

# NYSUT UNITED

A UNION OF PROFESSIONALS

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



## Rachel Murat



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### NYSUT UNITED [ July/August 2020, Vol. 10, No. 6 ]

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**NYSUT United** is a member publication of the International Labor Communications Association, Metro New York Labor Communications Council, State Education Association Communicators.

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**Annual subscription:** \$15. NYSUT members receive a copy of **NYSUT United** as part of their dues benefit. Households with multiple members will receive only one copy. If you do wish to receive more than one copy, please call 518-213-6000.

**Address changes:** POSTMASTER: Member Records Department, 800 Troy-Schenectady

Road, Latham, NY 12110

**UFT member address changes:** POSTMASTER: New York Teacher, 52 Broadway, 12th floor, New York, NY 10004  
PERIODICALS POSTAGE PAID AT LATHAM, NY  
ADDITIONAL ENTRY OFFICE  
WILLIAMSPORT, PA 17701

**NYSUT United** (ISSN 21587914) and **nysut.org** are official publications of New York State United Teachers. **NYSUT United** publishes six issues from September to June.

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# NYSUT Certification Guidance

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NYSUT has experts devoted to answering your certification questions. We're here to address some of your most pressing needs, such as:

- Help with expiring certificates
- Initial-to-professional certification
- CTLE requirements
- Additional certificates to improve your marketability
- Emergency COVID-19 certificate

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Visit [NextGen.NYSUT.org/Certification](https://NextGen.NYSUT.org/Certification) for:

- Information for classroom teachers and TAs
- Answers to frequently asked questions
- Resources including a schedule of webinars for new NYSUT members

# Legislative session ends ... ish

## NYSUT continues to push its agenda calling for revenue enhancement

By Ned Hoskin

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**Y**ou may recall at the beginning of the year the state Legislature planned to hustle through budget negotiations, take care of business and wrap up its session by the first week of June.

Hey, we've got primaries to run, right? That was unusual.

But then, COVID-19 changed everything. An unusual session became unprecedented.

The economy went in the tank, the state's projected deficit doubled, and lawmakers settled on a budget that flatlined state aid. The agreement also gave the governor's budget office new authority to cut further three times during the year if federal funding and revenues falter.

The scheduled session has ended, but lawmakers continue to work. We will continue to work with them.

Two big wins in the statehouse will help to mitigate the far-reaching effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lawmakers passed and the governor signed a law granting death benefits to the families of front-line workers who have died of the coronavirus.

It provides an accidental death benefit that is more substantial than the regular death benefit that public workers' families receive.

"So many of our NYSUT members are essential workers who did not have the option to shelter-in-place or work from home," said NYSUT President Andy

Pallotta. "They responded to the danger with valor. This is the least the state can do to honor their sacrifice."

The governor also signed an executive order directing all schools in New York to remain closed and suspended the 180-day instructional requirement.

"This necessary step will ensure consistency in instructional time for this extraordinary school year," Pallotta said.

Technically, the legislative session is not over until the end of the calendar year.

The union's legislative department is poised for the federal government to pass an additional stimulus package that the governor says he needs to fund the budget without cutting as much as 20 percent of state aid to education, health care and localities.

In the meantime, NYSUT and the labor movement continue to push for revenue bills that would increase the taxes on the ultrawealthy in order to address the state's dire fiscal crisis.

"We don't expect to get all the funding needed from the feds and we will need more," Pallotta said. "We need the Legislature to step up

and act to raise revenue to fight back any proposed cuts."

Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie has announced he is ready to bring the Assembly back if the governor puts forth cuts.

In May, 10 unions representing more than 1.5 million workers in New York called on Albany to increase revenue.

With a \$61 billion revenue shortfall projected over the next four years due to COVID-19, any impending cuts will disproportionately impact those already hit hardest by the pandemic, the labor leaders said, including the poor and working people, particularly in communities of color.

In addition to federal assistance, the coalition called for increased taxes on those earning \$1 million a year and above, a pied-à-terre tax on secondary residences in New York City, and a new capital gains tax on the more than 100 billionaires who live in New York State. Together, these measures could generate upward of \$5-7 billion a year in revenue, which will be desperately needed to mitigate the consequences of the pandemic and prevent a devastating reduction in public resources.

## COMING UP

**June 23**  
Primary Day

**June 25**  
NYSUT Board of Directors meets\*

**July 2-3**  
NEA Convention\*

**July 13-14**  
NYS Board of Regents meets\*

**July 14-15**  
NYSUT Endorsement Conference\*

**July 15**  
Deadline to file state and federal taxes

**July 16**  
NYSUT Board of Directors meets\*

**July 27-30**  
AFT Convention\*

**July 27-31**  
NYSUT offices closed (a manager will be on duty for member calls)

**Aug. 8-14**  
ELT instructor training

**Aug. 12**  
NYSUT Board of Directors meets\*

**Aug. 17-20**  
Democratic National Convention, Milwaukee, Wis. (may be held virtually)

**Aug. 24-27**  
Republican National Convention, Jacksonville, Fla., & Charlotte, N.C.

**August 2020**  
New Local Presidents Digital Academy and Conference

\*Conducted as virtual meetings in compliance with social distancing guidance

## ON THE COVER

Rachel Murat, a member of the Maine-Endwell Teachers Association, is the 2020 New York State Teacher of the Year.

Photo by Becky Miller.

# NYSUT holds special RA, elects statewide officers



EL-WISE NOISETTE



PROVIDED

**By Kara Smith**  
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**A**s part of the statewide union’s special Representative Assembly, NYSUT delegates saw the re-election of three current statewide officers, and the election of a new second vice president.

NYSUT President Andy Pallotta, Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango and Secretary Treasurer J. Philippe Abraham were re-elected to three-year terms. Ronald Gross, president of the William Floyd United Teachers, was elected NYSUT second vice president, replacing Patchogue-Medford’s Paul Pecorale, who did not seek re-election. The RA was hosted virtually due to coronavirus social distancing restrictions.

An American Federation of Teachers delegate, Gross was a social studies teacher for 30 years at William Floyd, his alma mater. He has served as one of three active teacher-members on the 10-member New York State Teachers’ Retirement

System Board since 2017. He is also an active member of the National Council on Teacher Retirement. Gross will oversee the statewide union’s program services.

“Never before have we faced challenges like we are facing right now, but I know that as a union representing teachers, School-Related Professionals, higher education professionals, health care workers and many others, we can be an integral part of charting a better path forward for New York,” Pallotta said.

“I’m proud of what my union sisters and brothers are accomplishing together in this unprecedented time and look forward to working with them in the years ahead.”

NYSUT has overcome significant challenges over the past three years to deliver for members across the state. The union ran a successful organizing campaign in the lead up to,



Top left, NYSUT President Andy Pallotta leads the special RA from the union’s headquarters in Latham. Rounding out the union’s leadership team, clockwise from top left, Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango shares flowers she received on her re-election; newly elected Second Vice President Ronald Gross; and Secretary-Treasurer J. Philippe Abraham.



PROVIDED

and in the wake of, the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Janus v. AFSCME* decision. The initiative highlighted the benefits of unions and union membership.

The statewide union’s political efforts have also played important roles at the state and local level. The union’s candidate Pipeline Project provides training and support for pro-labor working people interested

in running for political office. And in one of the union’s major political victories, NYSUT successfully got legislation enacted fixing New York State’s broken teacher evaluation system.

Looking ahead to the remainder of 2020 and beyond, the union’s strength will be essential

in fighting against potential cuts to education as the state faces an economic crisis, said Pallotta. A bright spot in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, he noted, is that union members have strengthened their bonds, supporting each other, their students and their families through a difficult time.

# They need to know we are there for them

## Layoffs put a face on budget cuts

By **Ned Hoskin**  
ned.hoskin@nysut.org

**T**om Rossiter, seventh- and eighth-grade math teacher in Rochester City Schools, got a layoff notice in May. This month he shared his story with dozens of state senators and staff.

He'll never forget his first day in the classroom. "I corrected an eighth-grader's behavior and he responded, 'Why should I listen to you? You aren't going to be here long.' As a new teacher, I simply didn't understand. It was the first day of school. Why would he say this?"

"Twenty-three teachers that worked with the seventh- and eighth-graders at that charter school quit or got fired that year."

Rossiter went on to share a heartbreaking tale of city kids whose needs are stifled, whose suffering threatens lives and whose horizons disappear in hopelessness. With only one year on staff in Rochester, the six-year veteran educator was among a second round of layoffs that started over the holidays in December.

Rossiter has been to funerals of former students. He has prevented suicides, had a student miss days because of a head wound suffered in a drive-by shooting, watched SWAT teams invade the neighborhood while his students were on

the playground. It's not easy. But it's crucial.

"Students desperately need positive long-term relationships with teachers to be successful. They need to know you are truly there for them," he said. Fortunately, Rossiter was recalled from layoff on June 9; others are not so lucky.

RTA President Adam Urbanski says the budget calls for 198 teaching positions to be cut, in addition to the 108 let go last December. "More than 84 percent of the cuts are teachers," he said. "That doesn't make sense. Teachers don't make up 84 percent of the budget."

In Albany, budget plans could reduce full-time positions by 142, including 35 layoffs. In the large Yonkers district, planned layoffs number 189.

In Troy, the city school district plans to layoff 23 reading teachers due to budget cuts. "It hits poor, urban districts harder than suburban districts," said Seth Cohen, an executive board member of the Troy TA.

But it's not only these urban centers. Layoffs are proposed in smaller districts across the state from Jamestown to Batavia, Auburn, Massena, Granville and Riverhead.

"This is what it looks like when the state arbitrarily decides not to fund a fair and equitable education for all by leaving revenue on the table,"

said Andy Pallotta, NYSUT president. "We've been all over the state this year to illustrate the impact these unnecessary cuts will have on our communities. We can Fund Our Future by imposing fair taxes on the state's wealthiest residents."

The cuts to SUNY, CUNY and community colleges could be even more devastating.

Professional Staff Congress member Marie-Michelle Strah, an adjunct at CUNY's John Jay College, received an email notice of her layoff.

"The impacts are going to be generational," Strah told the group of state senators. "We should be adding more instructional staff."

She said the cuts of some 4,000 adjunct faculty at CUNY campuses hit 50 percent of the professors and 50 percent of the courses in her program. At the same time, the administration anticipates a 17 percent increase in enrollment.

"The quality of education is going to suffer," she said. "Given the calls for educational and economic equity, we should take that promise seriously and not treat New York City students as second-class citizens. It's a civil rights issue."

PSC President Barbara Bowen told the senators it is time for lawmakers to raise desperately needed revenue by taxing the ultrawealthy

New Yorkers who can well afford it. "This is a turning point in American history," she said.

In a late-breaking development, NYSUT learned that fourth quarter state aid payments to community colleges are being delayed. That is causing some campuses to push for concessions that could result in some layoffs, as well.



RTA's Tom Rossiter and the PSC's Marie-Michelle Strah received layoff notices due to budget cuts. They shared their perspectives with state senators and staff in an online meeting.

# Vote! Support these candidates in June 23 primaries

**N**YSUT has endorsed candidates in dozens of races for state legislative offices and recommended nearly 20 congressional candidates for endorsements by the union's national affiliates, the American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association.

Primaries are slated for June 23. The state forwarded postage paid absentee ballot applications to registered voters who would like to avoid social contact at the polls, but you will be able to vote early, June 13-21, or on Election Day in your community. Absentee ballots must be postmarked by June 23.

"Now more than ever, it's clear that public schools are cornerstones of our communities, and we need representatives across New York who recognize that and will fight for public education in the halls of power," NYSUT President Andy Pallotta said.

"We are confident that the candidates we've endorsed are the types of leaders who can deliver for New Yorkers. Especially amid this

global pandemic, support for policies and funding that will move public education forward is critical as our educators work doubly hard to provide educational services and other essential resources for students and families."

The endorsements include five NYSUT local union members or retirees, some of whom came through the union's Pipeline Project. The project helps prepare and support individuals who are willing to step up as candidates to advance public education, health care and labor.

■ **Jackie Gordon**, a retired member of the Western Suffolk BOCES Faculty Association, is running for Congress in New York's second district on Long Island.

■ **Tommy John Schiavoni**, a retired member of the Center Moriches Teachers Association, is running for the state Senate in the first district, in Suffolk County.

■ **Jacqui Berger**, a member of United University Professions, is running for the state Senate in the 61st district in

Western New York.

■ **Chantel Jackson**, a member of the UFT in the Bronx, is running for the Assembly in the 79th district.

■ **Bill Conrad**, a member of the Kenmore TA in Buffalo, is running for the Assembly in the 140th district.

Find the full slate of NYSUT's endorsements and recommendations at [nysut.org/endorsements](https://nysut.org/endorsements).

NYSUT is scheduled to hold its

biennial endorsement conference for federal and state offices online in July.

NYSUT-endorsed candidates receive grassroots support from NYSUT members, including phone banking, mailings and literature distribution. The union also makes financial contributions from voluntary donations through the union's VOTE-COPE non-partisan political action committee.



Jackie Gordon, second row, right, is one of five NYSUT members running in primaries June 23. PROVIDED

## VOTE for NYSUT delegates

Here's a list of NYSUT members\* who are running as presidential delegates from various congressional districts. Vote for them to put the union "on the floor" at the Democratic National Convention this summer.

\*The list includes people who contacted us and may be incomplete.

### CD DELEGATE

#### Amy Klobuchar

26 Jacqui Berger

#### Bernie Sanders

2 Joe Tronolone

2 Mariana Pineda

7 Rachel Bernstein  
9 Pore Luxama  
12 Mindy Rosier-Rayburn  
13 Carla Bellamy  
13 Harold Forsythe  
15 Rosalie Toledo  
17 Katherine Brezler  
18 Jocelyn Greenhut-Figueroa  
22 Jennifer DeRocco  
24 Leeland Whitted  
25 Mary Lupien

#### Elizabeth Warren

1 Lillian Dudkiewicz-Clayman  
2 Latrice Curry  
3 Donald Nobles  
4 Meryl Fordin

4 Barbara Hafner  
5 Renee Freeman  
5 Shernice Blackman  
7 Paul Newell  
8 Kelly Folkers  
10 Arlene Geiger  
11 Thomas Schcherbenko  
11 KC Hankins  
18 John Bohuniek  
18 Cheryl Smith  
18 Sparrow Tobin  
19 Melissa Servant  
20 Christine Butry  
20 Melinda Person  
21 Christine Mooney  
21 Scott Dolan

21 Donald Carlisto  
22 Robert Wood  
22 Kirstin Vivacqua  
23 Dora Leland  
23 Adam Piasecki  
23 Liam O'Kane  
25 Marne Brady  
25 Amy Maloy  
25 Angelina Rivera  
25 Marvin Shepherson  
25 Matt Fink  
25 Scott Steinberg

#### Joe Biden

1 Ellen Gentilviso  
5 David Pecoraro  
6 Mercedes Goodsell

9 Marcia Kaplan-Mann  
9 Patricia Blackwell  
11 Michael Mulgrew  
11 Mohammed Chowdhury  
17 Florence McCue  
19 Frederick Kowal  
24 Bernard Washington  
24 William Scott

#### Pete Buttigieg

5 Maggie Martin  
10 Ken Sherrill  
11 Robert Kasegrande  
11 Elizabeth Kasegrande  
21 Dwight Stevenson  
26 Cherylyn Hughes

# Unusual budget voting ensures democracy in a pandemic

**W**e still don't know the results of this year's statewide school budget votes.

Originally planned for the third Tuesday in May, the date for budget referenda and school board elections in most public school districts — outside of the Big Five city school districts — was moved to June 9 due to concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic. Gov. Cuomo also ordered that all voting would be by absentee ballot. Easier said than done.

In the weeks leading up to the big day, districts struggled to mount mail-in budget votes and board elections. Many couldn't get ballots or envelopes printed and distributed on time. Ambiguity in voter eligibility and scheduling — due on the ninth, or postmarked by then — led to confusion.

Districts were scrambling.

At the last minute, the governor extended the deadline for voters to submit absentee school district ballots by one week. Voters still had until 5 p.m., June 9, to submit their ballots in person, but now had until 5 p.m., June 16, for ballots to be received at district offices by mail.

"This is one for the books," said NYSUT President Andy Pallotta. "In a year when federal education funding is in legislative limbo and state aid to localities hangs in the balance, local support for schools has never been more crucial."

Many districts are facing program cuts and devastating staff layoffs. (See article page 5.)

Concerns for public health and safety, obviously, dictated the change in plans. NYSUT supported efforts to get out the vote with online and television ads, printed mailers and fliers. Regional political organizers ran phone banks and outreach all over the state.

"This voting process, though unfamiliar, will give local school voters the opportunities they need to support their students, educators and communities," Pallotta said.

According to the report data, school districts on average are proposing budgets for 2020-21 that contain a spending increase of 1.68 percent. Last year the average statewide

spending increase that districts presented in their 2019-20 school budgets was 2.57 percent.

Statewide, 15 school districts proposed a 2020-21 property tax levy that exceeds their maximum tax levy limit, meaning these districts must get at least 60 percent voter approval for their budget to be adopted. The 15 districts are Alexandria, Arkport, Central Valley, Dolgeville, Dover, Fort Edward, Johnstown City, Naples, Northern Adirondack, Northville, Rensselaer, Sherburne-Earlville, Victor, Wainscott and Wyandanch.

Normally, districts that fail to pass a budget can try again four weeks later with an amended proposal or the same plan. The governor has indicated revotes will take place at a date to be determined but not before July 9. The 2020-21 fiscal year begins July 1.

## Union advocacy wins tenure for fourth-year teachers

Thanks to union advocacy, 54 Utica teachers won't have to wait another year to earn tenure.



After a big push by NYSUT's Legislative Department, the governor issued an executive order on June 7 exempting school districts from completing Annual Professional Performance Reviews for teachers. This paves the way for fourth-year probationary teachers like the Utica educators to be granted tenure this year.

A number of districts including Utica had been offering teachers a fifth year of probation because the pandemic derailed so many teachers' fourth-year ratings. State law requires that teachers receive four years of acceptable ratings, along with the superintendent's recommendation, in order to earn tenure.

"It was down to the wire for all 54 teachers," said Utica TA President Tricia Warner. "Everybody's just so relieved."

Warner said that once the executive order was issued, the district superintendent agreed to recommend all 54 teachers for tenure. The district and union signed a Memorandum of Agreement, with a school board vote expected as soon as possible.

"Once they got clear direction, the district moved forward and stood by their teachers," Warner said. "But no question, it was NYSUT's big push with the governor's office that made this happen."

The executive order suspends APPR requirements for schools around the state for the 2019-20 school year. Some districts had already granted tenure to fourth-year probationers, but others were in limbo until the executive order clarified the issue.

"It would have been grossly unfair to punish these fourth-year probationary teachers because of the pandemic," said NYSUT President Andy Pallotta. "While school buildings have been closed since mid-March, our educators have been working around the clock to be there for their students in every way possible."



# Courts reject another attempt to bankrupt unions

By Michael Del Piano and Edward Greene Jr.  
NYSUT Office of General Counsel

Score another victory for organized labor. The United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York rejected repayment claims for agency fees paid prior to the 2018 *Janus v. AFSCME* decision and dismissed a thinly veiled attempt to extort funds from NYSUT and its affiliate locals.

*Pellegrino, et al. v. New York State United Teachers, et al.* was a state-wide class action lawsuit for repayment of agency fees filed by two teachers — one seeking to represent a class of agency fee payers and the other seeking to represent a class of members who were allegedly coerced into joining their local unions because of the agency fee statutes. *Pellegrino* was one of at least 30 similar lawsuits against public sector

unions filed around the country.

“These suits are part of a larger coordinated effort by anti-labor groups that want unions to spend the time and money to defend them so they can defund and distract us,” NYSUT President Andy Pallotta said. “This decision sends them a clear message: After *Janus*, unions are stronger than ever. The voice of working people will not be silenced.”

For decades prior to the Supreme Court’s 2018 *Janus* decision, public sector unions in New York State collected agency fee payments from nonmembers, as authorized by New York’s Taylor Law and under a system that had been held constitutional by the United States Supreme Court in numerous decisions handed down by the Court over the past 30 years. In dismissing the plaintiffs’ claims in *Pellegrino*, the District Court held that a union cannot be held liable for relying, in good faith, on a state law and Supreme Court

precedents presumed to be valid.

The decision represents a major victory in the fight against forces that seek to financially cripple public sector unions and silence the voice of working people.

The Eastern District became the second federal district court in New York to apply the good faith defense to public sector unions who collected agency fees prior to *Janus*. Federal Courts of Appeals in the Second, Fourth, Seventh, and Ninth Circuits have ruled the same in similar lawsuits.

As expected, following the ruling *Pellegrino* plaintiffs filed an appeal to the U.S. Courts of Appeals, Second Circuit. The ultimate goal of these anti-union forces is to get back to the U.S. Supreme Court. The unions were represented by NYSUT’s Office of General Counsel attorneys Michael J. Del Piano, Esq., Edward J. Greene Jr., Esq. and Andrea A. Wanner, Esq., along with private attorneys.

## No time for unionbusters

Workers around the state continue to grapple with the fallout from the coronavirus pandemic. They are grieving the unimaginable loss of family members, friends and neighbors to the virus; lost jobs; facing food insecurity; and managing the continuing emotional and mental fallout from social isolation. Meanwhile, those who seek to weaken workers rights are not letting up.

Their goal now is to convince working families that opting out of the union is in their best interest. It’s not. The relentless attacks on organized labor are about the rich getting richer at the expense of the working class.

Our union will continue to stand for all workers. We will continue to fight for the resources public schools and higher education institutions, public hospitals and every New York citizen needs and deserves.

Are you ready when the anti-union forces come knocking? Let them know yours is a strong union household.

# STUDENT LOAN DEBT

## NYSUT webinars help members navigate relief

By **Sylvia Saunders**

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**N**egative amortization, IBRs, ICRs. What's the difference between Public Service Loan Forgiveness and Teacher Loan Forgiveness? Welcome to the complex world of student loan debt, where more than 45 million people owe an average amount of \$33,000.

With tens of thousands of NYSUT members struggling to understand and get out from under crushing debt, the union is offering free student loan debt workshops in partnership with Cambridge Credit Counseling. Since the COVID-19 crisis, NYSUT has moved the workshops online, helping thousands of members with an informational webinar and individualized follow-up support.

One of those members is Danielle Schaetzle, a reading teacher and member of the East Rockaway Teachers Association.

"I signed up for the webinar because I wanted to be more informed and figure out the next 'best' steps for me," Schaetzle said. "I've been paying for so many years and felt as though I had no other option. Every time I tried to find information on my own, I was definitely overwhelmed."

But for Schaetzle, the union's 90-minute informational webinar was "incredibly helpful and informative."



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Danielle Schaetzle, East Rockaway TA, recently participated in a NYSUT student loan webinar and learned she is eligible for loan forgiveness.

She learned about the various types of loans, repayment plans and misconceptions many students have coming out of college. Cambridge Student Loan counseling manager Todd Friedhaber clearly explained the nuts and bolts of two key loan forgiveness programs: The Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, which allows eligible educators to have their student loans forgiven after making 10 years of on-time payments, and the Teacher Loan Forgiveness program, for educators who teach full-time for five complete and consecutive academic years in a low-income school.

After viewing the webinar, Schaetzle took advantage of a follow-up appointment with a debt consultant and worked on an action plan. "He could not have been more supportive, clear and helpful!" she said.

Schaetzle, who has been teaching several years, is happy to say she learned she will be eligible for one of the loan forgiveness programs and can consolidate some of her private loans. "I learned that I did one thing right by not consolidating all of my private loans," she said. "Something I didn't know was when you consolidate the wrong combination of loans, those years of payments do not count toward (loan forgiveness payments)."

NYSUT is making the student loan debt webinars available free of charge as a benefit of union membership.

Student debt is a cross generational problem. "Younger people are unable to buy homes or delay starting a family. Older borrowers are more likely to default and literally pay until they die," said Megan O'Brien, manager of NYSUT's Organizing department.



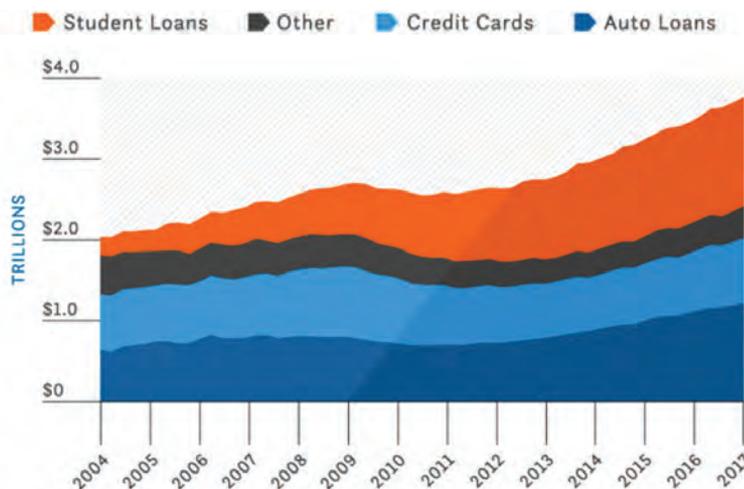
The goal is to educate members and get them to a place where they feel comfortable taking some action that may help them reduce or eliminate student loan debt, O'Brien said. Debt clinic participants are also offered follow-up services to help sort through options, including access to a student loan portal. For more info, go to [studentloans.nysut.org](http://studentloans.nysut.org).

### CARES Act includes big relief for student loans

The federal COVID-19 relief package includes student loan relief measures:

- Six-month suspension of federal student loan payments and interest accrual (through Sept. 30).
- Suspended monthly payments are considered as qualified payments toward achieving PSLF.
- Student loan borrowers are protected from involuntary collections, wage garnishments, or reductions of tax refunds or federal benefit payments during the COVID-19 public health crisis.
- TEACH grant and Teacher Loan Forgiveness programs are modified to allow exemptions during COVID-19, if an educator is unable to fulfill their teaching service obligation (TEACH) or consecutive years of teaching service (TLF).

### Student Loan Debt Growing Exponentially



SOURCES: FRBNY Consumer Credit Panel/Equifax

# Educators, unions call for change

By Liza Frenette

liza.frenette@nysut.org

The streets of the country and the world continue to swell with citizens emboldened to demand an end to the oppression of black and brown people, most recently witnessed by the killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer.

In June, NYSUT held a virtual vigil to lay bare the pain and anger resulting from systemic racism. On a daily basis, too many black and brown neighborhoods experience overpolicing, inadequate school funding, mass incarceration, substandard housing and lack of jobs.

“Together We Rise: A Virtual Vigil for Justice, Action and Peace” was also an opportunity to talk about next steps.

Several dozen educators spoke at the vigil about how education is the cornerstone of activism. They asked allies to learn about the issues black and brown people face, and share ideas about the vital task of educating students and neighbors. Students expressed their anguish in several moving musical, dance and poetic performances.

NYSUT Secretary-Treasurer J. Philippe Abraham urged listeners to support police reform, to vote, to stand up and be counted by completing the U.S. Census, to volunteer to help plan local actions toward racial justice and to teach about racism.

“Now is the time to double down on our commitment to civic engagement,” said Abraham, who directs social justice outreach for NYSUT.



Educators and students across the state participate in the NYSUT virtual vigil for justice, action and peace.

“We are in desperate need of real leadership in our nation.”

NYSUT will be hosting a series of trainings on implicit bias, racial injustice and structural racism.

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, called it out plain: Black people are murdered for driving, jogging, even sleeping.

“I ask you: Don’t be silent,” Weingarten said.

Instead, use this time to learn and examine what is happening, said Nikita Robinson, a member of United University Professions from SUNY Binghamton. Black history needs to be discussed in class, ranging from the horrors of the Tuskegee experiment, Robinson said, to the gifts of the roots of music from Africa.

“It starts with our schools,” said Samantha Rosado-Ciriello, president of the Yonkers Federation of Teachers. She called for funding so that all students have access to technology, art, music, psychologists and social workers. In Yonkers, they do not.

## How are the children?

Anthony Harmon, NYSUT Board member and president of New York Branch #2221 of the NAACP, said when members of the African Maasai people greet you, they don’t ask, “How are you?” Instead, they ask, “How are the children?”

“Our children are hurting,” Harmon said. He called on New Yorkers to create spaces for young people to thrive, and to pursue legislation to provide economic equality and justice.

Educators are making their voices heard in protests. Mohonasen teacher Maria Pacheco, a NYSUT Board member, ended up with blisters on her feet from marching in four rallies in one week.

“I go as a Latina, as a person of color, as a grandmother, as

a teacher, as a mother. I’m marching for my students, and I want them to know I’m with them,” Pacheco said.

In Buffalo, teacher Eve Shippens has also been rallying for racial justice for years.

“These are the families I serve. This is the community I live in,” she said. “We need to take a real hard stand and call for change. Our justice system is broken. Our neighbors are suffering.”

Like many other educators, Shippens is putting her efforts into education as part of her activism.

“My district is doing a wonderful job in leading culturally responsive instruction,” she said. The district’s office of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Initiatives is building a virtual anthology, “America, Hear Me Now.” The anthology includes submissions from students in pre-K through grade 12.

“We cannot allow this time to pass and wait for the next victim to outrage us,” said Derrick Thompson, crisis intervention specialist with the Mount Vernon TA.

## RESOURCES

Since it aired June 8, thousands have experienced the NYSUT virtual vigil. Find a list of eight action items from the event at [nysut.org/vigilaction](https://nysut.org/vigilaction).

Other resources for teaching about racial justice:

- [sharemylesson.com/collections/racism-in-america](https://sharemylesson.com/collections/racism-in-america)
- [neaedjustice.org/](https://neaedjustice.org/)
- [pulitzercenter.org/1619](https://pulitzercenter.org/1619)
- [tolerance.org](https://tolerance.org)
- [buffaloschools.org/Page/92864](https://buffaloschools.org/Page/92864)



# Great Neck members a driving force for good

By Liza Frenette  
liza.frenette@nysut.org

**W**ith their social justice mission guiding them, the Great Neck Teachers Association was able to make two jaw-dropping donations to help community members facing food insecurity.

First the union donated \$15,000 to a local Long Island food pantry. The woman who opened the envelope and saw the check called the TA pointing out the union had added too many zeroes. It hadn't.

The union next donated another \$15,000 — this time to the Great Neck Rotary Club, which assists families in need and local restaurants by purchasing food for twice weekly deliveries.

"It's just this great outreach that's so inclusive, with educators, politicians, clergy and local businesses," said Jennifer Snyder, who chairs the GNTA Social Justice Committee and is a union executive board member.

The day before New York State was put on pause, a school counselor relayed to Snyder that the St. Aloysius Interfaith Food Pantry, which educators had helped before with clothing and food drives, had no rice or beans.

"We put out a call to members and three or four people made food deliveries," said Snyder. But the demand on the pantry kept increasing with the aftershocks of the pandemic flattening many families' income. Due to COVID-19 concerns, members could not continue to buy food to donate to the pantry, and there were problems getting food delivered there in bulk.

So, using funds equal to what would have been spent to send officers and delegates to the annual NYSUT Representative Assembly — held virtually this year — and some rebates from the local's VOTE-COPE political action fund contribution, the GNTA's Social Justice Committee got approval to send the \$15,000 donations.

"Social justice is political action," said Snyder.

Located along the "Gold Coast" on the North Shore of Long Island, Snyder says Great Neck has "a tremendous amount of wealth."

Hidden among those riches are students and families in need. Out of pride or shame, students typically do not let on about their true situations at home. Some come from families where their parents are laborers. This can mean seasonal work, or given the current pandemic, no work. Some are English language learners.

The school district's social workers have been a good resource for providing more accurate information about the needs of students and their families.

"Our number one goal is to meet the need without the shame," said Snyder of the committee's work.

The union's social justice committee was born from its involvement with the NYSUT Local Action Project, a program that assists unions in building member engagement through community service, political action and coalition building. The Great

Neck team, consisting of members from the TA, the Paraprofessionals Association and the Office Staff Association, heard a presentation by NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango about the statewide union's Women's Committee and committees being formed at the local level. That prompted discussions by the team about concerns relating to women's issues, as well as gun violence, poverty and other matters, Snyder recalled.

"We thought we'd form a social justice committee open to all concerns," she said. The joint units surveyed members and formed a steering committee of seven. Fifty members signed on to become part of the committee.

Because the survey revealed that socio-economic disparity was a big concern, the committee knew where to point its compass when the pandemic hit.

"We're so proud of having a social justice committee," said GNTA President James Daszenski. "We're very excited so many of our members are a driving force."

The social justice committee continues to brainstorm other ways its members can help the community, Snyder said, including a desire to continue to support the Rotary Club food drops throughout the summer.

"This is the tip of the iceberg when it comes to need. I am so very fortunate to be among so many generous, intelligent and caring people. It truly takes a village," Snyder said.



## Unions, members meet need exposed by pandemic

NYSUT locals across the state have been intensely busy supporting families, small businesses and communities during the COVID-19 crisis.

Union members are the faces behind gift cards and food purchased at local businesses and provided to families in need. They have been manufacturing and procuring personal protective equipment for health care workers, including a donation by the Carmel Teachers Association to SUNY Downstate Hospital of 1,000 bottles of hand sanitizer. Knowing that in some families, sheltering in place can mean an escalation of violence in the home, Mike Lillis, Lakeland Federation of Teachers; Beth Chetney, Baldwinsville TA; and Kevin Coyne, Brentwood TA, banded together to donate to help victims of domestic violence.

"NYSUT locals and members across the state continue to step up for their students, their patients, their colleagues and their communities," said NYSUT Secretary-Treasurer J. Philippe Abraham, whose office directs the statewide union's social justice mission. That generosity includes donations of more than \$120,000 to the NYSUT Disaster Relief Fund to support health care workers and others on the front lines.

Local unions from every part of the state have donated funds and supplies to food pantries. Members are also stepping in to secure toiletries and other essentials.

We want to hear from you. Continue to share your stories at [nysut.org/NYSUTstrong](https://nysut.org/NYSUTstrong).

# Getting to know ... Sandy Schnurbusch

Sandy Schnurbusch works at the Union-Endicott Central School District office. She was interviewed by her local president, Andre Mathis, of the Union-Endicott School District Office Personnel Association. Mathis is also a member of the NYSUT SRP Advisory Committee.

## Tell me about your job and why you love what you do

I'm a senior typist for the Personnel Department. I have the privilege of working with many employees' attendance requests for substitutes. I handle questions, concerns, specific needs, and help work out the details. I meet with each new substitute to welcome them and help with orientation. The personal interaction is my favorite part. Working with so many strong and caring people is the highlight of

the position, which is one part of the quarantine that is hard.

## How did you get involved with the union?

My union involvement started as the treasurer while I was still new to the district. I enjoy working the details out and learning. I went to a couple training workshops and found them to be exactly what they said they would be. The benefits of each helped me understand my new position and the fundamentals of how the union works.

Our union seeks out different ways to make an impact — it might be donating pencils or making a scholarship donation. Along with each of my fellow members, we work together to strengthen our union and the district.



## How do you make a difference?

You'd have to ask someone else. In everything, I want my faith to be seen. My hope is that my desires, character and reputation reveal this. Right now, the pandemic and quarantine have brought to light the hardships of many. Hardships in the community

that don't have easy answers. I listen and try to share hope, joy and peace through the tears of their struggles. In turn, they make a difference in me because they trust me enough to share their lives.

## What about your spare time?

I am a wedding coordinator by hobby. I don't charge to have fun. I have been able to experience the special day of many in California, Montana and New York.

I also enjoy decorating and crafting. I serve in my church, which in turn serves the community. Whether it be teaching in vacation bible school or Sunday school, handing out popcorn and snowcones at the town fair or helping comfort others during a crisis or emergency, it is all for the glory to God.



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# Teamwork, mentoring secret to Queens College math ed program

By Kara Smith  
kara.smith@nysut.org

**A**lice Artzt knew she had a problem when she started teaching secondary math education in 1985. “I think I had three undergraduate students entering my methods class,” said Artzt, co-director of the Queens College secondary math education program. “I had some career changers, but I had few undergrads.”

With a single-digit undergraduate population, her choice was clear: start recruiting. But the Professional Staff Congress at City University of New York member also wanted to know why there were so few students. After learning Calculus One had a 50 percent drop rate, the problem became clear — a lack of student support. “They were entering as new students, with no friends and no support system, and they were too shy to go to their professor for help,” she said. “If they were thinking of becoming math teachers, that first college experience would kill it.”

She envisioned a new type of teacher preparation program. One that supported students throughout their academic career, providing a built-in network of classroom friends, an accessible faculty mentor, tuition assistance and a clear path toward a teaching degree. Thanks to a National Science Foundation grant in 1997, Teaching Improvements through Mathematics Education, better known as TIME 2000 — to mark

the looming millennium — launched. Nearly 25 years later, it’s still going strong with an alumni network of more than 250 educators, and a 95 percent five-year classroom retention rate for program graduates. Past graduates are her best recruiters, said Artzt, TIME 2000 director.

“I keep very close contact with the students. I want to know: What’s



TIME 2000 program graduates with director Alice Artzt, center.

program co-director and Queens College professor emerita.

Field work starts early. Freshmen observe a class taught by a Queens College alumna at the Louis Armstrong Middle School in Queens. “We meet with the teacher before the lesson, to discuss psychological principles to be applied, then we sit around the perimeter of the room and observe. Following the lesson, we debrief,” said Curcio, a PSC retiree. “It gets them familiar with how hard it is to teach — many are shocked how much work goes into lesson prep and assessing student needs.”

Other program features include an annual high school math conference, a tutoring club, newsletter, focused mentoring, journal submissions

and monthly hands-on seminars. “The seminars relate math to the real world,” explained Curcio noting that past guests include a choreographer who discussed the math of dance, and a mathematician versed in the interlocking designs of artist M.C. Escher.

Key to the program’s success is keeping students together and having a dedicated faculty member they can turn to, said Artzt. “The relationships students have, that support group, is what gets them through when things get hard.”

For more information about TIME 2000, visit [qc.cuny.edu/Academics/Honors/Time2000/Pages/default.aspx](http://qc.cuny.edu/Academics/Honors/Time2000/Pages/default.aspx).

## Parked

By Danielle Svetcov

**Recommended for:** Grades 4–8

**Recommended by:** Lonna Pierce,

Binghamton TA, retired school librarian



**Why I chose this book:** Cal is a 6-foot tall gangly, introverted artist who has a big heart for the homeless folk living in their vans in the park across from his house. He wants to rescue them — especially Jeanne Ann, who wants none of that. She’s recently arrived from Chicago with her mom who can’t find a job or an affordable apartment, so Jeanne Ann is surviving on spoonfuls of peanut butter. A prodigious reader, she can’t even get a library card since they have no real address. There are no pat answers here, but the reluctant friendship of the pre-teens and other characters make a compelling read.

**What I like best:** I love the Chicago librarian, Mrs. Jablonsky, who networks with peers to locate and support Jeanne Ann when she disappears from her daily library visits. We all need that one educator who thinks we are remarkable and is in our corner no matter what.

**How teachers can use this book:** This book is relevant to student’s lives and speaks eloquently for kids who don’t fit in, who aren’t getting enough to eat, or who have no safe place to live. It invites discussions about homelessness, affordable housing, and food deserts. When feelings are tough to express, the arts always give ample expression and voluminous voice to inner struggles. The humor in this uplifting book will draw kids in.

**About the author:** *Parked* is Danielle Svetcov’s debut novel for children. For more, visit [daniellesvetcov.com](http://daniellesvetcov.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 [liza.frenette@nysut.org](mailto:liza.frenette@nysut.org).



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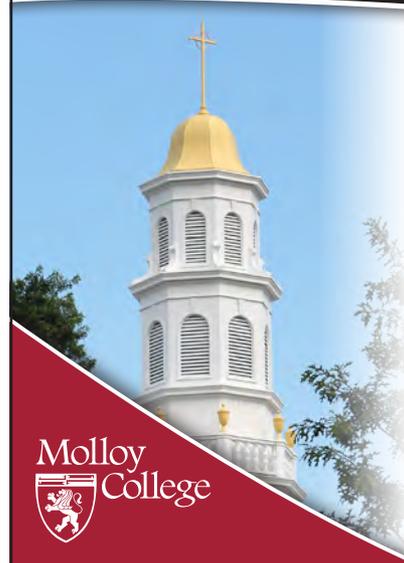


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# What do we miss? Everything

**E**ducators miss cracking jokes and sharing stories with their middle schoolers, high-fiving students in the hallway, attending morning programs with their kindergartners and advising school clubs with their teens. They miss seeing that spark when students “get it,”

and collaborating with co-workers to plan classroom lessons and brainstorm new ideas.

What do educators miss about being in the classroom? Everything.

While Google Meets are great and remote learning has its uses, some things can't be replicated outside of

the classroom: the heart-to-heart conversation with a student struggling with personal issues, or the pride of seeing a child you've known since kindergarten cross the stage and accept her diploma at high school graduation. Educators are doing their best to adapt to the post-COVID-19

reality; but there's no substitute for the daily rhythm of the classroom and good, old-fashioned human interaction.

In this strange, new world of social distancing, what educators miss the most are their students.

The kids working together to help each other learn. We are a team!  
**Tina Pitt Cooney, Greece TA**

Reading their expressions. Knowing just what they need by sitting close to them. Smiling at every child in the hallways, making them feel special. And teaching math.  
**Jenna Jaramillo, Mahopac TA**

I miss seeing and teaching my students in person. It's just not the same teaching digitally.  
**Ed Finney, Schodack CSFA**

The laughing together. My high school students are funny and full of life.  
**Silvia Jiménez, United Federation of Teachers**

I miss their faces. I know when they need help and then that wonderful expression when they understand what you are teaching.  
**Melissa Mayers Portmore, North Merrick FA**

I miss my students' faces! We try to reach out online, just not the same.  
**Sandie Carner-Shafran, Saratoga Adirondack BOCES EA**

Talking with my kids and colleagues, collaborating, teaching with my co-teachers, laughing until I cry, being a sounding board when I'm needed. Everything.  
**Andrea McCue, Haldane FA**

Everything. My babies. Impromptu teaching moments. My kids. Interacting and creating new ideas together. Hearing my students reactions to what they are reading. The conversations that come out of our readings. The ah ha moments. Singing. My students. My coworkers. Collaborating. MY STUDENTS in person laughing, smiling, thinking, and learning. Did I say my students?  
**Beth Willson, Troy TA**

I miss those random conversations from teenagers just being teenagers. I miss those lessons where I can see the lightbulbs go off in their heads. I miss the lessons where you end up learning something completely different than your original objective because the students needed something different that day.  
**Rachel Offenbach Smith, Brocton TA**

Making eye contact with kids, working the room so to speak. Being able to see engagement, confusion.  
**Beth Wagner, Hewlett Woodmere FA**

The students first and foremost! Each one of them remarkable and forging an amazing path ahead for themselves as adult students going back to school with many things to balance in their lives. And then I miss my colleagues and the fun and the inside jokes around the office.  
**Heidi Nightengale, UUP-Empire State**

# Teacher of the Year sees through trying time to a brighter future



PHOTOS: BECKY MILLER

By Matt Smith  
matt.smith@nysut.org

Meet Rachel Murat and immediately you feel the intensity with which she approaches her job. Her energy is boundless. Her style is direct. She's all business. And you can tell from the look in her eyes — having spent nearly a quarter century in the classroom — Rachel Murat has just about seen it all.

Maine-Endwell Central Schools Superintendent Jason Van Fossen considers Murat the district's "ambassador." She's led efforts to restore the Southern Tier community near Binghamton following two devastating hundred-year floods. She's helped families get back on their feet after being left homeless by fires. She's become widely known

for her work running a school-based food pantry, delivering meals to those in need.

Yes, there is little Rachel Murat hasn't experienced in her 24-year career as a high school social studies teacher. Or, so she thought.

"What college or professional-development course could have ever prepared us for what we are dealing with?" the 2020 New York State Teacher of the Year asked rhetorically in contemplating how the COVID-19 pandemic forced the shutdown in mid-March of school buildings statewide for the remainder of the academic year.

Spend a few minutes with Murat and you feel something else: the tremendous love and passion she has for her students and the Maine-Endwell community.

"I was ugly crying," she says about

returning to school in May to pack up her classroom. "School is one of my favorite places. Seeing smiling faces, getting high fives and elbow bumps bring me joy. The shell that is our building and my classroom right now is not a place I know."

The pandemic, Murat said, challenged teachers statewide in ways no one could have imagined, forcing educators "to build the plane as it flies." Still, they rose to the occasion.

"When we left school on March 11, no one could have imagined that we had seen our students together as a group for the last time. My first concern was talking to each of my 100-plus kids. I wanted to reassure them, hear their voices, picture their smiles as we laughed together, and find out who needed help with basic life necessities."

Part of Murat's remote work during the shutdown involved conducting more than 30 daily, 10-minute Zoom, phone or Google Duo meetings. But technology isn't all that guided Murat and her fellow educators in their work during the closure. So, too, did the principles of ensuring children's sense of safety and other emotional needs are met first so they can learn.

"That's my philosophy in everything I do," says Murat, who in 2009 created with her students the Maine-Endwell Assisting Local Spartans food pantry, which feeds as many as 150 children and 100 families on a weekly basis.

The pantry's mission during the shutdown has taken on an even greater sense of urgency, and Murat acknowledges, it also took an emotional toll.

"I can no longer read body

language as a student walks down the hall to know instantly whether it is an amazing day, or that something is fundamentally wrong. I can't shake the dread of knowing that for some of our kids, school is the one safe, structured, stable, clean and loving place they get to go every day.

"If you're not taking care of the social needs of your students, it doesn't matter what the curriculum is," she says. "One of the unintended benefits we came across (when we started the pantry and food deliveries) is we are able to see kids in their home environments and sometimes we are able to catch things we normally wouldn't have been able to catch as a school district, and those have helped us better serve those families and students in their time of need."

Van Fossen calls Murat's commitment to community "tireless."

"She's a fantastic teacher. She does tremendous things in the classroom. But it's how she impacts students (and families) outside her four walls, in the community, that sets her apart."

NYSUT President Andy Pallotta said, "Rachel is a shining example of

how we all should seek to impact our communities to build a better New York and world."

Patricia Sergent, president of the Maine-Endwell Teachers Association, said Murat "embodies everything that an educator should be.

"We have a culture here of community involvement, and Rachel provides a great example of how we reach beyond the borders of the classroom to help students and those in need," Sergent said.

Besides the food pantry, Murat serves as coordinator of the district's Mentoring Program, helping students navigate the transition from middle to high school.

And, she also created a Digital Citizenship program, teaching students how to positively represent themselves online — something she says is critically important today as colleges and employers scour the social media pages of prospective students and employees.

"She's a beacon of innovation," said Van Fossen. "She thinks outside the box. Education is more than just a test score, and you have to give people who are willing and have the energy the green light and the opportunity to grow. Rachel is a great example of someone who does not ever stop."

Still, in reflecting on this year's

shutdown, Murat knows there's no making up for lost time.

"There are fewer days that I cry now, and every time I think I've cried myself out, it hits me out of nowhere. I know that this, too, shall pass and that we are all in this together. But neither of those sentiments helps me grieve the lost time with my kids."

Yet, there's also something else she knows: The bond between teachers and students, as well as schools and communities, will grow stronger as a result of what they have gone through.

"There are life lessons beyond what the curriculum is," she said. "As educators, our bonds with our students will be strengthened by our time separated from them because in-person instruction will be that much more meaningful. Parents, guardians and taxpayers will have a greater appreciation for what it is our public schools provide.

"And for students, being in a classroom will have new meaning. Relationships will still be the priority as they reconnect with friends and classmates. They will be cherishing the milestones as they participate in every school tradition, soaking up all the memories and making their own, as they define their school experiences."



Far left, New York State Teacher of the Year Rachel Murat makes her way to her classroom at Maine-Endwell High School to prepare for the school day.

Murat works with students Kameron White (left) and Hannah Green (above). "Students' lives are not static so education cannot be static," Murat says. "We need to keep updating and adjusting what we are doing so that we are meeting the needs of the student."



# NYSUT members join SED's task force on reopening schools

By Sylvia Saunders

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**N**YSUT members will give the front-line point of view on the State Education Department's Task Force on Reopening Schools, serving on four regional panels around the state through June.

"We're pleased that Chancellor Betty Rosa and SED recognize that this is a collective effort and that stakeholders must have a voice in any decisions about reopening schools," said NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango. "Our members will share their expertise, answer questions and give valuable feedback on what's needed this fall."

The four regional panels will each have a variety of NYSUT-recommended members from the union's subject area committees and board of directors. In addition, each panel will have one NYSUT School-Related Professional, DiBrango said.

Regents Chancellor Betty Rosa said the task force will focus on "recovering, rebuilding and renewing," with educational equity at the forefront of any decision-making. The state's sudden shift to remote learning due to the pandemic highlighted the state's unacceptable inequities in educational opportunities and resources, including a great digital divide.

SED's invite-only virtual task force meetings took place June 15 and 17.

Additional meetings will be held from 8:30-11:30 a.m. June 22 and 24.

Sessions included breakouts in the following areas: health and safety; teaching and learning; transportation, facilities and nutrition; digital equity and access; budget and fiscal matters; social-emotional needs; special education; bilingual education/multilingual learners; and staffing/human resources.

Among many issues, DiBrango said NYSUT is emphasizing:

- Technology can supplement instruction but remote learning can never replace in-person teaching and support services.

- Computer instruction may not be developmentally appropriate for all, especially primary grade children and some students with disabilities.

- If plans include remote learning, the state must tackle the problems of unfair and unequal access to the internet.

- We must preserve the education of the whole child, including arts, music, physical education, world languages, Career and Technical Education, libraries and other special areas.

- Plans must address trauma-informed instruction, culturally responsive practices and social-emotional needs for both students and staff.

- Staff must receive

“Our members will share their expertise, answer questions and give valuable feedback on what's ahead this fall.”

— Jolene DiBrango

professional learning opportunities and have time for curriculum mapping.

With input from the task force meetings and a private consultant, SED recommendations will be presented at the Board of Regents meeting July 13.

It is unclear how SED's work will mesh with the governor's Reimagining Education Advisory Council, which is slated to release its own recommendations in June. Educators reacted swiftly and negatively when the governor suggested that remote learning could be the wave of the future and announced a partnership with the Gates Foundation.

NYSUT President Andy Pallotta urged the task force to "reimagine" how the state invests in public schools.

"When this is said and done, we will have many students who have been impacted directly by COVID-19. They may have lost a loved one to the virus. Others will feel isolated because they lost their daily contact with teachers, School-Related Professionals and their peers," Pallotta testified. "Our answer to those children cannot be 'Log into your Chromebook' or 'Our district can't afford a social worker.' We must commit ourselves to giving those students the resources they need."



# Union working to increase diversity in professions that change the world

By Kara Smith  
kara.smith@nysut.org

For Kewsi Burgess, a sixth grade teacher at the Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology in the Albany City School District, one of the toughest lessons he had to learn as a new teacher, and as an African American man, was how to fit in. After a rocky first year, he realized his best strategy was just to be himself.

"I had to stop worrying about whether people liked me, and do what was best for my kids and my community," he said.

Today the Albany Public School Teachers Association member is working toward a Ph.D. focused on the educational experiences of black boys. He hopes to use his personal and professional experiences to help close the achievement gap.

Burgess was one of six graduate student panelists who participated



Sixth grade teacher Kewsi Burgess is a member of the Albany Public School Teachers Association.

in "Pathways and Passion: Choosing Education and Mental Health Careers," a Zoom panel discussion sponsored by NYSUT, United University Professions and the State University of New York at Albany. The event was funded through a National Education Association grant.

The panelists are mentors in SUNY Albany's Touhey Family Fellows Program, which aims to channel

students from underrepresented groups into the education and mental health professions. UUP-Albany member Tammy Ellis Robinson, the program's faculty director, moderated the forums.

"We are so honored to partner on this work," said Jolene DiBrango, NYSUT executive vice president, who spearheads the statewide union's Take A Look At Teaching initiative,

which seeks to find solutions to the statewide teacher shortage and lack of educator diversity. "The current health crisis, and widespread protests in the wake of George Floyd's killing, highlights again the need to address racism in our society. By bringing your experiences and perspectives into your professions, you can become change agents."

Becoming the teacher of color that she never had throughout her K-12 education inspired Kristin Collins to pursue a degree in special education. "For kids of color growing up today, I want to send the message that they can be a teacher," said Collins. "Giving students that kind of exposure is important."

Increasing diversity in teaching and mental health care isn't a problem we can combat alone, said Ellis Robinson. "These professions change the world and make it a better place."

For more info, visit [nysut.org/lookatteaching](https://nysut.org/lookatteaching).

## Pandemic proves internet is needed for all

By Sylvia Saunders  
sylvia.saunders@nysut.org

The state's shift to remote learning during the pandemic has highlighted a serious lack of internet access for both students and staff.

The State Education Department is surveying school leaders on the issue, but anecdotal reports from the field are disturbing. For many, internet service is unaffordable. For others, particularly in rural areas, it's

simply unavailable.

"It is not just students who struggle to get Wi-Fi access," said NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango. "We have educators who have to drive to their school parking lot to log into the district Wi-Fi just to conduct their remote classes or upload course materials. That is unacceptable and deeply unfair."

After appearing in online faculty meetings huddled in her car with a blanket, parked outside her school, Peru biology teacher Catherine Butts

said her district finally made special arrangements for her and four other teachers to sit in the gym during certain hours. With high-speed service unavailable for her rural Adirondack home, internet providers estimated it would cost her \$10,000 for a new line.

Butts is certainly not alone. The St. Lawrence BOCES has identified at least 900 students without internet service. The Gouverneur superintendent offered land to a provider, but was told there were not enough

area homes to justify building a cell tower. In other areas, school buses equipped with Wi-Fi circulate around districts acting as mobile hotspots.

"We're also concerned that many of the free internet offers are expiring," said Mary Wills, coordinator of the St. Lawrence County People Project. "We're working with local representatives and Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand's office to call attention to the problem, but the bottom line is that internet service has to be recognized as an essential service."

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# Class of 2020

## Educators, unions help seniors celebrate important milestone

By Liza Frenette

liza.frenette@nysut.org

**W**orld-changing circumstances have emptied crowded auditoriums of eager parents watching their high school or college senior walk down the aisle to the classic “Pomp and Circumstance.”

But in many cases, caps and gowns still prevailed, as did music.

Graduations were held as socially distant drive-by events; on video; with individual appointment times to walk across the stage; and in other creative and pandemic-safe ways boosted by educators, staff and local unions.

In Buffalo, the Class of 2020’s graduation was more meaningful thanks to donations from the Buffalo Teachers Federation, which sponsored virtual graduations airing on local television stations in June and July. BTF donated \$15,000 to sponsor the ceremonies, providing each participating school with \$500.

“We want to help our students through these challenging times; however, we also want to provide something that our high school graduates can have to remember,” said BTF President Phil Rumore.

High schools purchased a half

hour or an hour of air time, and each school showcased its own virtual graduation.

Educators from the Washington-Saratoga-Warren-Hamilton-Essex BOCES formed a graduation caravan from Saratoga to Indian Lake visiting each of the dozen seniors. In each town, a police or fire escort trumpeted the visit; the graduate was presented with a swag bag and a handmade gift by school nurse Myrna Caro. NYSUT Board member Sandie Carner-Shafran, a member of the Saratoga Adirondack BOCES Employees Association, said each graduate received a cap and gown and had their photo taken.

In districts across the state, including Marcellus in Onondaga County, Saranac Lake in the North Country and Rondout Valley in Ulster County, teachers visited every senior student’s home and delivered “Class of 2020” lawn signs, some with photos and names of graduates.

In one Long Island district, students paraded in their cars while members of the Lynbrook TA stood outside the high school. Seniors drove by the lineup of educators, coaches and administrators, who cheered, held balloons and blitzed the air with noisemakers. The event

took place at 8:20 p.m., the military equivalent of 20:20.

Social studies teacher Kim Herrmann said some seniors passed by three times. Many of the 220 seniors had their entire families sandwiched into the car.

“During the course of the year you get little bits of love and joy all year. It was like packing that into an hour,” Herrmann said.

In Central New York, members of the Jordan-Elbridge TA joined parents, community members and local police and fire departments to stage parades for seniors in Jordan and in Elbridge. The groups also adopted seniors, putting together baskets and gifts for each member of the graduating class.

In Rockland County, the Clarkstown TA assembled its members in an entourage to visit every senior. The union purchased signs for each of the 700 graduates, and more than 100 teachers, teaching assistants and clerical staff gathered to deliver them.

“Members traveled 4,000 miles,” said Jonathan Wedekind, CTA president. “We celebrated every kid.”

*Note: As NYSUT United went to press, Gov. Cuomo signed an executive order allowing celebrations of up to 150 people.*



## Think ELT for online learning

Responding to member requests, NYSUT’s Education & Learning Trust is expanding its online offerings to help educators seek additional certification areas, meet Continuing Teacher and Leader Education (CTLE) requirements and get ready for the upcoming school year.

“We’re focused on meeting the changing professional needs of our members and responding to their requests for more online courses and seminars,” said NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango, who oversees ELT. Educators are eager for new courses on differentiated instruction, helping students who have experienced traumatic events and formative assessments to identify learning gaps.

DiBrango noted there are also numerous offerings specifically aimed at School-Related Professionals, as well as coursework to help educators meet the state’s Part 154 requirements to address the needs of English language learners. There are also many graduate level courses offered in partnership with area colleges. For more information or to register, go to [elt.nysut.org](http://elt.nysut.org).

In response to great demand, ELT has also added more 45-minute seminars designed to help members cope during these challenging times. The four 45-minute online sessions highlight the need for self-care; how to help students navigate their learning emotionally and academically; and practical tips for using technology and working from home. The sessions are free thanks to a grant from the National Education Association.

Please note: The registration site for the free seminars will say the cost is \$75, but members just need to hit the promo code for the training. For registration help, email [ELT@nysut.org](mailto:ELT@nysut.org).

Saranac Lake teachers prepare to celebrate the Class of 2020.



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# Working together for healthy schools

By **Liza Frenette**

[liza.frenette@nysut.org](mailto:liza.frenette@nysut.org)

**C**lean. Safe. Those are the essential words that NYSUT Program Services has been using to educate members participating in the creation of protocols to return to school.

“Best practice is that either your district or your building have a health and safety committee — with a local union advocate,” said Veronica Foley, NYSUT health and safety specialist.

Members should maintain a “continuous bargaining” mindset, Foley urged, to be sure the highest cleaning and disinfecting standards are being used; that buildings and classrooms have proper ventilation; and that social distancing is being followed.

“Make sure that whatever is agreed on is happening,” she said. Employers have a responsibility to make sure workplaces are free of recognized hazards. The Centers for Disease Control recommends naming a workplace coordinator to handle COVID-19 concerns and to establish a hierarchy of controls.

To keep schools clean and custodians, students and educators safe, the Hazard Communication Standard, set forth by OSHA and enforced in New York by the Department of Labor, must be followed.

That means individuals cannot bring in their own disinfectants, Foley emphasized. The hazard standard specifies how to safely use cleaning and disinfection products and includes each product’s Safety Data Sheet. These detail information that includes the personal protective equipment (PPE) needed to use the chemical safely; and how long it must remain on a surface to be effective.

Federal OSHA standards also provide for a record-keeping rule for incidents to be recorded, including COVID-19 sickness or a worker harmed using a chemical in the disinfection process.

## SRPs are essential

“In addition to providing meals and getting school work distributed to students while providing remote educational support, School-Related

oversees SRP issues for the union. “Additionally, many other SRPs are working — such as staff in clerical, information technology, building and grounds, maintenance, security and health care — to ensure a successful restart of our schools.”

“We’re essential,” said Herricks custodian James Hollingworth, who has been working on rotation at the New Hyde Park High School to clean and disinfect schools.



PHOTOS: EL-WISE MOSETTE

School-Related Professionals around the state, including maintenance staff responsible for cleaning and disinfecting surfaces, are working to prepare schools for the safe return of educators and students. Top, maintenance tech Joe Argus, vice president of the Taconic Hills Support Staff Association. Above, custodian Adam Waldo, vice president of the Central Valley United Employees.

Professionals continue to be vitally important in keeping our schools clean,” said NYSUT Second Vice President Ron Gross, whose office

Since schools closed Friday, March 13, custodians have been disinfecting each building. “We’d space each other out, and wipe

every flat surface, every locker,” said Hollingworth, a member of the Herrick Custodians, Bus Drivers, Cleaners, Maintenance and Grounds unit of the Herrick Teachers Association.

Although schools in New York use green cleaning products, chemicals are used for the additional daily disinfecting process throughout the school year, Hollingworth said, to make sure bacteria are removed — especially in places like bathrooms. Disinfectants typically need to remain on a surface for about 10 minutes to be effective.

For this pandemic cleaning, the Herrick crews used a battery-operated mister that helped apply the products, he said.

Most schools had to wait until June for teachers to be able to safely enter buildings to pack up their classrooms.

In Bethlehem, students’ belongings left in lockers were packed, sorted and bagged in late spring, said Karen Verhagen, a custodian with Bethlehem Central United Employees Association. Bus drivers dropped the items at students’ homes.

Once classrooms and lockers are totally emptied, additional cleaning and disinfecting can be accomplished.

## For more info

NYSUT is developing specific actions for members to take and will post guidance online at [nysut.org/healthandsafety](https://nysut.org/healthandsafety).

Other resources:

- [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html](https://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html)
- [osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf](https://osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf)





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# Retirees raise funds for coronavirus relief

By Kara Smith  
kara.smith@nysut.org

**W**hen Holland Patent Retired Teachers members launched an April drive to raise funds for local food banks and other community organizations, they decided to make things interesting. They asked other Retiree Council 8 groups to join them by issuing a two-week fundraising challenge.

"We realize we're fortunate to have retirement benefits coming in while lots of other people are out of work," said Carol Parzych, Holland Patent RT president. "We wanted to do something to give back."

Fellow RC 8 retiree members from Utica, Clinton, Remsen and Whitesboro happily joined in, and together the groups raised more than \$10,000 in direct member contributions.

"We got so many nice notes from retirees who appreciated having a way to give back at a time when we're encouraged to stay home," said Parzych. "Among our 119 members alone, we raised more than \$4,000."

Donation recipients included the Thea Bowman House, which provides childcare programs and a food pantry for low-income and at-risk children and families in the Utica community; the Foothills Rural Community Ministry, a coalition of

churches and organizations serving the rural needy in Central New York; and the Utica Food Pantry and the Food Bank of Central New York.

The initiative was so successful that HPRT is already organizing a second two-week fundraising challenge over the summer. To encourage participation, a random drawing, or small prize, is planned for those who contribute. The goal is to do something that benefits the community and that "perks everyone up a bit," said Parzych who is thankful that local members remain coronavirus free.



The coronavirus quarantine has put a stop to social gatherings like monthly retiree lunches and volunteer events. HPRT members instead keep in touch through a paper and digital format newsletter, and virtual meetings via Zoom and Google. "We've had our ups and downs, but overall it's working."

Right, Florence McCue, NYSUT ED 51-53 at-large director, receives a Women in Labor award from Mediterranean People and Communities in February. MPAC is a Westchester County coalition group committed to promoting social justice and equality. Pictured from left, McCue, MCAP President John Khader, and award winner Jennifer Puja, labor council director for the Westchester/Putnam Central Labor Body, AFL-CIO.



PROVIDED



PROVIDED

RC 46 purchased 6,000 wreaths for veterans' graves at Elmira Woodlawn National Cemetery. Volunteers helping to place the wreaths, from right, Jim and Cathie Jacobus, Judy and Kevin McInerney and Kathy and Keith Willes.



PROVIDED

RC 15 retirees pack boxes of school supplies to donate to a local elementary school. From left, Dolores Thompson, Roni O'Connor, Suzanne Carlock, Mary Curtis and Rhoda Stephens.

## DID YOU KNOW?

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

**Tracy Beatty**, RC 1, 2, 3, 44  
716-634-7132

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

**Peter Randazzo**, RC 5, 6  
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**Anne Marie Voutsinas**, RC 7, 8  
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**Ruth Shippee**, RC 9, 10  
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**Mark Padgett**, RC 11, 45  
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**Jennifer Shaad-Derby**, RC 12, 13  
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**Ellen Pincus**, RC 14, 15-16  
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**Claire Zatorski**, RC 17, 18, 19  
516-496-2035

**Joan Perrini**, RC 20, 21, 22, 23  
631-273-8822

**Judy D. Kalb**, RC 43  
561-994-4929, ext. 129

\* Editor's note: These provided images were all taken and submitted before the COVID-19 pandemic and current social distancing guidance was in place.

## “Quotable”



### Sue Kowalski

#school librarians are instructional partners and leaders in school communities. We've rallied virtually just like all our "bricks and mortar" colleagues. (@spkowski)

### José Vilson

As important as it is to talk to students about our times, it's equally if not more important to actively listen to students. Listening is a powerful tool in the work of anti-racism, especially when it comes to our most vulnerable. This is our moment. (@TheJLV)

### Dana Nessel

Now is a good time to remember the importance of unions which were formed, in large part, to protect the safety of workers. Unions are needed now more than ever to protect our workforce against #COVID19. Thank you @UAW for aggressively protecting our auto workers. #UnionStrong (@dananessel)

### Lorraine Reddinger

Many thanks to the educators & support staff who are retiring this year. Like the Class of 2020, these dedicated professionals missed the chance to enjoy their last days with students and colleagues. (@ReddingerLM)

### Teamsters

To safeguard the US food supply chain during the #COVID19 pandemic, we must protect food and agriculture workers #Teamsters #1u (@Teamsters)



## QUESTIONS FOR ...

# Beth Rizzi

School psychologist, Wappingers Congress of Teachers

### 1. How have you been connecting with students during the pandemic and school closures?

Since March 13, I have been in touch with students on my counseling caseload. I meet with many via Google Meet and a Google Voice number that I set up immediately. I also have a Google Form for check-ins which is available to all students through my school website. I also use mindfulness cards and mindful moments. Luckily, most of my students are very receptive to meeting. They really miss the in-person contact at school.

### 2. What do you think students' social-emotional needs may be when they return to school?

There are so many possibilities, some of which have been addressed and many that I am sure have not. First and foremost are grief, loss and stress.

Other concerns: What circumstances have they been living in? Have they been having their most basic needs (eating, sleeping) met? Have they lost someone close to them? Are students who have experienced school refusal in the past ready to come back?

When students return, it will be important to assess the need for mental health support because there are so many variables in crisis situations — and children's responses to crisis.

### 3. What about parents and educators?

Parents' mental health is also at risk during the pandemic. Lost jobs or cut back hours, working from home while simultaneously caring for children, social isolation, anxiety about the unknown — all of these contribute to parents facing myriad stressors that can increase the risk of mental health problems and exacerbate alcohol and drug misuse.

Another large concern is for my colleagues. Some may be immunocompromised. Some may have lost family members. How are they prepared to teach and serve students?

Have they had access to appropriate mental health services during our "on-pause" time?

### 4. You serve as president-elect of the New York Association of School Psychologists. How does this pandemic reveal the need for school social workers, psychologists and counselors?

Our state and country's health care resources are stretched thin, schools are closed, and families are feeling significant stress — all of this will impact children's health and well-being, now and in the future.

Studies show that adversity during childhood, including adversity stemming from natural disasters, can have lasting impacts on children's social-emotional health. And troublingly, this adversity will disproportionately affect low-income families who have fewer resources.

The stress currently experienced by many parents, students and educators, compounded by the uncertainty of how next year will look, is suggestive that all of these experts are needed.

### 5. How do you see this help unfolding?

School-based mental health practitioners need to be present to help address students' individual needs. They also need to work with systems, including educators and parents, to help them create frameworks for success in times that may continue to be uncertain.



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**Donald R. Corie** | April 15, 2020  
United Teachers of Northport

**Daniel J. Garcia** | April 9, 2020  
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**Marilyn Steadly Froim**  
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**Ronald Jones** | April 27, 2020  
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Association

**Murray Levine** | May 4, 2020  
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**Hilda Pacheco** | April 6, 2020  
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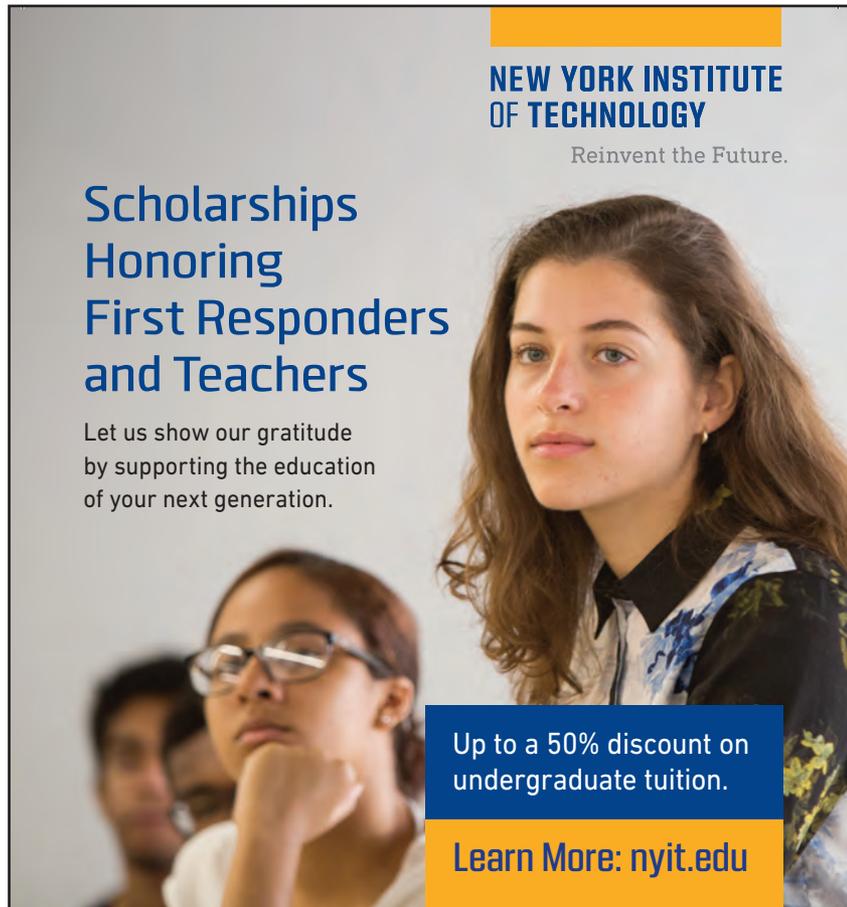
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United Federation of Teachers

**Bertram J. Springstead**  
May 3, 2020  
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 [julie.malec@nysut.org](mailto:julie.malec@nysut.org).*



**In Memoriam**  
Please visit our memorial honoring those members who died due to the coronavirus pandemic at [nysut.org/memorial](http://nysut.org/memorial).



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RSVP at: <http://bit.ly/33ii263>

For questions, call: (212) 463-0400 x 55378 | visit: [gst.touro.edu](http://gst.touro.edu) | email: [info.gst@touro.edu](mailto:info.gst@touro.edu)

## William Floyd United Teachers



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Members of the William Floyd United Teachers, led by President Ronald Gross, pictured at left with his wife and fellow WFUT member Wendy Gross, raised \$7,000 to help their community weather the coronavirus crisis. Using the local's slogan "stronger together," William Floyd UT members designed and sold more than 600 T-shirts. Proceeds from the sale went to several worthy causes. Business teacher Jacqueline Giacalone, along with technology teachers Joseph Brand and Joseph Carpinone, received funds to manufacture 500 face shields for hospital staffers. The union also donated: \$2,000 to Island Harvest, a not-for-profit Long Island food bank; \$1,000 to a virtual food drive organized by NYSUT's Nassau and Suffolk regional offices to benefit Long Island Cares Inc.; \$1,000 to Colonial Youth, a not-for-profit community-based youth and family agency; and \$1,000 to the NYSUT Disaster Relief Fund, to purchase and provide personal protective equipment, food and other supplies for health care workers. In June, Ronald Gross was elected NYSUT Second Vice President.

Kackos said. "Now the community comes to the Tri-Valley TA page for information. They know it's active and timely. We're very proud that."

That relationship has proved invaluable during the pandemic. The TVTA has used its platform to honor teachers earning tenure, recognize first responders and help organize a massive community caravan.

Now the local is honoring each member of the class of 2020. TVTA member Brenda Sloan, who serves as senior class adviser, assembled collages for each of the district's 65 graduates. The local posted the recognitions daily at 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. for one month.

"The Class of 2020 has missed a lot, so we want to shower them with love and support however we can!"

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

## Clarkstown Teachers Association

The Clarkstown TA, led by President Jonathan Wedekin, coordinated a successful fund-raising campaign among the union, district staff and the PTA to feed local families. The effort raised about \$30,000. The union also sold lawn signs recognizing health care professionals and purchased signs for graduating seniors. CTA members Heidi Bernasconi, Justin Sandomir and Amanda Youngmans were instrumental in organizing the outreach efforts.

## Homer Teachers Association

The Homer TA smashed its goal of raising \$5,000 for its HTA Pack the Pantry fundraiser. "Between GoFundMe and mail-in donations we are now over \$22,000 for the local food pantries," local President Robert Nasiatka shared with members on the union's Facebook page. HTA member Barb Bachmann, a home and careers teacher, organized the fundraiser to bring attention to the bare shelves in local pantries and the high poverty levels in rural communities.

## Lake Placid Education Association

Members of the Lake Placid EA, led by co-Presidents Kathleen Briggs and Brenden Gotham, raised money to help feed members in the community. The local donated \$1,000 to the Lake Placid Ecumenical Food Pantry and another \$1,000 to the nearby Wilmington Ecumenical Food Pantry.

## Syosset Teachers Association

Throughout April and May, members of the Syosset TA teamed up to support both the front lines and small local businesses. Using member donations, the local, led by President Michael Callahan, purchased meals from area Syosset restaurants and delivered them to health care workers, police officers and workers at area pharmacies and other businesses deemed essential.

## Tri-Valley Teachers Association

The Tri-Valley Teachers Association, led by President April Kackos, has managed to turn its

Facebook page into a trusted news source not only for its members, but for the entire community.

"We started the Facebook page about five years ago as a positive way to promote what teachers are doing and connect with the community,"



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The Tri-Valley Teachers Association is recognizing the Class of 2020 on its Facebook page. From mid-May to mid-June, the union posted online tributes to each of the 65 graduating seniors.

## 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, 2018 through August 31, 2019. 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, 2019 were \$75,156,494.

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, 2019, the premiums paid under such “experience-rated” contracts were \$53,559,272 and the total of all benefit claims paid under these experience-rated contracts during the plan year was \$17,816,271.

### Basic financial statement

The value of plan assets, after subtracting liabilities of the plan, was \$37,069,386 as of August 31, 2019, compared to \$29,835,276 as of September 1, 2018. During the plan year the plan experienced an increase in its net assets of \$7,234,110. 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 \$16,373,328. This income included participants’ contributions of \$4,070,741, earnings from investments of \$4,202,606 and other income of \$8,099,981.

Plan expenses were \$9,139,218. These expenses included \$5,417,234 in administrative expenses and \$3,721,984 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 \$9.60 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.

## IT’S WHAT WE DO

**Joe Forget**, Capital District Educational Opportunity Center Teachers Association

Culinary instructor Joe Forget is dishing out ladles of soup to help take the edge off hunger some people are experiencing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Forget, an associate professor for the Capital District Educational Opportunity Center under Hudson Valley Community College, has been teaching online courses and sending out packets of information for his students to learn at home.

Sometime in April, he started cooking up an idea. Taking stock of what was in his pantry, he made up batches of soup — 20 gallons worth of three different kinds — and set up a table outside his home. He posted his soup news on social media.

Forget served up 15-bean ham and potato soup, Andouille sausage and collard green soup, and broccoli cheese soup. People brought their own containers.

His next round of soup making brought out two dozen volunteers, and together they made 80 gallons of soup at the Knights of Columbus. Customers drove through the parking area and picked up soup served in quart- and pint-sized containers for carry out. Some people donated money, and the organization will use that to support local charity work.

As a member of the Knights of Columbus, Forget helps raise money for different causes. In the past three years, the organization has raised more than \$80,000. Forget’s vigor for volunteerism comes from a simple idea.

“It’s like teaching. There are a lot of intangibles. You don’t always see results right away, but you can influence someone’s life,” he said.

To read more about Forget’s story, visit [nysut.org/itswhatwedo](https://nysut.org/itswhatwedo).



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



# Count on NYSUT Member Benefits

**A**s we all continue to navigate through these uncertain times, we want you to know that NYSUT Member Benefits remains here for you — ready to assist and support NYSUT members as we always have.

Member Benefits is committed to helping NYSUT members make prudent decisions when it comes to their finances and essential needs. We ask that you exercise the appropriate precautions when making purchasing decisions, but keep in mind these programs are available and could help your families save money.

## Member Benefits Discounts & Deals

Member Benefits Discounts & Deals is a money-saving benefit available exclusively to NYSUT members that features the nation's largest private discount network. To get started, register your account using your NYSUT ID number at [mbdeals.enjoymydeals.com](https://mbdeals.enjoymydeals.com). (Your NYSUT ID number can be found on your NYSUT Membership Card; if you do not know your ID number, please contact the NYSUT Membership Department at

800-342-9810.)

After registering, you will be able to enjoy savings of up to 50 percent at more than 700,000 locations on shopping, restaurant dine-in and take-out, oil changes and vehicle maintenance, and much more. One of the best features of this program is the ability to request that your favorite local business join the network.

## Legal Service Plan

Participants in this program have access to a national network of attorneys who deal with personal legal matters. Plan participants are entitled to unlimited toll-free legal advice; a free Legal Security Package that includes a Simple Will, Health Care Proxy, Living Will & Power of Attorney; and two, free, hour-long consultations with a plan attorney.

## Financial Counseling Program

Participants in this program have access to a team of Certified Financial Planners and Registered Investment Advisors offering fee-based financial counseling services. Advice from Stacey Braun Associates, Inc. is unbiased, objective and customized specifically for your specific financial

situation.

## Office Depot/OfficeMax

NYSUT members can save an average of 30 percent on home office and printing needs, cleaning supplies, snacks and more, with up to 75 percent off preferred products, free delivery on qualifying orders over \$50 and discounted printing prices. Shop online or use store pick-up options.

## Connect America

This program offers the peace of mind that comes from having a landline or cell phone personal emergency response system (PERS). Effective March 2020, several new lower pricing options and enhancements are now available to NYSUT members and their families.

## CMM Open Enrollment — September 2020

Regardless of your age or the type of basic medical insurance you have, you and your family members could still be left with extraordinary out-of-pocket medical expenses — especially if you have a serious medical issue or require convalescent, custodial or home health care.

The NYSUT Member Benefits

Catastrophe Major Medical Insurance Trust-sponsored CMM Plan offers supplemental coverage that you and your eligible family members may need. Once the out-of-pocket deductible has been satisfied, this plan provides benefits for eligible expenses that your basic plan may not fully cover, including prescription drugs.

The Trustees of the CMM Plan are pleased to announce an opportunity to enroll in the CMM Plan during September 2020, with an effective date of Jan. 1, 2021.

NYSUT members who are in-service and reside in New York State (along with their eligible family members) can enroll along with current CMM Plan participants who would like to add eligible family members. Further information regarding the open enrollment opportunity will be available in September 2020.

For more information, visit [memberbenefits.nysut.org](https://memberbenefits.nysut.org) or call 800-626-8101.

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

## Estimate your pension at Retirement Online

If you're a member of Tier 3, 4, 5 or 6 in the New York State and Local Employees' Retirement System (ERS), you can now use Retirement Online to estimate your pension based on the salary and service information that ERS has on file for you. You don't have to be near retirement age to use this feature, but the estimate will be more accurate the closer you are to retirement.

To get started, sign in to your Retirement Online account at [osc.state.ny.us/retire/retirement\\_online/customers.php](https://osc.state.ny.us/retire/retirement_online/customers.php). Go to the "My Account Summary" section of your Retirement Online Account Homepage and click the "Estimate My Pension Benefit" button. Enter a date when you'll be eligible to retire, and you can start planning.

You can enter different retirement dates, beneficiaries and final average earnings to see your potential benefit. If you anticipate earning more before retirement or are planning to purchase past service credit, include those amounts in your estimate. You can also include a full- or part-time work percentage to help predict how much service credit you'll earn before you retire. When you're done fine-tuning your estimate, you can save a copy or print it out for your records.

Members in certain circumstances may not be able to create a Retirement Online estimate — for

In every issue, State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli, administrative head of the State and Local Employees' Retirement System (ERS) and trustee of the Common Retirement Fund, provides information on the System, which delivers retirement benefits to many NYSUT School-Related Professionals and other support staff. If you are an ERS member with a question of general interest, email [united@nysut.org](mailto:united@nysut.org).

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

example, if you recently transferred a membership to ERS or have multiple employers at one time. In these cases, please request an estimate at [contactnyslrs.com](https://contactnyslrs.com).

Retirement Online has a variety of other features. In addition to estimating your pension, you can:

- View your retirement account information and documents from ERS
- View your current service credit and apply for past service credit
- View or update beneficiary info
- Apply for a loan against your contributions
- Manage payments for your NYSLRS loan or past service credit
- View your Member Annual Statement (starting with your 2020 Statement)
- Apply for service retirement
- Create an income verification letter (mortgage letter)
- Apply for tier reinstatement
- Update your contact information and preferences, online vs. by mail.

To create a Retirement Online account, and to find resources and step-by-step instructions, visit [osc.state.ny.us/retire/retirement\\_online/customers.php](https://osc.state.ny.us/retire/retirement_online/customers.php).

### NYSUT ERS consultants

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

Trudi Davis • 914-592-4411  
[troers@nysutmail.org](mailto:troers@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).

## In the age of COVID-19, visit NYSTRS online

**Q:** With the New York State Teachers' Retirement System building closed due to COVID-19, what's the best way to get questions answered?

**A:** Although the NYSTRS building is closed to the public and PREP seminars are canceled until further notice, telephone benefit consultations are available, their phone lines remain open and they're still receiving mail. If you haven't already set up an online MyNYSTRS account, now is a great time to do it. You can file forms electronically, print 1099 tax forms, run benefit projections, securely correspond with NYSTRS and use their many self-service tools. A MyNYSTRS account will also allow you to file a service retirement application without a notarized signature; and even if there's an interruption in mail service, NYSTRS can still receive your forms through the account. For questions, call 800-348-7298, or visit MyNYSTRS at [nystrs.org](https://nystrs.org).



**Q:** Should I take any special precautions when mailing in NYSTRS forms?

**A:** Since the U.S. Postal Service is reporting standard mail delivery delays due to COVID-19 staff shortages, we recommend using registered or certified mail if you're filing time-sensitive forms or submitting important documents to NYSTRS.

In many cases, it's critically important that NYSTRS receive your documents in a timely fashion. For example, if you file for a service retirement, you have only 14 days from the date of retirement to withdraw your application, and 30 days to change your benefit payment option. With certified or registered mail, NYSTRS will consider the postmark date as the date received.

### 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)

Beth Chetney • 315-431-4040  
[bchetney@nysutmail.org](mailto:bchetney@nysutmail.org)

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



### DID YOU KNOW?

For questions about COVID-19 and your pension, visit [nystrs.org/About-Us/Press-Room/Headlines/COVID-19-Update](https://nystrs.org/About-Us/Press-Room/Headlines/COVID-19-Update).

## Advance your career

### With NYSUT ELT:

- learn research-based, classroom tested, methods in our seminars and/or graduate courses;
- meet certification requirements; and
- collaborate with fellow educators across New York state — online or site-based!

Your choice. Your professional learning.

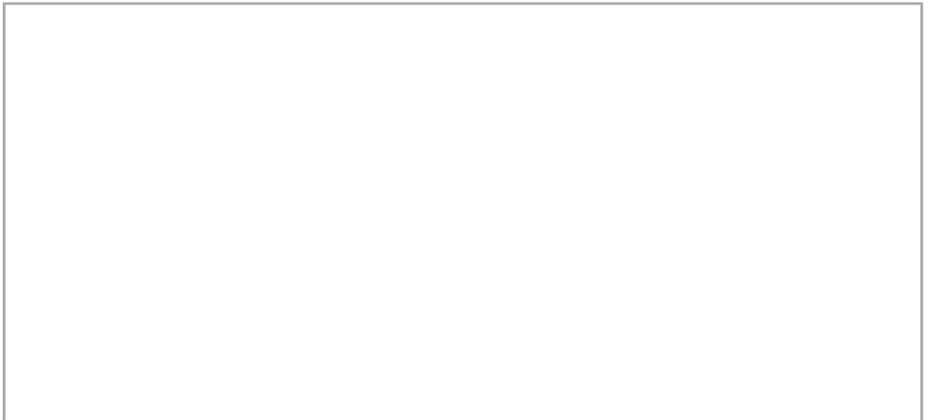
NYSUT members receive a 40% discount off of tuition for graduate courses. ELT is now a CTLE provider and many courses are applicable for NYSED Certification.



Register:

<http://elt.nysut.org> • 800.528.6208

NYSUT represents teachers, school-related professionals, higher education faculty, professionals in education, human services and health care, and retirees.



## Sometimes, we need to slow down and say



During these unprecedented times and in the face of incredible adversity, each of you continue to sacrifice and dedicate yourselves to our children, our families and our communities.

We would like to thank all of the educators, school-related professionals, nurses and other health care workers who continue to demonstrate their unwavering compassion, dedication and commitment to our communities on a daily basis.



Learn more about Member Benefits-endorsed programs & services by scanning the QR code to the right, visiting [memberbenefits.nysut.org](http://memberbenefits.nysut.org) or calling **800-626-8101**.

