

# SRP NewsLink

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

## SRP leaders prep members for SRP Lobby Day with NYSUT toolkit

Advocacy for SRP legislative issues is central to NYSUT's mission.

There is a long history of NYSUT SRP activism and advocacy at the local, state and national levels. SRPs participate in NYSUT's Committee of 100, where they speak to legislators alongside teacher colleagues. And during the "Fight for Fifteen" campaign for a living wage, SRPs were asked to kick their advocacy up a notch and they responded in a big way. That effort, and the resulting continuing gains to New York's minimum wage, made it clear that SRPs are powerful advocates.

In 2019 the statewide union created an SRP Lobby Day event for volunteer activists. Its purpose: to educate lawmakers on the issues important to SRPs and the communities in which they live.

To kick off the 2021 virtual SRP Lobby Day events, the union hosted a Town Hall with NYSUT President Andy Pallotta, Second Vice President Ron Gross, and special guest State Senator Shelley Mayer.

Mayer encouraged SRP leaders to learn about their elected officials prior to meeting with them in order to understand what committees they work on and other interests. See NYSUT's coverage of the event [here](#).

In addition to remarks from Pallotta and Gross, NYSUT's SRP At-Large Directors — Shelvy Young Abrams, Karen Lee Arthmann, Sandie Carner-Shafran, Deborah Paulin and Angie Rivera — unveiled the legislative activism toolkit for leaders by modeling the 10-minute meeting legislative activism presentation for participants. SRP leaders left the event armed with a toolkit to empower their members to make a difference.

**10-minutes meetings.** NYSUT SRP leaders used their "10-Minute Meeting: Legislative Activism for SRPs," PowerPoint and Talking Points, and other toolkit materials to hold virtual meetings with their members and alert them to the four issues volunteer activists would be



advocating for during SRP Lobby Day events May 3–5.

The issues: School bus attendant on every K–6 bus to and from school and school activities; safe toileting guidelines; impartial hearing officer during section 75 proceedings; and last in-first out rights during layoffs and recalls.

During SRP Lobby Day events, dozens of volunteer activists, working with NYSUT Legislative and Political staff lobbyists, met virtually with elected leaders to educate them on these issues so important to SRPs.

Are you interested in educating your members about the legislative issues impacting SRPs and how they can make a difference?

Local presidents may contact NYSUT SRP Coordinator Leslie Fottrell at [leslie.fottrell@nysut.org](mailto:leslie.fottrell@nysut.org) for access to the 10-minute meeting toolkit materials.

## Save the dates for the SRP Leadership Conference Oct. 29–31



Members of the Saratoga Adirondack BOCES Employees Association show off their labor-themed socks. (Photo: Andrew Watson)

Save the dates! The 2021 SRP Leadership Conference will be held Oct. 29–31, in Saratoga Springs.

Join School-Related Professionals from around the state for an unforgettable weekend of professional development and networking opportunities at the Hilton Hotel in Saratoga Springs.

Visit [www.nysut.org/srpconference](http://www.nysut.org/srpconference) to see a recap of last year's conference and for more information about registering for the fall conference.

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## IMPORTANT DATES:

### SRP Leadership Conference

Oct. 29–31, 2021

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

### American Education Week

Nov. 15–19, nationwide

### SRP Recognition Day

Nov. 16, statewide



Local presidents, have you heard from an SRP Advisory Committee member yet? The committee is charged with reaching out to the leaders in their region in order to learn of regional concerns, challenges and triumphs and to bring the same back to the committee and to NYSUT.

“Many local leaders will be receiving a letter from their SRP Advisory Committee members through their Regional Staff Director,” said NYSUT Second Vice President Ron Gross, whose office oversees SRP issues for the union. “I encourage local leaders to reach out and invite committee members to their upcoming meetings or other events.”

The committee will be reaching out to SRP leaders in their region to introduce themselves through their local regional offices.

To learn more about the SRP Advisory Committee visit [www.nysut.org/srpcommittee](http://www.nysut.org/srpcommittee).

Leaders who would like to invite an SRP Advisory Committee member to a local union meeting or event, or to speak to one may contact NYSUT SRP Coordinator Leslie Fottrell at [leslie.fottrell@nysut.org](mailto:leslie.fottrell@nysut.org) or 1-800-342-9800.

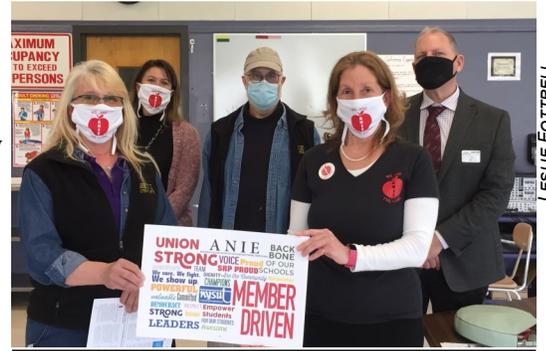
## Engaging members: branding and solidarity

Engaging members in the work of the union is one of the holy grails of union leadership. Which means, at times, is it also an elusive goal. When Rhinebeck Association of Non-Instructional Employees President Stacy Stoliker greeted NYSUT 2nd Vice President Ron Gross, she was decked out in local union branding, including logoed facemask, pin and union T-shirt. As were the members who visited with Gross and his staff.

In addition to the ANIE branding, her members were sporting the vibrant NYSUT “SRPs Rock” pins, Stoliker shared some of the best practices she uses as a local president.

**Branding.** At a NYSUT workshop, Stoliker learned that branding helps engage members because it gives them a sense of belonging. She and her exec committee worked on a few ideas and settled on the visual of an apple with the tag line “We are the Core,” which one of her members made into a logo. The local has put the logo on pins, notebooks, and most recently face masks.

Stoliker told Gross, “We put the logo on a black T-shirt and ask members to wear it the first Friday of each month to show solidarity.” Working with the NYSUT Labor Relations Specialist Dan Turgeon during a challenging negotiation, Stoliker’s local worked with NYSUT Communications to create a car placard for employees, which



From left: Tina Donohue, Stacey van den Thoorn, James Chapman, Stacy Stoliker, and NYSUT 2nd VP Ron Gross with the local’s placard and Rhinebeck ANIE branding.

gave powerful visual proof of just how important their work is in the district.

“My LRS is wonderful and I feel very supported by NYSUT,” said Stoliker who added that she loves attending NYSUT conferences because she learns from the workshops and by talking to other unionists.

In a future edition of the *SRP NewsLink*, we will share other engagement ideas on one-to-one conversations, newsletters, and getting members to participate in your local’s events.

How do you engage your members? Let us know by sending an email to [NewsLink@nysut.org](mailto:NewsLink@nysut.org).

# ELT

**nysut** Education & Learning Trust

## Where NYSUT members learn from NYSUT members

NYSUT Education & Learning Trust offers affordable seminars for School-Related Professionals, in both synchronous and asynchronous formats. Registrants earn CTLE credit by taking ELT seminars.

Virtual seminars, presented via Zoom, provide synchronous learning. Online seminars, are available on the Moodle platform, and let SRPs learn at their own pace, within a 30-day window of their own choosing. Visit [www.nysut.org/elt](http://www.nysut.org/elt) to view the current offerings and see how affordable professional learning can be.

If you are looking for professional learning in a synchronous or asynchronous format, NYSUT ELT has you covered.

NYSUT ELT is celebrating more than 40 years of providing NYSUT members with high-quality professional development.

Call 800-528-6208 or visit [www.nysut.org/elt](http://www.nysut.org/elt).

# Chronic stress an unwelcome component of pandemic

As we look toward summer, the pandemic continues to dominate headlines and our work and personal lives. With mask and other restrictions easing, the change can be welcome, but can add to our overall stress.

We have been living in pandemic mode for over a year and now that restrictions are lifting, we may just be catching up to our feelings about the past year.

“That includes grieving the people, routines and events that we have lost,” said NYSUT Social Services Specialist Ani Shahinian. “It’s important for us to allow ourselves to experience those feelings, since repression of feelings can exacerbate stress.”

Ellen Brandon is a licensed clinical social worker and psychotherapist in Albany, New York, who uses mindfulness, cognitive behavioral therapy, and guided imagery, among other techniques in her practice.

She explains why prolonged stress is harmful. “Our bodies are beautifully designed to process stress in small doses. We weren’t meant to live under chronic stress,” said Brandon. The fight or flight response occurs when stress hormones flood the nervous system. The body might need to fight or escape from the danger. This is tricky when there is no real opportunity to fight or get away from the perceived threat.

While our bodies are well equipped to process the stress chemicals it produces in small doses, chronic stress gives our body exposure to these chemicals almost constantly and our bodies don’t have time to recover, she explained. Chronic stress is unhealthy for our minds and our bodies and can lead to anxiety, depression,

digestive issues and even heart disease. Stress is normal but chronic stress is not.

Haley Kaplowitz is an epidemiologist and is executive director at a pharmaceutical company. She said that cortisol is an important part of the stress response. Adding, that new research suggests cortisol levels appear to impact the severity of COVID-19.

“Clinical trials of a COVID-19 treatment using dexamethasone — a drug that reduces the body’s natural cortisol production, as well as inflammation — has been found to help critically ill patients,” said Kaplowitz.

This continues to be a stressful time for many people. Research shows that constant exposure to stress is a major risk factor for developing chronic illnesses. Chronic stress negatively impacts brain structure, cardiovascular health, and weakens the immune system.

But how to mitigate stress during a stressful time?

One strategy is to admit the stress. “Just naming it, acknowledging it, can be a helpful beginning. And recognize that it may be normal to feel hesitant and maybe resistant to getting back to a more productive routine,” said Shahinian. Becoming aware is the first step toward dealing with the feelings of the aftermath of the past year.

It may also be helpful to know you are not alone. “Professionals and lay people alike are all being challenged by the pandemic,” Brandon said.

If you are feeling like you can’t easily stop feeling stressed and worried or you are having an increase of recurrent physical complaints like stomach or headaches despite medical intervention, you could benefit from reaching out to a

mental health professional.

If you or someone you know is having any thoughts of suicide, share these thoughts with someone else right away, added Brandon. A free resource is the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800-273-8255.

Shahinian has been very busy throughout the pandemic. The licensed clinical social worker has been fielding NYSUT member phone calls, making mental health referrals to members and their families, and providing informative webinars on stress management and other timely topics.

There is a lot in the news about the virus variants. The good news is, according to Kaplowitz, early data suggests the vaccines do protect against most, but not all, mutations. “Like the flu vaccine, it may have to be modified regularly to add protection against new strains,” she said. “Which is why it is still important that people adhere to the recommended safety precautions until herd immunity — when enough people have been vaccinated that the risk of infection becomes small — is established.”

In addition to NYSUT referrals, Shahinian said members should inquire whether they have a confidential Employees Assistance Program (EAP) through their workplace. This voluntary program can also provide referrals to counselors and assistance with other issues impacting work-life balance.

NYSUT members may contact Shahinian through NYSUT Social Services by calling 800-342-9810 or visiting [www.nysut.org/socialservices](http://www.nysut.org/socialservices).

## SRP session at Local & Retiree Council Presidents Conference



The SRP breakout session at the Local and Retiree Council President’s pre-Representative Assembly conference is a long-standing tradition to which SRP delegates look forward.

For the 2021 pre-RA session, the virtual SRP breakout session, “A legal update for SRP leaders” was presented April 28, and led by NYSUT Senior Counsel Pam Fynes and Associate Senior Counsel Laura Delaney, from NYSUT’s Office of General Counsel.

## Gross to RA delegates: 'SRPs are the backbone of our schools'

In his virtual address to delegates, NYSUT Second Vice President Ron Gross lauded School-Related Professionals for their tenacity and resilience during the pandemic, and recounted his first year as NYSUT Second vice President, learning the ropes and striving to meet and connect with members while adhering to COVID-19 safety guidelines.

"The one thing that remains constant through the good times and bad is the idea that we must always stick together to help get us through the tough times and celebrate during the best of times," said Gross. He lauded the compassion of SRPs as an inspiration he would never forget. During the pandemic, ensuring our students were fed nutritious meals was paramount to all school districts and our SRPs answered the call, he said. "They cooked and packed hundreds of thousands of meals," said Gross. Adding that SRPs also organized food



**NYSUT 2nd VP  
Ron Gross**

distribution centers, delivered food, cleaned and sanitized facilities and mastered supporting student needs in a virtual format. "SRPs are the backbone of our schools," said Gross.

Also during the virtual RA, delegates celebrated NYSUT SRP Members of the Year Dorothy Kamps of the United Federation of Teachers and Cheryl Rockhill, president of the Brushton-Moira Support Staff Association.

Kamps became a paraprofessional in Queens 28 years ago and early in her career understood the importance of union activism. That activism included mentoring new union activists, providing paraprofessionals training, and serving in a variety of elected positions: as a paraprofessional representative at her school, as the paraprofessional district 24 coordinator, and as a NYSUT and AFT delegate. She is known as a mainstay at union events,



**Kamps**



**Rockhill**

such as rallies and phone banks both locally and at the state level. She holds an associate degree from Queensborough Community College. In 1999 Kamps began working in UFT's Health and Safety department, providing professional development and training members in best practices to stay safe while on the job. Cheryl Rockhill is president of the Brushton-Moira School Support Staff Association in the North County. She began working as a substitute in the school cafeteria, then became a school and bus monitor, and now is the district's transportation assistant. Rockhill completed her associate degree in applied business in December 2020.

Rockhill worked for NYSUT's Member Organizing Institute, was one of the faces of SRPs in the "Fight for \$15" campaign, and is a NYSUT SRP Ambassador. She chairs NYSUT's statewide SRP Advisory Committee.

## No matter your goals, Member Benefits can help

Whether it's helping NYSUT School-Related Professionals members with decisions about financial or legal concerns, important choices regarding insurance coverage or simply saving on everyday purchases, NYSUT Member Benefits is here for you.

In response to the growing number of identity theft cases since the pandemic began, Member Benefits recently partnered with Cambridge Credit Counseling to create a customized identity theft webinar on how to best avoid, detect and resolve identity theft. The presentation proved popular this spring with hundreds of members attending multiple sessions. Additional dates will be offered this summer and all members are welcome to attend.

General consumer debt continues to increase in this country with approximately 45 percent of households carrying a month-to-month credit card balance. Cambridge can assist NYSUT SRPs with better understanding general

debt consolidation and student loan repayment options. The company offers a no-cost consultation with a certified counselor and is the provider of NYSUT's Student Loan Debt Webinars.

It's never too early or too late to create a sound financial plan or adjust your existing plan. Member Benefits endorses a Legal Service Plan and Financial Counseling Program that can offer expert guidance and advice to SRPs.

When it comes to protecting your family, Member Benefits endorses competitive insurance programs such as auto, home & renters, term life & level term life, dental, vision and pet insurance. These programs are not as expensive as you may think and there's no cost to inquire. Many of them can be purchased through payroll or pension deduction for greater convenience and savings.

Finally, NYSUT SRPs can save up to 50 percent at more than 700,000

merchants with the Member Benefits Discounts &

Deals program (including 21,000 deals throughout New York state). Register your account at [mbdeals.enjoymydeals.com](http://mbdeals.enjoymydeals.com) today to start saving on everyday purchases.

Learn more about Member Benefits-endorsed programs & services by visiting [memberbenefits.nysut.org](http://memberbenefits.nysut.org) or calling 800-626-8101.

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

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