

SRP's united to win good contracts

Delegates to the 2008 NYSUT Representative Assembly voted unanimously to launch living wage efforts. Here is a recent interview with NYSUT Vice President Kathleen Donahue on this initiative.

Q: We know that NYSUT has an SRP/ESP living wage campaign in the works. What brought this about?

Donahue: We are committed to the fight for strong SRP contracts, wages, and benefits for the long haul. Our SRPs are in locals across the state, from the eastern beach towns of Long Island to the schools of urban Buffalo. As I am sure happens in many states, those SRPs who live in the most expensive areas often have the lowest wages! Those situations—and many others needing our attention—are being looked at closely.

Q: NYSUT Representative Assembly delegates unanimously adopted a resolution committing to, among other things, provide “training for staff and locals to secure a living wage” for SRPs and help SRP locals “bring living wage resolutions forward for consideration by their school boards.” There wasn’t any controversy over this measure?

Donahue: Unanimous passage of this resolution was a reflection of the support SRPs feel from their colleagues. It also shows SRPs’ increased ability inside our union to organize to help shape union policy. Our members believe in equity and fairness for all workers, and embrace social justice as one of the frameworks around which we build our actions.

Q: How does NYSUT intend to implement the living wage resolution?

Donahue: We have an internal task force that is looking at the best ways to turn this resolution into action, and we are encouraging active and member-driven campaigns as the best way to win strong contracts for members—in all our local unions. Using that philosophy, we want to have quality contract campaigns going across the state. Those with the most potential for success may become living wage campaigns. When locals tell us they are ready to take the step to commit to a long-term drive, we will work with their leaders and staff to ensure they have the resources they need for a quality campaign.

Q: NEA has provided training and materials for your living wage drive. Has that helped—and what’s the best role for a national affiliate to play in a salary campaign?

Donahue: This has been a great example of teamwork and cooperation. NEA staff — including our former Ithaca SRP local leader, Debbie Minnick—have been tremendous resources for this effort. The experience that NEA brings to the table, from assisting these campaigns in many schools and states, really helps us understand what works in salary fights, whether it’s an SRP, teacher, community college, or health care local.

Q: You mentioned the Ithaca SRP/ESP local. In an historic living wage campaign in 2001-02, Ithaca paraeducators, with broad community and labor support, won a 50 percent

raise in the starting salary over a three-year contract, without takebacks. What lessons did NYSUT draw from this campaign?

Donahue: Ithaca showed that a contract campaign that has an active and involved membership, widespread community and labor support, and a good dose of tactical common sense can do great things. The lesson to learn from Ithaca: When locals use a broad range of tactics and supporters they can create the possibility of winning a strong contract. It’s an important lesson for every kind of local.

Q: How is the “spirit of Ithaca” alive today in other SRP contract battles? Can you offer a recent example of a NYSUT local using living-wage style tactics?

Donahue: We recently wrote about a good SRP contract campaign in a NYSUT *New York Teacher* cover story. Our members in the Vestal school district, an affluent suburb of Binghamton, are working together for a just contract. These aides and monitors have done a lot of community outreach. They point out the support they feel from the parents and teachers, and their profound disappointment with how they are treated by the administration. Like every SRP local union, they make a compelling case—those schools could not run without them and they deserve a fair shake.

Q: How would the experience of a well-planned SRP living wage campaign—based on strong local leadership, member engagement, and community outreach—also benefit other NYSUT members, from pre-K-12 teachers to higher education faculty?

Donahue: Those factors that make us successful on the SRP local level are also important in every local and regional effort we take on. No union can succeed alone; we do our best work in the company of allies, working on a common agenda. That’s why we’ll continue our role in strengthening coalitions on a variety of issues important to our members.

Q: How serious is NYSUT about keeping the living wage issue alive over the long term?

Donahue: As educators, we know that learning is a vibrant, ongoing process. We see that going down the road of fighting for living wages is the start of a journey that has economic justice for all our members as its goal. This has become a priority for our union and we will bring our resources to help our local unions win these fights. We’re in this for the long haul.

Q: But is talk about living wage/salary campaigns even relevant right now?

Donahue: It’s clear that working families and their unions are about to enter hard economic times. States across the country are saying that revenues are drying up as the financial industry sputters. But even in tough times, we have the right and obligation to fight for what’s right for our members, schools, and communities. The labor movement has to be a strong voice for working people, through good times and bad.

SRP NewsLink

A NEWSLETTER FOR NYSUT'S SCHOOL-RELATED PROFESSIONALS LOCAL LEADERS

WINTER 2008

www.nysut.org

VOL. 7, NO. 2

SRP Recognition Day, a big success!

The Tarrytown regional office SRP Recognition Day celebration on the evening of November 18th was a huge success. Over 70 people came for a glass of cheer and hors d'oeuvres.

Maria Barone and Joan O'Neil, co-chapter presidents of the SRP chapter of the Briarcliff TA and teacher aide Ginny Fitzgerald enjoyed the festive time shared with other SRPs from their region. Marie spoke of the bagel breakfast that the principal and assistant principal held for the SRPs at the HS and MS. The social committee gave a rose corsage to all and the principal gave a morning address on the loudspeaker thanking the support staff for all they do for the children. Briarcliff superintendent Dr. Frances Wills sent an email letter to the faculty and staff saluting the support professionals for their work in meeting the education goals for all the students. “Our support staff are critical players in the creation of a positive school climate, in reinforcing classroom lessons, and providing the resources that allow teachers to focus on instruction. We are grateful for their commitment and dedication.” Joan O'Neil works as an aide

in a first grade classroom. The children all made cards for her to show how important she is to them. “They said that they love me and that I am the best aide and thank you for working with me. I've never seen the word ‘appreciation’ spelled so many different ways!” Maria, Ginny and Joan all agreed that the evening at the Tarrytown RO sponsored by Marc Laffer, regional staff director, and many staff members was the perfect ending to a wonderful day.

Debbie DePalma from the Monroe Woodbury TA and Carol Herb of the Monroe Woodbury EA gave each union member a flyer with the NYSUT sticker and a scratch-off lottery ticket. “Hey, ya never know!” said Mary Ellen DeRosa also from the EA. Also, each building principal made a special announcement thanking the SRPs for their work and dedication.

Other celebrations include a teacher-sponsored breakfast for the Carmel SRPs... At St. Dominic's, the principal and union threw a joint luncheon for their SRPs... Arlevia DeLoach reports that SRP Recognition Day was a big thing around the P.S. 9 Building in NYC.

Thanks to Principal Sandra D'Avilar and the UFT Chapter Leader, there was food for everyone...Also from the UFT, Hector Ruiz reports that between 400 and 500 paraprofessionals and secretaries had a fantastic time at their special event in honor of recognition day...Paulette Quick, president of the Windsor Association of Office Personnel and School Aides, reports that her 74 members arrived at work to find a wonderful letter of thanks waiting for them. They also received a scented candle, crystal apple pins and mugs. Best were the home-made goodies provided to them by their co-workers. Paulette says, “Although we don't make a lot of money at our



Briarcliff SRP leaders Maria Barone, Joan O'Neil and Ginny Fitzgerald celebrate Recognition Day.

day”...Rick Comfort, the president of the Watkins Glen Faculty Association reports that his association worked together with the PTA and superintendent in putting together a joint celebration for their support staffers. Together, they put out a letter of thanks and provided a cider and donut celebration for all...The Nyack TA reports that a breakfast was provided in each building including the

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A Union of Professionals

Representing more than 600,000 professionals in education and health care
For more, see www.nysut.org.

IMPORTANT DATES

Check the NYSUT Web site for details of these events.

National School Breakfast Week

March 2-6, 2009

Health & Safety Conference

March 6-7, 2009, Saratoga Springs

NEA ESP Conference

March 13-15, 2009, Orlando

AFT PSRP Conference

March 19-22, 2009, Baltimore

Committee of 100

March 23-24, 2009, Desmond, Albany

NYSUT Local Presidents Conference

April 1-2, 2009, Buffalo

NYSUT Representative Assembly

April 2-4, 2009, Buffalo

National Administrative Professionals Day

April 22, 2009

Health Care Forum

May 2, 2009, Albany

SRPNewsLink

SRP NewsLink is a newsletter published periodically for New York State United Teachers' School-Related Professionals leaders. NYSUT locals and staff have permission to reprint all NewsLink content.

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administration building with invitations sent to every SRP...Mimi Koonz of New Paltz reports that more teachers and administrators wore the "NYSUT Proud" stickers than ever before and the teachers gave the SRPs delicious chocolate. The superintendent gave the support staffers a letter of thanks for all they do...In Sachem, the SRPs received a cool lapel pin that says, "Together we create a better tomorrow" as a way to say thank you for all their dedication...New Hartford had breakfast for the SRPs provided

by the district and a buffet dinner hosted by the PTA Council at the HS cafeteria. Robert Nole, the superintendent gave awards to the SRPs with 5,10,15,25, and 30 years of service with the school district...New Rochelle FUSE hosted a lovely party at a local restaurant for all their SRPs. 150 SRP members enjoyed food and cheer on their special day...In Mohawk, the union provided bagels and coffee and the teachers in Whitesboro showed their appreciation with bagels too.

ELT workshops for SRPs

NYSUT's Education & Learning Trust is proud to offer their School-Related Professionals workshops for professional development at a low, low cost to locals:

- Disability Awareness
- Supporting Students with Autism
- Dealing with Difficult Students

These workshops are made possible through a partnership with NYSUT's Program Services and NY State Department of Labor.

Contact ELT to secure your SRP professional development today!
(800) 528-6208 or www.nysut.org/elt.



NYSUT 2-for-1 incentive for AFT PSRP and NEA ESP (SRP) Conference

Our NYSUT school related professionals are fortunate to have the chance to take part in two excellent national conferences. To help defray the cost of one or both conferences, NYSUT will once again offer the 2-for-1 incentive plan. For locals who send more than one participant, for each second person, the local will be reimbursed \$250 plus the cost of travel expenses. Forms will be sent out to local leaders the beginning of January and will also be found on the NYSUT website. This form must be signed by the local president.

The NEA ESP (SRP) conference is March 13-15 with pre-conference workshops available on March 11-12. This conference will be held at the Doubletree Hotel in Orlando, Florida. Pre-conference workshops offered include; presentation skills, family-school-community workshop, president's/leader's workshop, diversity, and emerging leaders. All require pre-registration. Go to www.NEA.org for conference and registration information.

The AFT PSRP conference will be held at the Hilton Baltimore Convention Center on March 20 - 22. Pre-meetings, which you must pre-register for, are on March 19-20. Topics offered are: Health & Safety/Green Cleaning, Member Mobilization Training, and the Leadership Meeting. Go to www.AFT.org for conference and registration information.

These conferences offer a great opportunity for networking with other SRPs from around this great nation as well offering pertinent workshops, speakers and learning forums.

Apply for LAP

Application materials for the NYSUT Local Action Project were mailed out the first week of November. The application deadline is January 30th.

The 2009 LAP Institute will be held at the Gideon Putnam in Saratoga Springs, NY July 20-24.

If your local is interested, your NYSUT labor relations specialist can answer any questions you may have and help with the application. Your LRS's sign-off is required on the application.

New In-Service Dental Plan available Jan.1

NYSUT Member Benefits Trust recently endorsed a new dental plan for in-service members. The plan, provided by MetLife, becomes available Jan.1.

To be eligible, you must be an in-service (not retired) NYSUT member at time of enrollment. Coverage options include individual coverage, coverage for member plus one dependent, and coverage for member and family. Unmarried, dependent children are covered until the end of the month of their 25th birthday with no full-time student status required.

For more information, call Member Benefits at 800-626-8101 or log on to www.memberbenefits.nysut.org to download a brochure.

For information about this program or about contractual expense reimbursement/endorsement arrangements with providers of endorsed programs, please contact NYSUT Member Benefits Trust or refer to your NYSUT Member Benefits Trust Summary Plan Description.

Agency fee payers to NYSUT are eligible to participate in NYSUT Member Benefits Trust-endorsed programs.

A VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

Nancy Peluso

SRP Advisory Committee chair



I don't know about you, for me this year is absolutely flying by! It seems like only yesterday I was sick of listening to the noise of my air conditioner in my kitchen window and now I have to cover my shoulders with a shawl to ward off the cold air coming in my drafty windows.

I have been coordinating our local's VOTE-COPE campaign for a few years. I liken it to the shawl that protects me from the cold. I keep trying to figure out what it takes to get more SRP members to make contributions to VOTE-COPE. It seems simple. In a bad economy (like now) our jobs are the first to be eliminated. In a bad economy (like now) our jobs are the ones school districts want to sub-contract. Contributing to VOTE-COPE is more important now than ever before. I know everyone has experienced the higher cost of everything—I have too. We cannot afford not to contribute to VOTE-COPE. There are so many reasons to support VOTE-COPE: pension equity, retiree health insurance, increased salaries for SRPs, improved working conditions for SRPs, protection of seniority rights, and defeating proposals for privatization, union-busting and pension raiding. VOTE-COPE has also safeguarded our contracts by being the driving force behind legislation that requires employers to maintain the terms and conditions of our contracts when they expire. Without the "Triborough Law" as it is known, employers would be free to cut health insurance and other benefits during negotiations. Making a contribution to VOTE-COPE is the singular most important thing you can do to protect your job and your future. Just do it! Do it because it is the right thing to do. Do it!

NYSUT's Working for a Living Wage campaign is another endeavor that is very important. Securing a living wage and access to affordable health care for members is front and center on NYSUT's agenda.

The holiday season is upon us; so spring must "be around the corner"! Spring brings conferences. I encourage you to consider participating in the following events:

- March 13-15, 2009: NEA ESP Conference, Orlando, Florida
- March 19-22, 2009: AFT/PSRP Conference, Baltimore, Maryland
- April 2-4, 2009: NYSUT Representative Assembly, Buffalo, New York

Also - be sure to get your SRP of the Year award nominations in by January 5th. See the article below for more information.

My wish is for each of you to have a wonderful holiday and a terrific new year!

Constituency Awards deadline Jan. 5

The deadline for the 2009 NYSUT constituency award nominations is fast approaching. If you wish to nominate someone from your local for SRP of the Year, you will find the proper form in the RA Conference Call booklet which went out to local presidents several weeks ago. Forms can also be found on

the leader access section of the NYSUT website, under RA, forms. Your local president's signature if required and only one nomination per local is permitted. Nomination forms must in the NYSUT president's office and post-marked by January 5, 2009.