

# NYSUT UNITED

A UNION OF PROFESSIONALS

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THIS ISSUE OF NYSUT  
UNITED CONTAINS  
INFORMATION  
REGARDING THE  
NYSUT MEMBER  
BENEFITS SUMMARY  
ANNUAL REPORT

Alhassan  
Susso





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# NYSUT demands major changes to the state's grades 3-8 testing

By Sylvia Saunders  
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This year's debacle with the state's grades 3-8 ELA exams proved to be a nightmare for students and teachers alike — and certainly underscored NYSUT's "Correct the Tests" campaign.

While State Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia assured parents and educators this year's testing would be better, it turned out to be much worse. By the end of the first week of ELA testing,



EL-WISE NOISETTE

Capital region union leaders protest the flawed tests on the steps of the State Education Department. From left, Mike Silvestri, Schenectady FT; Seth Cohen, Troy TA; Natalie McKay, Schoharie TA; and Juliet Benaquisto, Schenectady FT.

Elia expressed regret for the complete shutdown of computer-based testing and vowed to hold the testing vendor, Questar Inc., accountable.

"Regrets are not enough," said NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango at an April 8 press event on the steps of the State Education Department while the Regents met inside. "We need action now."

The state testing problems went far beyond the epic failure of the computer-based testing trial, DiBrango noted. There was just as much frustration with the traditional paper and pencil exams, which are still way too long and developmentally inappropriate.

"We received hundreds of heart-breaking stories from teachers, parents and students," DiBrango said. "While testing is federally required, it doesn't have to be this way."

"My third-graders were breaking down in tears out of frustration and falling asleep because of the length of the test," said Schoharie Teachers Association President Natalie McKay. "Many were sitting more than 3.5

hours — that's longer than the SAT college entrance exam!"

McKay said the ELA exam is more a test of endurance, than content, for her 8- and 9-year-old students.

"It crumbles their confidence," she said. "The kids are not even showing what they can do."

DiBrango noted the union has also received disturbing reports of district administrators using

blatant misinformation and intimidation tactics to discourage opt outs.

Some building administrators were refusing to honor parents' requests to opt their children out, while others were offering bonuses for students to participate. Incentives included pizza parties and special events where the principal would shave his head or "kiss a pig" if participation rates hit 95 percent. Some schools promised to exempt students from final exams.

While such events might sound like harmless fun, parents and educators argued these kind of activities made students feel left out, harassed and traumatized. At least one family has filed a bullying complaint against their district under the Dignity for All Students Act.

The NYSUT media event also featured a number of Assembly members who said it is time for SED to overhaul its testing system or expect legislative intervention.

"We're not going to let this continue," said Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara, D-Rotterdam.

## ~~C~~ORRECT the tests

NYSUT's campaign is urging the Board of Regents and State Education Department to fix its flawed and unfair grades 3-8 testing system. Key concerns include:

- ✗ The state's ELA and math tests are too long;
- ✗ Untimed testing can be cruel and traumatic;
- ✗ The tests are developmentally inappropriate;
- ✗ Invalid scoring benchmarks mislabel children and schools;
- ✗ Computer-based testing is problematic and has been rolled out too quickly. NYSUT opposes online testing for grades 3-5.

Share your stories and learn more about the campaign at [www.correctthetests.com](http://www.correctthetests.com). See page 25 and read what some members had to say.

## COMING UP

### May 3-4

NYSUT Representative Assembly, Albany

### May 5-11

National Teacher Appreciation week. Visit [www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org) for resources.



### May 6-12

National Nurses Week. Visit [www.nursingworld.org](http://www.nursingworld.org) to access a free webinar, participate in contests and share inspiring stories.

### May 6-7

NYS Board of Regents meets, Albany

### May 14

Health Care Lobby Day

### May 21

Statewide school budget and board voting



### May 31

Primary voter registration deadline

### June 4

School-Related Professionals Lobby Day

### June 19

Last scheduled session for New York State Legislature, Albany

### June 25

Primary Election Day

## ON THE COVER

Alhassan Susso, a member of the United Federation of Teachers, is the 2019 New York State Teacher of the Year.

Photo by Becky Miller.



# FINALLY! Victory on APPR

## Enacted budget includes union-backed evaluation law, labor protections

By Ned Hoskin  
nhoskin@nysutmail.org

Remember last spring, when dozens of state senators, including members of the majority, had enthusiastically sponsored NYSUT's very important teacher evaluation bill. In the end, they failed to bring the bill to a vote! We were so close!

Fast forward to this April: The enacted 2019-20 state budget includes the union's language to fix the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) law.

"Finally!" exclaimed NYSUT President Andy Pallotta.

"Educators across New York earned a huge victory after banding

together to push for fixes to the broken teacher evaluation system that created undue stress for teachers, students and parents," he said. "The powerful message they sent to those who stood in the way of real progress will not soon be forgotten."

In a budget year that, by fiscal measures, was nothing more than disappointing, victory on APPR and some crucial labor protections were the main highlights.

Here's the evaluations law in a nutshell: It eliminates the mandate that school districts use state test scores in teacher ratings. It restores local control and makes sure that any teacher evaluation system is a subject of collective bargaining.

### What the law DOES:

- It eliminates the state growth model from section 3012-d of the Education Law. Growth scores will no longer be calculated by the state, starting next year.
- It eliminates the requirement to use state tests in APPR.
- It places decisions about student performance at the bargaining table. This means all of APPR will be subject to collective bargaining. Districts will not be making these decisions unilaterally.
- It ensures locals can continue using their current APPR in transition until another one is negotiated at the bargaining table. It also allows all teachers to be covered by group measures removing the

high-stakes nature of individual Student Learning Objectives. NYSUT believes most locals will probably use this approach, which will actually reduce testing by eliminating pre-tests.

No one will have to increase testing to comply with this law. Given the approach that most locals used for transition, NYSUT expects testing will decrease, not increase.

### What the law does NOT do:

- It does NOT give any new authority to the commissioner, and it makes sure she cannot backtrack on any of the measures she has already approved. Full repeal of the law would have given her authority to put in place a new system.
- The commissioner does NOT have the authority to mandate a new test.
- Districts do NOT choose the performance measures under the law; performance measures will be bargained collectively.

Go to [nysut.org](http://nysut.org) to see the updated Fact Sheet on APPR.

### Janus

The enacted budget includes language that will protect union members from organizations that seek to undermine unions following the U.S. Supreme Court's ill-advised 2018 decision in *Janus v. AFSCME*.

Groups have been attempting to obtain personal information to disseminate anti-union propaganda designed to erode membership. The language makes it an improper practice for an employer to release a public employee's personal information.

In addition, new language protects unions from frivolous lawsuits



PHOTOS: EL-WISE NOISETTE

NYSUT officers, staff and higher education activists with State Senate Higher Ed Chair Toby Stavisky, D-Queens, center, outside the Senate chamber on lobby day.





The property tax cap makes budgeting especially difficult for small school districts, says Erin Smith of Depew Teachers Organization; listening at left is Stacy Marzello, Batavia TA.



Aaron Sorensen, Catskill Regional Teacher Center director, advocates for more funding for professional development.

filed by former agency fee payers attempting to collect money paid prior to the *Janus* decision. It clarifies that these cases have no standing in state court.

### The money

Amid real-time, often conflicting alarms about shrinking state revenue, budget negotiations mostly failed to improve the state aid picture.

#### School Aid

The enacted budget allocates \$27.86 billion in funding for education, an increase of \$958 million, or approximately 3.7 percent more than last year. It includes a \$618.4 million increase in Foundation Aid and \$340 million to fully fund expense-based aids, which includes BOCES.

NYSUT was able to severely scale back the executive proposal that would have required school districts with buildings identified as “underfunded” to set aside 10 percent of their Foundation Aid increase to provide equity for those buildings. The final version preserves school districts’ local control regarding allocation of their funding.

#### Teacher Centers

The enacted budget restores \$14.26 million to teacher centers. It also provides \$368,000 for National Board Certification; \$2 million for the Mentor Teacher Intern Program; and \$25 million for Teachers of Tomorrow.

#### Special Schools

The budget provides \$17.2 million for increased salaries for staff in 4201, 4410, Special Act and 853 Schools. It also provides \$103.9 million to support 4201 Schools and allocates \$30 million in new capital funding to address health and safety projects.

#### Higher ed

In one positive development, community college aid was boosted by \$100 per full-time equivalent student. However, due to dwindling enrollments, many campuses could see a reduction in state aid. NYSUT-backed final language provides a trigger that ensures no community college campus will receive less than 98 percent of aid from the previous year. State funding for SUNY and CUNY is essentially flat, continuing a years-long trend of underfunding public higher education.

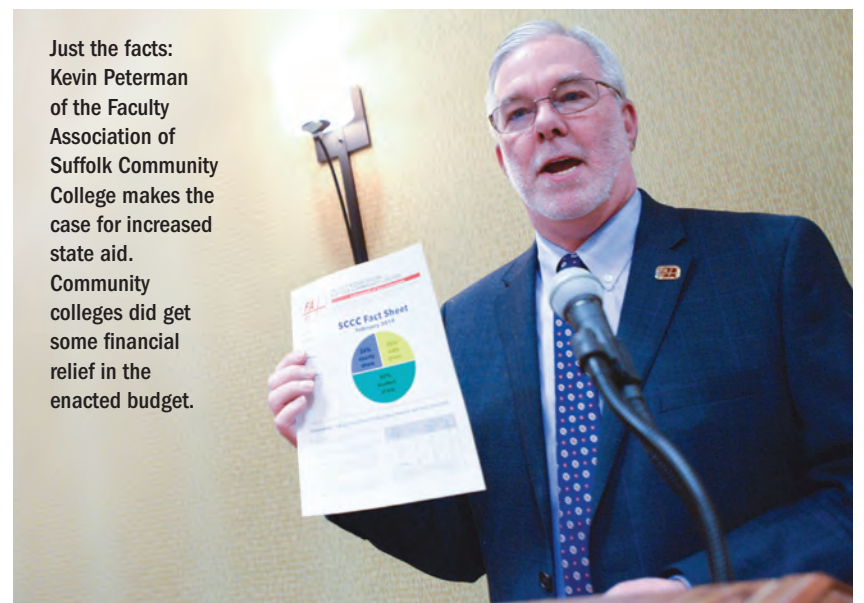
#### SUNY hospitals

The crucial state subsidy for SUNY hospitals (Downstate, Upstate and Stony Brook) was not restored.

The budget provides \$60 million in additional support for the hospitals, for a total of \$460 million, to offset the costs associated with uncompensated care provided for their communities. It also budgets \$100 million in capital funding.

#### Revenue

The enacted budget extends the surcharge on high income earners for an additional five years, until 2024; imposes a tax on Internet purchases; taxes real estate transfers over \$2 million in New York City; and creates a commission to implement a congestion pricing program in Manhattan south of 60th Street.





# School budget votes more important than ever

By Ned Hoskin  
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In some ways, this year's budget was a one-two punch against public education. In addition to severely underfunding schools, the governor and lawmakers chose to make permanent the ill-conceived tax cap.

Now, in perpetuity, the cap will be tied to the previous year's rate of inflation, or 2 percent, whichever is LOWER. The financial pressure on schools will increase, since the law limits the ability of districts to raise revenue locally to offset losses in state aid. Who pays the price? The kids.

"This is an arbitrary and inadequate way to address school funding," said NYSUT President Andy Pallotta. "It's unfair to taxpayers, it's undemocratic and it hurts students, especially in higher-need, lower-income districts."

This makes it more important than



ever to support local school budget votes and board elections statewide on Tuesday, May 21.

Districts that seek to exceed the cap to make up for inadequate school aid must gain a supermajority of 60 percent yes votes to pass the budget. It's a risky proposition.

It's important to realize any budget that does not win voter approval translates into a 0 percent cap. That

means, if the budget in a district goes down once, the school board can choose to have a revote, but may go directly to contingency and there would be no additional resources for the education of children.

That's a scenario that's par-

ticularly troubling when you consider that, in New York state, there have been several years of cuts in education aid. Many mandatory annual costs increase faster than inflation, so a flat budget becomes a slashed spending plan. As a result, students, schools and communities continue to cope with thousands of layoffs and cuts to programs.

Pallotta says student success is at

risk like never before.

"Education is not a frivolous expense," he said. "It's an investment in the future — not only in the future of our students, but the economic well-being of our state. When you go to the polls on May 21, know what's at stake.

"Voting 'yes' on your budget this year is an important step toward helping schools recover from the troubling fiscal constraints under which they've been operating the past few years, and a critical investment in our children's education and future," he said.

NYSUT provides tools and guidance for local union activists and volunteers to help pass school budgets and elect pro-public education board members. If you would like to help Get Out the Vote for May 21 — either for your work district or your home district — contact your union rep or your NYSUT Regional Political Organizer through [www.nysut.org](http://www.nysut.org)/RPO.

## Settlement reached in ESSA case

By Matthew E. Bergeron  
NYSUT's Office of General Counsel

NYSUT's Office of General Counsel reached a settlement in its lawsuit filed last October that challenged certain regulations instituted by the New York State Education Department purporting to implement the federal Every Student Succeeds Act.

The regulations challenged by the union's attorneys would have required local unions to reopen collective bargaining agreements to restrict the ability of certain teachers

to transfer into schools designated by the state education commissioner as needing "Comprehensive Support and Improvement" or "CSI," and to include those restrictions in successor agreements. These challenged regulations similarly would have imposed restrictions on which teachers could be assigned to schools that opened in place of those that had been closed.

NYSUT attorneys viewed these regulations as blatantly interfering with collective bargaining rights.

Clearly in response to our lawsuit, SED adopted amended regulations

that modified the language we had challenged. While the amended language was arguably an improvement, NYSUT did not think it eliminated the need for the lawsuit.

However, NYSUT and SED were able to agree on a stipulation of settlement, which was approved by the court, in which the state affirmatively takes the position that the regulations do not, and should not be interpreted to require any union to reopen a contract, include any particular term in a successor agreement or agree to any proposal or concession.

As a result, if any district takes a



position that the regulations require a collective bargaining agreement to contain particular provisions regarding teacher transfers, this settlement will be a valuable tool to show that such a position is incorrect.



# Knock, knock! Unionbusters are coming

By Kara E. Smith  
ksmith@nysutmail.org

**N**YSUT joined forces with the Public Employees Federation and the state AFL-CIO this spring to launch an aggressive advertising campaign to educate public-sector union members about the monied forces behind union-busting efforts.

Centered on a 30-second ad titled “Showdown,” the campaign lets union members know that the doorknockers who encourage them to surrender their union membership are part of a \$10 million national anti-worker campaign funded by billionaires. Campaign ads will appear throughout April and May on social media and digital video platforms, including YouTube and Hulu.

“They know that strong unions



give workers, both union and nonunion, better pay, better health care, safer working conditions and a voice in the workplace,” intones the “Showdown” voiceover. “And that means money out of their pockets.”

The ad calls on union members to tell anti-union doorknockers that they’re “sticking with our unions because New York is union strong.”

To further fight back against

well-heeled union busters, NYSUT will again mobilize its successful statewide summer Member Organizing Institute. The MOI deploys members statewide to have one-on-one conversations

with fellow NYSUT members at their homes. The goal is to forge long-lasting relationships between members and their union.

“The MOI experience was so rewarding for me,” said Sal Pergola, vice president of the Manhasset Educational Support Personnel Association. “What I learned, and passed on to members of other locals

and continue to share with my own local, is priceless.”

“Our plan is to build the strongest union in history and we want you to be a part of it!” said Andy Pallotta, NYSUT president.

MOI trainings are scheduled for late June and early July at NYSUT headquarters in Latham. Participants must complete either 12 or 18 four-hour shifts, attend a two-and-a-half-day training session, be comfortable with using a smartphone, be willing to accept observation and constructive feedback and be able to walk for most of their shift.

For more information or to apply for the Member Organizing Institute, visit [www.nysut.org/moi](http://www.nysut.org/moi).

For questions, email Megan O’Brien, NYSUT organizing manager, at [mobrien@nysutmail.org](mailto:mobrien@nysutmail.org).

## Union efforts reform New York elections

**A**s part of the 2019-20 state budget, NYSUT won significant changes to the election process.

The enacted budget expands the hours for voting in primary elections to conform with those of general elections — from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. — statewide. For the first time, polling places will be allowed to use electronic poll books in place of the large paper books currently used.

The reforms also introduce early voting in the state, from Saturday, Oct. 26, through Sunday, Nov. 3, this year. The general election is the first Tuesday after the first Monday of the month, Nov. 5.

Additionally, young people ages 16 and 17 can now preregister to vote when they turn 18, and voters who move within the state no longer need to reregister to vote in their new county.

Notably, New York had been the only state still holding separate primaries in June for federal and in September for state offices. But those days are over. Lawmakers moved the state’s primaries from September to June, to match the date for federal primaries. The change is expected to save county election boards money. So, this year’s primary date is Tuesday, June 25.

## Health Care Professionals Council



EL-WISE NOISETTE

NYSUT Second Vice President Paul Pecorale works with Health Care Professionals Council Chair Anne Goldman, UFT. More than 80 members attended the annual council-sponsored workshops to earn continuing education credits and acquire tools to deal with pressing issues affecting students, patients, educators and providers. Workshop topics included the impact of social media on brain development; dealing with compassion fatigue from vicarious trauma; and suicide screening.





# Local women's committees launching statewide

**NYSUT**

*Women*



By Kara Smith  
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**W**hen your geographic region stretches over 100 miles, getting members to a meeting can be challenging. Dora Leland, head of the Southern Tier Women's Committee, knows this firsthand. Elmira, where the group held its inaugural meeting in mid March, encompasses 47 school districts. Vestal has double that amount.

"I had two women who live 50 miles away travel in for the meeting," said Leland.

Committee goals include improving health care, mentoring younger women and fostering a sense of

community by regionally connecting union women. Leland hopes to have a healthy contingent of Southern Tier committee members at the next women's march in Elmira.

The group is one of 13 new local women's committees launched statewide over the last few months. Forming local committees is just one charge from the NYSUT Women's Committee.

"It's empowering to see so many new committees nurture the next generation of strong female union leaders," said NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango, who heads the committee.

Albany Public School Teachers Association President Laura Franz

was pleasantly surprised by the number of women who attended her local's interest meeting in early March. "We saw a lot of new faces," she said. "Many think a women's issues committee is a good way to get more involved in their union."

In addition to the next steps identified by the committee, Franz hopes to develop a mentor program to train new female leaders.

Barbara Hafner, president of the West Hempstead Education Association, heads the Long Island Federation of Labor Women's

Committee — composed of women from the organization's 160-plus member unions. The group registered as a 503(c) nonprofit and held an initial meeting in February where attendees discussed one of the biggest issues facing many women; child care.

"Some women can't afford to work due to child care costs," said Hafner, who plans to share information between the federation and the NYSUT Women's Committee.

Sheila Buck, president of the Rush Henrietta Employees Association Teachers Chapter, plans to help organize a Rochester regional women's committee as part of the Rochester Women in Leadership Summit in May, organized by Marne Brady,

BOCES United Professionals. Summit topics include women's workplace rights, general leadership skills and women in political leadership.

"I'm glad the NYSUT Women's Committee tasked us with starting local committees," said Buck. "As a female-dominated union, it's appropriate to focus on these issues."



The Albany Public School Teachers Association, led by Laura Franz, center, held an interest meeting in March. "We saw a lot of new faces," Franz said.

PROVIDED

Other women's committees and organizers include: Election District 13, Melissa Servant; Great Neck TA, Jennifer Snyder and Maddie Dressner; New Rochelle FUSE, Aisha Cook; Massena Federation of Teachers, Andrea Vierno; Saratoga Adirondack BOCES EA, Sandie Carner-Shafran and Cindy Goodsell; United College Employees-FIT, Roberta Elins and Amy Zaborowski-Smith; Western NY, Cheryl Hughes and Elaine Ablove; and West Seneca, Carla Kruszynski.

Follow the NYSUT Women's Committee on Facebook or Instagram at NYSUTwomen, or on Twitter @NYSUTWomensComm — be sure to use #NYSUTWomen.



PROVIDED

Members of the Saratoga Adirondack BOCES Employees Association, joined by NYSUT EVP Jolene DiBrango, celebrate the launch of the SABEA Women's Committee. NYSUT Board member Sandie Carner-Shafran, center standing, is the committee chair.



# Students take on structural racism

By **Liza Frenette**  
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**O**n a hot July day, J. Philippe Abraham landed in New York City from Haiti at 17 years old. He said his brown skin and clipped accent led people to think he didn't know English and they wouldn't be able to understand his speech.

"With each assumption there is judgment," said Abraham, NYSUT secretary-treasurer and former K-12 and college teacher. "It would've been easy to let that stop me from progressing. It can be paralyzing." He relied on allies and perseverance to keep moving forward.

"I'm a Caribbean dish with spice. I'm a curry! My accent is part of that

spice," Abraham told a room full of students gathered in Rochester for the annual Roc2Change summit on race.

The 600 energized teenagers representing 36 schools initiated discussions that brought out heated stories, spurred ideas for change and called for more diversity among educators. There was also talk of individual — but not cultural — acceptance and economic disparity.

Student presenters gave stark examples of disparity on a national level. The Civil Rights Data Collection reports that black students are expelled at a rate three times greater than white students. Black students accounted for 15 percent of the student body in 2015-16, but 31 percent of arrests.

"We need to hear from students," said Karen Lee Wilson, president of the School-Related Professionals for the Wheatland-Chili Federation of Teachers.

Her school has a high population of families of color, she said, but lacks a similar makeup of the teaching staff.

"We do not have a diverse population of adults who work at our school," she said.

Many students reported out that their schools had few to no faculty of color.

Roc2Change emerged several years ago as students from Monroe County began to come together to address race relations in their community. Joe DiTucci, a Spencerport Teachers Association educator and a diversity club adviser, said students prepare and lead the discussions in breakout sessions, using charts, data, maps and personal stories.

"This is all led by students," he said.

Mike LaBue, Greece TA, brought his English class. The teens initially started out as a club.

"Roc2Change is our curriculum," LaBue said, adding the students are given the green light to discuss deeply and freely. Students are working on painting a mural and serve as mentors to younger students.

School psychologist Kelly Weishaar, a member of the Fairport TA, said her district offers a teacher professional development program, Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity.

Weishaar's role as psychologist now involves working three days a week on issues of poverty, diversity, equity and access. The school's "culturally responsive lens" includes learning about a family's culture before contacting them about a mental health concern, for example. They may feel shame, they may not subscribe to therapy — or, they may embrace it, free of the "stigma that Americans hold," Weishaar said.

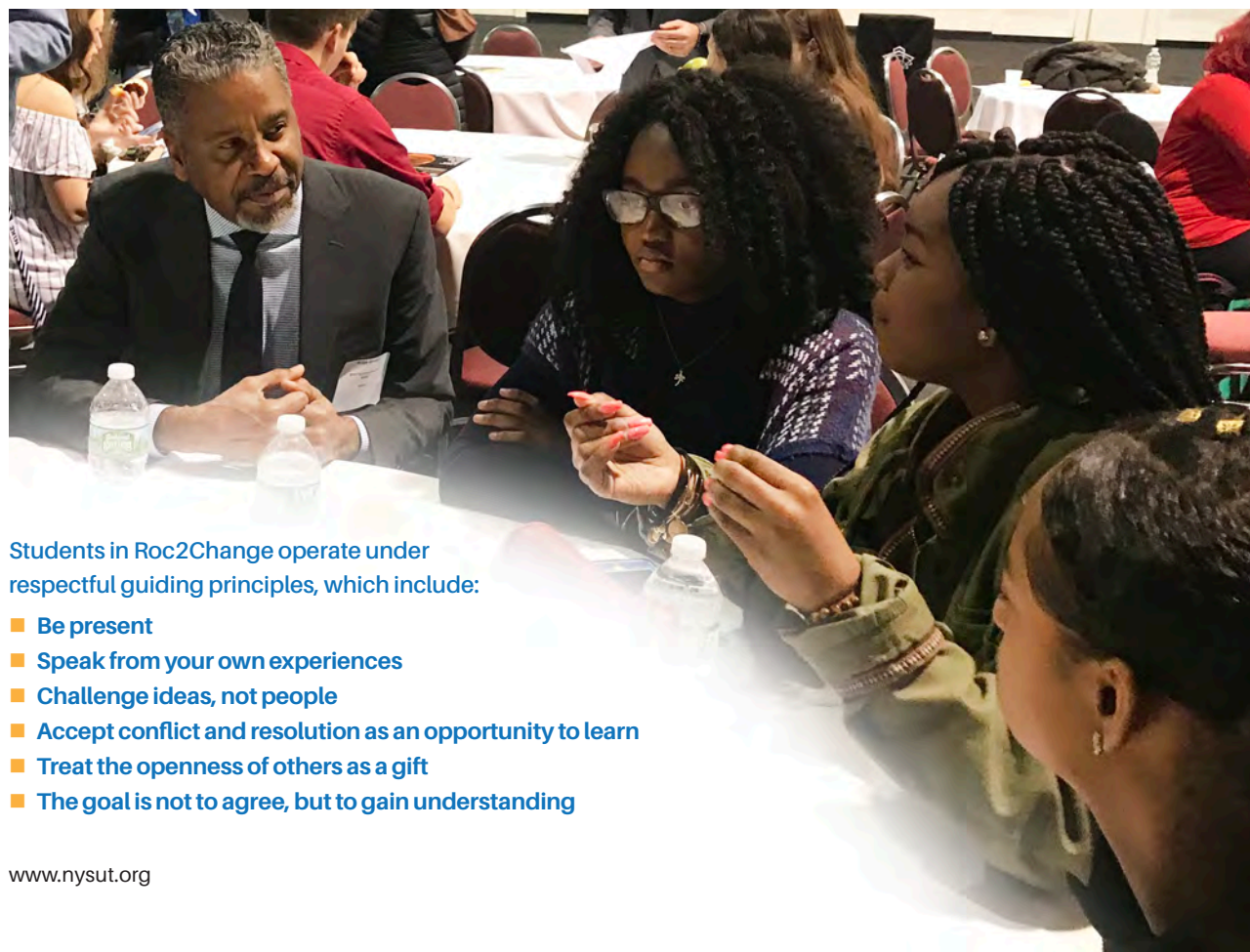
Diversity is often lost in sports and arts, and the school is examining data on who is participating, and what is holding back those who are not.

"Our next step, once we find patterns, is to look at what the barriers are, and how can we address them?" she said.



Below, NYSUT Secretary-Treasurer J. Philippe Abraham speaks with student members from Roc2Change, a student-led initiative to address race relations in Monroe County.

LIZA FRENETTE



Students in Roc2Change operate under respectful guiding principles, which include:

- **Be present**
- **Speak from your own experiences**
- **Challenge ideas, not people**
- **Accept conflict and resolution as an opportunity to learn**
- **Treat the openness of others as a gift**
- **The goal is not to agree, but to gain understanding**



# Lawrence local stands strong in contract fight

By Kara Smith  
ksmith@nysutmail.org

It's been said that troubled times can bring out a person's best. It's an adage that holds true for the roughly 300 members of the Lawrence Teachers Association in Nassau County on Long Island.

For the past eight years, they've worked without a contract, bogged down by a school board rigidly opposed to negotiating without draconian givebacks.

"They want us to eliminate class size limits and have new hires make 20 percent less," said Lori Skonberg, LTA president. "They've said no to everything we've brought to the table, and every time there was an agreement, the board president has reneged."

The Lawrence community is a study in contrasts. Although it's Long Island's third wealthiest community, Lawrence residents pay the lowest school taxes and the community has a poverty rate of more than 70 percent. Of the more than 8,000 children living in the district, roughly 2,800 attend public schools. Of those students, 77 percent are economically disadvantaged; 83 percent are students of color.

"We basically have a board that holds us in contempt," said Adam Berlin, an LTA negotiations committee member and eighth grade social studies teacher at the Lawrence Middle School. "There is a lack of money for books, school trips, basically anything we ask for the answer is no."

With the district purse strings pulled tight, cost cutting trumps student need, explained Berlin. Lawrence public school students



Members of the Lawrence Teachers Association, led by Lori Skonberg, have been working without a contract for the past eight years.

PROVIDED

use aging textbooks and computers; learn beneath leaking ceilings in mold-filled classrooms; and the districts' schools lack the mandated number of full-time aides and assistants.

Two schools now squeeze into a single building, producing disruption and educationally unsound age groupings. Teachers who retire or resign aren't replaced, leading to program cuts and crowding. The physical education budget has been slashed by more than two-thirds. Other casualties include music and arts classes, counseling and occupational therapy services and adequate school security.

"I don't use textbooks anymore because we don't have enough," said Berlin a 22-year LTA veteran. "My colleagues and I make photocopies — this would never have happened earlier in my career here."

## Proud to be LTA

Despite the hardships, the local is far from beaten. In fact, what could have ripped the LTA apart has instead brought it closer together. Skonberg

proudly notes that members wear union T-shirts daily — a different color each day — bearing the slogans "Proud to be LTA" on the back and "Educators make a difference #contractnow" on the front. In May last year, a rally outside the middle and elementary schools attracted hundreds, including supporters from dozens of surrounding locals and American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten. "We have the backs of the Lawrence teachers," said Weingarten who pledged to "shed the light here until you have a fair contract."

Additional pickets are planned for the spring, said Linda Gerard, LTA first vice president for health and safety, a social studies teacher at the high school. She noted that an LTA representative also attends meetings of the local Latino association since Latino children represent a majority of Lawrence students.

As Skonberg notes, Lawrence survived Hurricane Sandy, so the community is used to pulling together in times of trouble. "We are holding it together," she said noting that the

local strives to change the makeup of the local school board.

In the meantime, LTA members take pains to insulate students from the worst of the troubles. For Rachel Kreiss, LTA second vice president and a middle school special education teacher, that often means using a mix of creativity, ingenuity and a healthy infusion of her own funds, to differentiate the limited materials available for her students.

"Often the common core materials we're provided with don't work because [students] have trouble grasping the concepts," said Kreiss explaining that often educators work together to revamp curriculum, brainstorming ideas and sharing what they can glean from outside sources. "Before, we could order additional materials or attend trainings, now it's always about cutting corners."

Their efforts extend beyond the classroom. "Our students are so needy, we do a lot of charitable work within the community," said Berlin, noting that each building has a giving tree run by union social workers to collect holiday gifts for needy students, and the local annually donates Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners to district families. "We feel a moral obligation to do anything we can for our students."

As a Lawrence graduate and long time community member, Gerard is dismayed by the changes she sees, but remains committed to the district. "I have an allegiance to this school, my children graduated from here and my grandkids will enter the district next year," she said. "What's being done to the students is no fault of theirs. I'm still going to give 100 percent."



## semi | HIGHTECHU

Looking for hands-on activities focused on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics for your classroom? Registration is now open for this summer's SEMI High Tech U Teacher Edition Program, a free two-day event sponsored by NYSUT and the SEMI Foundation.

The program, to be held July 24–25 at NYSUT Headquarters in Latham, offers K–12 teachers and school counselors a combination of hands-on learning plus valuable career exploration information for students.

Educators learn from industry professionals about coding, nanotechnology, microchips

and semiconductors, alternative energy, logic and more. There is also a behind-the-scenes tour of the Colleges of Nanoscale Science and Engineering, SUNY Polytechnic Institute in Albany.

The workshop is offered at no cost to NYSUT members and includes continental breakfast and lunch on both workshop days. Participants will also earn state-required Continuing Teacher & Leader Education hours from NYSUT's Education & Learning Trust.

To register, go to [www.cvent.com/d/h6qqhh](http://www.cvent.com/d/h6qqhh). For more info, contact Terry McSweeney at 800-342-9810 ext. 6047 or [tmcsween@nysutmail.org](mailto:tmcsween@nysutmail.org).



BECKY MILLER

Educators at last summer's SEMI High Tech U program use a medieval catapult technology to launch Koosh balls and hacky sacks to learn about quality control in modern-day chipmaking.

## Free training offered for teachers of refugee students

Teachers are invited to join a free online course that can earn you CTLE credits while developing your skills to serve refugee students and families.

The 12-week pilot course is open to teachers of students with refugee backgrounds.

Offered by the Carey Institute for Global Good's Center for Learning in Practice, the Refugee Educator Academy coursework begins in mid-July and runs through October.

Coaching and community discussion will continue through March 2020.

Participants can expect to spend up to four hours online per week, with job-embedded assignments, discussions and formative assessments.

The first cohort will be limited to 120 teachers from New York, Arizona and Washington. For more info or to pre-register, contact Julie Kasper at [JKasper@careyinstitute.org](mailto:JKasper@careyinstitute.org) or go to <https://careyinstitute.org/programs/education/>.

## Union resources available to help combat the opioid crisis

Opioid addiction is an enormous societal crisis and NYSUT members are fighting it in the schools, health care facilities and communities they serve. (See article, page 20.)

The American Federation of Teachers offers a three-hour e-learning course on this topic.

By taking the course, developed by Harvard Medical School, members will be able to recognize the key factors in the current opioid epidemic and employ the techniques learned to identify addiction; respond with treatment strategies; support those in recovery; and engage in prevention education.

Members who successfully complete the course will be able to:

- identify those who are at most risk for opioid addiction;
- identify key signs of an overdose;

- administer Narcan (naloxone);
- explain treatment options for opioid addiction;
- define medically assisted treatment; and
- support those in recovery.



For more information, visit <https://aftlearning.org/group/61>.

The AFT also offers members free, accredited online courses in understanding opioids through the Harvard Medical

School Global Academy. The series on Opioid Use Disorder Education includes:

- Opioid Crisis in America;
- Understanding Addiction;
- Identification, Counseling, and Treatment of Opioid Use Disorder (OUD); and
- Collaborative Care Approaches for Management of OUD.

## Course for SRPs on understanding trauma

NYSUT's Education & Learning Trust has updated its series of courses for SRPs to include student trauma.

Often, the hurt that is felt by students is transferred to school personnel and it can manifest in a variety of ways. This seminar will engage participants in understanding the roots of trauma, its prevalence and causes,

the characteristics and associated behaviors, as well as learning how to work with traumatized students in a proactive and positive way.

Visit [elt.nysut.org](http://elt.nysut.org) for more info.





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STACEY CARUSO-SHARPE



### Caruso-Sharpe earns top NYSUT honor for women leaders

The union will present its prestigious “Not for Ourselves Alone:” The Sandy Feldman Outstanding Leadership Award to Stacey Caruso-Sharpe of the Amsterdam Teachers Association.

Caruso-Sharpe has retired from teaching after 37 years, but she continues to dedicate herself to the dual causes of public education and unionism.

She became a building rep early in her career, and is known as someone who was never afraid to speak truth to power. Throughout her entire career, Caruso-Sharpe worked to fight for teachers in her home local and for all NYSUT members. She continues to represent her region on the NYSUT Board of Directors and, for many years, she served as an AFT vice president.

“Her non-stop, can-do approach ... inspired so many of her colleagues to ask what more they can do,” said Eugene B. Agresta Jr., co-president of the ATA.

The NFOA award is given annually to two women leaders who have made important contributions to the labor movement over the course of their careers.

EVELYN DEJESUS



### Evelyn DeJesus a ‘fierce advocate for justice’

Educating women to lead on an educational, political and economic agenda is at the core of Evelyn DeJesus’s work at the United Federation of Teachers and as chair of the AFT’s Latino Issues Task Force.

DeJesus, vice president for education and executive director of teacher centers for the UFT will receive the prestigious “Not for Ourselves Alone:” The Sandy Feldman Outstanding Leadership Award.

The award is given annually to two women leaders who have made important contributions to the labor movement over the course of their careers.

DeJesus is a member of the NYSUT Board of Directors and Executive Committee, and is a national AFT vice president. A former social worker and paraprofessional who became a skilled teacher and administrator, “she is a fierce advocate for justice and a role model for educators of color and women in the labor movement,” said UFT President Michael Mulgrew.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Maria in 2017, she led the union’s humanitarian effort to fund clean drinking water for Puerto Rico and to support the 40,000 teachers in the new AFT local there.

# Recognizing member excellence

**N**YSUT annually celebrates individual members’ excellence in leadership, union activism and outstanding commitment to their professions. Learn more about the 2019 honorees throughout the pages of this issue of *NYSUT United* and at

[www.nysut.org/ra](http://www.nysut.org/ra).

The Representative Assembly, NYSUT’s highest policymaking body, sets the union’s course for the year ahead.

The RA online site will feature coverage of the union’s 47th annual convention including officer speeches, remarks from dignitaries and updates on delegate actions.



LAURA FRANZ



### Franz earns Feldman grant

Laura Franz, president of the Albany Public School Teachers Association, will receive the Sandy Feldman Leadership Grant at the RA in Albany.

The \$2,000 grant is given annually to one member to recognize and support new, emerging women leaders among NYSUT’s more than 1,200 locals.

Currently in her second year as president of her local union, Franz has been

involved for many years at the local, state and national levels. She has been a local officer and delegate to state and national conventions.

“I have been a member of, and valued the work of, my union for my entire working life,” she said.

Franz serves on the NYSUT Women’s Committee and the union mentoring subcommittee. She plans to use the funds

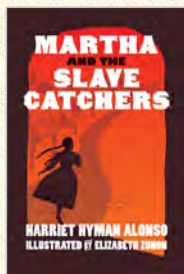
from the grant to develop and implement an APSTA mentoring program to grow and support future leaders in the local.

“Laura Franz has the kind of vision and commitment that will ensure the health and strength of our union for the future,” said Jolene DiBrango, NYSUT executive vice president, who leads the Women’s Committee.



**Martha and the Slave Catchers**

By Harriet Hyman Alonso  
Illustrated by Elizabeth Zunon

**Recommended**

by: Helen Hernandez,  
United Federation of Teachers

**Suitable for:** middle school

**Why I Chose It:** This historical fiction is about a young girl, Martha, who goes off to rescue her adopted brother, Jake. Jake's mother was a fugitive slave who was taken in by Martha's abolitionist parents and died giving birth to Jake. The story details the dangers that Martha encounters in her quest to bring Jake home and reveals the horrors of slavery.

**What I Like Best:** The book gives readers greater insight into the impact of the 1850s Fugitive Slave Act, and the importance of the work of abolitionists and the Underground Railroad. Readers have the opportunity to have meaningful discussions about slavery and race.

**How Teachers Can Use This Book:** This book can be used when studying the Civil War period. Readers can access "The Facts Behind Martha and the Slave Catchers" on the author's website, [www.harrietalonso.com](http://www.harrietalonso.com). There is a study guide available for educators on the publisher's website, [www.sevenstories.com](http://www.sevenstories.com), under the resources tab.

**About the author and illustrator:**

Harriet Hyman Alonso, a member of the Professional Staff Congress union, is a retired history professor at the City College of New York; a peace activist and a needlepoint artist. She is a recipient of the National Endowment for the Humanities Research Fellowship.

Elizabeth Zunon is the illustrator of many books, including the African folktale *How Many Spots Does a Leopard Have?* and *The Legendary Miss Lena Horne*. Visit <http://lizzunon.com>.

"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](mailto:lfrenett@nysutmail.org).

# 'Take a Look at Teaching' summits focus on solutions

By Sylvia Saunders  
[ssaunder@nysutmail.org](mailto:ssaunder@nysutmail.org)

One Monroe County Community College student explained how a "buddies" program at her high school piqued her interest in a teaching career. Others suggested increasing incentives for School-Related Professionals to pursue teaching certification — or developing supportive "grow-your-own" programs.

These were just a few of the many suggestions offered by hundreds of students, educators and community members who took part in NYSUT's first round of "Take a Look at Teaching" events this school year.

The forums, held in Syracuse, Kenmore-Tonawanda, at Monroe CC, and SUNY Potsdam, were the first in a series of events being held around the state to talk about ways to inspire a new generation to become teachers and help diversify the profession.

NYSUT launched the summits last fall to help address the national shortage that is already hitting New York in difficult-to-staff subject areas and high-needs districts — in both urban and rural schools. Enrollment in New York's teacher education programs has declined 47 percent since 2009, while one-third of teachers could retire in the next five years.

"As we hold these summits, solutions are emerging," said NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango. "At the same time, we're making important connections and building sustainable partnerships between K-12 and higher education."

For example, after the January summit in Kenmore-Tonawanda, West Seneca TA President Joe



JASON HUNTER

Participants at the SUNY Potsdam Take a Look at Teaching summit share ideas on recruiting future teachers. Standing: SUNY Potsdam physics professor Lily Li speaks with students.

Cantafo worked with his district to negotiate a partnership agreement with Buffalo State College to give teacher prep co-eds valuable pre-career experience in West Seneca schools.

Students will be paid as substitutes for one or two days a week, while also receiving professional development and an assigned mentor teacher. Upon completion, participants will be given preference for substitute positions and a guaranteed interview for any openings.

DiBrango noted the events are formatted to encourage sharing ideas and networking, thanks to a suggestion by Kenmore TA President Peter Stuhlmiller, a NYSUT Board member who helped coordinate the second summit. Rather than a large group presentation, the summits now feature roundtable discussion and reporting out the top two or three recommendations. That's made it a more interactive learning experience.

At SUNY Potsdam and Monroe CC

forums, students and faculty identified a list of barriers for aspiring teachers: financial hurdles, graduating on time, strict GPA requirements and continued problems with certification requirements and costs.

Practical suggestions included financial support to help educators get their state-required master's degree; and utilizing existing programs like the Educational Opportunity Program to learn about effective ways to recruit and support underserved students.

NYSUT is planning four more regional summits next school year in the Southern Tier, Long Island, Capital Region and Yonkers. For more information, visit [www.nysut.org/takealookateaching](http://www.nysut.org/takealookateaching).

**CORRECTION**

**Hayley Black**, Alexandria Central FA, earned National Board Certification in Literacy: Reading-Language Arts/Early and Middle Childhood.





# Partnership addresses sub shortage and jumpstarts aspiring teachers

By Sylvia Saunders  
ssaunder@nysutmail.org

## Talk about a win/win.

**W**hile many schools are struggling with a severe shortage of substitutes, SUNY Brockport's Teacher Immersion Fellowship program is filling that void in 19 area school districts — and giving aspiring teachers a head start into the profession.

It's an innovative program that got a lot of buzz at one of NYSUT's "Take a Look at Teaching" summits being held around the state to brainstorm solutions to the state's looming teacher shortage and encourage a more diverse educator workforce.

"The school districts love this because it gives them a steady supply of excellent substitute teachers and can actually save money," said SUNY Brockport's Dawn Jones.

"The (college student) fellows love it because they're paid \$100 a day and it gives them tremendous classroom experience, all sorts of professional development, plus a foot in the door for future employment."

The program began in 2016 with seven SUNY Brockport student "fellows" scheduled one to five days a week as full-time substitutes at Hilton School District. In just a short time, with state funding provided through Monroe 2 BOCES, the program has grown this year to six college partners, 19 participating local school districts and 100 student fellows.

"It's an amazing experience," said Abigail St. Denis, a SUNY Brockport student who substitutes Wednesdays and Fridays at Brockport's Gintler Elementary School and schedules college classes the other days of the



DAN CAPPELLAZZO

SUNY Brockport junior Abigail St. Denis is part of a Monroe 2 BOCES fellowship program where teacher prep students substitute in area schools. Other SUNY campuses with similar programs operating or in the works include Buffalo State, Geneseo, Binghamton and Empire State College.

week. "It's definitely giving me a lot more field experience long before I do my student teaching," she said. "And most importantly, it's helped me see that teaching is something I really want to do."

For Christyn Bork, now a second grade teacher at Hilton's Northwood Elementary School, the immersion program was a perfect fit — and helped her land her first teaching job.

She entered the immersion program as a graduate student and was thrilled to be placed at Northwood after doing her undergraduate student teaching. "I signed up for five full days a week and took my grad classes at night," she said. "I literally

worked in every K-6 grade, every classroom."

The few times when there was no substitute opening in the building, she went wherever she was needed — even covering for school secretaries, school monitors, or helping out with security at field days.

"I can't tell you how much it made me part of the school community," she said. "I grew so much as a teacher myself and I sincerely doubt I would have gotten my first job in a district like Hilton if it weren't for this program. You become a known entity."

In addition to the classroom experience, fellows attend after-school

professional development offered by BOCES, plus district activities.

As the program has grown increasingly popular and competitive, it now includes a "match day" similar to what med school residents experience. "Our students submit resumes and do interviews and the school districts are extremely eager to get a fellow," Jones said.

Financially speaking, the program benefits both students and districts. Since the districts receive state aid through the Monroe 2 BOCES cost-sharing arrangement, districts can actually end up saving money rather than hiring substitutes directly with district funding. College students appreciate the \$100-a-day and are able to quit unrelated part-time jobs in retail or food service.

While it's impossible to specifically credit the popularity of the immersion program, Jones noted that enrollment is up this year in both the undergraduate and graduate teacher prep programs at Brockport. With more participants, the college is looking at rearranging class schedules to free up more fellows during the day. The college is also tracking whether participation encourages students to stay in the area after graduation.

"Upstate, there's a lot of talk about the brain drain," Jones said. "We're hopeful this program — and exposure to different school districts — may convince more students to stay in the community."

"This is a perfect example of what can happen when P-12 and higher education partner," said NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango. "Having BOCES work as the cog in the wheel is an innovative way to get some state funding behind it."

## MISSION POSSIBLE

## State's top teacher connects with students

By Matt Smith

msmith@nysutmail.org

In telling the story of Alhassan Susso — New York State's 2019 Teacher of the Year — there are many places where one could start. But since this is, ultimately, a story about teaching, let's start there. Or, more specifically, let's start with the impact that one teacher can have on the life of a student.

When Susso was a teenager, he emigrated from the Gambia to the United States. He ended up in Poughkeepsie. With no place to stay, he lived in homeless shelters while attending high school. On the eve of his first-ever standardized test, he found himself without a place to stay for the night. Rather than preparing for his exam, he was forced instead to scramble to find shelter.

And there by his side, every step of the way, was his high school reading teacher, Pam Felter.

"She was not only there to make sure I succeeded academically, she was there to ensure that I was completely taken care of,"

Susso recalled.

"She validated my human-

ity without highlighting my brokenness. That gave me the foundation of what teaching should be: To ensure that kids are able to succeed academically, but also to ensure their overall well-being is at the core of what we do as teachers."

The impact that Felter had on Susso — who teaches history at the International Community High School in the Bronx — is one he still feels today. That's why Susso considers teaching not just a career, but also a mission.

"It is my job to help young people facing difficulties in their life make sure the obstacles they face do not become a barrier to their success," he said.

"When I look at where I am today it could not

have happened without the assistance of great teachers who guided me during my formative years."

Jay Shuttleworth, a professor at Long Island University who also serves as a social studies and curriculum coach at ICHS, said: "What's energizing about Alhassan is that he reinforces the idea that good teaching starts with the needs and interests of the students. He shows us what it looks like to bridge theory and practice. He's created courses where the learning objective is: 'what kind of life should I live?' Students find those kinds of objectives energizing, empowering and inspiring."

Kimberly Flattery Gaston, a special education and literacy teacher at ICHS who has come up through the teaching ranks with Susso and has witnessed his career development firsthand, said her colleague's strength is his willingness to be "self-reflective."

"He also has a positivity and an energy that is contagious," she said. "He brings it into the classroom, he brings it to students





# ents through humanity

and even as a leader in the school. He works really hard.”

“What I strive for in my classroom,” said Susso, “is to give students an opportunity to feel the learning process should be joyful. So there is a lot of laughter. Every day that I am able to put a smile on a child’s face, then I consider that a very successful day.”

## Long day’s journey

Susso, a member of the United Federation of Teachers, lives in Poughkeepsie with his wife and two children. He gets up at 4 a.m. each morning to catch a train to the Bronx, where he arrives an hour early at school to prepare. He returns home each night at 8 p.m.

ICHS sits in the nation’s poorest congressional district. Every student is a recent immigrant. They come from more than 15 countries, speak different languages, and hold many different beliefs. Most come from families living below the federal poverty level. And many entered high school reading at a fourth-grade level.

As an immigrant himself, Susso is well aware of the challenges they face. That’s why — besides handling a full teaching course load during the day — he also created a before-school

program in which he develops in his students the leadership, communication and financial-management skills necessary to achieve their dreams.

Last year, every student who completed Susso’s course graduated high school and 97 percent are enrolled in college.

“All my students see all day are obstacles,” said Susso. “I have been through the process they are going through, and know what the journey ahead is going to be like for them. When I first initiated (the before-school program), people thought I was crazy. If students aren’t coming to school on time, why would they come an hour early? We started with seven kids. Last year, there were over 60 kids. If students are learning something that will impact their lives, they will come to school no matter how early the class is.”

To say that Susso understands obstacles may be an understatement. Besides dealing with homelessness upon his arrival in the U.S., he fought desperately to bring his ailing sister here for medical treatment. Ultimately, those attempts were not successful, and she died at 19. Susso also suffers from a rare macular degenerative disease that’s left him with 20/80 vision.

He expects to go completely blind.

NYSUT President Andy Pallotta said Susso’s “incredible life story and unwavering commitment to his students are an inspiration and a reminder of the dedication, excellence and professionalism found in classrooms” across the state.

“Alhassan is the type of educator that knows he constantly needs to improve,” said Berenas Cabarcas, founding principal of ICHS. “He started out as a student teacher, and he had a rough first year, but he kept on going. And his mission was to be the kind of teacher that our students need and deserve so that way he can transform their lives for the better — especially being an advocate for immigrant teens.”

Maria Faliz, a former student of Susso’s, has experienced that very transformation.

“Before Mr. Alhassan, I was a very shy student. I didn’t speak English at all. So I was afraid of everything,” she said. “He helped me build my confidence. As a minority, when we see people like him succeed, we can see that we can reach that goal and be like him and so we can connect with him.”

Susso, who suffers from a rare degenerative eye condition, commutes two-hours by train from his Poughkeepsie home to Harlem, then takes the subway to his school in the South Bronx, arriving well before classes start. “If I can show my students that, despite my condition I still do my best to get to school an hour early to prepare, they too can overcome any obstacles they face. The choices they make will shape the life they lead.”

PHOTOS: BECKY MILLER



125th Street



PAUL C. CLEMENT



## Higher education activist a social justice champion

Paul C. Clement, a professor of economics and chair of social sciences at the Fashion Institute of Technology, is NYSUT's 2019 Higher Education Member of the Year. He has served as treasurer for the United College Employees of FIT since 2007. "He is an exceptional steward of the local's finances," said UCE FIT President Roberta Elins, noting that the local remains fiscally strong, even in the post-Janus world.

A leader in the fight for social justice, diversity and inclusion, Clement is a member of the American Federation of Teachers Racial Equity Task Force, and NYSUT's Social Justice Committee. He has presented on racial and social justice issues at AFT and AFT/NEA higher education conferences and at the NYSUT Community College Conference. He has also advised the Higher Education Policy Council.

Clement co-chairs FIT's Diversity and Inclusion Committee and has developed several well-attended symposia on diversity. In the wake of the racial unrest in Charlottesville, Va., Clement organized a well-regarded town hall event for the FIT community.

Clement is also a long-standing member of his local's Higher Education Lobby Day team.

By Liza Frenette  
lfrenett@nysutmail.org

**M**asked by the pleasant sounds of co-eds talking in campus crowds and music belting out from the open windows of dorm rooms, a sad reality challenges increasing numbers of college students. Too many of them do not have enough to eat.

According to a 2016 *Hunger on Campus* study, about 25 percent of students at community colleges are food insecure. The study, published by the National Student Campaign Against Hunger & Homelessness, found a similar number of students at four-year schools (about 20 percent).

Financial aid has not kept pace with rising tuition and housing costs. Often students are forced to choose between costly textbooks and meals. So many campuses are home to students with significant food insecurity that last year Gov. Cuomo issued a mandate requiring State and City University of New York colleges to set up pantries or provide access to free food to meet the needs of students.

The mandate bolsters the actions that unions have been taking to get food into the hands of hungry students — along with some adjunct faculty who work for meager pay.

At the University at Albany, union faculty and staff formed a food pantry committee in 2015, obtaining Chapter Action Project grants to set up and host UUP Fight Campus Hunger 5k fundraisers, said Greta Petry, founding pantry committee member and a member of the United University Professions chapter.

For its second 5k, the committee partnered with Sodexo campus food

# Union members lead the way feeding the hungry on campus



From left, Sarah Smith, Jim Shevlin and Bonnie Eannone, members of the United University Professions chapter at SUNY Old Westbury help out at the campus food pantry. Students — and some faculty — rely on the pantry to battle hunger on campus.

PROVIDED

services and raised \$10,000, which was split between a local St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry and a regional food bank.

The college set up a system so students could order food online from St. Vincent's, and volunteers would deliver the food to campus. St. Vincent's is also close to the college's downtown campus for walk-ins. The university's Neighborhood Life department recently won a \$55,000 grant; a campus pantry is scheduled to open at UAlbany this fall.

At SUNY Plattsburgh, the UUP chapter hosts food drives 3-4 times a year to support a campus pantry set up about five years ago. College librarians collected money to purchase and stock a freezer for the pantry. Food comes from student-led and community drives.

Students accessing help are very grateful, said Michele Carpentier, a UUP member and assistant vice president for student affairs. The

pantry is located with discreet access in Student Support Services. It's also stocked with personal care products. "Particularly the feminine products — we have students who can't afford them," Carpentier said.

Sarah Smith, assistant professor of public health and a UUP member at SUNY Old Westbury, said faculty and staff tapped their colleagues at nearby Nassau Community College for guidance in setting up a food pantry. NCC already had one established.

The Old Westbury pantry gets much of its food from Island Harvest, a regional distribution food pantry supplier. Food drives are also held by student groups, faculty and staff.

"There are a lot of staff that use the food pantry," said Bonnie Eannone of Old Westbury. "There's a stigmatization of food inequity that is still tough, especially for faculty."

CUNY reported food pantries, or means of providing food, at 18 of its 20 campuses in 2018.



# SRPs organize to keep the union strong

By Kara Smith  
ksmith@nysutmail.org

When Karen McLean read that NYSUT was hosting a Member Organizing Institute specifically for School-Related Professionals, she was excited.

"I did the MOI last year and it was very rewarding," said McLean, secretary-treasurer for the Herricks Teachers Association and a NYSUT SRP Advisory Committee member. She enjoyed meeting members on their doorsteps, noting "many said they had never had a NYSUT member visit their home."

McLean was one of dozens of SRP members who took part in the NYSUT SRP MOI at the union's headquarters in late March. Participants learned how to develop and communicate their union stories, door-knocking etiquette and best practices, and visited several member households during the two-and-a-half-day training. Back in their districts, program graduates will visit SRP members in their homes to better address their specific issues.



NYSUT organizer Liz Smith-Rossiter (foreground); Steven Carter, Buffalo Educational Support Team; and Karen McLean, Herricks TA, visit the home of Carol Ray, Albany Public School United Employees. PROVIDED

There is no substitute for that kind of member-to-member communication, said Jolene DiBrango, NYSUT executive vice president. "SRPs talking to SRPs about organizing issues is so valuable."

Brad Jagnanan, a teaching assistant and Henry Viscardi School Faculty Association member, is committed to helping NYSUT retain and recruit new members. "I want to ensure the union stays strong", he said.

A desire to help fellow members grasp the value of the union is what inspired Mary Beth Nardone to attend the training. The Port Washington Association of Educational Secretaries member says that many people don't understand what the union does for them.

"When people ask me why the union is valuable, I want to be able to educate them," said Nardone. "I don't come from a union family, but I consider the union to be very important."

NYSUT officers greeted the program attendees and acknowledged the crucial work they do every day.

"Thank you for your day jobs — you are the backbone of all that happens in our schools — and thank you for highlighting union value," said NYSUT Second Vice President Paul Pecorale, whose office oversees SRP initiatives for the union.

"I believe the MOI has forever changed the face of our union — I'm glad you're taking advantage of this, you will get so much out of it," noted NYSUT President Andy Pallotta.



## SRP leader a specialist in care, learning, advocacy

When teaching assistant Colleen Condolora speaks, people listen: students, lawmakers, teachers, unionists and fellow health and safety activists. Hers is the voice of gentle, determined, educated persuasion.

As a NYSUT 2019 School-Related Professionals Member of the Year, Condolora brings her devotion to the spotlight. She has been a special education teaching assistant for 29 years at the Capital Region BOCES, where she has put into practice a trauma-informed method of working with students for which she took a year of training. She teaches the methods through NYSUT's Education and Learning Trust classes.

"We have to change our own culture to consider where the child is coming from, asking not 'What is wrong with you?' but 'What is happening to you?'" said Condolora, who also tutors students.

Condolora serves on NYSUT's Health and Safety Committee, where she provides workshops on trauma-informed care at conferences. She is the only labor representative on her school district's health and safety committee, where she also advocates for therapeutic crisis intervention; anti-bullying programs and protecting staff and students from violence in the workplace.

She is a longtime RA delegate and a volunteer grassroots lobbyist with NYSUT's Committee of 100.



## Advocating for students, colleagues is 'her business'

Priscilla Castro, honored as a 2019 School-Related Professionals Member of the Year, has worked for 15 years providing instructional support to medically fragile students and students with autism. Her union involvement as a para representative and then chapter leader led her to become a borough advocate for the United Federation of Teachers, where she has worked the past five years with SRPs on contract and grievance issues throughout Queens.

Last year, in the shadow of the *Janus* case, she filled six binders with pledges from every member she visited at more than 100 sites, all of them sticking with the union.

"I made it my business," she said, telling members: "We have what we have because of the union. You have a career ladder program. Paras are able to go to school and at least six credits are paid each semester."

In 2016, she held a "Passion and Promise" thank-you celebration, honoring paraprofessionals with more than 20 years of service from 14 organizations. More than 150 people attended. The ceremony was such a hit that it was picked up by the UFT for many other District 75 schools serving students with special needs.

In 2017, she hosted a "Public School Proud" event to honor students with disabilities and the educators and health care professionals who work with them.

RAQUEL WEBB GEDDES



### Nurse on the go earns union honor

Many days, you can find visiting nurse Raquel Webb Geddes tending to sick people in their houses or apartments throughout Nassau County. She is part of these communities. Her scope of practice, though, extends far beyond the front doors.

Each week she also works for the United Federation of Teachers, traveling to sites in the Bronx, Staten Island, Nassau, Manhattan, Queens and other locales to run monthly chapter meetings for visiting nurses.

She also serves on the negotiating committee for the Federation of Nurses/UFT, keeping an eye on good working conditions to best serve nurses and patients. She has worked for the Visiting Nurse Service of New York since 1997.

Webb Geddes, NYSUT 2019 Health Care Professional Member of the Year, serves on the union's Health Care Professionals Council, which helps determine legislative priorities and monitors health concerns.

Every year, she attends NYSUT's Health Care Lobby Day to advocate for the rights of nurses and adequate patient care. She joins NYSUT in advocating for safe nurse-patient ratios, and opposing mandatory overtime for home care nurses.

Webb Geddes earned a master's degree in nursing and nursing education while working full time as a home care nurse and serving her union. She also has a certificate in holistic nursing.

By Liza Frenette  
lfrenett@nysutmail.org

**W**ith a measles outbreak in Rockland County and the New York City area generating national and international headlines, a group of Rockland County employees have been busy setting up vaccination clinics, providing information to the public and posting notices in schools about the spread of this disease.

Nationwide, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports 555 confirmed cases of measles this year. According to the New York City health department, there have been 285 confirmed cases of measles in Brooklyn and Queens since October.

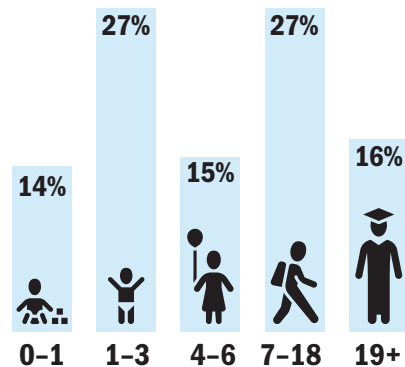
As of April 17, there were 190 confirmed reported cases of measles in Rockland County. Members of the Rockland Association of Managers, a union of 176 people affiliated with NYSUT, have been working to help stop the spread of the disease. In late April the county issued an order barring anyone diagnosed with measles from all public places, including schools, restaurants and other businesses.



The Rockland County Department of Health is reaching out in several ways to educate about the importance of the measles vaccine. Fliers in several languages are posted throughout the community.

# NYSUT members fighting measles crisis through education, immunization

Age groups for the confirmed measles cases in Rockland County\*



\*As of 4/15/19 Source: Rockland County Health Department

"We're trying to tell people what the danger is," said John Fella, president of RAM and deputy commissioner of the county Department of Social Services. "Measles can be dangerous for young children, pregnant women and unborn children."

More than 18,000 MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccines have been administered to individuals throughout the county, Fella reported, with the county health department working with physicians and local, federally qualified health centers. The department's communicable disease team — the unit charged with handling this outbreak — has set up free clinics and is notifying residents. The most recent clinic was held April 12.

"We recognize there are different thoughts about vaccination, but clearly this is for the greater good," Fella said. Since the outbreak of measles in the county, the health department has aggressively reached out to educate the public regarding

measles symptoms, and to encourage vaccination of children between the ages of 1 and 6.

These dedicated and hardworking county employees are joined by school and hospital health care professionals who are caring for patients with measles and striving to continue to educate the public.

"The work of our members and their colleagues in the Rockland County Health Department demonstrates the critical role public health workers have in protecting communities from disease outbreaks like the measles," said NYSUT Second Vice President Paul Pecorale. "Given how underfunded our public health infrastructure is, their work is even more impressive."



**9/10 UNVACCINATED PEOPLE WILL GET IT IF EXPOSED**

Source: Centers for Disease Control

A measles infection can last for several weeks; symptoms typically start 7-14 days after exposure. Measles is marked by flat, red spots and rashes. It is very contagious and can be transmitted through the air when an infected individual coughs or sneezes — even up to several hours after that person has left the room. According to the State Department of Health, an infected person can spread the disease even before they exhibit symptoms — from four days before they have a rash to four days afterward.



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**Sylvia A. Matousek**

A staunch unionist and long-time local president, Sylvia died March 8.

Sylvia taught in North Syracuse schools for 46 years. She was a well-known and respected labor leader, who served as president of the North Syracuse Education Association for more than 35 years.

She was also a NYSUT pioneer. Sylvia served on the union's Board of Directors for 20 years and was a recipient of NYSUT's highest honor for female leaders, "Not For Ourselves Alone:" The Sandy Feldman Outstanding Leadership Award.

**Richard Anderson** | Feb. 20, 2019  
Ithaca Teachers Association

**Valerie Crowder** | Feb. 7, 2019  
Syracuse Teachers Association

**Greta T. Facey** | Jan. 20, 2019  
United Federation of Teachers

**Adele C. Fagon** | Dec. 16, 2018  
Yonkers Federation of Teachers

**Mary T. Mat** | Jan. 25, 2019  
Webutuck Teachers Association

**Rose Marie Pierce** | March 20, 2019  
United Federation of Teachers

*Obituary submissions must include decedent's full name, union affiliation, date of death, and contact information 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 [jmalec@nysutmail.org](mailto:jmalec@nysutmail.org).*

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# Tackling opioid epidemic through prevention, education

By **Liza Frenette**  
lfrenett@nysutmail.org

Last year, 70,200 people died from a drug overdose — 68 percent of those deaths involved opioids, according to the Centers for Disease Control. That is more names than are etched on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

“(Addiction) knows no bounds,” Robert Kent, general counsel for the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS), told NYSUT members gathered for the biennial Health and Safety Conference.

Pay no attention to geography, economics or social status. This poisoned arrow hits everywhere. Opioid use often leads to heroin use — it’s cheaper — which is now frequently laced with dangerous fentanyl.

Approaching the opioid epidemic from many angles could help tip the scales. OASAS was recently awarded \$5.1 million to create 14 new recovery centers.

New York schools received education information and resources from OASAS, the State Education Department and the Department of Health. Schools are vital prevention partners, particularly since the majority of addictions begin in teenage years — often as a result of students using pain pills to recover from (or keep playing through) an injury.

Coaches, for example, can play an important role by urging students to take the time to heal after an injury.

Laura Ficarra, prevention planning

and education coordinator at OASAS, said there is a link between mental health issues and addiction. Younger people especially will try to self-medicate. As of July 1, 2018, all K-12 health teachers have to instruct on multiple dimensions of mental health. The focus is on wellness, prevention and how students can access assistance, she said.

Ethan Doak, Hudson Falls Teachers Association, uses 15-minute lessons twice a week in positive action, which focuses on social skills, the concept of self and how to deal with tough times.

“It allows students to think collaboratively and to think through things and feel emotions,” Doak said.

Other schools use PAX, a classroomwide game that teaches

students skills necessary for self-regulation — skills that can help students build self-confidence, regulate their emotions and resist drugs. OASAS covers the cost of training and materials for PAX.

Ruth Grisham of the Schenectady Federation of Teachers has seen several students negatively impacted by drugs. Her school uses full implementation of PAX in grades K-5.

“Part of how we get where we need to is to work with students while they’re young,” Kent said.

With new federal funding from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 11 new districts will be funded for PAX programs, Kent said.

Resources are available at [www.combataddiction.ny.gov](http://www.combataddiction.ny.gov), call 877-8-HOPENY or text HOPENY.



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## CONSTITUENCY AWARD WINNERS 2019 REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY

JOYCE MAGNUS



### Retiree member of the year Joyce Magnus

Joyce Magnus is treasurer for the United Federation of Teachers Retired Teachers Chapter; the political action representative for Retiree Council 17; the UFT's Staten Island Retiree Political Action representative; and an executive board member for the UFT's Retired Teacher Chapter.

Magnus' proudest recent accomplishment, as a political action representative, was helping to get out the vote in the 2018 federal elections through phone banking and canvassing. Her efforts contributed to the successful election of all the UFT- and AFT-endorsed candidates. Magnus received the UFT's Tom Pappas Award in 2014.

As an in-service member, she served as a NYSUT/American Federation of Teachers delegate; a UFT certification representative; and representative for the Queens UFT. Magnus was also the recipient of the Trachtenberg Award and the Smallheiser Award.

KEN ULRIC



### Retiree leader a political action rockstar

Ken Ulric is the first vice president/acting president for Retiree Council 17; the Political Action Committee coordinator at-large for Nassau County; and president of the Farmingdale Federation of Teachers Retiree Chapter.

As PAC coordinator, Ulric's primary focus lies in retiree phone banking. Under his leadership, retiree activism helped defeat the 2017 Constitutional Convention ballot proposition and elect Baldwin teacher Christine Pellegrino to the state Assembly.

He is a former member of the NYSUT Board of Directors, and represents RC 17 on the NYSUT Retiree Advisory Council; at contiguous ED 51-53 meetings; and at the Long Island Retiree Delegates Council. Ulric also speaks about the history of unions at various workshops.

Ulric supports social justice through his PAC involvement and, in 2016, he received a NYSUT Community Service Award.

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## “Quotable”



### Lori A Griffin

One proposed solution from my table at #TakeALookAtTeaching that my school already does — post your education somewhere visible like a doctor to show it takes years of hard work and dedication to be a teacher and it's all worth it! @nysut (@llagxena)

### Alex Sanchez

Women can close the pay gap by forming #unions. #UnionStrong 2019 #UnionStrong #1u (@LALiving213)

### Don Carlisto

Really @NYSEDNews? Testing today was a dumpster fire. “Intermittent delays” resulted in panicked kids, frustrated faculty and staff and testing conditions that should throw into question any idea that these results are credible. #CorrectTheTests @nysut (@DCarlisto)

### Ceci Hall

“Strong unions mean a strong middle class which means a strong economy.” There is a direct relationship between unions and middle class ... and it's getting worse not better #SupportLaborUnions #UnionStrong (@Prog\_Organizer)

### Martin Daly

Grateful to @nysut for its strong and unequivocal stance opposing flawed state assessments! “The current tests do not provide any useful information to parents or teachers or any real information on how a district is performing.” (@marty10707)



## QUESTIONS FOR...

# Lynne Muth

## Monroe #1 BOCES United Professionals

### 1. After 15 years as a school nurse, this year you came to Albany for your first lobby day. Why?

My local union president, Joe Alati, invited me to come to BOCES Lobby Day after I spoke out at a meeting about the desperate need for more school nurses and more funding for health services. Legislators think we are just applying Band-Aids and taking temperatures. I wanted to explain how school nurses do so much more.

### 2. What did you tell lawmakers?

I explained how I divide my time between two Rochester City schools, with more than 1,000 students. That's not unusual: Many nurses work in two or three buildings. We don't just serve the students. We work closely with families and often act as a go-between for students with the doctor, the teachers and other school staff. For example, we had a 3-year-old student recently diagnosed with diabetes. I worked closely with her mom, who came into school with tears and fear in her eyes. She had lots of questions and I needed to reassure her,

“Your baby is going to be safe at school.” I also educated the teacher on what (diabetic warning signs) to look for and offered simple suggestions, like giving the child a snack before gym.

### 3. What other kind of issues do you handle?

I told legislators about a teenager in hospice, who wanted to be able to attend school as long as she could. I worked with the family, their physician, the one-on-one aide and the teacher. She was able to come to school until the week before she died of a respiratory issue. Her mom was incredibly grateful and said it

wouldn't have been possible without the support of a school nurse. Of course that was an unusual case, but we're on the front lines for everything — from

asthma to drug addiction to poverty and mental health issues. Suicide attempts are increasingly common. We have many more medically fragile students. It's frightening that some schools don't have a school nurse at all. As a (regional rep) for the NYS School Nurse's Association, I heard about one suburban school where the assistant principal was giving out meds and administering first aid.

### 4. Tell us about some situations where it was critical for a school nurse to be there.

One time, I had a fifth-grader who came down to the office and said his eye was hurting. I talked with him at length because something didn't seem right. All of a sudden he grabbed the back of his head, screamed out in pain and was totally unconscious. I immediately suspected a brain aneurysm. He survived because a lot of things fell into place. We called 911 and first responders came immediately. I told the hospital the pain appeared to be at his brain stem, so they had a neurosurgeon ready to go when he arrived. It was a great team effort, but it might have been a tragedy if there hadn't been a school nurse at the school.

### 5. What kind of reaction did you get from lawmakers?

We talked about the NYSUT-backed bill that calls for a school nurse in every building and legislators were extremely supportive. I feel like they really listened. At the end of the meeting one legislator pulled me aside and said, “Just keep telling your story.”





# ~~C~~ORRECT the tests

NYSUT is calling on the state to fix its broken grades 3–8 testing system. Read the following testimonials from members across New York State and share your testing stories at [www.correctthetests.com](http://www.correctthetests.com):

## Capital Region

I teach a class with several English language learners. One student has only had two years of formal education. This child wanted to do her best and spent five hours on day two of the ELA test trying to read and answer stories and questions that were far out of reach for her. It was torture to watch her struggle. Why not test her at her level and let her find some success?

## Western New York

This year, despite the “shortened” test, I had 8- and 9-year-old students sitting for at least two hours straight. As I know through experience and research, a child

is not developmentally ready to work at something for this length of time. If testing of this nature is required, at least make it accessible to children ... fewer texts to read and more developmentally appropriate questions. The written responses were incredibly long for third graders — six short response questions and an essay. This was way too much for them.

## Central New York

I was told that if I even ask a child if they have an opt-out letter I would lose my certification. I was also told by admin that as a state employee I was to “sell” the test. Our school leader told students there were no opt outs this year. For those that did bring a letter, a phone call to parents was made. Parents were told their child would need the test to qualify for accelerated classes or to get the help they need.

## Lower Hudson Valley

Today I witnessed a very hardworking student hysterically crying because she was almost done and her test froze. When she was able to log back in, all of her work was gone. Insanity. This child worked SO hard. How on earth can you expect a

12-year-old to get back into the mindset to being test ready after having lost all their hard work?

## Lower Hudson Valley

My students had to sit and wait 1 1/2 hours to get onto the system. Finally, when they did get on and completed the test, they could not submit! One of my students had a breakdown, crying. The psychologist needed to be called in.

## Long Island

I had two fifth graders who began day two of the ELA test at 9:35 and continued testing until 2 p.m.! They missed lunch, recess and music. They were permitted to bring their lunch into the extended testing room and eat for 10 minutes. They were so stressed out, but wanted to do their best. Afterward, when they finally joined the class again, one of the students asked me for a hug.

## Central New York

A third-grade student told me she spent the whole day taking the test and only stopped for lunch. This is abuse. I think that the governor and other NY

politicians should have to sit and take the fifth-grade test and only be allowed to get up for lunch and the bathroom for two days straight.

## Lower Hudson Valley

On day two of the test, my students had to write six short answers and one long response! Of my 23 students, 15 were still writing their responses at 2:30! That's five hours of testing! When I took the SAT at 18, it only took three hours to complete and I was 18, not 8! This was a form of child abuse.

## WRITE TO US!



Letters are published at the discretion of the editor, who takes space, relevancy, fairness, legal liability and accuracy into account. To submit a letter, email [united@nysutmail.org](mailto:united@nysutmail.org), or mail to Letter to the Editor, NYSUT Communications, 800 Troy-Schenectady Road, Latham, NY 12110. Please include your name and union.



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## Johnstown Teachers Association



For the fourth consecutive year, the Johnstown Teachers Association has extended its 100 Acts of Kindness on the 100th day of School program.

“This is a way to give back to the community that has long supported education,” said President Nancy Lisicki.

Members of the JTA donated children’s books to the local urgent care waiting room; passed out books to children around town; and donated to cancer research. The educators also handed out snacks, lotto tickets and paid for people’s food or coffee at drive-thrus.

Students were also included in the local’s joyful actions. Students in Ashleigh Scott’s class, above, created “Survival Kits” filled with snacks and words of gratitude and encouragement to members of the local police force.

## Nassau County locals

Union members from 18 different locals recently brought their newest colleagues together to celebrate and share. The “meet-and-greet” social included more than 50 members from Nassau County locals. Early career members who attended included teachers, clerical professionals, nurses, teaching assistants, teacher aides, guidance counselors and social workers with five or fewer years of service. They shared common issues and challenges they face, along with values they share.

Local leaders who attended the social emphasized the importance of early union activism; the relationship of unionism to educator success; and the value of building solidarity among instructional staff and School-Related Professionals. Speakers included Frank Van Zant, Rockville Centre TA president; Karen McLean, Herricks TA treasurer; and Matt Jacobs, NYSUT staff director of the Nassau Regional Office.

## Rome Teachers Association

The Rome Teachers Association, led by Rob Wood, is dedicated to the success of the district’s community schools program — and that includes ensuring families have access to food when they need it.

The local contributed \$1,600 toward start-up costs for a food pantry at Gansevoort Elementary School and will be buying a refrigerator, freezer and the initial food to outfit the pantry. Food will include dairy products, meats and fresh produce.

Food insecurity is high on the list of concerns families face, said Joseph Eurto, RTA member and Community Schools chair. The pantry at Gansevoort, to be named One Big Family, is anticipated to serve many of the school’s families “as well as be open to any family in the Rome district,” Eurto said.

The Giving Tree Pantry at Bellamy Elementary School helps serve about 50 families each month.

## Pine Plains Federation of Educators

The knights and ladies of Sir Read-a-Lot’s Castle took over Family Literacy Night recently — and a good time was had by all.

The event was the culmination of the Pine Plains Federation of Educators’ Parents as Reading Partners event co-sponsored with the Pine Plains PTA. More than 80 students in grades pre-K to 6 attended with their families and participated in fun literacy-based activities on their quest to reach the castle and earn their prize — a brand new book. Activities included following a recipe to make a snack and telling jokes to the king’s court.

“Family Literacy Night is truly a community event: PPFE members do all the planning and prep work, middle and high school students volunteer to help set up and run stations, and our local librarians run a station as well,” said local President Janine Babcock.



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

## KUDOS!



### It’s an honor

**Jeanine Hall**, Hendrick Hudson Education Association, was recognized as Biomedical Science Teacher of the Year by Project Lead the Way, a nonprofit organization that has developed a project-based approach to STEM education curricula for pre-K–12 students. She received an outstanding teacher award at the PLTW Summit in Indianapolis in February.

**Nicole Lopez**, United Federation of Teachers, won a \$10,000 cash prize and was recognized as an inaugural Sanford Teacher Award recipient. She was chosen for her commitment to bringing together students of diverse backgrounds through social emotional learning approaches.

### In print

**Joan Geller**, a retired United Federation of Teachers librarian, has written three e-books. *Butterfly Girls*, co-authored with Melanie Geller, is a collection of art and poetry addressed to characters in literature and to historical figures. *A Man for Emily: Short Stories, Essays and Book Reviews*, explores life after failed relationships and women’s plight to strive out on their own economically. *Four Stories* is a book about jilted lovers and people in perilous situations. These books are all available on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

**Laurie Zelinger**, Oceanside Federation of Teachers retired school psychologist, wrote *Please Explain Tonsillectomy and Adenoidectomy to Me: A Complete Guide to Preparing Your Child for Surgery*, with her son, Perry Zelinger. The book is a guide for parents to help explain the procedure to their young children — and to help them cope with it as well. Information on ordering the book, published by Loving Healing Press, is available at [www.drzelinger.com](http://www.drzelinger.com).

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

# IT'S WHAT WE DO

## Chris Pendergast, United Teachers of Northport

Most of the time, Chris Pendergast speaks through the computer attached to the front of his wheelchair.

But at a party marking his 70th birthday, the words he typed were read out loud to the crowd from his own voice, caught on recordings prior to his illness and transcribed by technology.

Pendergast has amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, known commonly as ALS, a fatal disease that attacks the nerve cells. The life span after diagnosis is 2-5 years.

But he is the exception to the rule — and then some. Pendergast was diagnosed in his mid-40s in 1993. He has lived 26 years with ALS.

"I simply wanted to fight," he said. "I never thought I'd be here all these years later."

He is now living with quadriplegia.

"The day I stopped dying from ALS and began living is a metaphor for turning my disease into a vehicle to do good," he said.

Pendergast founded the non-profit ALS Ride for Life (<https://alsrideforlife.org>) and has now raised \$8 million for research, and patient and family support.

The Christopher Pendergast Center for Excellence at the SUNY Stony Brook Medical Center is the first ALS medical treatment facility on Long Island.

He has successfully advocated for waiving the waiting time for a person with ALS to collect disability; and for the creation of an ALS registry through the Centers for Disease Control registry ([www.cdc.gov/ALS](http://www.cdc.gov/ALS)).

To read more about Pendergast's story, visit [www.nysut.org/itswhatwedo](http://www.nysut.org/itswhatwedo).

**On the job and in the community, NYSUT members make a difference.**

## 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, 2017 through August 31, 2018. The annual report has been filed with the Employee Benefits Security Administration, U.S. Department of Labor, as required under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA).

The Board of Trustees of 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, 2018 were \$71,851,556.

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, 2018, the premiums paid under such "experience-rated" contracts were \$36,738,470 and the total of all benefit claims paid under these experience-rated contracts during the plan year was \$16,330,907.

### Basic Financial Statement

The value of plan assets, after subtracting liabilities of the plan, was \$29,835,276 as of August 31, 2018, compared to \$26,082,218 as of September 1, 2017. During the plan year the plan experienced an increase in its net assets of \$3,753,058. 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 \$12,192,288. This income included participants' contributions of \$3,731,608, earnings from investments of \$1,635,246 and other income of \$6,825,434.

Plan expenses were \$8,439,230. These expenses included \$5,084,981 in administrative expenses and \$3,354,249 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:

1. an accountant's report;
2. financial information and information on payments to service providers;
3. assets held for investment;
4. insurance information, including sales commissions paid by insurance carriers; and
5. 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, Plan Administrator, Trustees of the New York State United Teachers Member Benefits Trust, 800 Troy-Schenectady Road, Latham, NY 12110-2455, 518-213-6000. The charge to cover copying costs will be \$13.80 for the full annual report, or 15 cents 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.

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# Maintain your NYSUT membership in retirement

**A**re you planning to retire soon? The transition from active employment to retirement brings some challenges that must be carefully handled; look to your union and NYSUT Member Benefits to assist you during this important time in your life.

You must maintain NYSUT membership as a retiree in order to continue participating in NYSUT Member Benefits-endorsed programs and services. Act now to ensure continuation of your NYSUT membership. You can accomplish this in one of two ways:

1. If your local offers retiree membership, you must continue membership within your local. Check with your local to see what, if any, retiree membership requirements are in place. Compliance with your local's retiree membership requirements is a prerequisite for continued membership in NYSUT and the American Federation of Teachers (one of NYSUT's national affiliates).
2. If your local does not provide some form of retiree membership, you will continue as an at-large retiree member of NYSUT through the Retiree Council in your region. To ensure continuation of NYSUT membership, make sure your local reports you as retired and changes your member code to "3" or writes "retired" on the membership report sent to NYSUT. Again, this will afford you membership in your geographic retiree council and NYSUT along with the AFT.

Retiree membership is not automatic for the National Education Association, NYSUT's other national affiliate. You may choose to join NEA as a Lifetime Retiree for a one-time fee of \$250.

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 an enrollment form and information on how to join NEA National, contact NYSUT Retiree Services at 800-342-9810, ext. 6291.

If you are a non-lifetime NEA retiree member or know someone who has been lost from the NEA/NY rolls, contact NYSUT Member Records at 800-342-9810, ext. 6224, for information on how to join NYSUT and NEA as a retiree.

For questions about establishing retiree membership, contact 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, ext. 6224

For questions about maintaining your NYSUT membership or information on NYSUT retiree programs, contact the NYSUT Retiree Services Consultant serving your region:

- **Buffalo area** (RC 1, 2, 3, 44): Tracy Beatty, 716-634-7132
- **Jamestown area** (RC 4, 46): Louise Ortman, 716-664-7425
- **Rochester area** (RC 5, 6): Peter Randazzo, 585-454-5550
- **Syracuse/Utica area** (RC 7, 8): Anne Marie Voutsinas, 315-431-4040
- **North Country/Capital District** (RC 9, 10): TBA, 518-825-0730
- **Southern Tier** (RC 11, 45): Mark Padgett, 607-786-5742
- **Greater Capital District/Mid-Hudson area** (RC 12, 13): Jennifer Shaad-Derby, 518-783-7977
- **Orange, Rockland, Putnam and Westchester Counties** (RC 14, 15-16): Ellen Pincus, 914-592-4411
- **Nassau region** (RC 17, 18, 19): Claire Zatorski, 516-496-2035
- **Suffolk region** (RC 20, 21, 22, 23): Joan Perrini, 631-273-8822

- **Florida (RC 43):** Judith Kalb, 561-994-4929, ext. 129

## Payroll to pension deduction

The transition from payroll deduction of NYSUT Member Benefits-endorsed programs to pension deduction is NOT immediate or automatic. However, following the steps below should help to ensure a smooth process.

✔ Contact Member Benefits at 800-626-8101 when you know your definite retirement date; Member Benefits will then communicate that information to each plan administrator of programs you participate in.

✔ Call each plan administrator of programs you participate in to verify your address so you can be billed at home once your payroll deductions stop; Member Benefits can provide you with the necessary contact information. You should receive a bill for each program you had on payroll deduction. If you do not receive a bill, contact the applicable program administrator to verify a bill was mailed to your proper address. Any discounts you enjoyed with payroll deduction will continue for up to one year with your home billing. Pension deduction yields the same discounts offered as payroll deduction.

✔ 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.

✔ When you receive the bill for the next premium, it should include a Pension Deduction Authorization

Card. Complete and sign the card, and send it back with the bill to the plan administrator in lieu of payment. If you do not receive a Pension Deduction Authorization Card with your second bill, contact Member Benefits for one to be sent to you.

Upon receipt of your Pension Deduction Authorization Card, 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.

Allow time for each of the steps above to be completed. Please 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 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.

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





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## What to know about ERS Tier 6



If you joined the New York State and Local Employees' Retirement System (ERS) on or after April 1, 2012, you are in Tier 6. There are more than 200,000 Tier 6 members, who make up one-third of ERS membership.

Tier 6 members become vested after 10 years of full-time credited service. Vested members are eligible for a service retirement benefit as early as age 55. Full retirement age is 63, but you can retire between 55 and 63 with a reduced benefit.

ERS is a defined benefit retirement plan. In this type of plan, your pension is based on a preset formula, not your individual contributions. Your pension will provide a monthly benefit that you can count on for your lifetime, which means you do not run the risk of outliving your savings, as is the case with 401(k)-style retirement savings plans. Tier 6 members also are covered by disability retirement and death benefits.

The amount of your pension is based on your final average salary (FAS) and years of credited service.

In every issue, State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli, administrative head of the New York 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@nysutmail.org](mailto: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.

For ERS Tier 6 members, final average salary is the average of the five consecutive years in which your earnings were highest. Each year of earnings is limited to no more than 10 percent above the average of the previous four years.

Most ERS Tier 6 members are in the Article 15 retirement plan. In this plan, if you retire with fewer than 20 years of service, your pension benefit equals 1.66 percent of your final average salary for each year of service. If you retire at 20 years, the benefit is 1.75 percent of your final average salary for each year, or 35 percent.

If you retire with more than 20 years of service, you receive 35 percent of your FAS for the first 20 years, plus 2 percent for each additional year. For example, if you retire at 63 with 35 years of service, your pension would be 65 percent of your final average salary.

You can find out more about your benefits by reading your retirement plan booklet, which is available online at [www.osc.state.ny.us/retire/publications/vo1530/index.php](http://www.osc.state.ny.us/retire/publications/vo1530/index.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](mailto:troers@nysutmail.org)

Kathy Hine • 585-454-5550, ext. 144  
[rochers@nysutmail.org](mailto:rochers@nysutmail.org)

Patti Lennon • 516-496-2035, ext. 324  
[nroers@nysutmail.org](mailto:nroers@nysutmail.org)

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

## Working in retirement



**Q:** Can I return to work immediately after retiring from NYSTRS?

**A:** It depends on where you work. If you work for a private or a federal employer, you can return to the workforce immediately. However, if you plan to work for a New York State public employer, you MUST have a service break before returning to the workforce — weekends and holidays don't count. Typically the break needs to be at least one business day. However, to avoid problems if you're considering returning to work, contact NYSTRS at 800-348-7298, ext. 6150 before making a final decision.

Additionally, for one year from your retirement date, you can't work

in a position that's the same, or similar to, the one you previously held. Lastly, if you're collecting a NYSTRS retirement benefit and you take a job in retirement with another NYS public employer, you can't join another NYS public retirement system. For details, consult the NYSTRS publication, *Working in Retirement* at [www.nystrs.org/NYSTRS/media/PDF/working.pdf](http://www.nystrs.org/NYSTRS/media/PDF/working.pdf).

**Q:** Do I need to resign from my district prior to retiring, or is it implied once I submit my NYSTRS application?

**A:** Resignation is between you and your employer; retirement is between you and the NYSTRS system. Before retiring, you must first resign from your district since you can't be on payroll and be retired.

Additionally, for NYSTRS purposes, your resignation date must be at least one day after your effective retirement date. For example, if your last working day is June 30, your earliest retirement day would be July 1. A good first step is scheduling a consultation with your human resource or business office, or with your local union representative, to determine your district's retirement policy. And remember, you only have 30 days from your effective retirement date to change your retirement options. After 30 days, the law does not allow for any changes.

### NYSUT TRS consultants

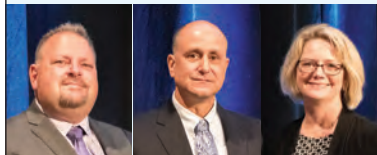
TRS members with questions may call your teacher-members on the New York State Teachers' Retirement System Board of Directors:

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

Sheila Sullivan Buck • 585-454-5550  
[sbuck@nysutmail.org](mailto:sbuck@nysutmail.org)

Paul Farfaglia • 315-431-4040  
[pfarfagl@nysutmail.org](mailto:pfarfagl@nysutmail.org)

Ronald Gross • 631-273-8822  
[rgross@nysutmail.org](mailto:rgross@nysutmail.org)



### DID YOU KNOW?



According to actuarial estimates from the New York State Teachers' Retirement System Board, the employer payroll contribution rate for the 2019-20 school year will be 8.86 percent, down from 10.62 percent for the 2018-19 school year.

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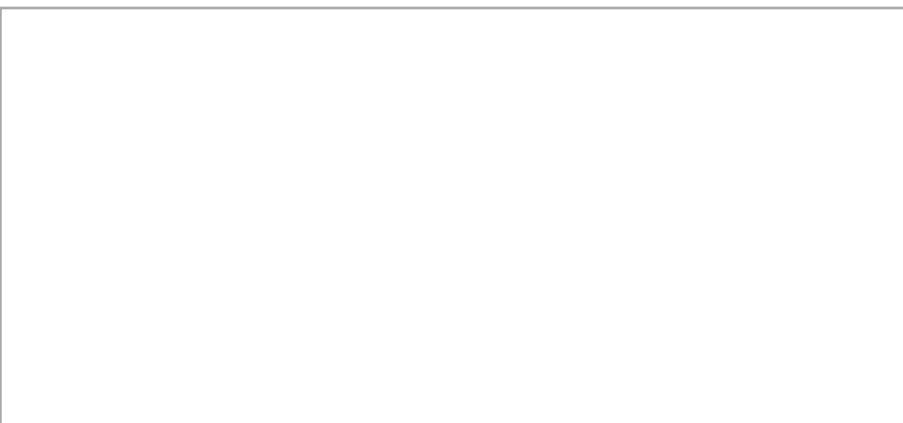
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