

NYSUT UNITED

A UNION OF PROFESSIONALS

INSIDE

'We did it together!'

Union celebrates historic victories in state budget, more work to be done | **3**

Grow Your Own

NEA grant will help NYSUT, local unions address teacher shortage | **18**

THIS ISSUE OF NYSUT UNITED CONTAINS IMPORTANT INFORMATION REGARDING THE NYSUT MEMBER BENEFITS TRUST SUMMARY ANNUAL REPORT AS WELL AS CHANGES TO TRUST-ENDORSED PROGRAMS (PAGE 29). PLEASE READ AND RETAIN THIS ISSUE FOR FUTURE REFERENCE.

Teacher of the Year



OCEANSIDE HIGH SCHOOL

Jennifer Wolfe



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NYSUT



Awards

Congratulations to the winners of the union's annual awards recognizing members' exemplary service to their local unions, their professions and the community.

The honorees for the NYSUT Albert Shanker Award for Distinguished Service, "Not for Ourselves Alone," The Sandy Feldman Outstanding Leadership Award and the NYSUT constituency awards were selected in 2020. As awards were not able to be presented at the 2020 NYSUT RA, these awards will be presented to recipients at this year's convention.

Historic victories in state budget

By **Ned Hoskin**

ned.hoskin@nysut.org

In the midst of a pandemic that hit New York state so hard, this year's battles for an equitable state budget were more important than ever.

And, we won!

"We did it together!" said NYSUT President Andy Pallotta.

The state-wide union's legislative staff, political action coordinators and hundreds of volunteer activists seized every opportunity in this challenging year.

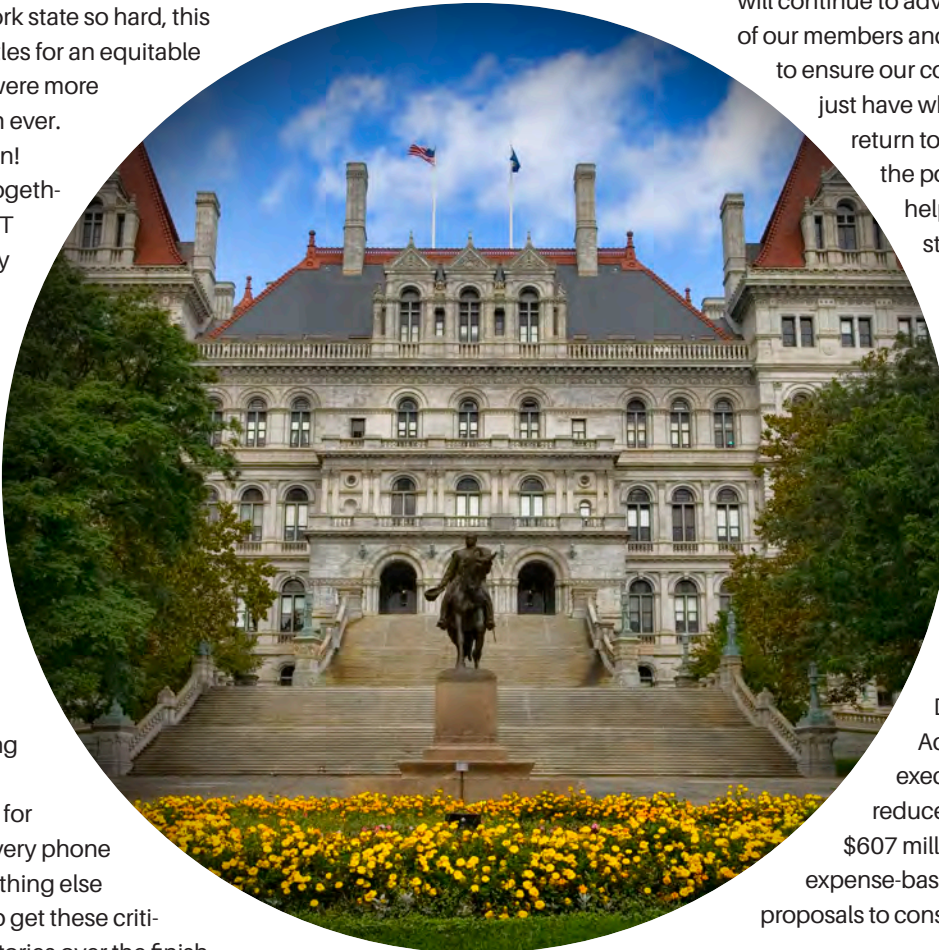
"Thank you for every email, every phone call, and everything else you did to help get these critical budget victories over the finish line," Pallotta said. "Together, we will always make a difference!"

After years of lobbying, marching and protesting, NYSUT members finally won progressive tax reform, ensuring that the ultrawealthy will pay their fair share to support public education, health care, small businesses, cultural groups and more.

After working for a generation with a broad coalition, NYSUT members this year won a commitment to fully phase in the Foundation Aid formula over the next three years, including payment of the \$4 billion the state already owes to districts under the formula. The budget guarantees at least

a 2 percent increase in Foundation Aid for every school district in the state.

NYSUT members and higher



education activists made progress after a decade of chronic underfunding, with elimination of the TAP Gap over the next three years, additional funding for student opportunity programs, more than \$1 billion in new capital funding for CUNY and SUNY, and restoration of proposed funding cuts to community colleges and four-year campuses.

The union also gained critical provisions to protect retirees' health care.

"It's an understatement to say it has been a tough year, but this budget brings hope for revival starting in 2021," Pallotta said.

"That isn't to say there is not more work to be done, though," he said. "We now turn our attention to the remainder of the legislative session. We will continue to advocate on behalf of our members and those they serve to ensure our communities don't just have what they need to return to normal, but that the policies in place help us come back stronger."

Here's what the enacted budget provides:

School Aid

\$19.8

billion in Foundation Aid, for a total

of \$29.5 billion, an 11 percent increase. It

rejects the Local District Funding Adjustment and the executive proposal to reduce state support by \$607 million. It fully funds expense-based aids and rejects proposals to consolidate them.

Federal COVID-19 Supplemental Stimulus

Before July 1, school districts must share plans on how to spend this one-shot funding on a variety of needs, such as: the safe return of students to in-person learning, educational technology and addressing the impact of COVID-19 on students. Parents, educators and other stakeholders must be part of the process.

Spend It

The federal money is available for districts to use right away, but the state spending plan does not allow districts to use the federal money to increase their unrestricted reserves.

Continued on page 4...

COMING UP

May 3-7

National Teacher Appreciation week. Both ptotoday.com and pta.org have celebration resources and ideas.

May 4

SRP Lobby Day

May 6-12

National Nurses week. The pandemic has taken a toll on frontline workers, including nurses. Please take a moment to recognize these everyday heroes.



May 11

Health Care Lobby Day

May 13

In-district Committee of 100 meetings

May 18

Statewide school budget and board voting

May 21-23

NYSUT Health & Safety Conference. Visit nysut.org/healthandsafety to register

May 28

Primary voter registration deadline

June 22

Primary Election Day

June 28

NYSUT Board of Directors meets

NYSUT will continue to hold lobby days in 2021. Please note, some or all of these events may be conducted as virtual meetings in compliance with COVID-19 and social-distancing guidance.

ON THE COVER

Jennifer Wolfe, a member of the Oceanside Federation of Teachers, is the 2021 New York State Teacher of the Year.

Photo by Becky Miller

Statewide ad campaign pitches safe reopening of schools

NYSUT launched a \$1 million statewide television and digital advertising campaign in March to draw attention to the critical safety guidelines schools need to follow as they reopen more classrooms for in-person learning.

Titled “My Kids,” the 30-second ad notes the critical importance of in-person learning for students, drawing attention to the need for COVID-19 testing in schools, vaccine availability for education professionals, social distancing, mandatory masking, and sanitization and hygiene protocols as part of reopening strategies. You can view it at nysut.org/mykids.

“The best way for educators

to teach and for students to learn is to be in person in the classroom, and we agree with parents and administrators that we need to get back to that for all students,” NYSUT President Andy

Pallotta said. (See article, page 6.)

“To do it, we have to continue to prioritize the health and safety of our students, our educators and our school communities. As districts

look to bring more students back, educators have a key role to play in ensuring that the policies in place allow students to learn in the safest possible environment.”

NYSUT has called attention to the pressing need for more districts to ramp up COVID-19 testing efforts for students and staff while continuing to adhere to clear safety standards set by public health officials, including mask wearing and proper social distancing. Recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance on school reopening reaffirms what it takes to safely operate schools, and the state and federal governments must provide the financial resources districts need to put every possible safety measure in place.



Historic victories

... Continued from page 3

Implicit Bias Training

\$1 million for NYSUT’s implicit bias training program — part of the “Many Threads, One Fabric” initiative which seeks to address racial and social injustice.

Broadband

Funding to offer high speed broadband service at a cost of no more than \$15 per month to low-income families.

Community Schools

\$250 million in community school funding as a set aside through Foundation Aid.

Professional Development

The budget restores mid-year cuts to teacher centers and provides \$14.26 million for teacher centers 2021-22. It includes \$2 million for mentoring and \$184,000 for National Board Certification.

Special Schools

\$30 million capital fund for 4201 Schools, and \$17.2 million to provide minimum wage assistance for 4201, 4410, Special Act and 853 Schools.

Mental Health

\$11.5 million for mental health support grants to school districts.

Restorative Justice

\$3 million for grants to school districts to increase the use of alternative approaches to student discipline.

Universal Pre-K

\$535 million for a three-year

phase-in of statewide universal pre-K for 4-year-olds.

Community Colleges

Using 2020-21 as a base year, the budget establishes a 98 percent funding floor for Base Aid for 2022 and includes a \$50 FTE increase.

TAP Gap

The spending plan eliminates the TAP Gap in four years. The maximum TAP award has been increased by \$500 to \$5,665 for 2021-22.

SUNY Hospitals

\$230 million for the three SUNY hospitals to offset the costs associated with uncompensated care, and \$150 million in capital funding for expenses incurred in the past year.

During the pandemic, SUNY hospitals were on the forefront of care delivery, and Downstate was

converted to a COVID-19 only hospital. It is important that these hospitals are compensated for the invaluable role they played.

In the remainder of the session we will be seeking hazard pay for UUP members who were on the frontline, as well as debt service relief for the hospitals.

Health

The final budget rejected proposals to eliminate the full reimbursement of Medicare Part B standard premiums to retirees enrolled in New York State Health Insurance Plan, to eliminate the reimbursement of the Income Related Medicare Adjustment Amount, and to institute a graduated or sliding scale health insurance reimbursement system, preserving the current flat rate contribution.

NYSUT spreads the word on opt-out rights

By Sylvia Saunders

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With ads on billboards, buses and bus shelters all over the state, NYSUT is going big to let parents know they have the right to opt their kids out of this spring's state standardized tests.

"This year has tested our kids enough," the union campaign says. "Parents: Know your rights to opt your kids out of state tests."

The union's four-week campaign, which began the week before the state's English Language Arts testing for grades 3–8, features billboards in Buffalo, Rochester, Albany and Syracuse, along with placards on buses and bus shelters in Albany, Westchester and Long Island. NYSUT has also posted digital ads on social media promoting a web page — nysut.org/optout — where parents and educators can find fact sheets with updated information on test refusal rights and why the union believes this year's tests should have been canceled due to the pandemic.

"In a year that has been anything but standard, forcing states to administer standardized exams just doesn't make sense," NYSUT President Andy Pallotta said.

"We have grave concerns that standardized tests at any level can be administered in any sort of equitable way," said NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango. "While high-stakes tests have never been the best way to measure what students know and are able to do, they are especially unreliable this year when the schools have been offering such a wide variety of in-person, hybrid and remote instruction."

With no statewide opt-out process, it is up to individual school districts to

set procedures and inform parents of their rights. While some districts have proactively sent out links to make it easier for parents to submit opt-out forms, other administrators have provided parents and teachers with inaccurate information on testing procedures and the consequences of opting out.

In a new twist this year, some districts, including New York City, Ossining, Rye, Arlington and West Irondequoit, have instituted policies where parents "opt-in" their students, if they want them to take the grades 3–8 tests. In other districts, administrators are strongly encouraging participation.

"Our fact sheets attempt to clear up any misinformation so that parents can make an informed decision," DiBrango said. "NYSUT fully supports parents' right to choose what is best for their children."

DiBrango noted that since the federal government said the mandated tests must go on despite the pandemic, State Education Commissioner Betty Rosa and the Board of Regents have taken several steps to ease the testing burden:

- There are no consequences for students who do not take the grades 3–8 state tests in ELA and math; or grades 4 and 8 science.
- Students receiving remote-only instruction do not need to come to school just to take tests. If parents want their remote-only students to take the tests, they can schedule it with the school.
- The tests are shorter: There are no field questions and students will take only one session with multiple choice questions.

- The grades 3–8 testing window is expanded to provide more flexibility for districts. ELA exams will be administered between April 19–29 and math assessments are slated May 3–14. Students receiving hybrid instruction can take tests on the days they ordinarily attend.

- Unlike previous years, there is no threatened funding fallout for districts with high opt-out rates in the 2020–21 year. The U.S. Department of Education is waiving the 95 percent participation rate requirement

and the state's accountability system is placed on hold.

- The state has canceled all high school Regents exams not required by the federal government. The only Regents exams that will be administered are English Language Arts; Algebra I; Living Environment and Physical Setting/Earth Science.

- Regents exams will not be required for high school graduations. Students must only pass their courses to get credit toward Regents diplomas. For information on 2021 diploma requirements, go to nysut.org/factsheets.



Six feet or three feet: Safe reopening involves more than distancing



By Ned Hoskin
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Districts across the state spent the late winter weeks planning to allow more students in classrooms by reducing COVID-19 distancing rules from six to three feet. Many even ordered

custom barriers they believed would be necessary to do it safely.

When the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued guidelines in March that allowed three feet of distancing in classrooms without barriers, in certain circumstances, many administrators felt vindicated

— and then went scrambling to find the receipts for their plexiglass.

When the state Department of Health issued its own revised guidelines in April to conform with the federal changes, NYSUT spoke out to clarify that safe reopening is about much more than a tape measure.

The state “is making it crystal clear

that distancing is only one part of a layered mitigation strategy,” said President Andy Pallotta.

The revised guidelines draw detailed distinctions between when it’s appropriate to have three feet of distancing and when six feet is still necessary. They also mandate masks at all times and lay out specific ventilation recommendations, and they maintain provisions for cleaning, hygiene and contact tracing.

The guidelines also say community transmission — with a majority of New York counties currently at high levels of transmission, per CDC metrics — is a critical factor in how physical distancing changes are implemented.

Most importantly, before districts make changes, they must give parents and educators opportunities to provide input on reopening plans.

“That has always been and must continue to be essential to the

reopening process,” Pallotta said.

NYSUT maintains that more must be done to strengthen safety protocols.

The state recommends that districts “strongly consider” implementing screening testing, but the union insists there is zero excuse for all districts not to implement routine testing as soon as possible.

“The federal government is making hundreds of millions of dollars available to New York schools explicitly for this purpose,” Pallotta said. “It’s long past time to get this done.”

NYSUT members, as much as anyone in school communities all over New York state, long for a day when they can return to buildings with all of their students.

“What we’ve wanted from the very beginning of the school reopening process is for that to happen in the safest possible environment,” Pallotta said.

VOTE MAY 18

Support your local schools



The 2021 local school budget voting in most districts will be in person this year on May 18. A bill to allow absentee ballots for school budget votes is pending.

Education unions can play a large part in convincing supportive members of the community to get out and vote to pass budgets and elect school board candidates who will promote public education.

Districts must share their budget proposals with the public between April 27 and May 4, and hold a public hearing between May 4 and 11.

This year districts will be receiving a boost in state aid due to the Foundation Aid agreement. (See article, page 3.) However, on the local level, district budgets still must adhere to the state’s tax cap, which limits increases in the property tax levy to 2 percent or the rate of inflation,

whichever is less. This year, the tax cap is set at 1.23 percent, the smallest increase since 2016-17.

Districts calculate their local tax levy cap using a number of exemptions and local growth factors. Some end up higher and some end up lower than the state tax cap number.

In addition to finalizing their school budgets, districts also must develop plans to spend their one-time COVID-19 related federal

funding to help with pandemic related expenses. These plans must be posted on districts’ websites by July 1 and must be developed with stakeholder involvement. The State Education Department will be releasing applications for the federal funds by early May. School districts must then apply to SED to receive the funds.

With everyone pulling together, these schools reopened safely

By Ned Hoskin

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Friday the 13th of March 2020, the 41 members of Scio Teachers Association were scrambling. The district in southern Allegany County has 350 K-12 students in one building, and the state had suddenly ordered school buildings to close due to COVID-19.

Everyone was trying to make plans and figure out remote instruction, but no one knew how long it would last.

"We thought it might be a couple of weeks," said TA President Kevin Mole. "We never came back."

It was the same down the road at Friendship that day. The 346-student district provided a 30-minute Zoom tutorial and closed the building down for the remainder of the school year. The faculty and administration met periodically as they all figured it out, but by June, the goal was clear.

"We are here for one reason and one reason only, and that's the kids," said Jim Greenaker, Friendship TA president. "We know the kids learn better when we are in the same space together."

While media reports focus on districts that have struggled to safely reopen school buildings, these locals in rural Southwestern New York have proven that educators are committed to staying open and doing it right.

"Everyone wants to be in school," Mole said. "Teachers want to teach from school, students want to be in school. That's the ideal, that's the goal. The question was: Can we do it safely?"

The answer is yes.

"We've been open in person 100 percent all day every day" since September, said Carin Schultz, president of the 21-member Whitesville TA. Whitesville, with 175 students in one building, is tucked in the southeastern corner of the county on the Pennsylvania border. "Our ability to keep everyone safe here was our main priority," she said.

Opening buildings safely has been a tremendous challenge for most districts around the state, despite the best efforts of educators and their

unions.

"Any educator will tell you the best way for students to learn is to be in person in the classroom," said NYSUT President Andy Pallotta. "In a number of places — notable among them these three in Southwestern New York — that has been done safely and successfully."

The smaller size and relative isolation of these communities worked to their advantage, but it was not easy.

"It might be logistically less complex" in a smaller district, said Mole. But, "the issues are the same, and you need everybody pulling in the same direction."

No matter what size the district, this requires state support, unified teachers, a cooperative administration and parents on board to make it work. Local union members in these districts spent months working with their administrations to anticipate the

difficulties and develop protocols.

"We had many meetings over the summer," Schultz said, "and our administration allowed anyone who wanted to be a part of it to attend. Most of our unit members attended the meetings."

Early in the summer Greenaker surveyed his members and 98 percent of respondents said they would do anything necessary to get back to in-person instruction in September.

"From then on, our bargaining unit drove the conversation," he said. The members identified potential issues the administration hadn't thought of and developed solutions.

"As a union, we came out unified, and our members felt the administration was responsive to them," Greenaker said. Ultimately, "the plan was teacher friendly; without the teachers we have here, it wouldn't have worked."



At the start of a school day, staffers (from left) Cory Hills, Friendship TA; Audra Metz; and Angela Eddy, Friendship TA, check the temperatures of students coming into the building at Friendship Central.

JIM GREENAKER

Women's

history must be amplified year-round

By Kara Smith
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Julia Reichert and Steven Bogner's documentary "9to5: The Story of a Movement," chronicles the history of a group of clerical workers who joined together to advocate for better pay and advancement opportunities, and an end to workplace sexual harassment in the early 1970s. In 1981, 9to5 partnered with SEIU and formed SEIU District 925, a nationwide labor union for office workers.

"Women are missing from our curriculums and that sparked my interest in telling this story," said Reichert, noting that bringing class, gender and union history together is important. "Lots of union knowledge has been lost. This was a chance to bring it back, from a feminist perspective."

The United Federation of Teachers' Women's Rights Committee and NYSUT's Women's Committee offered a free virtual screening of the documentary, and a

follow-up panel discussion. Panelists included the filmmakers, NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango, and Kim Cook and Lane Windham of the Worker Institute at Cornell. UFT WRC co-chairs Victoria Primiano and Latrice Curry moderated.

Like many, Curry didn't realize the film starring Lily Tomlin, Jane Fonda and Dolly Parton, and hit song of the same name, was fact-based. For DiBrango, whose first job after college was as a secretary, the women's experiences resonated. "I teared up watching this because I know the collective strength it must have taken for those women to speak up," she said.

Cook, a 9to5 and District 925 organizer in the 1980s, discussed how they brought feminist sensibilities to unionizing. "We developed deep connections and trust with people and sought to have a more cooperative movement," she said.

"Making the Case for Women in History," a moderated #NYSUTchat on Twitter, discussed how educators can include women's voices

in school curricula. The event was inspired by PBS's "Where are the Women?" virtual summit.

Participants agreed that inclusion should occur in all subject areas and all grade levels. "Women are not sideline contributors, we are at the forefront," said Lori Atkinson, Copenhagen Teachers Association.

"Gender bias is pervasive in classrooms and our culture," said Marne Ryan Brady, BOCES United Professionals, noting that fewer than 11 percent of textbook references are devoted to women and K-12 textbooks and curricula often portray women as bystanders to history.

"Representation matters," said Aisha Cook, New Rochelle Federation of United School Employees, noting that showing the contributions of women is important so that children don't grow up having lower expectations for women.

DiBrango acknowledged the work to highlight women's achievements during Women's History Month — and called for more. "We need to make it a year-round endeavor."

For information on other events and resources, go to nysut.org/women.



Union grants support educators, communities

By Liza Frenette
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It's big. It's \$600,000 big. That is the final tally for the second round of AFT Innovation Fund pandemic grants, and out of 16 recipients nationwide, one-quarter of them are NYSUT local unions.

"We're thrilled to help support educators who have stepped up during such a difficult time. So many of our members have identified pressing needs due to the increased stress and trauma of the pandemic and

the challenges related to distance learning and getting schools re-opened safely," said Evelyn DeJesus, American Federation of Teachers executive vice president and former NYSUT Board member.

A \$50,000 AFT grant to the White Plains Teachers Association will pay for six freezers and seven refrigerators for new school pantries, as well as a refrigerator for a local church food pantry that serves many student families. Grant money will pay for shelving, tubs, and non-perishable foods; \$5,000 is for emergency clothing

along with personal care items.

"This is a testament of networking and partnerships among unions," White Plains TA President Kara McCormick Lyons said.

In Copenhagen, the TA is using its \$39,000 grant to purchase yoga equipment — offering an alternative to traditional physical education. The local will also develop a mindfulness curriculum, following a program begun by school librarian Krishna Greene.

Copenhagen TA President John Cain said teachers using mindfulness

practices have already seen positive changes.

Wi-Fi access is the focus of a \$23,000 grant to the La Fargeville TA. The funds will allow the local union to buy 50 mobile hot spots to assist families who lack internet access.

"It's crucial to our students so they can be on the same playing field," Deanna Henry, LTA president, said.

In New York City, the United Federation of Teachers earned a \$40,000 grant to create a partnership to offer professional development in social-emotional learning strategies.



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| Literacy, online + 1 night per week on campus | TESOL with additional ESOL certification, online + 1 night per week on campus |
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Conversation, listening important tools to combat racism

By Kara Smith
kara.smith@nysut.org

Learning how to listen, show mercy and be a change agent was the focus of “Courageous Conversation: The Art of Listening, Mercy and Change,” the April event in NYSUT’s Many Threads, One Fabric social justice series.

Leven “Chuck” Wilson, at right, a counseling professional with a range of experience in areas including diversity, inclusion and community engagement, was the featured speaker. J. Philippe Abraham, NYSUT secretary-treasurer leads the series. NYSUT President Andy Pallotta thanked Abraham for his efforts.

“This is bold, powerful work at a difficult time,” Pallotta said. “This is work you were born to do.”

After the Derek Chauvin trial and the racial inequalities exposed by COVID-19, “now more than ever, we

need to talk about the deep-seated racial tensions within our society,” said Abraham in welcoming remarks. “Let’s learn how to move forward and have courageous conversations.”

The event helped participants recognize racial disparities in their communities and workplaces and learn how to overcome attitudinal and structural barriers to make change. A key focus was learning to become a better listener, understanding the role of mercy, compassion and forgiveness and learning to de-escalate anger, frustration and pain.

“Courageous conversations must start with being calm, having respect and understanding that we’re all different,” said Wilson, noting conflict is counterproductive. They must also start with a metaphorical blank canvas — something that can’t happen without extending mercy and forgiveness.

“I don’t know a person alive who

hasn’t said or done the wrong thing, whether intentional or not,” he said. “Mercy is the twin to forgiveness, allowing us to connect and identify challenges and learn how to address concerns.”

The death of George Floyd at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer placed America at a turning point, explained Wilson. It forced the nation to confront the prevalence of societal racism and the need for an ongoing conversation about how to make things better.

“Sometimes truth is not friendly, sometimes it punches,” said Wilson. “But dealing with the truth is the foundation of having a courageous conversation.”

Wilson is the founder of the Renew Group, an organization that

strengthens families and improves communities. He holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees in social work and is a partner with the AFT’s Teacher Diversity program. Wilson recently joined the AFT Health Issues department to develop work addressing mental health.

Visit nysut.org/manythreads to learn more about the NYSUT series.



True colors inspire art fundraiser

By Liza Frenette
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Artist and TikTok sensation Fritz Proctor remembers how he first learned to love color and paint in a struggling public school in Niagara Falls.

“My high school art teacher Mr. (Robert) Lynch really changed my life. He showed me art isn’t just a hobby; it’s a lifestyle. He was so supportive,” Proctor said from Boston, where he makes signs for the state of Massachusetts.

After work, he paints in his

basement. Under the name @fritzdostart, Proctor uses a smorgasbord of paints to exactly color match paint cards, objects or fabric. His TikTok videos have garnered him a following of 4.1 million people.

Proctor recalls that when he was a student, the school had a poor arts budget, but field trips to cities to see diverse architecture and museums were eye-opening for him.

“I want to use my platform to give back,” he said. Proctor has set up a GoFundMe page with a goal



PROVIDED

to raise \$10,000 for art supplies and cultural field trips for students at his former Western New York school.

“It is so kind of him to want to give back to his alma matter, and to help support our art students,” said Lynch, a member of Niagara Falls Teachers. “(Fritz) saw first-hand the transformative power of art education and wants young students to have the same experience.”

With art too often being the first subject on the chopping block, Proctor hopes to make an impact. “Developmentally, it’s so important for students to explore their own minds through art,” Proctor said. Visit <https://gofund.me/2bb047e9> for more info.



Albert Shanker Award for Distinguished Service

Jonathan Kozol, an author who is one of the most eloquent and outspoken advocates for equality and racial justice in our nation's schools, will receive NYSUT's Albert Shanker Award for Distinguished Service at this year's Representative Assembly. The honor is the union's most prestigious award recognizing special contributions made to public education in the United States.

Throughout his career spanning more than five decades, Kozol's poignant books have highlighted the glaring inequalities in education — how race and a lack of funding divide students into separate and unequal schooling systems. He also speaks out about the negative impacts of high-stakes standardized testing, charter schools and vouchers.

"Jonathan Kozol's life-long

commitment to social and racial justice in our education system is unparalleled," said NYSUT President Andy Pallotta. "At a time when the pandemic has exposed an even deeper divide in educational opportunities — and racial tensions are mounting — his message is even more timely today."

Kozol earned a bachelor's degree in English from Harvard University and was a Rhodes scholar at Oxford University. In the heat of the civil rights movement in the 1960's, Kozol moved from Harvard Square into a poor Black neighborhood of Boston and became a fourth-grade teacher.



His experience there inspired his first major work, *Death at an Early Age*, which described his first year as a teacher and exposed the race-driven inequalities in public education.

He was later fired from Boston Public Schools for teaching the poem "Dream

Deferred" by Langston Hughes. He eventually left teaching but never stopped his campaign for a more equal and just educational system. In *Savage Inequalities*, Kozol visited rich and poor schools in 30 communities across the country, vividly documenting how poor schools were overcrowded, understaffed and

unable to provide equal opportunity for students.

In his 1995 bestseller *Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and the Conscience of the Nation*, Kozol spent a year getting to know families in the Mott Haven neighborhood of the South Bronx, the poorest neighborhood in the poorest congressional district in the nation. Ten years later, in *The Shame of the Nation*, Kozol wrote about conditions in 60 schools he studied, finding that inner city children were more racially isolated than they had been before *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Kozol, who was the keynote speaker at NYSUT's Representative Assemblies in 1992 and 1998, is working on two new books: one for teacher activists and the other for children.

"Not for Ourselves Alone:" The Sandy Feldman Outstanding Leadership Award



Catalina Fortino
United Federation of Teachers

Former NYSUT First Vice President Catalina Fortino immigrated to the United States from Argentina with her family as an English language learner, and she dedicated herself to lifting up students with similar challenges.

Earning a bachelor's in early childhood education and her master's in special education and bilingual education, she worked to help English language learners and students with special needs.

A UFT activist, she strengthened the profession as the chair of the NYSUT Bilingual Committee of Practitioners, the co-chair of the state Professional Standards and Practices Board for Teaching and as a member of the state Committee of Title I Practitioners and the American Federation of Teachers English Language Learners Task Force.

In 2011, Fortino was named director of the UFT Teacher Center and elected as the UFT's vice president for education. Three years later she was elected first vice president at NYSUT and vice president of the AFT. Catalina Fortino served her union at the state and national level with the utmost dedication and integrity, advocating strongly and effectively for her students, her colleagues and the teaching profession from pre-K through post-graduate.



Florence McCue
Yonkers Federation of Teachers

In a career going back 50 years, Florence McCue has demonstrated that the goal of leadership is not to create followers, but to create more leaders.

From her second year of teaching in 1972 until her retirement in 2004, McCue served the Yonkers Federation of Teachers in numerous positions. As a building rep, she helped protect contract rights and worked closely with teachers and administrators. She initiated a "buddy" program that partnered seasoned teacher leaders as mentors with non-

tenured teachers — helping new teachers succeed while schooling them about the value of their union.

McCue went on to serve the YFT as treasurer, political activist, member of the negotiating team, and NYSUT and AFT delegate. In 1997, she became a delegate to the AFL-CIO Westchester-Putnam Central Labor Body where she still focuses on legislative, political and community service activity.

In retirement, McCue continues her activism as executive vice president of the NYSUT Retiree Council of Westchester and Putnam counties. She is the Retiree At-Large Director on the NYSUT Board, representing all 230,000 retirees in the state and Florida, and serves on the NYSUT Retiree Advisory Committee.



School-Related Professional Members of the Year



Dorothy Kamps

When Dorothy Kamps shows up for phone banks, rallies, union events and organizing, it's because she knows the value of the union. Kamps was brought up in a union-centric family of electrical workers, and then became active in the United Federation of Teachers during her own career.

A longtime stay-at-home mom, she went to work as a paraprofessional right where she lived: in the borough of Queens. At age 42 she earned her associate degree from Queensborough Community College. Kamps worked for nearly two decades with the youngest elementary students as a classroom paraprofessional at P.S. 71 in Ridgewood. Her work with the UFT started part-time as Paraprofessional District Coordinator, and eventually she began full-time work in the union's Health and Safety Department providing training and professional development for paraprofessionals.

"As a longtime member of the chapter's Executive Board, Dorie has mentored many new activists, always taking newcomers under wing and bringing them along to be union leaders," said Shelvy Young Abrams, UFT chair of paraprofessionals and a member of the NYSUT Executive Board.



Cheryl Rockhill

Cheryl Rockhill, president of the Brushton-Moira Support Staff Association, wears many hats — and not just because of the long, cold North Country winters. She is a union advocate, a bus monitor and transportation assistant, chair of the SRP Advisory Council and a NYSUT Education & Learning Trust instructor.

Throughout all these jobs, she has taken college courses, earning her AAS degree in accounting in

December 2020 through the AFT's Union Plus education program.

"She is the gold standard on many levels for School-Related Professionals," said Jeanette Stapley, Election District 9 director who nominated her for the NYSUT award.

This past year, the importance of her work dispatching and monitoring buses became paramount when drivers took on four runs a day to deliver meals to nearly 500 students — one-half of the district's population.

Rockhill is an ambassador for NYSUT's Member Organizing Institute, marched in the 2019 first-ever SRP rally at the Capitol, and volunteers for NYSUT SRP lobby days. She testified before the New York State Wage Board in the "Fight for 15" as the voice of SRPs.

Retiree Members of the Year



Donald Nobles

Donald Nobles is the vice chair leader for the United Federation of Teachers Retired Teachers Chapter. He retired in 2013 after 28 years as a special education teacher, and now works tirelessly on behalf of veteran parents and their children as the vice chairman of the UFT's Veterans Committee. He joined the group in 2005.

A current committee focus is lobbying the New York City Council and department of education to provide training for school counselors about available veterans' benefits so they can help community members access them. These include mental health counseling and housing and employment support. As Nobles wrote last April in *New York Teacher* magazine, "dealing with the extended effects of post-traumatic stress disorder ... affects more than the individual. Veterans' family members are also affected — children possibly more so because they don't have the coping mechanisms to understand the causes of a parent's erratic behavior."

Nobles was elected a UFT chapter leader in 2003, a position he held until his retirement. He has received numerous awards throughout his career, including the AFT Political Mobilization award in 2015; the Marsh/Raimo Award for Political Action in 2011; and the Ely Trachtenberg Award in 2003.



Deb Peterson

Deb Peterson is the longtime former president of Retiree Council 43, Teachers Retired in Florida, a position she held from 2010-20. She is the current president of the RC 43's Space Coast unit, a position she's held since 2014.

Peterson's retiree contributions to NYSUT are many. She served as RC 43 vice president from 2006-10; co-president of the RC 43 Space Coast unit from 2010-14; NYSUT Retiree Advisory Committee member from 2014-20; a NYSUT Committee of 100 member since 2014; a member of the ED 51-53 resolutions committee since 2010; and a 2009 member of the AFT Leadership Program. Peterson is also a member of the Florida Coalition Project and the NYSUT Women's Committee.

She's received many awards throughout her union career including the AFT Living Legacy Award in 2014; and several NYSUT Communications Award wins for her blog "From the Desk of the President."

After a career as a music teacher and vocal director in the Haldane Central School District, Peterson retired in 2005. She was vice president for the Haldane Faculty Association for more than 25 years and served as its grievance chair and part of its negotiations team from 1975 until her retirement.



Higher Education Members of the Year



Barbara Bowen

A fierce advocate for higher education members, students and progressive causes, Barbara Bowen has served more than two decades as president of the Professional Staff Congress representing more than 30,000 faculty and academic staff at CUNY.

Bowen is well known for her passion and persistence — urgently calling for greater investment in higher education, standing strong at the bargaining table and always leading the charge at marches and rallies. Elected in 2000, she has worked relentlessly to win improved benefits and teaching conditions for PSC members, including important job protections and living wage provisions for adjuncts that are a model for the nation.

Bowen, a professor of English at Queens College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, taught for 15 years before becoming PSC president. She is a scholar of 17th-century English literature and African American studies and has published numerous works in her field.

She is an AFT vice president, a member of NYSUT's Board of Directors and the executive board of the New York City Central Labor Council. Bowen decided not to run for another term as PSC president; she will return to teaching after a one-year sabbatical.



Jamie Dangler

Since 2012, Jamie Dangler has served as the state-wide vice president for academics for United University Professions, NYSUT's local representing professionals and educators at the State University of New York.

Over the past 20 years, Dangler, a member of the NYSUT Board, has had many UUP leadership roles, serving on the UUP statewide Executive Board since 2008, and from 2009-12, as president of UUP's Cortland chapter. Dangler also leads UUP's Task Force on Teacher Education, a committee that successfully advocated against 2014 SED teacher certification mandates that discouraged students from entering teaching. The work led to the elimination of one of four exams, and a review process to help students fulfill the edTPA requirement.

The chief negotiator for UUP's 2011-16 contract, Dangler also represents UUP on the state's multi-union Labor/Management Work-Life Services Advisory Board.

Dangler is the co-author of an extensive research report for UUP on gender and salary inequity; she was instrumental in compiling UUP's *Guide for Academics* and developed the union's *Family Leave/Work Life Services* guide.

Before becoming a statewide UUP officer, Dangler was an associate professor of sociology at SUNY Cortland.



Mike Fabricant

NYSUT Executive Board member Mike Fabricant is a longtime Professional Staff Congress leader and activist; PSC represents NYSUT members at the City University of New York.

He is a current PSC executive council member and legislative representative, and former PSC first vice president, treasurer and vice president for senior colleges. In these positions he has been essential to every aspect of PSC work, from contract campaigns, to campus organizing, to legislative advocacy and coalition building. Fabricant also has a deep connection to K-12 education. He is the author of three scholarly books on the politics of K-12 education and has participated in NYSUT task forces on teacher education and APPR.

Equally important, Fabricant is a community leader and advocate on questions of housing and homelessness. He currently heads the Elizabeth Coalition to House the Homeless, and starting in the 1980s, was a founding member of three different social service agencies serving the homeless and people with disabilities in his local community.

Fabricant has been a faculty member at the Hunter College School of Social Work for 30 years and is the author of nine books and numerous articles.

Health Care Professional of the Year



Nancy Barth-Miller

An energetic hospital nurse, Nancy Barth-Miller has treated patients for injuries and illnesses throughout the AIDS epidemic, SARS, Ebola and COVID-19 — all while championing unionization.

Barth-Miller worked at Staten Island University South, a division of Northwell Health, from 1982 to December 2020. She has worked as a registered nurse in the emergency room, critical intensive care, hemodialysis, post-anesthesia care and in staff development.

Her union roots run deep. Seeking better representation in her early career at the hospital, Barth-Miller successfully organized with the UFT in 1989. In 2006, she became chapter rep at the hospital for the Federation of Nurses/United Federation of Teachers.

She is an original member of the NYSUT Health Care Professionals Council formed in 2002, where she serves as a voice for hospital nurses and helps shape the annual Health Care Professionals Forum. Barth-Miller is active in her community, and has worked as a clinical adjunct professor, and high school educator for a New York City Board of Education LPN program.

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'I finally made it.'

After 28 years, UFT member now a full-time teacher in the Bronx

By Matt Smith
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There's determination. There's persistence. And then there's Calvin Edwards.

The man who NYSUT President Andy Pallotta calls a "gentle giant who never gives up on kids," is also a man who refused to give up on himself. And after 28 years spent working toward becoming a teacher, Calvin Edwards — at age 51 — is now a full-time, full-fledged middle school science teacher in the Bronx.

"I truly believe it is a gift from God," Edwards said of his hallmark persistence. "If I am not happy with something in my life, I will work until I change it. I also believe it is never too

late to improve and enrich your life."

Edwards, who completed certification requirements in December, is teaching at P186X Walter J. Damrosch School where he was hired in February. His journey, however, began in 1992, when he entered community college with the goal of becoming a teacher.

But then life happened. There were kids. Health issues. Family obligations. After finally graduating in 2000, Edwards began pursuing his bachelor's. And then there were more hurdles. The courses he needed were not being offered by CUNY, leaving him stuck. So, for the next 17 years, he took courses whenever he could.

It was slow going, but thanks to a UFT benefit that paid for six credits per semester, Edwards — a veteran paraprofessional — was able to continue and complete his bachelor's degree in May 2018 and then his graduate work. And when he finally

completed his certification and landed his job, he called Pallotta — his close friend and mentor, whom he assisted in the classroom back when the NYSUT president was teaching in New York City.

"It was a good feeling to tell a close friend that I accomplished a lifelong goal," Edwards said. "It was exciting to tell someone who was invested in my journey that I finally made it."

"When he called to tell me," said Pallotta, "we both screamed like little kids. This is the journey of a lifetime."

So, after 30 years pursuing his dream, what was it like to realize it?

"I was a little nervous the first week," Edwards said, "but the nerves went away pretty quickly. Teaching is pretty close to what I envisioned, and



the years of experience (as a paraprofessional) helped me immensely with behavior management."

Of course, what he did not envision was beginning his career during a pandemic. Nonetheless, Edwards said, his goal remains the same as it was when he began this journey back in 1992: "To be the best teacher that I can be and make a difference in the lives of as many students as possible."

Buddy Project a boon for students K-20

By Liza Frenette
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The St. Lawrence County People Project has developed a program teaming area undergrads with K-12 students for learning and fun in a COVID-19 safe way.

"The Buddy Project," offers free mentoring, tutoring or specific skills training, such as language lessons, music lessons or yoga. A coalition of leaders and students, in collaboration with the county youth bureau, developed the plan to support K-12 students within St. Lawrence County.

The program helps undergraduates from St. Lawrence University,



The Buddy Project pairs undergrads, including students from St. Lawrence University, above, with K-12 students for mentoring, tutoring and social-emotional support.

SUNY Canton and SUNY Potsdam access field experience during the pandemic, while also helping younger students adjust and thrive.

Tutoring, project boxes and videos focusing on character development are all in the works.

Before COVID-19, college programs allowed students to earn credit hours for working in classrooms, or to earn money in work-study programs as reading tutors. The pandemic wiped out that contact.

"We had college students who wanted field experience without anywhere to go," said Mary Wills, director of the People Project, a union-led initiative combining the energy of unions, businesses, educators, company leaders and civic groups to improve the lives of residents in this economically struggling county.

An underpinning of the Buddy

Project is awareness of the need to help students with social-emotional challenges exacerbated by the pandemic, said Wills, a retired Ogdensburg teacher.

The colleges are charged with providing training for undergrads helping out in these programs, instructing them in confidentiality, appropriate interactions and safety.

The Buddy Project is led by Wills, Ashlee Downing-Duke of St. Lawrence University, and SUNY Potsdam's Julie Johnson and Sarah Solley, both members of United University Professions, the SUNY higher education union.

"We're hoping this program is not just for the pandemic," Wills said.

Oceanside teacher an inspiration to students, fellow educators

By Matt Smith
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A few weeks before the start of this academic year, Jennifer Wolfe stood inside her empty Oceanside High School classroom on Long Island with tears in her eyes — tears for her students whom she had not seen in five months since the COVID-19 shutdown, tears for her typically spirited classroom that had been void of life for too long, and tears of uncertainty for what a new year in such a strange time might hold.

“Despite the obstacles,” said Wolfe, the 2021 New York State Teacher of the Year, “we’re gonna make it work. That’s what teachers do. We make stuff work.”

It hasn’t been easy. Wolfe, her colleagues, and educators across the state have been working under unprecedented conditions in rapidly changing environments. Distance restrictions inside the classroom and remote instruction over the internet have impaired teachers’

interaction with students. There have been technological challenges. And frequent schedule changes due to positive COVID-19 tests and exposures have repeatedly upended lesson plans on a dime.

Still, despite such extraordinary circumstances, Wolfe and educators throughout New York have “made stuff work” because “that’s what teachers do.”

“Everyone is relying on each other and it’s really been kind of great,” said Wolfe, who’s been teaching social studies at Oceanside for 24 years. “Everybody has really come together. It’s been tough and there are a lot of things out of our control that we normally would have control over. I really believe we have risen to the challenge.”

“Teacher expertise and dedication,” she added, has been “the one true constant” enabling students to navigate and learn during the pandemic. And, Wolfe said, it will be teacher-generated solutions that will keep kids on the path to success as students emerge from the COVID-19 era.

Wolfe, a member of the Oceanside Federation of Teachers, will be the first to tell you she is passionate about teacher leadership. And in choosing

her as this year’s Teacher of the Year, the State Education Department not only recognized Wolfe for her work with students, but also for empowering fellow educators to take on leadership roles.

“When teachers are put in positions of leadership to control their profession,” Wolfe said, “the education that students receive is usually more effective.”

In 2002, Wolfe became the first teacher in Oceanside to achieve National Board Certification, in part she said, because it “was best for my students.”

But she didn’t stop there. Knowing what was best for her students is best for all students, Wolfe, over the past two decades, has personally guided more than 20 other teachers in the district — as well as numerous others in districts across Long Island — through the rigorous 300-plus-hour National Board Certification process, which is considered the “gold standard” of the teaching profession.

In fact, before Wolfe achieved NBCT status, there were only 66 NBCTs on Long Island. Today, through her mentorship as a National Board regional coordinator, there are more than 200.

“Jen’s dedication to her



Teacher of the Year

Jennifer Wolfe



PHOTOS: BECKY MILLER

profession, and her passion in constantly elevating not only her career but the careers of her colleagues, is why teachers in New York state’s public schools consistently rank among the nation’s very best,” said NYSUT President Andy Pallotta. “Teachers like Jen not only enable students to succeed in the classroom, they also change student’s lives.”

Oceanside Superintendent Phyllis Harrington said Wolfe has helped grow the teaching profession on Long Island.

“It’s not only her knowledge about effective teaching, it’s how she imparts that knowledge to other teachers, particularly novice teachers,” Harrington said.

A three-time Fulbright recipient and former state High School Social Studies Teacher of the Year, Wolfe plays a key role in Oceanside’s Tenure Attainment Plan, which she created with her colleague Erin Girleir Rosenkranz. The supportive but

challenging four-year program for novice teachers aims to ensure they are supported during the critical first years of their career.

NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango called Wolfe’s commitment to supporting young teachers “selfless and inspiring.” She noted too that it serves as a reminder that “collaboration is a key ingredient to success in the classroom and that new teachers in New York state are not alone and will be supported as they develop their craft.”

Harrington said Wolfe is a role model for those new to the profession.

“She’s helped young teachers understand that teaching is hard work, that it is an intellectual

activity, and that it takes a degree of commitment that she displays single-handedly.”

The superintendent added that inside the classroom, it’s Wolfe’s authenticity that enables her to connect with students. “Jen is real. So when she is working with her students, and she’s facilitating the learning, she makes the content come alive.”

Oceanside senior Alexa Poplawski agrees.

“She’s very fun, and accessible. I hated waking up for first period — freshman year, sophomore year, every year — but I had Ms. Wolfe for first period last year and I was excited to go to class every day. She

would make my day so much better. She’s really just the best teacher I’ve ever had.”

“I am lucky that I work in a district where there are a lot of accomplished

teachers and I see the outcome of that” in my students, Wolfe said. “I have kids who are capable and confident and they feel great about themselves. That doesn’t come by accident. It comes because they’ve had very accomplished teachers.”



NYSUT and SED congratulate the state's 60 new NBCTs

By **Sylvia Saunders**

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It's an impressive feat any year — but achieving National Board Certification in the year of the pandemic is quite an accomplishment.

In an online ceremony complete with virtual balloons and “spotlight” recognition, NYSUT and State Education Department officials congratulated New York's 60 teachers who completed the rigorous process in 2020.

“COVID-19 presented challenges like we've never seen, halting much of our lives,” said NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango. “Yet you demonstrated an unwavering commitment to your profession and a drive to achieve your goal. It's a



tremendous accomplishment.”

Education Commissioner Betty Rosa told the state's newest NBCTs she is amazed how they dedicated the hundreds of hours to the application process, while also navigating remote learning and the social-emotional challenges of COVID-19. “Your passion for your work and your students is at the core of everything you do,” she said.

Other speakers included Regents Chancellor Lester Young, Regent

Roger Tilles, Michelle Accardi of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and 2021 NYS Teacher of the Year Jennifer Wolfe, an NBCT herself.

New York is home to 2,179 National Board Certified Teachers who

have completed the voluntary performance-based assessment process that includes a portfolio, student work samples, videos and analysis of a candidate's teaching and student learning. Created by teachers, for teachers, National Board Certification is the nation's highest credential for the teaching profession.

Hundreds of districts have locally negotiated incentives recognizing National Board Certification such as

salary step increases, release time or a stipend for achievement. DiBrango said NYSUT also will continue supporting candidates with regional writing institutes and support groups through teacher centers.

Rosa noted the new state budget continues support for the state's Shanker grant, named in honor of the legendary union leader Albert Shanker, to help educators earn the credential. The grant defrays a candidate's \$1,900 fee for all four components — plus provides districts with up to \$500 per candidate for supportive services, such as hiring a substitute to cover classes during release time.

For more information on National Board Certification or to view the award ceremony, go to nysut.org/nbct.

'Grow Your Own' initiatives will address teacher shortage

By **Sylvia Saunders**

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Thanks to a major grant, NYSUT's Take a Look at Teaching initiative will be working with local unions around the state to build “Grow Your Own” programs that will help recruit and retain educators.

“Our goal is to inspire and support a new generation of diverse and talented people to join the education profession,” said NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango. “Grow Your Own programs are a wonderful way to develop aspiring educators who are strongly connected to the school and community.”

NYSUT's Grow Your Own initiative is a three-year project funded

with a \$675,000 grant from one of NYSUT's affiliates, the National Education Association. The NEA's Great Public Schools Fund provides grants to state and local affiliates with promising projects and ideas to help improve student success.

Research shows that successful GYO programs are rooted in strong partnerships between P-12, higher education and community organizations. NYSUT will work with local unions on a wide variety of GYO programs including future educator clubs and career exploration/immersion activities for middle and high school students. For educators, the project will pilot peer networking, mentoring by in-service members and retirees and professional development through NYSUT's Education

& Learning Trust.

NYSUT will also co-sponsor a variety of virtual and face-to-face events, workshops and meetings, and share resources on an updated website, takealookatteaching.org.

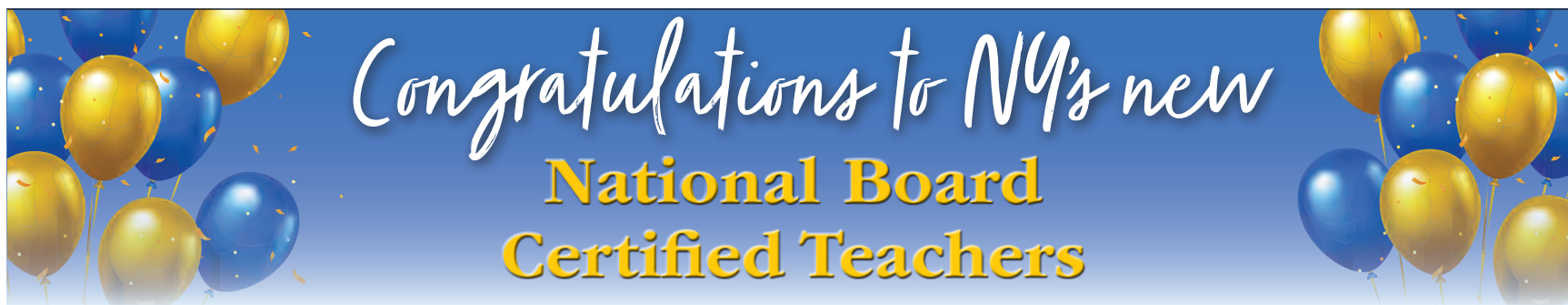


GYO programs address the need for more diversity in the teaching force by recruiting and supporting students of color, particularly males of color. GYO initiatives can also be crucial in rural communities, which are facing serious recruitment and retention challenges. The project will expand efforts to recruit and support

School-Related Professionals from within schools to become teachers.

The GYO project is a natural outgrowth of NYSUT's Take A Look at Teaching initiative, which began three years ago to address the teacher shortage and improve diversity in the educator workforce. The need for teachers is great, as New York is facing declining enrollment in teacher education programs, increased retirements and shortages in difficult-to-staff subject areas and districts.

As New York's student population has grown increasingly diverse, the teacher workforce remains 80 percent white. While students of color comprise 56 percent of total enrollment, teachers of color represent only 19 percent of the workforce.



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Key

- AYA:** Adolescence and Young Adulthood
- EA:** Early Adolescence
- EAYA:** Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood
- EC:** Early Childhood
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- EMC:** Early and Middle Childhood
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Mother-daughter duo find silver linings in pandemic teaching

By Sylvia Saunders
sylvia.saunders@nysut.org

When COVID-19 shut down school buildings last year, fourth-grade teacher Jennifer Austin couldn't imagine how remote learning would work.

"They said you can use this thing called Zoom," the 27-year veteran member of the Fillmore Central School Faculty Association recalled. "I had never even heard of it. I thought you just pressed a button and then you talked to people."

But when she walked into the living room where her daughter Lizzy — a first-year teacher at neighboring Belfast Central Schools — was zooming with her students, Jen was stunned. "She's there screen sharing, showing videos, playing interactive games — doing a lot more than talking into the camera," Jen recalled. "I said 'Whoa! Can you show me how to do that?'"

And for the rest of the school year, it turned out to be a blessing the two were trapped in the same house. "Sometimes I'd be struggling and my class would say, 'Go get Miss Austin,'" the proud mom said. "She was my secret weapon."

It was a perfect flip-flop from earlier in the year, as Lizzy leaned on her mom in September, October and November for classroom management tips and other tricks.

In a lucky twist, both teach fourth-grade in similar small-town Allegany County school districts. "No question, she really helped me," Lizzy said. "She had the experience and a lot of tools and strategies in her pocket."

"And when the pandemic hit,



PROVIDED
Fillmore FA's Jennifer Austin and her daughter Lizzy, a new teacher in neighboring Belfast, lean on each other as they adjust to pandemic teaching

Lizzy had the technology tools in her pocket," Jen added. "We became like co-teachers."

Looking back at the past year of teaching, both Jen and Lizzy feel like the pandemic will have positive long-lasting impacts on education.

"Now that they were forced to rely on technology, seasoned teachers like my mom — and kids for that matter — are now more comfortable and recognize all the benefits of technology," said Lizzy, a member of the Belfast Teachers Association. "It's also given me a lot of good ideas to help differentiate learning. I'm making more pre-recorded videos and trying out interactive games that the kids love to use."

Teaching in a pandemic also encouraged greater communication with parents and more teamwork among staff. "Delivering homework packets and working at weekly food

pantries, we built tremendous bonds with parents," Jen said.

"And the collaboration among teachers has been incredible," said Lizzy, who found herself texting college classmates and working with other teachers in her district. "I'm hopeful that attitude of helping each other out will continue."

Now that she's back in the classroom in a hybrid schedule, Jen noted the pandemic experience has inspired her to use her Smartboard in new ways. "I had a Smartboard for five years and basically used it to show videos and write on," Jen said. "Now I use it to Zoom with the virtual kids, play games and screen-share for instruction. I can show kids how to manipulate a protractor and measure angles."

"Obviously technology will never take over everything," Lizzy said. "I think the pandemic showed us the 1:1 personal connection is super-important."

"That was maybe the biggest lesson of the pandemic," Jen chimed in. It made the public — parents and students — realize how important teachers and human interaction are.

"If I had asked my fourth-graders last February, how they'd like to have a couple months off from school and learn from home — they would have screamed YES!" Lizzy said. "Now that we're back in person, they really appreciate it. There's a new mindset."

As they urge students to wear masks, use hand sanitizer and wipe down their desks, both Jen and Lizzy are amazed how seriously their fourth-graders follow the rules. "If I asked them now if they wanted to close down schools, they'd yell 'No way!'" Lizzy said. There's nothing cool about being back in quarantine.

**Peter's War:
A Boy's True
Story of
Survival in
World War II
Europe**



By Deborah
Durland DeSaix
and Karen Gray Ruelle

Recommended by: Marcia Biederman, retired ESL teacher, United Federation of Teachers

Suitable for: Grades 4–6

Why I chose this book: This is a true story about one boy's courage in the face of immeasurable danger as his family is on the run fleeing Hitler. It distills the nightmare of persecution during WWII into a personal story of resilience and empowerment.

What I like best: Peter is a real boy, close in age to his readers. He is flawed and compelling, and his attempts to come to terms with his world can help readers to do the same as they travel along with him on his journey to survive and to resist.

How teachers can use this book: First-person testimony of this kind provides a great way for students to understand history. Peter kept a diary and excerpts are included as part of this newly published book. Students can create their own diaries as they try to put themselves in Peter's situation. This book can be paired with the Shoah Foundation's online educational program, "One Man, Two Voices: Peter Feigl's Diary and Testimony," which includes video snippets of Peter as an adult.

About the authors: DeSaix and Ruelle have collaborated on other award-winning books about WWII, including *Hidden on the Mountain: Stories of Children Sheltered from the Nazis in Le Chambon* and *The Grand Mosque of Paris: A Story of How Muslims Rescued Jews During the Holocaust*. Their books have received the Sydney Taylor and ALA notable book awards.

"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.

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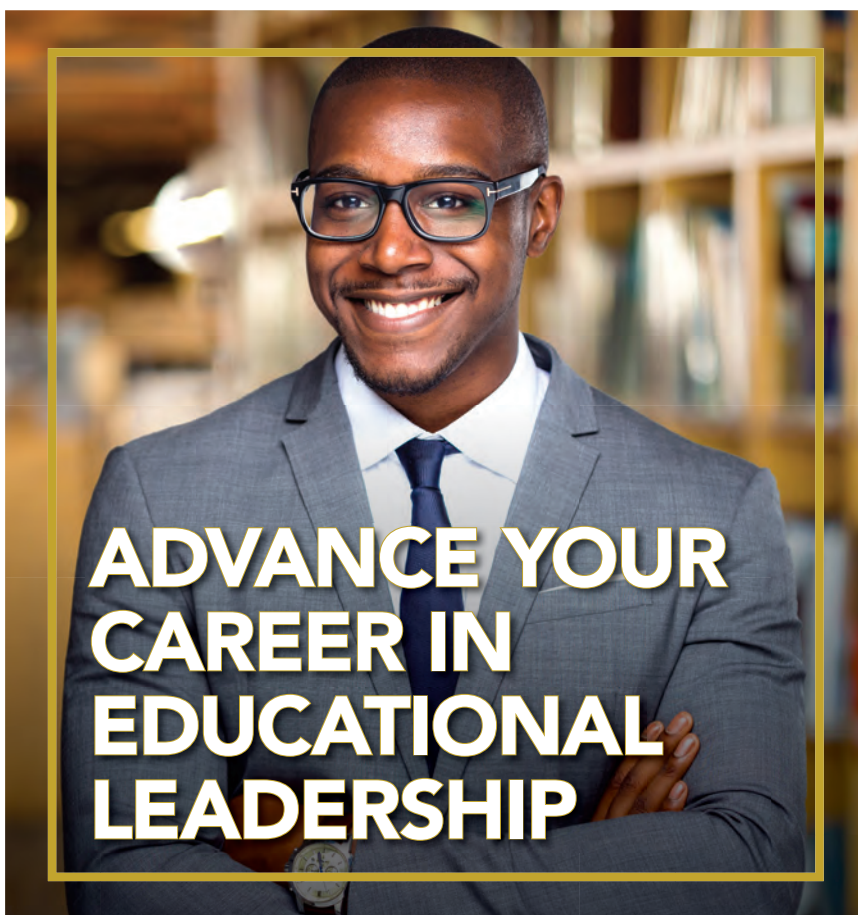


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Music educators keep the stage lights lit

By Kara Smith

kara.smith@nysut.org

The show must go on. For generations of thespians, these are words to live by. But for educators staging student performances, staying true to the adage was challenging this year. They struggled to fit auditions and rehearsals around hybrid and remote schedules, social distancing guidelines and quarantine disruptions. Despite it all, they found unique ways to keep school theater alive amidst a pandemic.

Marc Beja, a choir and theater teacher at Cold Spring Harbor Jr./Sr. High School in Suffolk County, wasn't sure the show would go on last summer since so many questions remained about the upcoming school year. "Originally we were hybrid so it seemed crazy to try and cast a show with half the kids in and half the kids out," he said.

Successfully videoing, editing and selling tickets for an online-streamed production of the radio play "War of the Worlds" over the Halloween weekend bolstered his confidence. To meet social distancing requirements, the Cold Spring Harbor TA member used FlipGrid for student auditions, Zoom for rehearsals and brushed up on his videography skills, using a district room with a green screen wall and inexpensive green tablecloths as theater flats. "I brought in two kids at a time and did takes against the tablecloths and wider shots in the studio," he said. "I could make it look like we had several kids in the room together."

Beja is now using that experience to produce "High School Musical Jr." at the junior high school. "Everyone is working hard to make these theatrical

experiences with students," he said. "We're all finding something that works for our community."

At W. Tresper Clarke High School, Nassau County, Gregory Krajci, East Meadow TA, never doubted he and his students would put on a show. The question was how. "We normally do our high school musical in February but we pushed things to mid-April," said Krajci, an orchestra teacher and choreographer.

For rehearsals of "Little Shop of Horrors," students were masked at all times and used socially distanced blocking and choreography. All principle roles were understudied in

case of quarantining. Krajci purchased mask bracket inserts to help students sing more easily. After the state department of health issued guidance allowing students to be six, versus 12, feet apart while singing, Krajci staged two, limited capacity, in-person performances and streamed a pre-recorded dress rehearsal. "I'm really proud of the kids," he said. "They all came together to put on a pretty great show."

At Locust Valley High School, Nassau County, a district parent and stage crew students built an outdoor set, complete with a 7-foot crypt, for rehearsals and filming of its videoed production of "The Addams Family," said Allison Hungate Wood, a vocal music teacher. "We filmed the large

ensemble numbers outdoors," she said explaining that the production features a sizable cast of ghostly Addams ancestors who rise from the crypt. The students "had a blast" deciding what deceased ancestor to portray, including a ballerina, disco person and Victorian ladies.

Cast members filmed their personal audio tracks at home and a videographer edited the pieces together. Hungate Wood, of the Locust Valley School Employees Association, hopes to show the finished product in a drive-in format. "I wanted to give kids the sense of community that comes from being in a musical even though they have to be socially distant," she said. "Years from now it's not the songs they'll remember, but the sense of belonging."

Educators across the state are finding safe ways to host choir and theater performances. Below, students from Locust Valley High School, supported by vocal music teacher Allison Hungate Wood, stage a pandemic-safe production of "The Addams Family."



NYSUT pushing for increased mental health services

By Liza Frenette
liza.frenette@nysut.org

Elementary school social worker Adrienne Cohan has been seeing a rise in anxiety and a lack of students being able to emotionally regulate. Over the last five years, she’s witnessed an increase in young students displaying more crying, more anger and even physical aggression, she said. More students are entering kindergarten with short attention spans and a lack of social skills.

And now — after more than a year of online everything — there will be more challenges in getting students acclimated to a return to school.

NYSUT continues its hard push to increase mental health services in schools. Proposed state legislation

(S. 1969/A. 5019) would ensure that all elementary, intermediate, middle, junior and senior high schools in New York have a full-time licensed social worker and a full-time certified school psychologist on staff. A second bill (S. 831) would require a school guidance counselor in each school.

“It’s so important to have that team at every level. It’s powerful when you put all our trainings together,” said Cohan, a member of the Starpoint Teachers Association and NYSUT’s Health and Safety Committee. “There should be a multidisciplinary team in every building.”

Cohan noted students will need to build their mental and emotional stamina to come back. Some families have been deeply affected by job loss and the deaths of loved ones or neighbors from COVID-19. Routines

have been upended, and in-person contact has been limited.

As a social worker, Cohan works with students and their families. Together with a school counselor, she visits elementary classes for eight weeks at a time to help students learn social-emotional signs and tools.

“We teach them how to identify and express feelings,” she said. “Having mental health professionals in schools is crucial for the students, their families and the surrounding community.”

Rayna Shapiro, Edgemont TA, has worked as a school psychologist for 23 years, consulting with individual students, groups, and with parents and faculty. She conducts screenings and evaluations focusing on cognitive, academic and social-emotional strengths and needs. She sets up

behavior plans and liaisons with outside mental health professionals.

“We do whole school social-emotional interventions,” Shapiro said. “It’s destigmatized if you’re known.”

In many districts, however, there are not enough clinical staff even in normal times, she said. The National Association of School Psychologists recommends one psychologist for every 500 students.

“For many kids, the social isolation has really been a struggle,” she said. “Some are not showing up for remote or hybrid.”

Of further concern is racial and economic inequities that exist in health care and educational practices, which COVID-19 has further exposed.



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“Quotable”



Liz Shuler

It shouldn't take an act of courage to join a union. But how @BAmazonUnion workers stood up to Amazon intimidation was courageous. It was historical. We're with @RWDSU as they challenge those illegal union-busting tactics. This isn't the end, instead a powerful beginning. #1u (@lizshuler)

Kurt Hassenpflug, NBCT

There have been more than 240 school shootings since Columbine. I was in middle school. I still remember my first lockdown drill. That was almost 23 years ago And what has changed? (@KVFlug)

Janella Hinds

Patriarchy is a labor issue. Racism is a labor issue. Transphobia is a labor issue. Anti-immigration policy is a labor issue. Sexism is a labor issue. Grateful for tonight's conversation with women leaders of @CentralLaborNYC. More to come. #solidarity #UnionStrong (@JanellaTHinds)

Dwayne Reed

Don't be that White teacher in shock when another Black life is taken away, yet completely oblivious to how you might be killing the spirit of the Black children in your classroom. (@TeachMrReed)

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QUESTIONS FOR...

Tracey Jimenez

Trumansburg Support Staff Association

1. The Trumansburg Support Staff Association is one of NYSUT's newest locals. What inspired your team to organize?

We've had an unofficial support staff union for many years. But we've talked about officially joining a union for a while, even while we were working on our most recent contract. When the pandemic hit, negotiations got 100 times harder and we realized how vulnerable we were.

At our last meeting, administration just stopped negotiating with us and handed us an agreement to sign. They wanted us to pay the same health insurance rates as teachers and administrators. Since most support staff earn around \$13 an hour, it was too expensive. Many of us would have brought home less.

At first they offered us a living wage increase, but as the pandemic progressed, they said they couldn't even offer us that. We couldn't take that back to our members.

2. How did you start organizing?

I'm part of an organizing team — elementary school secretary Darla Sielaff; bus driver Ginger Mosher; high school administrative assistant Deanna Crance; middle school administrative assistant Brenda Everhart; and myself, an elementary information aide.

Deanna started investigating union options and she eventually called Tom Drumm, a NYSUT organizer. We also spoke

with Ryan Radley, president of the Trumansburg Teachers Association. He was very supportive, and provided us with helpful information.

3. Who are the members of the Trumansburg SSA?

We're a unit of around 90 bus drivers, cafeteria workers, transportation workers, information and support aides, clerical staff and grounds, maintenance and operations professionals. Most of us have more than 10 years with the district, some nearly 20. Many of us moved back to be closer to family, or we stayed here because we love the community.

We come in on weekends. We help teachers after hours. We are an integral part of the fabric of the district. We deserve to be recognized.

4. What are your goals for your first contract?

I work with amazing people: teaching assistants who fill in for all those moments a teacher can't

be there, bus drivers who build relationships with kids and the parents who trust them with their babies, and a cafeteria staff who went from zero to 60 when the pandemic hit. I want them to be paid what they deserve. That's my biggest wish.

I want the people retiring, or considering retirement, to have better health care. We can do better for them; they've dedicated their careers to the district.

Job training is also important. We often aren't a priority.

5. When it comes to this effort, what are you proudest of?

I'm proud of the people who came out to vote and I'm glad that NYSUT was there for us. More than 80 percent of our unit voted and a good portion of us were clearly in support. It's nice to have someone guiding us so we can better help our members. For instance, three days after we affiliated, we had an issue with administrators and Tim O'Brien, the NYSUT Southern Tier Regional Office staff director, came and helped us out.

I think about all the people who don't have a union, and all the workers trying to organize. They're using their voice to protect themselves. It's something that every American worker should have access to.

From left, Deanna Crance, Trumansburg Support Staff Association co-president, and Tracey Jimenez.



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Elizabeth Irwin | Dec. 8, 2020
Rhinebeck Teachers Association

John Long | May 20, 2020
Port Jefferson Station Teachers Association

Allan A. McDougall | Jan. 27, 2021
Carle Place Teachers Association

Vincenetta O'Donnell | Jan. 18, 2021
Holland Teachers Association

Ntina Paleos-Stemas | Jan. 30, 2021
Hewlett Woodmere Faculty Association

William Purdy | April 7, 2020
Carle Place Teachers Association

Joyce Rosenzweig | Oct. 6, 2020
United Federation of Teachers

Flavia Ruffini | Jan. 9, 2021
United Federation of Teachers

Josephine Sopis | Sept. 13, 2020
Scarsdale Teachers Association

Philip Dello Stritto Jr. | Feb. 23, 2021
Retiree Council 7

Patricia Waelder | March 3, 2021
Onondaga CC Federation of Teachers and Administrators

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

[RESOURCES FOR YOU]

Eric J. Iberger appointed to NYSTRS Board

Math teacher Eric J. Iberger was appointed as a teacher-member on the New York State Teachers' Retirement System Board of Directors. He will fill the remainder of the term vacated by NYSUT Second Vice President Ron Gross, who stepped down at the end of January. Named to the post by State Education Commissioner Betty Rosa, Iberger will be eligible for election to a full three-year term at the TRS annual delegates meeting in November.

Iberger, president of the Bayport-Blue



Point Teachers Association on Long Island since 2013, is vice chairperson of NYSUT's Pension & Retirement Committee and has been a committee member since 2014.

He is a graduate of St. Joseph's College and SUNY Stony Brook and has taught mathematics at Bayport-Blue Point High School since 1996. Iberger served as the district's grade 9-12 mathematics teacher-in-charge, and as the grade 6-12 mathematics department chairperson from 2004-13.

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May 21-23

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nysut.org/healthandsafety

Held Virtually | Open to All NYSUT Members

In Memoriam

Please visit our memorial honoring those members who died due to the coronavirus pandemic at nysut.org/memorial.

Preparing for retirement? Member Benefits can help

The stressful transition from active work to retirement could be made easier if you plan ahead and take a few steps in advance. If you are enrolled in NYSUT Member Benefits-endorsed programs and are interested in continuing that participation, you will need to maintain your NYSUT membership as a retiree. This can be accomplished in one of two ways:

1. Continue membership within your local if retiree membership is offered. If your local maintains retiree membership requirements, you must comply with these requirements to continue your membership in NYSUT and our national affiliate American Federation of Teachers.

2. Continue as an at-large member of NYSUT through the retiree council in your region. Contact your local to ensure you have been reported as retired, and that your dues code has been changed to "3" or "retired" either on the membership report sent to NYSUT or through the membership tool available on nysut.org. This will provide you with membership in the retiree council in your region along with NYSUT and the AFT.

Retiree membership is not automatic for National Education Association; you may choose to join this national affiliate as a lifetime retiree for a one-time fee of \$300.

At this time, as a current NYSUT member or retiree participating in NEA Member Benefits, you do not need to purchase retiree membership with NEA. For information about joining NEA National and/or an enrollment form, contact NYSUT Retiree Services at 800-342-9810.

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

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

United Federation of Teachers members:
212-598-6855.

United University Professions members:
800-342-4206.

Professional Staff Congress/CUNY members:
212-354-1252.

All other NYSUT members: 800-342-9810.

Contact the NYSUT Retiree Services Consultant serving your region if you have questions about

maintaining NYSUT membership or would like further information about NYSUT retiree programs:

- **Buffalo area** (RC 1-3, 44): Tracy Beatty, 716-634-7132
- **Jamestown area** (RC 4, 46): Louise Ortman, 716-664-7425
- **Rochester area** (RC 5-6): Peter Randazzo, 585-454-5550
- **Syracuse/Utica area** (RC 7-8): Anne Marie Voutsinas, 315-431-4040
- **North Country/Capital District** (RC 9-10): Ruth Shippee, 518-825-0730
- **Southern Tier** (RC 11, 45): Mark Padgett, 607-786-5742
- **Greater Capital District/Mid-Hudson area** (RC 12-13): Jennifer Shaad-Derby, 518-783-7977
- **Orange, Rockland, Putnam and Westchester counties** (RC 14-16): Ellen Pincus, 914-592-4411
- **Nassau region** (RC 17-19): Claire Zatorski, 516-496-2035
- **Suffolk region** (RC 20-23): Joan Perrini, 631-273-8822
- **Florida** (RC 43): Judith Kalb, 561-994-4929, ext. 129

Payroll to pension deduction

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

1. Contact Member Benefits at 800-626-8101 when you have your definite retirement date. Subsequently, Member Benefits will communicate that information to each plan administrator of programs you participate in.

2. Call each plan administrator of programs you participate in to verify your mailing address so you can be billed at home once payroll deductions stop. Member Benefits can provide you with contact information for plan administrators if needed.

3. If you do not receive a bill for each program you had on payroll deduction, contact the applicable program administrator to verify a bill was mailed to your correct address. All discounts provided through payroll deduction will continue for up to one year with direct billing; pension



deduction offers the same discounts as payroll deduction.

4. Make sure to pay each bill you receive. You must be on home billing for at least one billing cycle so your pension system has time to put your permanent monthly pension benefit in place. Even though

you may be receiving a monthly pension benefit, this does not mean your permanent benefit has been finalized. Deductions can only be taken from the permanent benefit; this can take up to six months.

Please Note: You must be receiving your permanent monthly pension benefit from the New York State Teachers' Retirement System, New York City Teachers' Retirement System, New York State Employees' Retirement System, New York City Board of Education Retirement System, or receive income from a monthly lifetime annuity from TIAA to be eligible for pension deduction of Member Benefits-endorsed programs.

5. When you receive the bill for the next premium, it should include a Pension Deduction Authorization Card. Complete and sign the card and send it back with the bill to the plan administrator in lieu of payment. Contact Member Benefits if you do not receive a Pension Deduction Authorization Card with your second bill.

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

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

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

SUMMARY ANNUAL REPORT FOR NEW YORK STATE UNITED TEACHERS

MEMBER BENEFITS TRUST

This is a summary of the annual report of the New York State United Teachers Member Benefits Trust, EIN 22-2480854, Plan No. 503 for the period Sept. 1, 2019 through Aug. 31, 2020. The annual report has been filed with the Employee Benefits Security Administration, as required under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA).

The Board of Trustees of 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 Aug. 31, 2020 were \$70,940,683.

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 Aug. 31, 2020, the premiums paid under such “experience-rated” contracts were \$51,671,454 and the total of all benefit claims paid under these experience-rated contracts during the plan year was \$16,396,355.

Basic financial statement

The value of plan assets, after subtracting liabilities of the plan, was \$46,018,334 as of Aug. 31, 2020, compared to

\$37,069,386 as of Sept. 1, 2019. During the plan year, the plan experienced an increase in its net assets of \$8,948,948. This increase includes unrealized appreciation and depreciation in the value of plan assets; that is, the difference between the value of the plan’s assets at the end of the year and the value of the assets at the beginning of the year or the cost of assets acquired during the year. During the plan year, the plan had total income of \$17,694,111 including employee contributions of \$4,307,321, realized gains of \$74,138 from the sale of assets, earnings from investments of \$5,268,574, and other income of \$8,044,078. Plan expenses were \$8,745,163. These expenses included \$5,474,196 in administrative expenses and \$3,270,967 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 S. Hartnett, who is 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 \$0.15 per page for any part thereof.

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

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

Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20210.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (Pub. L. 104-13) (PRA), no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless such collection displays a valid Office of Management and Budget (OMB) control number. The Department notes that a Federal agency cannot conduct or sponsor a collection of information unless it is approved by OMB under the PRA, and displays a currently valid OMB control number, and the public is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. See 44 U.S.C. 3507. Also, notwithstanding any other provisions of law, no person shall be subject to penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if the collection of information does not display a currently valid OMB control number. See 44 U.S.C. 3512.

The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average less than one minute per notice (approximately 3 hours and 11 minutes per plan). Interested parties are encouraged to send comments regarding the burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of the Chief Information Officer, Attention: Departmental Clearance Officer, 200 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Room N-1301, Washington, DC 20210 or email DOL_PRA_PUBLIC@dol.gov and reference the OMB Control Number 1210-0040.

NYSUT Member Benefits Trust Summary of Material Modifications and Notice to Participants

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

Dated: March 2021

SPECIAL COVID-19 RELATED SUMMARY OF MATERIAL MODIFICATIONS RELATING TO THE EXERCISE OF CERTAIN PARTICIPANT RIGHTS UNDER THE NYSUT MEMBER BENEFITS TRUST

This special COVID-19 related Summary of Material Modifications (“SMM”) relates to your benefit rights under the NYSUT Member Benefits Trust (the “Plan” or “MBT”). This SMM amends the Special Enrollment Rights and COBRA Continuation Coverage sections of the MBT Summary Plan Description (“SPD”), published in March 2021, to

reflect guidance that was recently issued by the U.S. Department of Labor Employee Benefits Security Administration (“EBSA”) in EBSA Disaster Relief Notice 2021-1 (the “Notice”). This new guidance may extend the time you have to exercise your COBRA, special enrollment, and claims and appeals rights under certain MBT-endorsed Benefit Programs. **Please read this SMM carefully and keep it with your SPD.**

Beginning March 1, 2020, any participant deadlines that relate to the exercise of your COBRA, HIPAA special enrollment, or claims and appeals rights that fall during the “COVID-19 Outbreak Period” (March 1, 2020 until 60 days after the announced end of the COVID-19 National Emergency)

will be suspended until the earlier of: (a) one year from the applicable deadline; or (b) the end of the COVID-19 Outbreak Period. This means that every time a participant has a COBRA, special enrollment, or claims and appeals deadline that occurs on or after March 1, 2020, that deadline will be suspended for up to one year, as long as the COVID-19 Outbreak Period continues. The Notice provides the following examples to help explain this relief:

Example 1: If a participant would have been required to make a COBRA election by March 1, 2020, the Notice delays that requirement until February 28, 2021, which is the earlier of one year from March 1, 2020 or the end of the COVID-19 Outbreak

Period (which remains ongoing).

Example 2: If a participant would have been required to make a COBRA election by March 1, 2021, the Notice delays that election requirement until the earlier of one year from that date (March 1, 2022) or the end of the COVID-19 Outbreak Period.

If you have any questions about how these changes may affect the exercise of your COBRA, special enrollment, or claims and appeals rights, please contact the applicable Benefit Provider directly.

Sincerely,

Board of Trustees

NYSUT Member Benefits Trust

Death benefits

As a member of the New York State and Local Employees' Retirement System (ERS), you may be eligible to provide your beneficiaries with a death benefit depending on your years of service, your retirement plan and whether you are retired or still in active service.



Death Benefits for Retirees

If you retire within one year of leaving public employment, at your death, your beneficiaries may be able to receive a one-time, lump sum payment as a post-retirement death benefit.

If you die within the first year of retirement, the post-retirement death benefit is 50 percent of your ordinary death benefit. If you die within the second year of retirement, it is 25 percent of your ordinary death benefit. If you die after your second year of retirement, the benefit will be 10 percent of what would have been payable if you had died in the first year of retirement, or at age 60, whichever was earlier.

For more information, visit our Death Benefits page for retirees at osc.state.ny.us/retirement/retirees/death-benefits.

Beneficiary Changes

You can view or change your death benefit beneficiaries using Retirement Online. Sign in at web.osc.state.ny.us/retire/sign-in.php.

Death Benefits for Active Service Members

If you die while in active service and have at least one year of service credit (and your death is not the result of an on-the-job accident), your beneficiaries may be entitled to an ordinary death benefit. For members with at least three years of service credit, the benefit will equal three times your last year's salary. There may be limitations based on your age when you die, and certain earnings limitations may also apply.

If your death is the result of an on-the-job accident, an accidental death benefit may be available to your spouse or certain other beneficiaries as specified by law. The accidental death benefit is payable as a monthly pension, and for most members is equal to 50 percent of your wages during your last year of actual service.

For more information, visit our Death Benefits page for members at osc.state.ny.us/retirement/members/death-benefits.

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.

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



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

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
trudi.davis@nysut.org

Patti Lennon • 516-496-2035, ext. 324
patti.lennon@nysut.org

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

Spring into retirement

Q: I'm planning to retire at the end of the 2020-21 school year. What steps should I take this spring to prepare?

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

- The filing period for a July 1 retirement begins April 2. File online through MyNYSTRS (age 55+) or submit a paper application (RET-54). You can file your application for retirement up to 90 days prior to your effective date of retirement, or as late as the date of retirement.
- Monitor pending New York state legislation — new laws, such as statewide retirement incentives, could affect your NYSTRS benefits. Visit nysut.org for updates.
- We recommend filing for retirement at least 30 days before your retirement date to avoid retirement payroll delays. At that time, you



must indicate your choice of either the maximum benefit or an option. To learn more about these options, contact a NYSTRS representative at 800-348-7298, ext. 6250.

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

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

Because this is such an important and ultimately unalterable decision, we strongly advise scheduling an individual benefit consultation, over the phone or via video, with NYSTRS before making a selection. You can book a consultation via MyNYSTRS, or by calling 800-348-7298, ext. 6100.

NYSUT TRS consultants

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

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

Sheila Sullivan Buck • 585-454-5550
sheila.buck@nysut.org

Beth Chetney • 315-431-4040
beth.chetney@nysut.org

Eric Iberger • 518-376-4333
eric.iberger@nysut.org



Did you know?

This year marks the New York State Teachers' Retirement System's 100th anniversary. It began operating on Aug. 1, 1921.



Brentwood Teachers Association

The Brentwood TA is blending the needs of businesses with those of students by supporting hometown restaurants, bakeries and delis this year for its annual effort to raise scholarship money. All prizes this year will be gift certificates to local businesses — most of whom have been hurt by the pandemic.

BTA President Kevin Coyne said the raffle will raise \$10,000 for scholarships, helping seniors heading off to college. The BTA has been raising scholarship money for years, initially with a longtime, after-school dance program, and then by raffling off big-ticket items. The local switched this year to gift certificates to local businesses.

"We want to support our local main streets. We also want to put the face of the teacher's union out in the community," Coyne said.

East Greenbush Teachers Association

The East Greenbush TA raised \$1,200 to provide breakfast and lunch to frontline workers, volunteers and National Guard personnel at the SUNY Albany COVID-19 testing and vaccination site.

The effort supported Route 4 Pizza, a local business that cooked 32 pizzas. Thanks to an unexpected donation of coffee and donuts from Dunkin', the EGTA was able to donate \$250 to the district-run Food for Families program and \$250 to the Nassau Resource Center food pantry. EGTA member Pete Zilgme generated the idea to thank vaccination workers, and members Kristen Landers Zilgme and Stephen Lapolla helped with the deliveries. The EGTA is led by Drew Romanowski.



A member of the New York National Guard receives breakfast and lunch donations from the East Greenbush TA. The local thanked those on the front lines of the COVID-19 vaccination and testing efforts for their hard work.

Half Hollow Hills Teachers Association

The Half Hollow Hills TA, led by Richard Haase, combines member wellness with community support. The local hosts a monthly wellness challenge and fundraiser.

For April, the wellness theme was "Movement." The local hosted a walkathon and encouraged donations to support General Needs Ltd., a local organization serving homeless veterans. With every \$25 donation that the union collected, the local was able to purchase a pair of

boots for a veteran in need. The local's goal was to raise enough to purchase 50 pairs of boots.

The event also offered a healthy bit of competition. All participants received an HHHTA gift and were entered into a raffle for a special basket. The local shared member photos to its HHHTA Facebook page.



Mid-Hudson locals "sock it" to COVID-19

A large group of NYSUT local unions worked together to "Sock It to COVID" by collecting socks for homeless shelters and agencies serving people in need. The early spring campaign generated 7,500 pairs of socks that were delivered to a half dozen organizations in the region.

NYSUT's Mid-Hudson Regional Office coordinated the campaign after determining that socks are the most requested item by homeless shelters. Participants in the sock drive included Rondout Valley Federation of Teachers and School-Related Professionals, Wappingers Congress of Teachers, Onteora TA and Onteora Non-Teaching Employees Association, ED 13, Red Hook Retirees, Germantown TA and Germantown Support Association, Tri-Valley TA, Dutchess County BOCES Faculty Association, Hyde Park United EA, Marlboro FA and Marlboro retirees.



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



In print

Christine Jacobson, Middletown Teachers Association retiree, has published *Dancing Around the Truth*, a memoir about her DNA testing surprise. Available at [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

John Loss, Orleans-Niagara BOCES TA, has published ... *Not Always Homeless: A Christian Approach to Helping the Homeless*. The book, available at [powells.com](https://www.powells.com), tells the stories of 13 formerly homeless people.

David Ossont, Oneida TA retiree, and **David Dampf**, Oneida TA, have published *The Ghosts of Saratoga*, a young adult novel chronicling the Battle of Saratoga. The book is available at [sunburypress.com](https://www.sunburypress.com).

Carol Oxman, United Federation of Teachers retiree, has published *Because Mommy Always Comes Back*. The children's book addresses separation anxiety and is available at GPHoneytomes@yahoo.com.

Andy Rose, UFT retiree, has published two books featuring school teachers as rescuing heroes. *Lily's Payback* and *Lessons to Die For* are available at [andyroseauthor.com](https://www.andyroseauthor.com).

Steve Schockow, West Irondequoit TA, has published *Thirty Days of Presidents*, sharing little-known events in the lives of U.S. presidents. Available at [indiebound.org](https://www.indiebound.org).

Irene Willis, Rye Neck TA retiree, has published *Green Dialogue: Poems and What They Bring: The Poetry of Migration and Immigration*. Both are available at [ipbooks.net](https://www.ipbooks.net).

"Kudos!" recognizes the accomplishments of NYSUT members. Have good news you'd like to share? Email united@nysut.org; include "Kudos!" in the subject line.

Advance your career

With NYSUT ELT:

- collaborate with fellow educators across New York state — online or remote!
<https://elt.nysut.org/register/courses>
- learn research-based, classroom-tested methods in our seminars and/or graduate courses; and
- meet certification requirements. Your choice. Your professional learning.



Register:

<http://elt.nysut.org> • 800.528.6208

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



NYSUT United | May/June 2021

1220M

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

On the road of life, the right choice can make a big difference

No matter where you are on your journey, NYSUT Member Benefits has programs & services that could make the trip a little easier.



- Get guidance on student and general debt
- Plan for the future by exploring the Financial Learning Center
- Save with our discount programs
- Protect your assets by purchasing important insurance coverage

Check out all your union membership has to offer!



Scan Me

Scan the QR code to get started,
visit memberbenefits.nysut.org or call 800-626-8101.

