advocacy helped advance education for your students?

This is the third year the Lexington School for the Deaf TA has sent representatives to Committee of 100. Many legislators do not know what the 4201 Schools are, or why we so desperately need more funding. We are beginning to change that as we meet with more legislators each year, and as NYSUT continues to lobby for us. I am hopeful that, as legislators begin to understand our needs, they will enact legislation to create funding parity between the 4201 Schools and their local school districts. With funding parity, the 4201 Schools would get the same percentage increases each year as local public schools. It would enable us to better meet the educational needs of our students.



[LETTERS]

Don't lose sight of the big fights ahead

Friends of public education lost a big battle with Betsy DeVos' confirmation as education secretary. Yet, despite our disappointment, it's important not to lose sight that the bigger fights lie ahead at the

state and local levels.

Public education activists must encourage state legislators to reject any effort to defund our already underfunded public schools. State legislators need to say no to voucher programs that benefit unaccountable and non-inclusive private, parochial and charter schools.

Only public schools are committed and required by law to teach all of our country's students regardless of circumstances.

Perhaps the greatest concern of all for friends of public education is the Nov. 7 election and the vote to determine whether New York will hold a constitutional convention. Any progress made in public education, environmental protection, collective bargaining, pensions and social welfare could be reversed if a constitutional convention convenes.

— Carolyn Faggioni, *Sewanhaka Federation of Teachers*

Correction

Candidates seeking National Board Certification can earn three graduate credits for each completed component for a total cost of \$300. The cost was incorrect in the March 2017 issue.

This land is your land

For Earth Day 2017, Earth Day Network is launching an ambitious goal of achieving global climate and environmental literacy by 2020 — the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. EDN offers online toolkits for educators and ideas to celebrate on April 22 and beyond. Visit www.earthday.org to find lesson plans for K-12 teachers, resources for higher education professionals and ideas and tips for lawmakers. There's even an "Earth Day in a box" toolkit for organizing community events. If you happen to be in Washington, D.C., April 22, EDN and the March for Science are co-organizing a rally and teach-in on the National Mall. For more info, visit www.marchforscience.com.



Share My Lesson has loads of free resources to support your Earth Day events. In "Everything's gone green: The story of Earth Day," the National Constitution Center explores the history of the environmental movement in the United States. This lesson is suited for middle school and high school students. A middle school lesson from the Nature Conservancy examines reforestation and its impact on climate. For these and other Earth Day-related lessons, visit <https://sharemylesson.com/collections/earth-day>.

Financial literacy

Just in time for tax day, April 15, several resources are available to teach financial literacy. Kids.usa.gov offers lessons and worksheets on explaining taxes to students in grades 5-9. For tax day resources for students in elementary school through high school, check out www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/april-15-tax-day. Resources include timelines, political cartoons, and even the tax returns of U.S. presidents and vice presidents. Finally, www.themint.org provides tools to help teach children to manage money wisely and develop good financial habits.



Educator's Voice focuses on content area instruction

NYSUT's journal of best practices in education, *Educator's Voice*, celebrates a milestone in 2017.

"I am proud to present the 10th anniversary edition," said NYSUT Vice President Catalina Fortino, noting the publication has lived up to its goal of showcasing the work NYSUT members do every day in the classroom — and sharing best practices with colleagues across the state.



The theme for Volume X is: *Engaging all Learners through Content Area Instruction*. Authors share instructional practices designed to engage students by making them active partners in the learning process.

"This collection demonstrates how content area instruction can become the core of daily practice with students front and center in the process," Fortino said. The practices emphasize the importance of meaningful content to help students acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed.

Volume X will be available this month for download at www.nysut.org/educatorsvoice.

Examples of topics include: learning to think, read and write like historians; the school library as a Makerspace; teaching through entrepreneurship; tackling bullying in the early grades through the arts; and much more.

NYSUT is already soliciting authors for Volume XI: *Family Engagement and Community Partnerships*. Family and community partnerships help to create more vibrant school communities and support a child's overall well-being by promoting the integration of academic, social and emotional learning.

For more information or to download the call for proposals for the next volume, visit www.nysut.org/resources/special-resources/sites/educators-voice/call-for-proposals.

The deadline for proposals is June 12.

[ICYMI: IN CASE YOU MISSED IT]

Rochester teachers care

A new, three-year video project — Rochester Teachers Care by the Rochester Teachers Association — brings viewers into the heart of the classroom and into the many ways teachers educate and motivate their students every day. The first video features John-Martin Cannon, a first-year, sixth grade teacher at School 10, as he begins every school day with a talking circle. The circle provides Cannon's students with a safe and comfortable time to talk about things important to them. Watch it at nysut.org. The project was made possible through a NYSUT Solidarity Grant.

A new video of Rochester educators at work will be shared on the RTA website, RTA's Facebook page, Twitter and other social media venues every week during the school year.



Show the love for public schools

NYSUT and its coalition partners have launched a positive and pro-active statewide campaign to help you share why you're #PublicSchoolProud, and to encourage you to declare: #ILovePublicSchools! At nypublicschoolproud.org you'll find downloadable posters and profile pictures and banners for your Facebook page and other social media.



Proud of schools for deaf

A series of four posters celebrates the dedicated educators, students and their families who make New York State's schools for the deaf vibrant and constructive learning centers. NYSUT represents about 600 educators who work in the privately run, state-supported schools. You can download printable posters at www.nysut.org/posters or order via email at orders@nysutmail.org. Reference Project No. 925P_17 and include your name, mailing address, number of copies needed and a contact phone number.





PHOTOS BY EL-WISE NOIBETTE

■ NYSUT's Andy Pallotta, above, tells hundreds of coalition activists about his "bucket list" at a rally on the Capitol's Million Dollar Staircase. At right, grassroots activist Susan Dodds, Norwood-Norfolk Teachers Association, buttonholes state Sen. Joseph Griffo, R-Utica, during an office visit at Committee of 100 Advocacy Day.



Relentless

Grassroots advocacy drives agenda in Albany

By Ned Hoskin
nhoskin@nysutmail.org

Standing in the center of the noisy mass of coalition partners and activists overflowing the Million Dollar Staircase in the state Capitol, NYSUT Executive Vice President Andy Pallotta looked up to the ceiling and smiled.

"It's great to be here among friends, which doesn't always happen in this building," he said. "... My wish is that all of us here would be able to pay the millionaire's tax! It's on my bucket list!"

On this first Monday in March, weeks before the state budget is enacted on March 31, Pallotta and NYSUT local union leaders, leaders of other unions, progressive activists from Stronger Economy for All and the Fiscal Policy Institute pulled no punches in letting state lawmakers and the governor know how they could generate enough additional revenue to meet the state's needs:

- Extend and expand the "millionaire's tax," and
- Close the "carried-interest loophole."

NYSUT fully supported the state Assembly in its call to extend AND expand the "millionaire's tax," moves that would increase state revenue by \$5.6 billion. The proposal would expand the income tax surcharge on the state's highest earners, incrementally raising rates an additional .5 percent for those making more than \$5 million, 1 percent for those making more than \$10 million and 1.5 percent for those making more than \$100 million.

The union was also backing a two-house initiative to close the "carried-interest loophole" that benefits only hedge-fund managers and private equity partners while costing taxpayers some \$3.5 billion a year in tax revenue that could be used to expand programs that support students and middle class families. Because they derive their income from transactions and capital gains, not salaries, these finance managers pay half the income tax rate most people do. The proposal would allow the state to recoup this lost revenue.

During the annual ritual known as the union's Committee of 100 Advocacy Day, nearly 600 NYSUT grassroots activists descended on the Capitol to seek more financial support from the state for schools, colleges and hospitals.

When lawmakers asked, "Where will we get the money?" the activists were armed with the answers: Expand the tax and close the loophole.

Classroom teachers, college faculty and professionals, and other educators fanned out to meet with local legislators. They pressed for a \$2.1 billion increase in school aid, the same level of funding called for by the Regents; a strong, multi-year investment in SUNY, CUNY and the state's community colleges; funding for faculty initiatives, and restoration in state subsidies to SUNY hospitals.

Stay informed

The state's new fiscal year begins April 1. Watch www.nysut.org for updates about the state budget and how it affects you.



College students, unions join forces for higher ed funding

A week earlier, hundreds of college students from the tip of Long Island, from New York City and from Central and Western New York boarded buses in the predawn darkness and bounded off them to roll down the Empire State Plaza concourse and tell their stories to lawmakers. The message:

- Boost the state's investment in public higher education, and
- provide funding for faculty initiatives.

United under the catch phrase "Invest in Futures," the students — joined by academic and professional faculty from SUNY and CUNY — squeezed into a large meeting room off the concourse to rally together before they broke into smaller groups for visits with legislators. It was standing room only.

"We're running out of chairs, we're running out of coffee," said Pallotta. "What a great problem to have! This is very exciting!"

Some students awoke at 5 a.m., some at 4 a.m. and some never went to bed the night before.

"You are the spectacular ones, the ones who got up early to ride the buses to be here," said Professional Staff Congress President Barbara Bowen. "We've never had so large a group here. We cannot waste this day!"

"It's different this year," United University Professions President Fred Kowal said after addressing the student activists. "There's a dialogue, and the fact that lawmakers are asking for information from us is very important."

One busload of Suffolk County

□ Clockwise from right: Hundreds of college students from all over the state poured off buses for Higher Ed lobby day; a Southern Westchester BOCES delegation, including success story Tamira Glover, third from left, meets with Senate Democratic Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, second from right; and, red-clad students from Eastern Suffolk BOCES stand out from the crowd.



Community College students managed two special conferences with top legislative leaders: Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie and Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan.

It was important to bring the students to the leaders, said Kevin Peterman, president of the Faculty Association of Suffolk Community College. "We've been underfunded for way too long. We need to drive that story home."

Students, educators emphasize the value of BOCES' programs

To Tamira Glover, being in a BOCES program for incarcerated youth literally saved her life.

"Honestly if it hadn't been for my BOCES family, it would have gone one of two ways," Glover told state lawmakers as she passionately made the case for more BOCES funding during a special lobby day in March. "I'd either be doing major time or I'd be dead. I really believe BOCES saved my life."

Serving time in Westchester County Jail when she was just 17, Glover said the educators at Southern Westchester BOCES' Sprain Brook Academy pushed her to develop her reading skills, focus on school work and turn her life around.

Now, with a Regents high school diploma, she's planning to attend college this fall.

Glover was one of many BOCES students who took part in the March 1 BOCES advocacy day, lobbying side by side with her BOCES counselor, Kevin McAllister, and science teacher Keith Mattos, both members of Southern Westchester BOCES TA.

The students poignantly made the case for more state funding so programs can be enhanced and expanded.

Their stories were as varied as the incredible range of BOCES programs — from intensive special education programs to career and technical offerings in fast-growing fields like health sciences and the trades.

Campaign targets bid to enrich corporate charter schools

Not all the action was on the streets and in the corridors of power. Tens of thousands of NYSUT "e-activists"

hammered away at legislators through the NYSUT Member Action Center, and through their own Facebook and Twitter accounts.

In response to the state Senate Republicans' attempt to push unacceptable charter school expansion plans throughout the state, NYSUT launched an online campaign to stop the "DeVosTATION." The Senate proposal sought \$244 million for charter schools, and would lift the statewide cap on the number of these publicly funded, privately run schools.

Tying the move to the extreme privatization schemes and charter follies coming out of Secretary Betsy DeVos' federal Department of Education, the ongoing NYSUT campaign generated more than 20,000 messages to GOP senators in mere days.

Other MAC campaigns advocated for teacher centers, to end receivership, to preserve health care reimbursements for retirees, to support opt-out rights and much more.

Advocacy by the numbers

8

District offices of seven Republican state senators picketed by NYSUT local union members to protest the lawmakers' support of a proposal to expand charter schools across the state.



4,203

Phone calls by NYSUT members and retirees to Senate Republicans to say NO to the expansion of charter schools in New York State. Forty-two percent of them went to Sen. Flanagan.

\$394.6 million

Cash held by publicly funded, privately run charter schools in New York State, with \$451.1 million in unrestricted net assets, according to NYSUT's newly updated report, "Flush With Cash." Go to www.nysut.org/news/2017/march/charters-holding-nearly-400-million-in-cash.

19,708

Faxes sent to **32** Republican state senators in the first two days of our "Say NO to MILLIONS more for Corporate Charters" campaign against the GOP's DeVosian proposal to lift the cap on charter schools and boost charter school funding by \$244 million. Nearly half of those faxes were sent to Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan.

600

Lobbyists-for-a-day — all NYSUT members or retirees — flooded lawmakers' offices to share stories from the front lines of education and health care on NYSUT's modestly named Committee of 100 Advocacy Day. Even the first Committee of 100, in 1973, exceeded its description when **165** activists marched into the Capitol.

90,272

People reached by our social media campaign targeting GOP senators for trying to bring DeVosTATION to New York.

Parents:
Know your rights to opt your children out of state tests.

Visit nysut.org/optout



13

Billboards NYSUT posted statewide to remind parents about their rights to "opt-out" their children from state tests.

700

Students from State and City University of New York campuses and community colleges converged on the Capitol for Higher Education Lobby Day to urge lawmakers to support public higher education.



EL-WISE NOISETTE

And we're not done yet ...

Stop the DeVosTATION

If President Trump and Education Secretary Betsy DeVos get their way, three essential federal grant programs would be wiped out to help pay for private school vouchers. New York State could lose more than \$368 million in federal funding that is used to recruit, hire and retain effective teachers; reduce class sizes; provide professional development opportunities, especially for educators who teach children with disabilities and English language learners; fund before- and after-school programs; and offer college aid for undergraduate students with demonstrated financial need.

In all, Trump's DeVosTATING budget contains:



Don't let Betsy DeVosTATE our public schools

- a 50 percent increase for charter school funding.
- a \$250 million private school "choice" program.
- \$1 billion for a fund portability program, which is nothing more than a

disguised voucher system. Portability could bankrupt some public schools and slash funding for the rest.

Call your representative in Congress and tell them to stop the DeVos agenda. To find your elected official, go to mac.nysut.org.

Don't destroy our health care

The American Health Care Act would have been disastrous. Though the GOP-led House pulled the bill after it was clear it would not pass, Republicans will surely try again. Tell your representatives in Washington: Don't destroy our health care! Use your Facebook and Twitter accounts to add to the growing chorus of dissent.

To find your elected official, go to mac.nysut.org.

Support our students, schools

A day of action for public education is set for **May 1** across New York State. Events are sponsored by the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools (AROS). Contact your local president to see what is planned in your community and watch www.nysut.org for more details.

Voting on school budgets and elections for school board members take place **May 16**. Support students and educators by approving school budget proposals and by electing school board members who are pro-public education.



Open the state constitution? Heck, NO.

New website offers tools to defeat ConCon referendum

This is the sixth in a series about key reasons why an upcoming referendum to hold a state constitutional convention must be defeated. The series, “Open the state constitution? Heck, NO,” examines topics — collective bargaining, public pensions, forever wild provisions, public education and social welfare obligations — that would be at risk if a state constitutional convention was held.

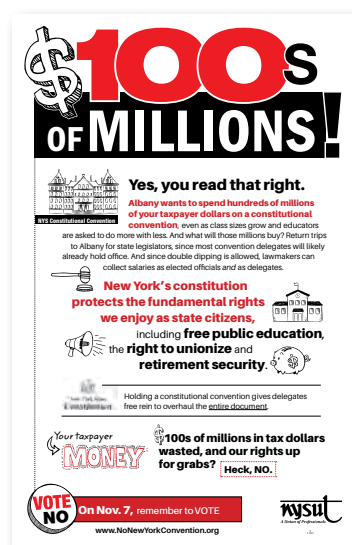
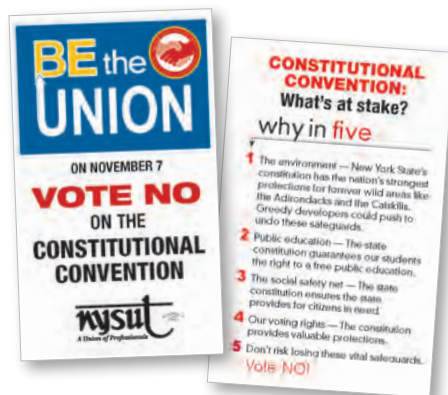
By **NED HOSKIN**
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NYSUT is launching a new website to help members and like-minded activists turn the tide against the Nov. 7 referendum on a New York State constitutional convention.

NoNewYorkConvention.org provides dozens of documents and links to arm regular folks like us with the information to write effective letters to the editor, to speak to groups large and small, and to dominate social media.

Even more importantly, tools on the website can help you know what to say in those one-on-one conversations that occur at work, at home, on the ball field or the beach, at the grocery store or the dog park.

“Polling shows that many New Yorkers don’t know what the constitutional convention is about,” said NYSUT Vice President Paul Pecorale. “The most effective way to communicate the risks and follies of this multi-million dollar boondoggle for political insiders is face



to face, and one on one.”

It’s not always easy, however, to know what to say — and how to say it persuasively and effectively. Resources at **NoNewYorkConvention.org** can help.

For example:

Your uncle says: “We can do something to fix education policy if we have a constitutional convention.”

The Point/Counterpoint document on the website suggests you say: “The constitution already has strong protections for public education. What fixes do you think delegates would put in place to make it better? I’d rather have education professionals who are teaching our students make the decisions instead of some convention delegate, wouldn’t you?”

In addition to the Point/Counterpoint tool, the website features:

- “Pandora’s Box” — everything you need to know about a constitutional convention — in a single-page hand-out and in a PowerPoint format.

- A sample letter to the editor.
- A collection of articles and other handouts that make the case against the referendum.
- A poster you can download to post in a visible place.
- Convenient “Why in 5” palm cards that present five reasons why a constitutional convention is a bad idea — for one, many of our rights would be vulnerable.
- An order form for “Vote NO!” buttons and car magnets.
- Links to engaging videos, helpful articles and dozens of other helpful websites.

“In this ‘off-year’ election, the referendum on the constitutional convention will be the most important box on the

Nov. 7 ballot,” said NYSUT Executive Vice President Andy Pallotta. “Turnout will be down, and that means when we get our members and friends to get out and vote ... we win. It’s on all of us to have those conversations, convince people to vote, and to vote NO on this wasteful proposed party for politicians.”

What you need to know

- The constitutionally required 20-year referendum to propose a constitutional convention will be on the Nov. 7 ballot.
- If it passes, three delegates per state Senate district and 15 at-large delegates — 204 in total — would be elected at the next general election, in November 2018.
- Delegates can include members of the Legislature or other elected officials, as well as political party leaders — and they can hold both positions, collecting both salaries and double pension credits.
- The convention would meet in Albany in 2019 for an unspecified duration, and then publish its suggested amendments.
- Any proposed changes are submitted to voters for approval separately or as a group for another public referendum.

RA delegates to determine union’s course

NYSUT’s 2017 Representative Assembly convenes Friday, April 7. Following an extremely busy fall and a host of challenges on the labor and education fronts, the 45th annual RA offers an opportunity for the union to reflect on the past year and to determine the priorities for the coming year and beyond.

More than 2,800 delegates are reported for the two-day convention. Delegates, elected by their local unions, will set the union’s course by electing NYSUT officers and members of the Board of Directors. Representatives to serve as delegates and alternates to the American Federation of Teachers convention will also be elected.

RA delegates will act on four proposed constitutional amendments and 44 resolutions on a range of topics, from education and sanctuary status for campuses and schools, to support for addiction recovery and NYSUT’s opposition to a state constitutional convention.

The RA also offers an opportunity to recognize member excellence

through the union’s constituency awards, LifeLine awards, Political Action Volunteer awards, and community service and VOTE-COPE honors.

The business of the convention is preceded by the Local and Retiree Council Presidents Conference Thursday, April 6. To follow the convention, visit www.nysut.org/ra.

When a health plan goes off the rails

This story is a **'poster child'** for why unions really matter

By Matt Smith
msmith@nysutmail.org

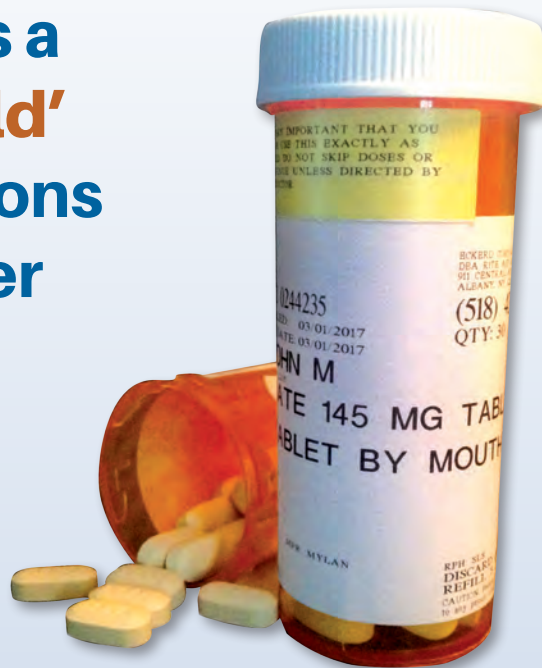
Sean Crall describes the story this way: "It was absolute chaos."

And that might be putting it mildly.

Imagine you have cancer and, with virtually no warning, your insurer prevents you from receiving chemotherapy; or you have diabetes and suddenly they deny you insulin; or you have a child whose long-term medication is no longer covered.

"We're not talking being denied aspirin here," said Crall, president of the East Greenbush Teachers Association, whose members receive medical coverage through a consortium called the Rensselaer Columbia Greene Health Insurance Trust. "In many cases, we're talking life-saving medication."

The trust, which serves 23 school districts comprising members from nearly 40 locals, was created to keep costs down. Last summer, the trust decided to change its pharmacy manager and, as part of that move, changed from an "unrestricted" to "restricted" formulary, which essentially placed stricter limits on the types of generic and brand-name drugs preferred by the plan. The move — which was projected to result in a \$7 million savings — was expected to have only a negligible impact on those covered through the consortium.



That's not what happened. Instead, the change wreaked complete havoc on the lives of thousands of education professionals and their families across a three-county area.

"The trust underestimated the impact" on participants, Crall said. "They figured it would affect 1 to 2 percent. Instead, it affected between 17 to 20 percent."

The East Greenbush TA immediately filed a grievance. Other locals did too, and filed charges with the state Public Employment Relations Board.

"Members were incensed," said Derek Lewis, a NYSUT labor relations specialist in the Capital District Regional Office.

But in a cruel twist of fate, it was determined that most locals did not have language in their contracts to support the grievances. So, they called a meeting of all local leaders who represented members impacted by the trust's move.

Facing litigation by a number of locals, the trust offered to mediate the dispute regionally. That offer led to meetings involving local leaders,

“As a large collective group, our voice was very strong and convincing. It allowed us to demand meetings and information from the consortium that even the superintendents weren't getting.”

district superintendents, trust board members, Civil Service Employees Association and School Administrators Association of New York State representatives and NYSUT labor relations specialists.

The group met several times over a three-month period starting in November, and the meetings uncovered some unsettling findings, including:

- the trust was charging participants too much in premiums, and
- members were not being rebated their share of overpayments when excess cash was sent by the pharmacy plan back to districts.

Troy TA President Seth Cohen said the action taken by NYSUT and the local unions exposed the "complete lack of transparency by the trust in how they conducted business before this debacle.

"This is a consortium of 23 school districts, however, there is a select executive board of seven that makes all the decisions," Cohen said. "And then those decisions are not fully shared until the changes happen."

The mediation led to a settlement, under which the trust agreed to give locals increased bargaining leverage. It also agreed to set up a \$50,000 fund to compensate members who faced increased prescription costs. To address

the artificially high premiums, the trust will grant a "premium holiday" in 2018, if there is a surplus, so parties can share in the savings.

The Troy, Averill Park and East Greenbush districts, meanwhile, will soon leave the trust and move to another consortium that offers more transparency.

"The decision to bring everyone together was critical to making sure that no one was left in the cold," said Lewis. "Without the NYSUT affiliation, and without thinking globally, there would have been a lot of losers."

Cohen agrees.

"This type of issue is a 'poster child' experience for why unions matter," he said.

"Our contract language was weak and vague when it came to challenging what the consortium did, and several of the other, smaller locals had no language in which to challenge at all," Cohen said. "However, as a large collective group, our voice was very strong and convincing. It allowed us to demand meetings and information from the consortium that even the superintendents weren't getting."

Lewis said the lesson learned from this experience makes it incumbent upon locals to assess their contracts, realize where they might be vulnerable and "shore up those holes."

"Moving forward," he said, "we are going to see increased efforts by districts to save money in areas that have never been attacked before."

Crall believes that message has been heard loud and clear. "Locals all over the region have been alerted because of what's happened here," he said. "Language matters."



MARTY KERINS JR



'Resist. Rest. Repeat.'

Union's first conference on women's priorities inspires, energizes

By Sylvia Saunders
ssaander@nysutmail.org

Participants at NYSUT's first-ever conference on women's priorities left the two-day event last month clearly revved up and ready to go.

As a closing activity, NYSUT President Karen E. Magee asked them to take a sticky note and write down their "key takeaway" and "next step" to turn insights into action.

The responses were telling:

"We need to stay angry and constantly fight for what is just and right," wrote one.

"I have the tools and the support," wrote another. "Now I need to put on my roller skates!"

And in perhaps the most concise response, three simple words: "Resist. Rest. Repeat."

Magee said she was struck by the number of young participants at NYSUT's "Speak Up, Stand Up, Step Up!" conference and how honest and action-oriented conversations can be a true catalyst for change.

The conference, held at NYSUT headquarters in Latham and planned by the union's Ad Hoc Women's Steering Committee, proved to be a perfect extension of the many women's marches held around the country the day after President Trump was inaugurated. "It was an inspiring day and reminded me



BECKY MILLER

yet again why it's so important to be sure women's voices are heard," said Magee, who attended a march held in Seneca Falls, the birthplace of the suffragette movement.

The conference addressed a wide range of important issues, including domestic violence, retirement security, communications, political engagement and more. As participants heard firsthand testimony from survivors of domestic violence, a horrific tragedy was unfolding just miles away. Elizabeth Gonzalez, a teacher aide and member of the Schenectady Federation of Teachers, died after being set on fire. Her husband has been charged with her murder.

During a lively open space "un-conference" session, attendees selected topics, ranging from how to help fearful immigrant students to "The Trump Effect in the Classroom," for small group follow-up discussions.

Syracuse Mayor Stephanie Miner, the

■ NYSUT members join President Karen E. Magee, above, center, to discuss women's priorities.

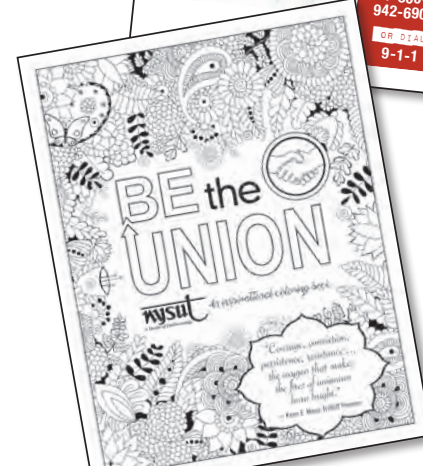
Left, participants visit the conference's wellness fair.

keynote speaker, said she has never seen the kind of "grassroots, genuine action" that continues to rise up and counter the spewing hatred that is boiling up across the country. She urged participants to speak out on behalf of immigrants, refugees and other marginalized people.

"There is solace in solidarity for all of us," Miner said. "There are thousands, if not millions, who feel the way we do."

NYSUT's Board of Directors voted to bring a resolution to the union's Representative Assembly in April to make the Ad Hoc Women's Steering Committee a permanent standing committee. "After all, more than 70 percent of our members are women," Magee said.

Magee recently announced she would not seek re-election as NYSUT president in order to work closely with American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten and the New York State AFL-CIO on a new



Resources & more

For complete coverage of the "Speak Up, Stand Up, Step Up!" conference, go to www.nysut.org/womenspriorities. You'll find resources, including posters and hotline numbers regarding domestic violence, a downloadable "Be the Union" inspirational coloring book, and PowerPoint presentations on retirement security and media bias.

initiative to advance economic opportunities for women. "I embrace the opportunity to carry forward at the national level the causes near and dear to my heart," Magee said. "And I look forward to continuing these conversations with all of you."

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Regents OK union-led changes to teacher certification process

By **Sylvia Saunders**
ssaunder@nysutmail.org

In a major win for union and higher education activists, the Regents in March approved significant changes to fix the state's new teacher certification process, including the elimination of one of four exams and a new review process to help candidates successfully complete the edTPA requirement.

NYSUT Vice President Catalina Fortino thanked the many faculty members and students who spoke passionately on the issue at statewide forums and to all who sent emails to the Regents, calling for the board to follow the edTPA Task Force's recommendations.

Fortino also praised the thoughtful work of the task force that was co-chaired by UUP Vice President for Academics Jamie Dangler and included members of UUP, the Professional Staff Congress/CUNY and NYSUT.

For the last three years, union leaders have strongly made the case that the state's teacher certification process is unfair and discourages prospective teachers from entering the profession.

The flawed exams, which the State Education Department introduced in 2014, contributed to a sharp dropoff in the number of college students who want to become teachers. Teacher education program enrollments in New York have declined by more than 40 percent and some students have left the state to become teachers elsewhere.

"Our teacher preparation faculty, their students and many deans of SUNY teacher preparation programs should take heart that three years of effort, of speaking out and of working with a number of concerned Regents paid off," Dangler said. "We went from being told no changes would be made to knowing that our members' efforts made a historic difference to the profession."

The Regents vote sets in motion the following actions:

- immediate elimination of the Academic Literacy Skills Test (ALST);
- setting up a process to review the Educating All Students (EAS) exam and extending the EAS safety net until it is revised;
- establishing a standards-setting panel to determine whether the edTPA passing score should be reset;
- establishing a multiple measures review process for cases where a teacher candidate falls within a specific scoring range on the edTPA;
- extending edTPA safety net pending completion of standards-setting panel work and establishment of the multiple measures review process;
- reviewing edTPA handbooks to determine whether alternative performance assessments are more feasible for certain areas;
- annual release of information revealing the qualifications of edTPA scorers (Pearson test scorers are off-site and do not directly observe student teachers);
- establishing a clinical practice work group to review the length and requirements of student teaching (Student teaching assignments range from 40 days to a year); and
- seeking legislative funding to increase vouchers for student certification exam costs.

When some Regents questioned whether the moves would lower standards, Regent Kathleen Cashin, co-chair of the Higher Education Committee, noted that New York has more certification exams than any other state. In addition, the ALST was harshly criticized as being racially biased, redundant and a poor predictor of who will succeed as a teacher.

Both Cashin and Chancellor Betty Rosa strongly lashed out at critics who claimed the Regents were eliminating literacy requirements or lowering standards. "There's an enormous amount of literacy on the other assessments," Cashin said. "You can't pass the edTPA, CST or EAS if you're not literate. The [edTPA] is like doing a master's thesis!"

Rosa noted the "pushback" came from "people who have no clue" about the content of the flawed ALST, or what New York teachers have to go through to become certified. Rosa said a number of professors with Ph.D.s volunteered to take the ALST and found that many of the questions were convoluted or had multiple correct answers.

Charles Sahm, director of education policy at the Manhattan Institute, a conservative think tank, took an ALST practice exam and agreed. "I found the reading comprehension section to be kind of infuriating," Sahm told reporters. "I only got 21 out of 40 right."

"If it's not a good test, our students shouldn't be subjected to it," Cashin said. "This is a case where we took a careful look and listened to the field ... The best policies come from the bottom up, not top down."

■ From left, Regent Kathleen Cashin, UUP Vice President for Academics Jamie Dangler, Regents Chancellor Betty Rosa and NYSUT Vice President Catalina Fortino. The unions successfully made the case for necessary changes to the teacher certification process.





Dragon tales

**Teacher
of the Year
weaves stories
into lessons to make
science come alive**

PHOTOS BY STEVE JACOBS

“Incorporating auditory, visual and kinesthetic activities for my students allows their brains to touch the material and rehearse the material in more than one way.”

— AMY HYSICK,
NYS TEACHER
OF THE YEAR

By Leslie Duncan Fottrell
lfottrel@nysutmail.org

The dragon’s sinister teeth gleam white. Its tongue, forked and red, juts out from a blue and green mouth. Its wings span nine feet. This fearsome papier-mâché and plastic creature, forever suspended in mid-flight, looms from the ceiling over Amy Hysick’s high school science classroom.

Dragons are the thing in the 2017 New York State Teacher of the Year’s class at Cicero-North Syracuse High School in Onondaga County. Dozens of them, including plush stuffed animals, plastic inflatables and even a very-much-alive bearded dragon, call every nook and cranny in the classroom home.

The classroom is located in the basement of the school’s technology wing, next to a shop class. Sometimes her students hear the grind of drills and saws.

“My students began calling the room ‘the dungeon,’ so I thought, ‘Why not make it a castle?’” she says.

The classroom is guarded by stonework and a knight in shining armor, protecting all, of course, from dragons. “Kids learn better when they are comfortable in their surroundings,” she says.

Yet, beyond the castle theme, Hysick is all about biology. Her dress is patterned in double helix. Her earrings match, although she also likes to wear a pair that is the chemical structure for caffeine. Her wardrobe is full of such biology-based outfits — which help make her lessons come alive.

NYSUT President Karen E. Magee calls Hysick “an inspiring educator, who uses innovative, multi-modal teaching to reach her students. She is also a strong advocate for students and for her community.”

Hysick is theatrical. Her lectures on complex topics weave stories, analogies, call and response and mnemonic devices together. She divides her 80-minute block classes into several components, which include the interactive lecture, quiz and hands-on learning.

“Incorporating auditory, visual and kinesthetic activities for my students allows their brains to touch the material and rehearse the material in more than one way,” she says.

And so, after her lesson on mitosis (cell division) for the Regents-level living environment class, Hysick announces that the hands-on lab is going to be “glucose-based.” She then unveils trays containing sandwich cookies, sprinkles and toothpicks and promises the students she has some “Tasty, tasty science!”

The students get to work, creating the stages of mitosis, making mitosis cookies, which they can “Dispose of any way you like after photographing them for me,” she says. Hysick walks among the students checking their work and offering encouragement. Students pop the tops off cookies, draw on the cream-filled center with toothpicks and judiciously add sprinkles to form the stages of mitosis.

Hysick gives her students short quizzes nearly every day. Using ZipGrade,

□ Amy Hysick, member of the North Syracuse Education Association, uses hands-on learning to help her Cicero-North Syracuse high school students understand the nature of science.



a grading app, on her smartphone, she gets instant feedback to see what her students know. She can and does alter her teaching approach based on quiz results. "That's what assessments are supposed to be for," she says.

"We take part in an opt-out movement annually," says North Syracuse Education Association President John Kuryla (rhymes with "gorilla," he offers). "And we feel very firmly that some of the legislation around testing has been detrimental to students. Amy stands behind that.

"She's been able to be present at rallies and speak to local media as a parent and as a teacher," says Kuryla, who adds that Hysick meets with legislators to discuss the detrimental impact funding cuts have on schools.

"Assessment is one of the most valuable tools teachers have. But in my

opinion, the current grades 3-8 tests do not represent the true value or purpose of assessment," Hysick says as she moves between small bins, doling out baking soda, vinegar and old-fashioned film canisters for her next class.

"Assessment should be frequent, appropriate for the grade level being taught, shouldn't be a 'surprise,' but be aligned to the learning standards. The results should be used to adjust classroom instruction according to students' needs." Hysick adjusts her instruction constantly in immediate response to her students' needs.

Nowhere is that more evident than in her science explorations class, a class she co-teaches with special education teacher Jeff Colasanti. "She puts so much effort into planning, so once she is in front of the kids she is not searching for words, or materials," he says.

After Hysick's lecture on volcanoes and the different types of volcanic eruptions, the science exploration students pick up the bins Hysick prepped earlier and go outside to study how built-up

pressure can change a volcanic eruption. They pour vinegar into the bottom of the film canister and measure a teaspoon of baking soda into the circular depression in the canister's top. It takes both dexterity and agility for the students to flip the top and seal — the quicker, the better — to see maximum pressure build. Hysick looks like she is having as much fun as they are, especially when the built-up pressure pops the tops off some of the canisters.

"When I walk into Amy's classroom, I see kids excited to be here," says Bill LaClair, executive principal of Cicero-North Syracuse High School. "They are engaged in learning."

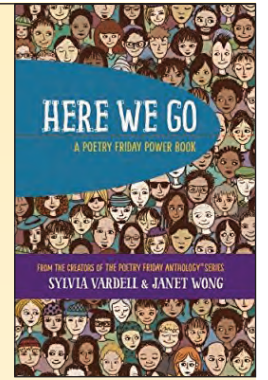
LaClair cites Hysick's ability to use different strategies to meet students where they are. "That's due to her commitment to this work."

That commitment to differentiated learning and to engaging all students "makes her one of the finest examples of what public education provides for student learning," says NYSUT Vice President Catalina Fortino.

Hysick, ever the noble teacher, understands that even the strongest castle can have weak spots. She believes in rebuilding, or what she calls recovery from failure and setbacks, and offers her students opportunities to retake quizzes and tests. "You have as many chances as you need," she tells them, "to show me that you learned what you need to learn."

Here We Go: A Poetry Friday Power Book

By Sylvia Vardell & Janet Wong



Recommended by: Susan Polos, Bedford TA, school librarian, NBCT

Recommended for: Ages 8 and older

Why I chose this book: April is Poetry Month. It's also School Library Month, and this book is a perfect addition to school and classroom libraries. The authors convey the power of poetry through the stories of four children confronting socio-political issues — immigration, gender roles, food insecurity and more. Wong and Vardell link these poems to pre-writing activities and prompts that allow students to write their own poems. In the end, the characters join together with a positive message of hope.

How teachers can use this book: The book is designed in 12 "PowerPacks," each with an anchor poem, a specific poetry exercise and a specific social justice theme. There are 12 connected lessons complete with activities and resource lists.

What I like best: The poems, written from the perspective of four children — Ameera, David, Jack and Jenna — are representative of a diverse classroom; their problems are particular, yet universal. This small volume packs a big punch as children are empowered to create their own poems and to effect change in the world.

About the authors: Janet Wong (www.janetwong.com) is a former labor relations lawyer who left that career to become an internationally known poet and speaker. She has written many books about teaching poetry. Sylvia Vardell is a professor at Texas Women's University in the School of Library and Information Studies and specializes in children's books. She originated *Librarians' Choices*, an annual review and selection guide for the latest books for children and young adults.

"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 lfrenett@nysutmail.org.

BOCES union leaders: Services lacking for students with disabilities



BOCES United Professionals' Andrew Jordan:

"At the end of the day, it comes down to the almighty dollar."



SED Assistant Commissioner Christopher Suriano:

"Students don't lose their disability when they move from one setting to another."



Saratoga-Adirondack BOCES EA's Jo James:

"Fragile students ... are being traumatized in the classroom."

PHOTOS BY ANDREW WATSON

By Sylvia Saunders
ssaunders@nysutmail.org

In disturbing detail, BOCES union leaders were loud and clear when they voiced concerns that too many students with disabilities are not getting the specialized services they need.

NYSUT Vice President Catalina Fortino set up a special meeting last month with State Education Department Assistant Commissioner Christopher Suriano so he could hear directly from the field.

Union leaders, who raised similar concerns at a NYSUT advisory council meeting with Fortino earlier in the year, said budgetary pressures, dangerously low staffing levels and a lack of state monitoring are shortchanging students and causing safety concerns.

"I just want us to be safe and I want the kids to get what they need," said Sandie Carner-Shafran, a NYSUT board member and teaching assistant at Washington-Saratoga-Warren-Hamilton-Essex BOCES. "We're operating a day treatment program without the

necessary supports."

BOCES union leaders representing programs around the state said students are simply not getting the specialized instruction, smaller class size and extra adult attention required under their Individualized Education Programs, or IEPs.

For example, students may be in a 6:1:1 setting for a social studies class in their home district, but are then "magically mainstreamed" with 40-50 students in BOCES programming.

"We're getting so many more challenged kids," said Southern Westchester BOCES culinary teacher Gerry Murphy. "Seventy percent of our kids in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs have an IEP or accommodation."

Murphy talked about how having more than 40 students in his shop — sometimes using potentially dangerous

equipment — can pose serious safety concerns. "It's just not fair to the kids," he said.

Suriano looked around the room and asked if this is a common occurrence. More than a dozen hands went up.

"It's like that in our alternative high school," said Andy Jordan, co-president of Erie 1 BOCES United Professionals. "A child from a 6:1:1 setting for academic classes is in a physical education class with 40 kids.

That's a huge ask for one physical education teacher."

"That can be tough on fragile students, too," said Jo James of Saratoga Adirondack BOCES EA. "Their IEPs require a smaller setting and a [richer] staffing ratio for a reason. Students are being traumatized in the classroom."

Suriano said it shouldn't be that way. "Students don't lose their disability

“ I just want us to be safe and I want the kids to get what they need. ”

— SANDIE CARNER-SHAFRAN

when they move from one setting to another," he said. "Supports in a hands-on program might be different, but they still need supports to succeed."

Suriano said the commissioner and the Regents are keenly interested in improving outcomes for students with disabilities. "The goal is to have more students with disabilities succeed ... and to have more students with disabilities accessing your services," he said.

Union leaders said the problem has intensified as local school districts struggle to balance budgets under the state's tax cap on spending. BOCES administrators, in turn, are trying to offer services to districts as economically as possible — even striving to rebate school districts any unspent funding at the end of the year to encourage future enrollments.

"In a BOCES we're there to serve the district," said one leader. "It's a business model, but at what point do the student's needs supersede?"

"In my mind, you're not a business at all," Suriano said. "You're designed to

Continued on page 17

Longtime local union president named new Regent

By Sylvia Saunders
ssaunder@nysutmail.org

Susan Mittler, a retired teacher who served nearly two decades as Ithaca Teachers Association president, was elected to an open Regents Board seat effective April 1, replacing James Tallon. The State Legislature in March also re-elected Vice Chancellor T. Andrew Brown and Regent Nan Eileen Mead to five-year terms.

Mittler has been an educator in New York State for more than 35 years, teaching pre-K to middle school classes during the first half of her career and then students in the district's gifted and talented program. She was appointed to the New York State Professional Standards and Practices Board from

2005-13 where she focused her efforts on the development of authentic, valid assessments of educators and students. She also served on the NYSUT Policy Council for several years.

Currently, Mittler is on the faculty at Cornell University in the College of Industrial and Labor Relations in the area of collective bargaining. She earned a bachelor's degree from Cornell and a master's degree in elementary education from SUNY Cortland.

"She knows well that if we want the best for our children we have to recruit, train and then continue supporting excellent teachers who know their field and care deeply about children," said Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton, who represents Ithaca and nominated Mittler during a joint legislative session.

"Given her experience and dedication

to public education, we strongly believe Susan will add an important voice and perspective to the Board of the Regents," said NYSUT Vice President Catalina Fortino, who served with Mittler on the Professional Standards and Practices Board.

Fortino noted it's important for the Regents Board to have experienced educators like Mittler. She has vowed to be a strong presence in educational institutions throughout the 6th Judicial District, which covers Broome, Chemung, Chenango, Cortland, Delaware, Madison, Otsego, Schuyler, Tioga and Tompkins counties.

NYSUT also congratulated Vice Chancellor Brown and Regent Mead on their re-elections to the state policy-making board.

Brown, a Rochester attorney who

serves as an adjunct professor at SUNY Brockport and Monroe Community College, was appointed to the board in 2012 and elected vice chancellor last year.

Mead, who represents the 1st judicial district, has been a financial services industry professional for more than 20 years and served two terms as first vice chair of the New York City Schools Chancellor's Parent Advisory Council.



PROVIDED

■ Susan Mittler brings more than 35 years of education experience to the Regents board.

Continued from page 16

meet the needs of students [that] your component districts can't provide."

Leaders told Suriano, who was named an assistant commissioner last fall, that the state is too easily issuing variances so BOCES can get around staffing requirements, increase class size and save money.

They said staff shortages are reaching a crisis level, especially for hiring para-professionals and substitute teachers.

"The working conditions have gotten so tough that the sub doesn't even come back after lunch," Carner-Shafran said.

"And we have more and more people out on worker's comp because of injuries," Murphy said. "It's real rough out there."

School psychologists and social workers are stretched to the max, increasingly spending more time on crisis intervention and less time managing their caseload.

"Social workers are just trying to keep their heads above water," said Laura Coleman of Broome-Delaware-Tioga

BOCES TA.

"We have just one psychologist once a week for an hour," Carner-Shafran added.

"Professional development has not kept pace on how to handle increasingly intense behavior," said Flora Fasoldt of Capital Region BOCES. "We need crisis

teams and we're slow to do that."

Other issues discussed included lobbying for increased reimbursements for BOCES programming and capital expenses; offering services for English language learners in BOCES programs and revamping Annual Professional Performance Reviews (APPRs) to more

accurately show student growth for special education teachers.

Throughout the meeting, Suriano listened carefully and took copious notes. He said he would take their concerns back to Commissioner MaryEllen Elia and discuss the issues raised with BOCES district superintendents.



■ BOCES union leaders, above, from around the state listen carefully as SED Assistant Commissioner Christopher Suriano assures them the department will take a closer look at how the state approves variances for special education staffing and class size. At right, Laura Coleman of Broome-Delaware-Tioga BOCES Teachers Association, says state standardized test scores do not reflect her students' real growth.



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Getting to know ... Loretta Falkowski

Teaching assistant Loretta Falkowski was interviewed by Annie McClintock, president of the United Teaching Assistants of Harborfields and a member of the NYSUT SRP Advisory Committee.

Why do you love what you do?

I am a special education teaching assistant at Washington Drive Primary School in Centerport. I work with students who have varying degrees of learning, emotional and/or social disabilities. Along with collecting data and following behavior plans, I work collaboratively with classroom special education teachers to keep the students on task. One-to-one instruction is often necessary because the students are pulled from class for related services. From the moment they step off the bus to the moment they get back on, I am there to help them in whatever way,

shape or form is necessary to ensure their success.

During the last 14 years, I have had the privilege of working with kindergartners, first- and second-graders, watching their faces light up when they finally “get it” for a math concept, or helping them write a story they are proud to read to the class. Primary school presents many challenges for these children and helping them navigate the ground work is vital for their success.

How are you involved in your union?

I am the building representative for the United Teaching Assistants of Harborfields. When I first started working I found it difficult to get answers about issues that would arise. So the following year, I ran for building rep and, you guessed it, I am still doing it today.

I have attended many of NYSUT’s training programs, such as “Union Rep, Political Action, Negotiations and Leadership,” each one more valuable than the last. All this knowledge helps me to help my members. If I don’t have the answer, I know where to find it. I’ve learned to be a good listener and to be supportive of all my members.

How do you make a difference?

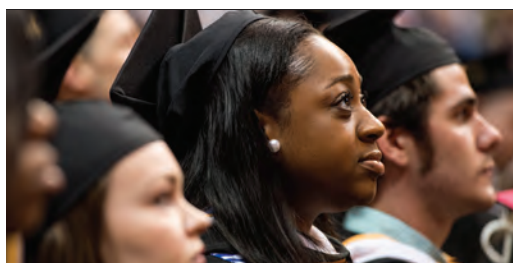
I make a difference when I observe my students attend a lesson and complete an assignment that would have overwhelmed them at the beginning of

the school year. I make a difference when my students no longer destroy a classroom in a fit of anger and instead use their words to express that they need a break. I make a difference when my members thank me for my help in negotiating a new contract. I make a difference when a grievance is settled and the matter is resolved.



JONATHAN FICKIES

SRP Loretta Falkowski, a member of the United Teaching Assistants of Harborfields, works with her kindergartners at Washington Drive Primary School in Centerport, New York.



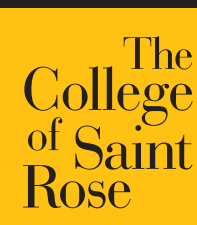
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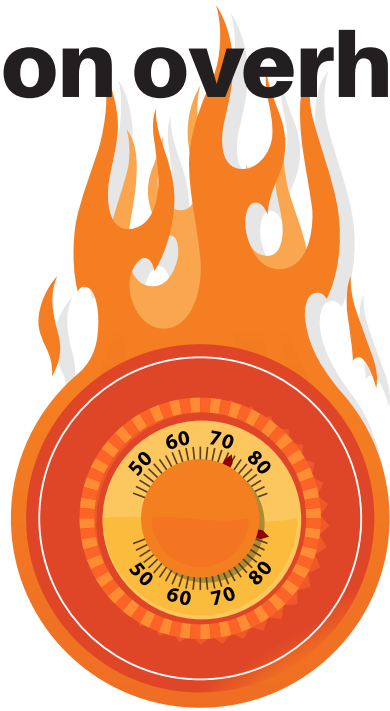
The heat is on overheated classrooms

By Liza Frenette
lfrenett@nysutmail.org

In winter, the heat is often cranked too high in schools. And when the warm spring and early summer weather comes, many schools do not have air conditioning. Humid spikes in classroom temperatures foster sluggishness and even illness for people with medical conditions.

“Overheated schools and colleges affect learning, waste energy and cost school employers money,” said Wendy Hord, NYSUT health and safety specialist. “As bad as it is for students, overheating makes it harder for a teacher to teach and for staff to be productive.”

In addition to heat concerns, studies show that student test scores went down 23 percent on days carbon dioxide spikes were recorded, said Darryl Alexander, director of the health



and safety program for the American Federation of Teachers.

“We should consider having building report cards — like student report cards,” Alexander told 167 union members from schools throughout New York State

during the 2017 NYSUT Health and Safety Conference.

NYSUT has set up a proactive study to help educators record classroom temperatures. Data gathered this spring will be used to advocate for a law that would limit upper temperature extremes in schools and colleges.

Illnesses believed to be caused by poor indoor air quality, uneven temperatures and other school health and safety problems — such as rodents, leaky roofs and mold — include asthma, sinusitis and chronic bronchitis, Alexander said.

Vigilant monitoring of health and safety conditions will be needed should the federal government forge ahead with reductions in funding and oversight from the Environmental Protection Agency, for example. “They’re giving up responsibility to be a watchdog,” Alexander said.

NYSUT Vice President Paul Pecorale noted that some schools are located

Join the campaign!

NYSUT members in K-12 and higher education locals are encouraged to join the union’s Campaign to End Overheated Schools. Participants are asked to collect temperatures in May and June for a two-week period. The data collected will help generate a report on the problems and help the call for remedies. For more information and to download the room temperature record log, visit www.nysut.org/healthandsafety and click on “classroom temperature log.”

near dangerous areas, such as being downwind from plants and factories that emit toxins. Diesel truck sites, explosive material manufacturing and storage facilities and Superfund sites need to be mapped so schools can be alerted to potential dangers and further air hazards.

Unsung hero honored for health, safety work

By Liza Frenette
lfrenett@nysutmail.org

Joe DeCarlo, a member of the Auburn Teachers Association, received a hearty burst of applause for receiving NYSUT’s Unsung Hero award at the statewide union’s biennial Health and Safety Conference last month.

The award was created in 2009 to honor union members who identify and help solve health and safety problems in the workplace or manifest healthy environments at work.

DeCarlo first attended the Health and Safety Conference in 2015. He was so fired up he went back to his school district and started an ATA health and safety committee, which he now chairs, and a districtwide committee involving ATA members, staff and administrators. He co-chairs that committee.

“The district is now addressing long-standing issues,” he said, including rodents, ventilation problems and temperature extremes. He successfully prodded the district to provide the prescribed number of toilets, as required by OSHA standards, for faculty, separate from students.

“The training and learning is the real award,” he told fellow conference attendees.

DeCarlo put together a survey of ATA members to gauge teachers’ health and safety concerns. Number one on the list: air quality and temperature.

He supplied uniform thermometers in classrooms with specific issues. In one building, one classroom was 56 degrees while another was 86 degrees. In one wing of a school, where four kindergarten classes are located, the temperature was 88 degrees.

“Our littlest ones were experiencing



From left: NYSUT Vice President Paul Pecorale and Auburn TA President Cheryl Miskell congratulate Auburn TA member Joe DeCarlo for being named the 2017 NYSUT Unsung Hero.

high extremes,” he said. He urged his colleagues to collect data for NYSUT, which is tracking temperature disparities to advocate for a law that would limit upper temperature extremes.

The second biggest concern is the

district’s failure to fill positions when someone is sick, DeCarlo said.

When teachers are out and a substitute is not hired, general education teachers are pulled out of their classes to school special education students, and vice versa.

“So, we’re absent when we’re not,” said DeCarlo, a special education teacher.

When maintenance staff is absent and no one fills in, cleanliness of the school is impacted. Social workers, school psychologists, occupational, physical and speech therapists are automatically not replaced when they are unavailable, he said. DeCarlo hopes to organize a think tank to find solutions to this problem.

“Communication and connection are the source of our strength,” he said. “Our real strength is unity. It’s not enough to tell it like it is. You must work to make it like it should be.”

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Alfred Joseph Candido Sr.
Feb. 14, 2017
Utica Teachers Association

Lou Caviolo | Oct. 23, 2016
Yonkers Federation of Teachers

Elaine Hogan Crosby
Sept. 10, 2016
Wappingers Congress of Teachers

Richard Herko | Nov. 15, 2016
Orchard Park Teachers Association

Shawna Marzella | Dec. 3, 2016
Jamesville–Dewitt Faculty Association

Charles McAuliffe | Dec. 17, 2016
Buffalo Teachers Federation

James Gordon Mead
Aug. 25, 2016
Wappingers Congress of Teachers

Joseph Meyers | May 1, 2016
New Rochelle Federation of United School Employees



Lorraine C. Porter | June 1, 2016
United Federation of Teachers

Anthony Pugliese | Nov. 29, 2016
Buffalo Teachers Federation

E. David Rebmann Jr. | July 5, 2016
Orchard Park Teachers Association

Elinor H. Samuels | July 6, 2016
United Federation of Teachers

Full obituaries, if provided, are available at www.nysut.org. Submissions must include decedent's full name, union affiliation and date of death, and contact information for the person submitting the notice. Fax notices to 518-213-6415; send to Andrew Watson, NYSUT United, 800 Troy-Schenectady Road, Latham, NY 12110-2455; or email awatson@nysutmail.org.


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[LOCALS UNIONS IN ACTION]



The next time members of the BOCES Educators of Eastern Suffolk need to write a note, they can use union stationery — thanks to the work of members Cora Weule-Sparwasser, Gina Gabrini and the students in their graphic arts classes. The fun notepads feature the union name, buzzing BEES, the union website and a catchy tagline — “Education— What the buzz is all about!” The union is led by President James Beck.

Education - What the buzz is all about!
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West Genesee Teachers Association

The West Genesee TA, led by John Mannion, refocused its philanthropic efforts this year a little closer to home. The local coordinated with the district to gather and disburse care items for students, staff and families in the West Genesee community.

WGTA members, along with other West Genesee staff and students, collected non-perishable food, clothing, hygiene and other items, which were sorted by high school student council members and assembled into care kits. More than 75 care kits were made and distributed back to the schools. Additionally, each nurse’s office at the elementary schools received a stockpile of assorted hygiene items they will dispense throughout the year as needed.

WGTA members also raised more than \$630 for the Carol Baldwin Breast Cancer Research Foundation and the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society.

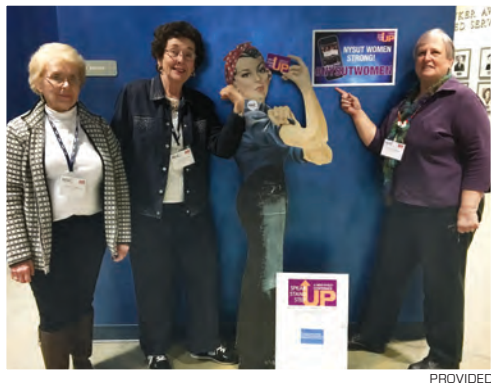


PROVIDED

Members of the West Hempstead Educational Association — along with support from students, district staffers and the community — raised nearly \$5,000 at the union’s eighth annual Battle of the Schools fundraiser. All proceeds from the event go to fund scholarships for graduating seniors. Above, from left, Stacy Gulisano, Jaclyn Klafter, Denise Frary, Lisa McCarthy and Daisy Weinsten help staff the event.

Share news about your local’s union or community events at united@nysutmail.org; include “LIA” in the subject line.

[RETIREES IN ACTION]



PROVIDED

From left, Carol Gehrig, RC 8; Loretta Donlon, ED 51 director; and Deb Peterson, RC 43 president, share a moment of empowerment at the NYSUT Speak Up, Stand Up, Step Up Conference in March.

From left, RC 16 members Joan Caputo, Ani Khachadourian, Ed Berry, Florence McCue, ED 51-53 at-large director, and Marty Sommer at Sen. Charles Schumer’s office in Peekskill.



PROVIDED

The Jefferson-Lewis Council of NYSUT Retirees awarded a scholarship to sixth grade teacher Shenita Ruiz Williams, Beaver River Teachers Association, to offset the cost of classroom supplies. From left, Kelley Hawksley, president of the BRTA; Lynn Hunneyman, Jefferson-Lewis president; and Ruiz Williams.



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The artwork of **Bobbi Mastrangelo**, Smithtown Teachers Association retiree, is on view at Orlando's Orange County Regional History Center through April 23. Mastrangelo uses plastics to create her unique manhole art series, "Grate Works." For more information, visit www.thehistorycenter.org/exhibition/plastics-under-cover-bobbi-mastrangelos-grate-works-of-art.

In print

Michele Haiken, Rye TA, has published *Gamify literacy: Boost comprehension, collaboration and learning*. In the book, published by the International Society for Technology in Education, Haiken and contributing authors highlight how a game-based approach to learning can boost literacy skills and encourage collaboration. Subjects covered in the book include gamifying culinary arts, scavenger hunts, tips for recognizing student achievements with badges and much more. The book is set to be released April 30. For more information or to pre-order, visit iste.org/resources.

Jeffrey Pflaum, UFT retiree, has been published in *Creative Teaching and Learning*, an online magazine from the Imaginative Minds Group's Teaching Times products. Pflaum's most recent article, "Writing with music," is part of a series on creativity and emotional intelligence. To read the article, visit library.teaching-times.com/articles/writing-with-music.htm. For more info, including a free copy of the publication, contact the author at jeffreypflaum@gmail.com.

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New online planning tool

Preparing for retirement is one of the most important things you'll ever do. The decisions you make now will affect your financial security for the rest of your life, so you want to be sure those decisions are based on the best information available. Now, the New York State Employees' Retirement System (ERS) offers you a convenient and accurate way to plan for retirement with the new Retirement Online.

Retirement Online is a secure way to review information about your pension benefits and update your account in real time. In many cases, you can use Retirement Online instead of sending forms through the mail or calling.

Here are some of the things you can do with Retirement Online:

- Review up-to-date information about your retirement benefits.
- Update your address, phone number and email address.
- Review your service credit and any service purchase payments.
- View beneficiary selections or submit a beneficiary designation request.
- Apply for a loan and check loan balances.

Over time, we will introduce additional features. One of the great advantages of Retirement Online is that you can conduct business whenever it is convenient for you. Retirement Online is not yet available 24/7, but you can access it Monday through Friday from 6:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. and on weekends from 6:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. It is recommended you use Internet Explorer.



Every issue, state Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli, sole trustee of the New York State and Local Employees' Retirement System, 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@nysutmail.org.

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

To register for your account, go to the NYSLRS homepage at www.osc.state.ny.us/retire and look for Retirement Online. You'll notice we've incorporated security measures used by many financial institutions. You'll be asked a series of questions to verify your identity. The questions are provided by a trusted third party. ERS does not store the questions or your answers. You'll also be asked to create a user ID and password for your account, and provide answers to security questions as an added layer of protection. If you were a user of our old Retirement Online, you must register for a new account.

We hope you'll sign up today, but using the new Retirement Online service is optional. You will still be able to conduct ERS transactions through the mail or by contacting us. If you have questions or need help registering, please call the ERS Contact Center toll-free at 866-805-0990 or 518-474-7736 and select option one to get help for Retirement Online. The contact center is available Monday through Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 4:15 p.m.

Learn more about Retirement Online at www.osc.state.ny.us/retire/retirement_online/customers.php.

NYSUT ERS consultants

Most NYSUT School-Related Professionals* belong to the New York State and Local Employees' Retirement System (ERS). NYSUT ERS consultants are available to help SRP members navigate the retirement system. Consultants can answer questions, provide forms and help members contact the ERS. Contact any one of our consultants for assistance.

Trudi Davis • 914-592-4411
troers@nysutmail.org

Kathy Hine • 585-454-5550, ext. 144
rochers@nysutmail.org

Patti Lennon • 516-496-2035, ext. 324
nroers@nysutmail.org

*Note: Certified teaching assistants belong to the state Teachers' Retirement System (TRS).



Spring into retirement

Q: I'm planning to retire at the end of the 2016-17 school year. What steps should I take this spring to prepare?

A: Congratulations on your impending retirement. The New York State Teachers' Retirement System publishes a useful chart outlining quarterly steps members should take in their final year of teaching. Here's what you should do now:

- The filing period for a July 1 retirement begins April 2. You can file your application for retirement (RET-54) with NYSTRS up to 90 days prior to your effective date of retirement, or as late as the date of retirement.
- Monitor pending New York State legislation — new laws, such as statewide retirement incentives, could affect your NYSTRS benefits.

We recommend filing for retirement at least 30 days before your retirement date to avoid retirement payroll delays. At that time, you must indicate your choice of either the maximum benefit or an option.

To learn more about these options, contact a NYSTRS representative at 800-348-7298, ext. 6250.

Q: I've submitted my retirement application, but I'm not sure I picked the correct option. How much time do I have to make changes, and how do I select another option?

A: You have 30 days from the effective date of your retirement to select another benefit option. But take note — once those 30 days expire, there's no turning back. The law doesn't allow further changes after 30 days. To modify your selection, visit the NYSTRS website for a copy of the election of retirement benefit form (RET-54.6), or contact one of the NYSTRS trustees for further information.

Because this is such an important — and ultimately unalterable — decision, we strongly advise scheduling an individual benefit consultation with NYSTRS before making a selection. To schedule, call 800-348-7298, ext. 6110.

NYSUT TRS consultants

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

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

Tim Southerton • 631-273-8822
tsouther@nysutmail.org

Paul Farfaglia • 315-431-4040
pfarfagl@nysutmail.org

Jolene DiBrango • 585-267-3420
jdibrang@nysutmail.org



Did you know



With assets approaching \$110 billion, the New York State Teachers' Retirement System is the nation's ninth largest pension fund, according to the trade publication *Pensions & Investments*.

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