

**NYSUT**  
**UNITED**

A UNION OF PROFESSIONALS

**WE ARE  
IN THIS**

**TOGETHER**

As we continue to work through the pandemic, students and educators need support more than ever. Schools must prioritize, fund and staff social workers, psychologists, school nurses and counselors.

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### NYSUT UNITED [November/December 2021, Vol. 12, No. 2]

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# NYSUT Certification Resources

Did you know that our union has an office that's entirely devoted to helping our members navigate the certification process?

Visit [nysut.org/Certification](https://nysut.org/Certification) to get access to all our certification resources, including:

- Certification information for teachers and teaching assistants
- In-depth information on how to get and maintain certification in a variety of subject areas
- Overview of CTLE requirements
- Answers to frequently asked certification questions
- Webinars covering certification topics
- Ability to reach one of NYSUT's certification experts

# Back at school: Striving to 'meet the kids where they are'

By Ned Hoskin  
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After a long summer of waiting for the state of New York to provide guidance on how to safely reopen schools this fall, newly installed Gov. Kathy Hochul finally cut bait and told P-12 schools what they needed to do.

Her Department of Health plan called for mass vaccination of educators and staff and regular testing for those who declined inoculation. She also mandated masks for students and staff in buildings and continued social distancing.

our schools," said NYSUT President Andy Pallotta.

The union supports universal mask wearing as part of a layered mitigation strategy that also includes robust COVID-19 testing, contact tracing, proper ventilation and other strategies recommended by public health experts. It also supports regular COVID-19 testing for school staff who are not vaccinated.

Most importantly, "It's critical that educators continue to have a voice in the implementation of vaccine requirements and other COVID policies at the local level," Pallotta said.

So, how has it gone? "Things have been going ok," said Albany Public Schools Teachers Association President Laura Franz on the Capitol Pressroom radio program, as educators strive to "meet kids where they are" and deal with the unprecedented trauma of a global pandemic. The social-emotional learning needs are crucial right now.

"We're trying to take it day by day," she said.

"Teachers are doing what they've always done," said Joe Cantafio, president of the West Seneca TA, "doing the best we can with what we have and where we are."

The mask mandate has caused some communities to push back against school districts that are following the state guidance. In

buildings, it's not as much of an issue.

"As usual, students are very resilient," Cantafio said on the same radio program. "They wanted to be back in school every day, we've wanted them back in school every day, and if the price for that is wearing a mask, we've all done it."

Franz said the requirement to show proof of vaccination or submit to testing is a reasonable and workable guideline. People may have a number of reasons to resist vaccinations, but the answer is to ensure that they have access to free testing so they can participate fully.

United University Professions President Fred Kowal said SUNY's non-hospital campuses continued this fall with a testing mandate for faculty and staff who declined vaccination, which became the model across the country. All on-campus students must be vaccinated.

"We had real problems with outbreaks on many campuses last year, but the chancellor instituted aggressive steps" that have been effective so far, he said.

NYSUT Second Vice President Ron Gross leads the union's health and safety program. "Our membership is experiencing a pendulum swinging back and forth across the pandemic," he said. "First we were dealing with social distancing and masks, and now we are focused on vaccine and testing mandates. Our members are feeling the stress, and they are coming to us seeking answers."

Bottom line, vaccination is the best protection, but "we support a strong testing program for those who opt out of the vaccination regimen," Gross said.



Albany PSTA member and fourth grade teacher Felicia Nobles works with a student at Arbor Hill Elementary School.

While the reactions in communities across the state varied drastically, NYSUT supported the guidance, which closely followed the federal CDC recommendations already in place.

Only days after she took office, following the resignation of Andrew Cuomo, Gov. Hochul took "decisive action to bolster health and safety in

## COMING UP

Nov. 2  
Election Day

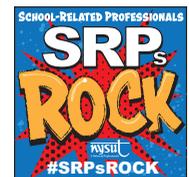


Nov. 5-7  
NYSUT Community College Conference

Nov. 15-16  
NYS Board of Regents meets

Nov. 15-19  
American Education Week. Visit [nea.org](http://nea.org) for celebration ideas, resources.

Nov. 16  
New York State School-Related Professionals Recognition Day



Nov. 19-20  
NYSUT Women's Committee meets



Dec. 3-5  
NYSUT Board of Directors meets, Saratoga Springs

Dec. 11  
NYSUT Civil and Human Rights Committee meets, Latham

Dec. 11-12  
NYSUT Subject Area Committees meet

Dec. 13-14  
NYS Board of Regents meets

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

NYSUT calls for a full support system in schools to serve the needs of students and educators. See page 8.

Cover by Mark Sharer

# Public Service Loan Forgiveness program gets big overhaul

By **Sylvia Saunders**  
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In a huge win for educators and other public service workers, the Biden administration announced a much-needed overhaul of the broken Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program.

Unions have been pushing hard for the changes, which are expected to help more than half a million borrowers. The U.S. Department of Education estimates 22,000 borrowers will become immediately eligible to have their loans erased automatically — and another 27,000 borrowers previously declared ineligible could see their debts disappear if they submit employer information.

The PSLF program is infamous for denying student loan forgiveness to thousands of public servants, dismissing applications due to administrative errors and other technicalities. Unions have filed lawsuits and fiercely advocated to force the federal government to fix the problems

and fulfill the bipartisan promise of public service loan forgiveness.

Since its inception, the PSLF program, which is supposed to forgive the student debt of public-service workers after 10 years of service and 120 qualifying monthly payments, has rejected 98 percent of applicants.

The changes announced Oct. 6 include a broad expansion of the kind of payments that count toward PSLF. Originally the program was limited to federal Direct loans through Income-Driven Repayment plans. Now borrowers can also count payments they've made on other loans, including Perkins and Federal Family Education Loan program loans. Non-IDR payments and late payments will also count. Borrowers must apply for a limited waiver available through Oct. 31, 2022.

Starting later this fall, the USDOE is launching an extensive outreach campaign to let borrowers know about the changes. This will include emailing borrowers who have hit 120 PSLF-eligible payments but need to

verify their employment to receive forgiveness. The department will also notify borrowers about any additional payments that can be automatically counted and the option for reconsideration of denied applications.

It's important that borrowers go to [studentaid.gov/pslf](https://studentaid.gov/pslf) to make sure their contact information is correct.

NYSUT stands ready to help members navigate the PSLF changes. The statewide union offers free student loan debt workshops and counseling services in partnership with Cambridge Credit Counseling. Since the COVID-19 crisis, NYSUT has moved the workshops online, helping members with informational webinars and individualized follow-up support.

Cambridge counselors noted that if

it turns out you've made more than 120 payments on a Direct loan after recalculating the number that now qualify, you can receive a refund for those extra payments.

If you're holding Perkins or FFEL loans, you must consolidate them into the Direct loan program by Oct. 31, 2022, so their balances can be forgiven. It won't be possible after that date.



## NYSUT Pipeline helps unionists get elected

Despite the constantly changing landscape of COVID-19 and the delta variant, "NYSUT's political operation has been hard at work doing what it does best — winning elections," said President Andy Pallotta.

The union's Pipeline Program continues to grow — focused primarily on recruiting, training and running NYSUT members for elected office. The general election on Nov. 2 will be another chance to show how it works.

This year, 20 NYSUT members are running in all corners of the state, for local offices ranging from city council to town supervisor.

NYSUT's regional political organizers work closely with the candidates to ensure they have all the tools needed to be successful.

In addition, NYSUT is supporting the work of the Monroe Community College Faculty Association in backing 17 endorsed candidates in Monroe County.

"As you know, these races are

crucial to our sisters and brothers in higher education, and we are happy to be joining with them to ensure the success of their endorsed candidates," Pallotta said. NYSUT's involvement in county legislature races also extends to Erie, Nassau and Suffolk counties.

Several spouses of NYSUT members and at least one member of the union staff are running for office, as well.

Some races include:  
■ Sunny Aslam, UUP, running for

- Onondaga County Legislature;
- Christina Calarco, Auburn TA, Cayuga County Legislature;
- Terry Cuddy, Cayuga-Onondaga BOCES TA, Auburn City Council;
- Megan Comerford, Frontier Central TA, Hamburg Town Council;
- Jill O'Malley, Faculty Federation Erie CC, Tonawanda Town Council;
- Howard Maffucci, (former member), Monroe County Legislature; and
- John Baynes, Fairport EA, Monroe County Legislature.

# Higher ed: Safety concerns predate COVID-19

By Ned Hoskin  
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**E**ven while striving to cope with the implications of COVID-19, the Professional Staff Congress at CUNY has been pressing to identify health and safety problems needing remediation or buildings needing to come off line.

The PSC has trained more than 200 union health and safety watchdogs to participate in walkthroughs of campus worksites and identify threats to health and safety.

"Health and safety has been our primary fight" over the university's 20 campuses, said new PSC President James Davis. Many of the buildings have suffered from years of deferred maintenance, he reported to the NYSUT Higher Education Policy Council recently.

"There's a ton of federal funding," Davis said, but "we've not seen enough of [it] being invested in the institution."

The pandemic has had its effect, as well. PSC lost 2,000 contingent faculty and also many professional staff since the COVID-19 shutdown began, he said.

On SUNY four-year campuses, United University Professions ran an

aggressive vaccination campaign, said UUP President Fred Kowal. The Department of Health requires vaccinations for all health care employees at SUNY hospitals.

The union did workshops and outreach to members, and many people got their shots as a result. Very few have not been vaccinated.

"We got the message across: Vaccinations should be mandated and through our work on our campuses, the impact was lower than we thought it would be," he said.

Kowal also said the union is close to securing retroactive overtime pay for health care professional members who have been so overburdened by the massive pandemic response.

At the beginning of the shutdown, members of the Union of Clerical, Administrative and Technical Staff at NYU were part of a hiring freeze and the local lost 125 members, reported UCATS President Stephen Rechner. Almost everyone remaining was ordered to work from home.

But 10 percent of members were required to work on campus full-time as essential workers during the height of the shutdown.

Interestingly, 10 years ago, the union had negotiated contract language that said, in a shutdown,

"essentials" would be paid time and a half for the first three days. Well, the administration failed to honor that agreement. The union had to fight for it.

"And, we won!" Rechner said. The UCATS members who had to risk working on campus while everyone else was home are getting their time and a half.

Rechner said NYU had originally planned to require in-person work for all by this past August, but the union gained flexibility in remote work after demonstrating that it was effective.

Most of the 125 positions lost are expected to be filled soon, he said.

Community colleges report reduced enrollment this fall in the range of 10 to 15 percent. The four-year schools have seen a slightly lower reduction.

A big factor in enrollment might be the pending federal aid package that

could include two years of free tuition at colleges that primarily offer associate's degrees.

NYSUT Higher Ed Policy Council Chair Roberta Elins, president of the United College Employees at FIT, likened it to "reverse Excelsior," which is the state's "last-dollar" scholarship



DAVE SANDERS

James Davis, new president of the Professional Staff Congress at CUNY, says health and safety has been a priority.

that pays for public higher education at four-year schools, under rather strict conditions.

On a positive note, Elins added that the annual NYSUT Community College Leadership Conference will return to an in-person format in November after a COVID-related break in 2020.

## Local unions can sway local elections



**T**his year's general elections on Nov. 2 are primarily for local offices. But that doesn't mean they are insignificant. In local races local unions can have the biggest impact on the outcome.

"When a local union can get close to 100 percent of its members to vote for candidates who support the union agenda, especially in local races, it can make all the difference," said NYSUT President Andy Pallotta.

"Know who your local union is backing, VOTE and help other

supporters get out to vote," he said.

Early voting in New York runs Oct. 23-31. Check with your county board of elections for details on times and polling locations.

You will find five statewide ballot proposals on the ballot this year.

# Bus driver shortage being felt statewide

**By Liza Frenette**  
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In Ithaca, the district is short 25 school bus drivers.

They could “limp by” with about half that. “We have 11 open routes a day,” said Chris Horstman, bus driver and president of the Ithaca City School District Employees Association. With 150 square miles and 4,000 students a day, it’s a wide gap.

The school is one of hundreds across the state hustling to fill empty driver’s seats. A nationwide bus driver shortage has caused short-term school closures, halted some schools’ return to in-person learning, put mechanics and fuelers — who have their commercial driver’s licenses — in the driver’s seat, and forced student schedule changes.

In testimony before the state Senate Education Committee in September, NYSUT President Andy Pallotta said federal stimulus money could be spent to hire more bus drivers.

“The low pay and a lack of benefits, coupled with being solely responsible for policing the behavior of students while also trying to safely operate the bus, results in a very difficult job with a lot of responsibility for little reward,” Pallotta said. The union also supports requiring on-board school bus attendants and monitors who can ensure the general safety of all students on each school bus.

## Tackling the shortage

Deb Paulin, Alden Central School Employees Association and SRP at-large director on the NYSUT Board, said when COVID-19 hit, “we lost eight drivers right off the bat. They were older and they were afraid for

their health.”

“We had 20 drivers retire last year out of 91,” said Charlie Jones, president of the Bethlehem Central United Employees Association. This fall, he said, “we have 68 routes and could only fill 65. Combined routes make for tighter and more stressful schedules for drivers.”

“We’ve had to consolidate every route covered,” said Darci Hover, president of the Chatham Central Bus Drivers Association, where 20 drivers retired last year.

Some students are starting school later, have longer wait times after sporting events, or ride a bus longer than usual while drivers add pick-ups and drop-offs to fill the gaps.

The reasons for the shortage are varied but include low pay; a split shift work schedule with few hours; and increased responsibilities before, during and after routes due to the pandemic.

Jones reported that two bus drivers left because of the Bethlehem district’s new COVID-19 vaccine mandates.

Local unions are working with districts to set up job fairs and information tables. Ithaca has a banner on a bridge over its busiest highway, along with radio and newspaper ads.

Chatham will host an open house for bus drivers in November at the Columbia County Fairgrounds.

“We are just banging out ideas on how to reach people,” Hover said. “It’s a real team effort.”

Starting pay is \$20-\$22 an hour in Chatham, where drivers working four hours a day get health insurance, thanks to union negotiations.

Alden was able to attract three new drivers in September. Paulin said starting pay has increased from \$17.50 to \$19 per hour with a guarantee of two hours a day.

Keeping up with mandated seating charts for contact tracing, ensuring that children keep their masks on, new pre-trip requirements for checking the bus, and disinfecting and sanitizing the buses after every run has added to the stress and responsibility of the job, said

Vincent Nesci, a bus driver and president of the New Hartford Employees Union.

“COVID has really impacted how we operate,” he said. “We’ve always been short drivers, but by the end of last year it was quite significant.”

Potential new drivers face tougher requirements for the CDL, he said, and longer training times. It also takes longer to get a Department of Motor Vehicles appointment.

But it’s worth it.

Nesci, a retired police captain in Utica, sees driving buses as another way to serve his community.

“You get to know students by name and face,” he said. “You’re the first one they meet in the morning. You can change their outlook and their mood.”

Ithaca school bus driver Chris Horstman trains other drivers in the district. Ithaca is short 25 school bus drivers.



PROVIDED

# NYSUT Disaster Relief Fund offers helping hand in times of trouble

By Kara Smith  
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**E**rick Potter never thought he'd consider a three-hole punch a luxury. But after Tropical Storm Fred wiped out 20 years of accumulated classroom supplies by swamping the Jasper-Troupsburg High School building with three feet of floodwater in mid-August, he has a new appreciation for things like whiteboard markers and manila folders.

"There's so much we take for granted that you miss when we don't have it," said Potter, president of the Jasper-Troupsburg Teachers Association.

Unfortunately, Potter's experience isn't unique. In the Southern Tier and downstate New York, major late summer storms left countless members with homes and property ravaged by flooding. To help members through tough times like these, the statewide union created the NYSUT Disaster Relief Fund in 2005. Member-donation fueled, the fund provides relief to members for losses stemming from man-made, natural and federally declared disasters, such as flooding.

NYSUT created a special Jasper-Troupsburg Tropical Storm Fred Disaster Relief Application to reimburse members for up to \$500 in non-district-supplied classroom materials lost to flooding, excluding furniture and other equipment.

"Many members lost a career's worth of personal classroom materials," said NYSUT Secretary-Treasurer J. Philippe Abraham, who heads the

union's disaster relief efforts. "This funding can help members replace the things you don't always think about, but that add up."

Brett Van Woert, an Addison TA executive board member, got to work after Tropical Storm Fred. The VOTE-COPE coordinator for NYSUT's Elmira Regional Office, Van Woert used his mailing lists to share information about the NYSUT fund with regional local presidents.

"Lots of families had to evacuate and several homes were condemned," said Van Woert. "It's been a month, and there is still great need."

The Addison TA donated \$500 to the Addison Volunteer Fire Co.; \$1,000 in supplies and materials to help repair Addison youth baseball and softball fields; and \$1,000 in materials and supplies to the neighboring town of Woodhull, equally hard-hit by the storm.

## Hurricane Ida floods downstate

"Churning water coming down the street. It was like in the Bible. Lots of water; you could see the waves and it just came rushing in breaking down the door and windows."

That's how Palmyre Seraphin, a ninth-grade teacher at Channel View School for Research in Rockaway Queens, described the evening of Sept. 1. When the remnants of Hurricane Ida hit, the first floor of her home was submerged in five feet of water and her cars were destroyed. While the financial losses are bad, the lingering trauma has left Seraphin with a "huge fear of it raining again, it gives me anxiety."

A bright spot was help from her



Addison Teachers Association members donated money and supplies following flooding in the Southern Tier. From left: James Dufort, CJ Olander and Brett Van Woert.

union, through both the NYSUT and United Federation of Teachers disaster relief funds. As she waits for her insurance claims and assistance from FEMA, knowing her union cares offers solace.

"Having people listen to your story and to just be kind ... that is a great help," she said. "It's so much to deal with."

Billy Coleman, executive vice president for New Rochelle Federation of United School Employees and a member of the districtwide health and safety team, helped lead the local's disaster relief response when Ida flooded parts of New Rochelle.

"About 60 percent of our members live in New Rochelle," said Coleman, noting that FUSE represents both teacher and SRP members.

Coleman is also closely involved in recovery work as the secondary plant manager for New Rochelle's Isaac E. Young Middle School. Both

the middle and high schools suffered significant damage; high school classes were remote through late fall due to flooding. "It's frustrating; the kids were excited about returning to school. It's an emotional blow for everyone," said Coleman.

To donate to the NYSUT Disaster Relief Fund visit [nysut.org/disaster-relief](https://nysut.org/disaster-relief). NYSUT assumes 100 percent of the administrative costs associated with the fund. Every penny donated to the fund goes to helping union members. NYSUT Social Services is also available to help members through difficult times. To learn more about this free, union-provided benefit, visit [nysut.org/socialservices](https://nysut.org/socialservices).



# Support all students and educators

By Liza Frenette  
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**W**appingers school psychologist Beth Rizzi created online resources to reach students. In the North Country village of Malone, school psychologist Chris Van Houten is consulting more with teachers, making more classroom visits and making a point to meet with all students. In Scarsdale and suburban Gates-Chili, school psychologists have embraced telehealth practices to make sure students have access to services.

Across the state, NYSUT school psychologists, like their teaching counterparts, had to create new pathways to reach students when school buildings closed and are now glean- ing ways to help students adjust to being back in school.

Many students have experienced the upheaval of a world where some parents lost jobs, family members died or are experiencing long-term illness from COVID-19, and social isolation became necessary to avoid exposure to the virus. More students now struggle with anxiety.

As part of NYSUT's Future Forward initiative, the union says schools must prioritize, fund and staff school psychologists, social workers, counselors, nurses and school-related professionals so that social-emotional supports are available to all students.

NYSUT recommends three bills currently before the state Legislature to make this happen: One to require schools to employ at least one full-time social worker and a licensed school psychologist, another to require at least one counselor, and one to ensure all districts and BOCES employ at least one



In testimony before the Senate Education Committee, NYSUT President Andy Pallotta calls for the state to fully fund the social-emotional support staff all schools need.

registered professional nurse in each school building.

This year's hard-won increase in state Foundation Aid and federal American Recovery Plan funding presents an opportunity to accomplish these long-overdue goals, said NYSUT President Andy Pallotta in recent testimony before the state Senate Education and Budget committees.

School psychologists agree.

When school buildings closed, Rizzi, a member of the Wappingers Congress of Teachers and president of the New York Association of School Psychologists, created a Bitmoji, or virtual, office stockpiled with links

and resources on topics ranging from meditation to mindfulness to support students.

"We also created a check-in form that kids could



Beth Rizzi, Wappingers Congress of Teachers

access online. If they were experiencing a crisis and needed to be seen, they could complete the form and one of us would reach out," she said. Panic attacks, family discord, fear about academics, family illness or suicidal ideation are just some of the crises presented.

In this year's younger grades, where students had to begin their school careers online, "we're definitely noticing the socialization piece. Students are having difficulty with peer interaction," Malone's Van Houten said. Many

students are not used to the ideas of classroom experiential play or manipulative play.

"It's been a roller coaster. It was very difficult to connect on screens," he said. During the first four months of the pandemic last year, when schools were closed across the country, Malone school psychologists were among those making socially distanced home visits.

Several psychologists shared how one of the biggest concerns was finding ways to connect with students who dropped out of sight while school buildings were shut down.

Peter Faustino, Scarsdale TA, said prior to the pandemic he was hesitant to do any telehealth, "but because we were thrust into it, I found uses for it. Kids seem open to technology."

Some kids felt safer being in their room when discussing tough topics, he noted. One student creatively used a different background on the screen for each telehealth meeting in order to reflect his mood.

"It was a signal to how the student was feeling, and it sparked

discussion," Faustino said.

On the flip side, Faustino said, one student did not like what he was saying and clicked off the computer, shutting him out.

Faustino also noted that while Scarsdale provided devices to every student, not every district could do that, and many students in the state still struggle with reliable access to the internet.

School psychologists have also helped teachers, who have been dealing with uprooted classrooms and mixed teaching methods. In Scarsdale, Faustino said

... Continued on page 9



As schools continue to work through pandemic uncertainty, now is the time to implement proven practices that establish strong foundations for growth in our schools. Research backs up what educators know — we can lay the groundwork for our students that will enable them to thrive academically, socially and emotionally. It's up to all of us to outline a path forward for our students; we must act on what we have learned from these crises.

Together we can outline a path forward that will lead New York's schools to a chapter of profound progress. NYSUT's Future Forward initiative calls for local districts and the state to:

- Support public schools as the center of our communities.
- Support students' social-emotional needs.
- Fight for racial justice.
- De-emphasize high-stakes testing.
- Adopt best practices for instruction and technology.

Learn more about the statewide union initiative at [nysut.org/futureforward](https://nysut.org/futureforward).

# Bargaining strength in action

By Liza Frenette  
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**N**ew union-negotiated advances in salary, benefits and working conditions are improving the lives of educators and support staff — as well as bringing in desperately needed new hires.

The value of union membership doesn't end with the paycheck. Union leaders, guided by NYSUT's core values — good jobs; affordable, high-quality health care; strong public schools; a strong and vibrant democracy; and a society free of discrimination, bigotry and hatred — fight tirelessly for contracts that support members and their families.

Here are a few examples of powerful union-won gains across the state:

- The Fairport Transportation Association settled a contract significantly improving the salaries of bus drivers and attendants.

The local union, led by Ron Rutherford, was stymied from attracting new hires by starting salaries for drivers of \$14.50 an hour, and \$12.50 an hour for attendants. Pay will now be \$18 an hour for drivers,

and \$15 an hour for attendants. Additionally, the district agreed to use federal stimulus money so that drivers

will receive an extra \$2 an hour for three years; attendants will be paid an extra 25 cents hourly for three years.

"They were one of the lowest-paid bus driver groups in Monroe County," said Sheila Sullivan Buck, NYSUT labor relations specialist. "They were bleeding members."

Two new bus drivers have signed up since the pay was raised, she said. New drivers were previously paid only \$100 to attend a mandatory 30-hour training. Now, they will be earning the new hourly rate for the training itself.

- The Malone Federation of Teachers, a 250-member local led by Nathaniel Hathaway, negotiated language protecting members from a workload increase due to COVID-19. Malone is located about a half hour from the Canadian border.

- Union advocacy provided SRPs in Lyons with a well-earned boost.



Local leaders negotiated a contract reopening to deal with staff shortages and low pay,

said Janice Bailey, president of the Lyons Support Staff Association, a Central New York union of 58 clerical staff, custodians/cleaners, TA/aides, monitors, cafeteria workers and mechanics.

Previous salary negotiations were for a three-year contract with 2.9 percent plus 70 cent increases each year, but now the support staff will see a salary increase of 6 percent plus \$2 this year, with the next three years at 2.9 percent plus 90 cents.

- The Rome Teachers Association negotiated an MOA with the district recovering excess premiums paid in 2020 — more than \$350 per individual premium payer. Excellus BC/BS had notified the Madison Oneida Herkimer Health Insurance Consortium they were reimbursing districts — not individuals — for excess premiums paid during the pandemic when doctor visits,

elective procedures and outpatient treatments were severely curtailed. The local union's vigilant health insurance committee alerted officers, led by President Rob Wood, who then negotiated with the district for the funds. As a result, teachers received an 8.75 percent reduction in their premiums for the year.

- During the last contract negotiations for the Schenectady FT, President Juliet Benaquisto bargained for more time during new teacher orientation to talk about why unions matter and what they do. In the past, the union would get less than half an hour to speak to new teachers out of three days of orientation. This year, the SFT had two hours to provide breakfast and union information to 100 new teachers. Benaquisto told them how salary schedules, health insurance benefits, advocacy for reasonable class sizes and planning time all come from union bargaining.

"There are great benefits that come with their contract, and it's only good as long as we continue to stay a strong union," she said.

## Support all students and educators

... Continued from page 8

psychologists created a six-week professional development mindfulness and meditation course for teachers.

Speaking to best practice for students and educators, NYSUT called for an end to the practice of concurrent

or simultaneous teaching. "We appreciate NYSUT being vocal about that," Van Houten said. "It was so challenging."



Stacy Killings, Gates-Chili TA

In suburban Gates-Chili, where more than 18 countries are represented in the student population, veteran school psychologist and TA member Stacy Killings said mental health needs "shot through the roof." Students missed

out on the daily interaction and some had pressing needs, including not being able to fill prescriptions due to their parents' unemployment.

"For a lot of kids, school is a safe space," she said.

Meeting with students online provided an opportunity to connect not just with the student, but with their families as well.

"I'm going into their home (virtually); they're going into mine. I hear dogs, I see kids, we're at the kitchen

table," she said. She used the phone when online access wasn't available and promoted journaling for the students.

A new energy is now filling the schools, even with the still-necessary masking and distancing precautions. And with legislative support to fund and implement proven practices, that growth will continue.

"There is an excitement in this building that feels amazing," Killings said.



### Richard Mangino – A lifelong union activist



To the members of the Pioneer Faculty Association, Richard Mangino is a union legend. Although retired since

1996, Mangino, RC 3, has long served as a mentor to in-service PFA leaders. And when asked to attend an arbitration hearing earlier this year, about contract language he wrote in 1972, he generously testified alongside other witnesses. The local won the arbitration and former PFA president Carolyn Richards attributes the victory to “having the author of the original language on hand to interpret it.”

The PFA thanked and formally recognized Mangino at an executive board meeting. But when they heard about the NYSUT Legacy Fund, they agreed that honoring him with a legacy award was a perfect way to further show their appreciation. “He shows the importance of being union strong, as well as the importance of contract language,” said Richards, who believes that Mangino’s willingness to help the local brought greater unity to their membership. “His work is a lesson for all unionists.”

To honor an in-service or retiree activist from your area, visit [nysut.org/legacyfund](https://nysut.org/legacyfund). The fund recognizes honorees at three contribution levels. All donors receive a letter of thanks for their contribution.

**\$250** — Honorees receive a NYSUT Legacy Fund pin, keychain and coin; and a certificate of recognition.

**\$500** — Honorees receive all \$250-level benefits and a mention in *NYSUT United*.

**\$1,000** — Honorees receive all \$500-level benefits and recognition at the annual NYSUT RA.

# Event celebrates Hispanic excellence, achievement

By Kara Smith

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**N**YSUT Secretary-Treasurer J. Philippe Abraham welcomed two Latina trailblazers as part of “Celebrando Nuestra Hispanidad,” NYSUT’s Hispanic Heritage Month celebration — State Education Commissioner Betty Rosa and Evelyn DeJesus, American Federation of Teachers executive vice president. Both women are the first Latinas to hold their respective positions. “You each have done so much to uplift us and to represent Latinx individuals throughout the country,” said Abraham in opening remarks at the virtual celebration.

The pair took part in a lively panel discussion co-moderated by Abraham and Maria Elena Guzman, a UFT member and educator. Andy Pallotta, NYSUT president, thanked both for participating and welcomed viewers. “It’s good seeing so many friends here today and to celebrate the many contributions of Hispanic

and Latinx Americans.”

Both women stressed the importance of staying true to yourself. “I learned early on that you have to define who you are and to always be a woman of integrity,” said DeJesus, who overcame great personal challenges. “You have to know that you matter and that you are valued.”

“I don’t allow others’ expectations to define my worth — I reject rejections,” said Rosa. She advised finding strong mentors and creating a road map for where you want to go. “Lead with honesty, have a moral conscience and trust your gut.”

Fostering greater diversity within the teaching profession, and the importance of unions and education policymakers working in partnership, were also discussed.

“We all have the same goal — high quality education for all, so we need each other... even when we agree to disagree,” said Rosa. “Unions take on issues that support the overall healthiness of what we’re trying to achieve.”

DeJesus advised Latinx and Hispanic individuals interested in education to jump in. “We need more people who look like, and who understand, our students. So many kids have lost so much,” she said.

Other event highlights included a performance by University at Albany dance troupe Fuego Intenso, and remarks by Esther Hernandez-Kramer, Farmingdale Federation of Teachers; Hector Ruiz Jr., UFT; and Wendy Palladino, Bellport TA.

Commissioner Rosa; Yanira Merino, president of the Labor Council of Latin American Advancement; and Migdalia “Mickey” Jimenez, regional director of Capital District Latinos, each received NYSUT awards.

“We must continue building our voice and fighting for equality,” said Merino, who thanked NYSUT leaders for the accolade. “We came here in different boats, but we are now one in this country.”

Noting that a \$4,000 UFT scholarship helped her attend college at Long Island University in the early 1970s, Jimenez read one of her scholarship recommendation letters penned by a teacher that continues to inspire her. “She helped me get where I am today, I keep this letter in my Bible,” said Jimenez. “Teachers do so much for children simply by believing in them.”

Hispanic Heritage Month is celebrated annually Sept. 15 to Oct. 15. “Celebrando Nuestra Hispanidad” is part of the statewide union’s “Many Threads, One Fabric” social justice event series.



NYSUT Secretary Treasurer J. Philippe Abraham welcomes State Education Commissioner Betty Rosa (top left) and AFT Executive Vice President Evelyn DeJesus (top right) to the statewide union’s Hispanic Heritage Month event. UFT member Maria Elena Guzman was the co-moderator.



## Getting the facts about diversity, equity and inclusion

By Kara Smith  
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**T**he term “critical race theory” is everywhere these days, dominating school board meetings, making headlines and inspiring vigorous debate in many communities. The issue has many educators wondering — what exactly is CRT and how does it impact my teaching?

The answer is simple. It doesn’t.

CRT isn’t a subject taught in the K-12 curriculum despite what anti-public-education pundits would have you believe. It’s an obscure academic concept that’s been around for nearly 50 years. It centers on the idea that race is a social construct that’s embedded into our legal systems and policies. In an article published by the American Bar Association titled “A Lesson on Critical Race Theory,” author Janel George sums up CRT as “the work of progressive legal scholars seeking to address the role of racism in the law.”

That’s hardly a topic addressed in the average K-12 classroom.

“National anti-union organizations like the Heritage Foundation and ALEC are trying to politicize public education to advance a partisan agenda and weaken support for public education,” NYSUT President Andy Pallotta explained. “They’re encouraging their followers to run for local school boards to push out pro-public-education school board members and undermine public trust in our already underfunded public schools.

“This is a direct threat to districts and the budgets that support public education in our communities,” Pallotta continued.

The outrage over CRT has caused headaches for some educators, many of whom are unfairly targeted simply for doing their jobs and teaching fact-based American history. A shared, honest understanding of the past bridges divides and gives students the skills they need to better understand and help develop solutions to societal problems, which is an important part of creating a nation of informed citizens, explained NYSUT Secretary-Treasurer J. Philippe

Abraham, who leads the union’s “Many Threads, One Fabric” social justice initiative.

“For the sake of our students, we must stop playing politics with public education, our children deserve nothing less,” he said.

The State Education Department recently released a Framework on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. It encourages school boards to establish Diversity, Equity and Inclusion committees and policies and to use inclusive and culturally responsive practices and curricula that acknowledge the impact of racism and bigotry in America.

“We applaud the Regents for their continued dedication to strong diversity, equity and inclusion policies and practices that, with community input and support, can help school districts better support every student academically, socially and emotionally,” said Pallotta.

“As professionals, educators believe that all students deserve honesty in education,” said Abraham. “Educators, not pundits or politicians, know best how to design



age-appropriate lessons for students.

“No matter their color, background or ZIP code, all students deserve an equal shot at success in our schools,” he continued. “And that starts with an education that imparts honesty about who we are, integrity in how we treat others, and that has the courage to do what’s right to build a better nation and future.”

NYSUT’s “Many Threads, One Fabric” initiative offers a slate of regular programming examining racial justice, diversity and equity issues. It also provides training for school community members in the areas of implicit bias, microaggressions and stereotypes. For more information, visit [nysut.org/manythreads](https://nysut.org/manythreads).

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# Getting to know ... John Collins



PROVIDED

*John Collins is president of the St. Lawrence-Lewis BOCES Federation of Instructional Support Personnel. He was interviewed by Cheryl Rockhill, president of the Brushton-Moira Support Staff Association and chair of the NYSUT SRP Advisory Committee.*

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

I am a teaching assistant in the Applied Behavioral Analysis program. We work 1:1 with students who are on the autism spectrum. We receive children from all over St. Lawrence County, from 16 of our 18 component districts. Our goal is to build skills necessary to function as independently as possible whether they enter

college, the workforce, or remain at home after school.

There is lots to love about the ABA program: watching the kids acquire, practice and master skills; celebrating students and colleagues as they achieve their goals; camaraderie between the staff; and the gratitude of parents. What I love most about my job is seeing my students gain confidence in their abilities.

## How did you get involved in your union?

I started out as a long-term substitute. Like many new teachers, I made

a few newbie mistakes. When my principal relieved me of my duties she mentioned that, because I wasn't a full-time teacher, I had no mentor teacher or union support. I vowed to never let that happen again.

When BOCES hired me, I started attending union meetings and familiarizing myself with the contract. I then entered the new member trainings offered by our NYSUT regional office, learning how to connect members with NYSUT's program and member services. I gained a reputation as a fearless advocate for fellow union members. In 2017, I was elected secretary. Come 2020, I ran uncontested for president.

## How do you make a difference?

I provide my students calm and steady support to master

independent living skills. It's rewarding to see them flourish.

I teach members their rights under the collective bargaining agreement and state laws; and help them to advocate for themselves and our students. I am also a safety for them to vent. Times are tough and our members need to know they can have a safe haven for "letting it out."

## What about your community engagement, hobbies?

Two times a year the union hosts a charity drive to support our community. We also stand in solidarity with other unions.

Since high school I have been a "ringer" for several trivia teams. This past spring, I auditioned for the show "The Chase." I am hoping to be cast should there be a third season.

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## 2022 NYS Teacher of the Year

# Agriculture teacher takes top honors

By Matt Smith  
matt.smith@nysut.org

It's shortly before 8 p.m. and across an open field from a small farmhouse set back from the road on the outskirts of this rural Western New York town, a bright sun is sinking fast, ending another busy day for Carly Santangelo — but not just yet. There's still a herd of bleating goats inside a barn at the end of a dirt driveway that needs tending.

Tending to the herd: It's the same way Santangelo begins each morning, before sunrise, prior to heading off for the day to Cuba-Rushford Central School where she teaches agriculture to middle and high school students.

"Carly is knowledgeable and enthusiastic. But I think what's most important is she lives the life; Carly's authentic," said Michael Johnson, a Cuba-Rushford technology teacher who Santangelo considers a mentor.

There's a rich history of dairy and cheese production in Cuba, and soon Santangelo's goat farm, which she runs with her husband, will also include a creamery. But cream's not all that rises to the top in Cuba these days. So, too, has Carly Santangelo, named by the State Education Department as New York State's 2022 Teacher of the Year.

A nine-year classroom veteran, Santangelo's lessons span the concepts of environmental stewardship, agricultural sustainability and community building. With a focus on preparing students for the workforce, she also aims to develop in her students a sense of community through initiatives such as volunteering at the local food bank and teaching elementary school students and area businesses about the value of composting. Santangelo said she wants her students to realize the impact they can make on the greater good.

NYSUT President Andy Pallotta said Santangelo's commitment to not only her students but also her community underscores the very mission of the union movement.

"Carly represents the very best qualities that our members possess: Dedication, mastery of craft, and a sincere belief in community," Pallotta said. "Cuba is a town made up of working families and Carly is dedicated to improving the lives of everyone who lives there. We're privileged to call her a NYSUT member."

Katie Ralston, Cuba-Rushford Central School 6-12 principal, said Santangelo "is a teacher who knows no limits" and whose impact "extends well beyond the four walls of her classroom."



PHOTOS: DANA FOURNIER

"I love all things about education, but Career and Technical Education just feels really important to me because we need our students to be prepared for the workforce," said agriculture teacher Carly Santangelo, a Cuba-Rushford Teachers Association member and the 2022 New York State Teacher of the Year.

Take, for instance, the World Foods and Diversity program she founded with Joseph Franzen, a Cuba-Rushford history teacher. Now in its first year, the course helps students understand how gender, race, history and other global issues relate to the food we eat.

"Food's something we all connect with," Santangelo said. "Giving kids the opportunity to have their hands in the soil and produce their own food empowers them. It gives them a point of connection to people who they might not have had a connection to before."

Santangelo also works to expose all students to fields traditionally viewed as male-oriented, such as welding. Doing so, she said, helps break down gender-based barriers and stereotypes.

NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango said key to Santangelo's success is that she "recognizes the power of trial and error as part of the learning process."

"Carly not only meets students where they are when they arrive in her classroom," DiBrango said, "she helps take them to new heights. That is very inspiring."

"We have to view our school as an extension of our community," Santangelo said. "Learning takes place in the classroom but learning also takes place when we allow our students to take what they have learned and apply it elsewhere."

### Congratulations!

Also recognized by the State Education Department as 2022 Teacher of the Year finalists are: **Amber Chandler**, Frontier Central Teachers Association; **Jeanne Lance**, Watervliet Teachers Association; **Heather McCutcheon**, Herkimer Faculty Association; and **Lynn Sajdak**, Hamburg Teachers Association.

# Syracuse teachers play critical role in Afghan family's escape to freedom

By Matt Smith  
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This is a story about Afghanistan, oppression and basic human rights; about action, hope and perseverance — and about teachers, NYSUT members and the impact they can make in the lives of their students, their community and beyond.

When the Taliban took control of Kabul in late August, Syracuse teacher Megan Brown reached out to her former student, Basir Naziri, an Afghan immigrant who still had family in the war-ravaged country.

"I wanted to let him know I was aware of the situation and that I cared," said Brown, a Syracuse Teachers Association member and middle school English as a New Language teacher. "I never envisioned a scenario where I could do anything to help."

That was until a colleague told her about Zac Lois.

A fellow STA member and eighth-grade history teacher, Lois was part of a group called Task Force Pineapple, a small network of veterans scattered across the country working to evacuate Americans, Afghans and allies to safety.

"I thought, 'Who is this guy? What can he do?'" Brown recalled, not knowing Lois is a former Army captain and Green Beret who spent 12 years serving in hotspots such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

Brown sent Lois a text explaining she heard he might be able to help. Lois replied, telling Brown to pass his number on to her former student. The student sent Lois's contact info to his uncles in Kabul. And from that

point on, Brown, a Central New York mother of a 5-year-old, found herself in her very own real-life action movie involving the life-or-death struggle of an Afghan family halfway around the world.

"Syracuse is a very diverse city. A lot of our students are immigrants or refugees," said Lois. "We have a small Afghan population. I wanted to do everything I could to help."

Lois said when Task Force Pineapple started, members studied the Kabul airport, Taliban checkpoints, and the challenges evacuees would face. That's when he remembered the Underground Railroad and the poster of Harriet Tubman that hangs in his class.

"We had a contact on the inside with the 82nd Airborne. I reached out and explained the situation and asked if he'd be willing to help," said Lois, adding that as thousands of people were packed together trying to fight their way through the airport's four gates, there was a little hole in a wall where the task force secretly pulled people through.

Working under cover of darkness, the task force would communicate via cellphone with its people, sending directions, signals and instructions: *Go down this path, walk 100 feet along this wall, look for a green chem light and when you get to it, flash your cellphone three times.*

Lois said evacuees were sent a pineapple-patterned image. As they approached 82nd members, they would show the pineapples to indicate they were working with the task force. Once identities were verified, U.S. soldiers would bring the evacuees through the wire.

It was not smooth sailing. At one

point, Naziri's uncles were told not to proceed because the situation was just too dangerous.

"It was like running a gauntlet," Lois said. "There were families, young children, beat pretty severely. There was one pregnant woman beaten by the Taliban so severely she went into labor right on the street. And it wasn't just Afghans. It was Americans, green card holders; it was a mixed bag."

Back in Syracuse, Brown's job was to relay information she received from Lois to Naziri's family in Afghanistan — secret codes, GPS meeting points, deployment times, even words of encouragement.

"Looking back now, I don't know if I realized the full gravity of the moment," Brown said. "There were times I was so tired but I knew if I fell asleep and they missed a message, that could literally be the difference between them getting out of the country. Me staying up all night in my own house is nowhere near what the family had to work through. That definitely put it into perspective."

"Her dedication was incredible," Lois said of Brown. "She was working

as a surrogate shepherd and there the whole time."

On Aug. 26, 15 members of Naziri's family finally reached the Kabul airport and successfully escaped. They were among the very last, gaining freedom just minutes before suicide bombers set off a deadly explosion killing dozens, including 13 American military members.

Lois, meanwhile, continues his work with Task Force Pineapple. He said more than 5,000 people remain on the group's evacuation list — Americans, journalists, women's rights activists, military targets and members of the LGBTQ community. Lois is on leave from his teaching position — a request he gratefully said his administration supported fully.

"The last couple of years at school we've talked a lot about oppression, justice and equality, and I don't think there is any better representation of that than this situation," he said. "I've kind of had a moral crisis. I had to ask myself: If I quit (the task force work) right now, am I really setting a good example for my students about the importance of these issues?"



PROVIDED

After a harrowing journey aided by two Syracuse teachers, 15 members of the Naziri family escaped Afghanistan. Above, five members of the family await transfer to the US from a safe location in Germany.

# Thinking outside the box on alternative

By Matt Smith  
matt.smith@nysut.org

It's 7:25 a.m. and students are making their way upstairs to the top of the former Kenmore Middle School, where teachers are lined along both sides of the corridor, waiting to dole out morning greetings, pats on the back and high fives.

"There she is!"

"You ready? It's going to be a great day!"

"Good morning, Gino!"

"We're like a family here," teacher Cheryl Hughes said of the students, educators and administrators who gather each day on the building's third floor — home of the Ken-Ton School District's Big Picture Program, an alternative education high school.

"The students here stick together. They get along, and even bicker, like brothers and sisters. And they know too that here is where they have another caring adult in their lives," said Hughes, a NYSUT Board member and Kenmore Teachers Association secretary who also serves as a science teacher and advisor in the Big Picture Program.

Based on a nationally designed, research-based education model, Big Picture was brought to Ken-Ton in 2012 out of concern over graduation rates, said Matt Chimera, a retired social studies teacher who spent 38 years in the classroom and helped launch the program in the district.

At the time, Chimera was one of only three full-time teachers in Big Picture serving 30 students in ninth and tenth grades. Now the Ken-Ton program has seven full-time teachers and a principal serving 90 students grades 8 to 12. The program's graduation rate stands at 94 percent,

higher than the overall district's.

The program's success, Chimera said, is that its project-based approach appeals to non-traditional students who would otherwise have difficulty in a typical classroom environment. Chimera recalled, for example, one project undertaken by a student that focused on skateboarding. The construction of a skate ramp involved math and technology; the physics of the sport provided lessons in science; while the biographical essays the student wrote on his favorite skaters helped develop knowledge in English and skills in writing.

"It's not like you are just sitting around here. You are always engaged. It's very hands-on,"



Matthew Miller, a social studies teacher and internship coordinator for the Big Picture Program, shares a smile with students.

said eighth-grade student Avahn Jackson.

Also appealing is the 15-to-1 student-teacher ratio.

"The smaller class sizes really help me with my anxiety, which is something I have always struggled with," said fellow eighth-grader Ariana



NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango, left, and Cheryl Hughes, Kenmore Teachers Association, discuss the Big Picture Program, an alternative education high school in the Ken-Ton School District near Buffalo.



Top: Student Avahn Jackson says the "hands-on" nature of the Big Picture Program keeps students engaged.

Correa as she sat in a circle with her classmates, tossing a bright stuffed squid to one another that designated whose turn it was to speak.

NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango said Ken-Ton's Big Picture Program

Right: Classmates share a moment in the Ken-Ton School District's Big Picture Program.

PHOTOS: DAN CAPPELLAZZO

# tive education

serves as a model for all schools on how to provide a strong academic curriculum while ensuring students' social and emotional needs are being met.

"The program allows for the time that you need as a teacher to develop those really meaningful relationships. What we hear from students over and over here is how they feel valued and cared for by the teachers," said DiBrango. "It's not because teachers here care more. It's because there is explicit time to be able to express and show their care. Then that allows the students to model it with one another. It's developing a culture — a family environment."

Prior to the start of each school day on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, Big Picture students and teachers in Ken-Ton gather for a "Pick Me Up," which serves as a pep rally of sorts to start the day off on a positive note.

"There's a great family atmosphere here," said Ken-Ton Superintendent Sabatino Cimato, smiling. "Where else are you going to find a bunch of kids this excited to be in school at

eight in the morning in October?"

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, students report to internships in the community: at veterinarian offices, local gyms, auto repair businesses, law firms, locksmiths — you name it.

Key to Big Picture, Chimera said, is the advisory component in which teachers — who must apply to work in the program — stay with the same group of kids for all five years. In doing so, they get to know not only their students, but also the parents, with whom they build open lines of communication.

"It takes a special kind of person to teach in this program," said Chimera, a member of NYSUT Retiree Council 1, who now serves as president of the

district's board of education. "You really become part of your student's family and so you need to have someone who wants to build those relationships."

Big Picture is "unlike any educational experience I have ever been part of," said Richard Kennedy, a Kenmore TA member and math teacher in the program who formerly worked as a calculus professor at Canisius College. "This helped me rethink what education truly means. And (the students) really did a lot to help me rethink my future."

DiBrango, who was in Ken-Ton touring the Big Picture Program recently, was asked by senior

## Big Picture NY

Big Picture Learning was established in 1995 with the sole mission of putting students directly at the center of their own learning. Students spend considerable time in the community in real-world work situations. With less emphasis on standardized tests, students are assessed on exhibitions and demonstrations of achievement.

Across New York state — in rural, big city, urban and suburban districts — schools are incorporating project-based learning into their curriculum. And several districts are taking advantage of resources offered through Big Picture Learning, whether it's the full Big Picture experience or internships and other real-world opportunities. For more information about Big Picture Learning, visit [bigpicturelearning.org](http://bigpicturelearning.org).

Alexandria Bolt, "How did you get your start and how did you rise to the level you are now?"

The NYSUT officer talked about how she spent 21 years as a classroom teacher, became involved in her union, took on various roles and eventually ran for elected office.

"It's scary to change what you are doing," DiBrango said. "But keep trying. Keep evolving. Just because you are in one place one day doesn't mean you have to be there the next."

"Eventually," said Bolt, an aspiring teacher herself, "I want to be just as high up as you."

PHOTOS: DAN CAPELLAZZO



# TOC offers crucial support for aspiring teachers of color

By Sylvia Saunders  
sylvia.saunders@nysut.org

**W**ithout the state’s Teacher Opportunity Corps program, Syracuse English language arts teacher Leeza Roper doubts her dream of teaching would have become a reality.

After a school counselor at her Brooklyn high school encouraged her to explore life outside the city and apply to an upstate campus, Roper, pictured at left, landed at SUNY Oswego. It was a big leap of faith since she had never even visited the campus overlooking Lake Ontario.

“Both my parents are deaf and we didn’t have the money or the time for college visits,” Roper said. “It ended up being a good choice — but it was a big transition for me.”

Six hours away from home, Roper really struggled that first semester. It wasn’t just academics; it was trying to juggle school work along with extracurriculars like being an African Dance captain and an active member of the American Sign Language Club.

“I was forgetting my reason for being there, my studies,” Roper said. An email from Nichole Brown, director of SUNY Oswego’s Teacher Opportunity Corps program, changed everything.

“Ms. Brown and TOC literally picked me up and carried me through,” Roper said. In addition to tuition assistance, a stipend for books and transportation funding for clinical experiences, TOC also provided crucial emotional support with weekly check-in meetings, academic help and networking opportunities. Her TOC extended placement in Syracuse led to a full-time job offer.

“The check-in meetings were the

best part — making you feel like you weren’t alone,” Roper said. “It was such a strong community where we felt free to share our feelings and vent. It was so empowering to be together, with people who look like you, Asians, Hispanics ... We talked through ways to handle difficult situations.”

Sidney Rajab, another Oswego TOC student, agreed, saying he’s not sure he would have made it through student teaching without TOC.

“Many times I wanted to give up,” said Rajab, a recently tenured automotive technology teacher at Edison Career and Technology High School in Rochester. “There was so much pressure and I was overwhelmed preparing lessons, labs and teaching for the first time in front of students.”

A Ugandan emigrant, Rajab was self-conscious about his accent, but Brown and his TOC peers helped him build teaching skills and confidence.

Rajab also greatly appreciated TOC’s extra support on how to prep for the teacher certification exams, launch his career and later secure financial support to earn his master’s degree. TOC also helps cover the costs of certification exams and fingerprinting, which can add up to more than \$1,200.

“Even at this point, as I’m completing my doctorate degree, I still call Ms. Brown for advice,” Rajab said. “She stays in touch long after you graduate. I can always count on her.”

Both Roper and Rajab feel fortunate they were able to get into Teacher Opportunity Corps, a state-funded program at 17 public and private colleges around the state. The \$3.45 million program serves about 600 students statewide, including at SUNY’s Brockport, Buffalo State,

Cortland, Old Westbury and Oswego campuses; and CUNY’s Hunter, Medgar Evers, Queens and York colleges.

TOC is designed to increase the number of historically underrepresented individuals entering the teaching field, providing financial, social, academic and professional support — setting candidates up for success and improving retention rates.

“We need to diversify the teacher workforce,” said Brown, a member of United University Professions, representing academic faculty and staff at the State University of New York. “Eighty percent of the teachers in the state workforce are white, while students of color make up the majority of the student population.”

NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango said expanding promising programs like TOC is essential if the state wants to recruit and retain a more diverse teaching pool. NYSUT’s Take a Look at Teaching initiative is providing grants to encourage local unions to create “Grow Your Own” programs and work with community and higher ed partners like TOC to improve access and support for more students of color. “All students, whether in urban, suburban or rural schools, benefit from a diverse teacher workforce,” DiBrango said.

Both Roper and Rajab said it’s important for students of color to have role models they can identify with.

“I tell them, ‘You’re sitting in the same spot I was in — the same high school, the very same classroom. Auto technology is such a high demand field that can open a lot of doors for you,’” said Rajab, who is teaching at his alma mater. “I’m a living example of what’s possible.”



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# SRP leaders to share tips, strategies

By **Liza Frenette**  
liza.frenette@nysut.org

**A**s the seasons turn and the pandemic continues to wreak havoc, one constant remains: The union continues to fight for what educators need to stay safe on the job and empower themselves in a workplace significantly impacted by COVID-19.

School-Related Professionals know those struggles all too well. From dealing with severe staffing shortages to changing job duties and switching from in-person to remote and back to in-person, SRPs are on the front lines and behind the scenes.

As *NYSUT United* went to press, SRPs leaders were finalizing plans for the annual SRP Leadership Conference, to be held Oct. 29-31.

This year's theme: "Together again: SRP leaders creating a better tomorrow."

Christel Williams-Hayes, recording secretary for the Chicago Teachers Union, will deliver the keynote address. The CTU recently successfully pushed for a health and safety committee in every school, including SRP members, to meet weekly with administration. Williams-Hayes encourages SRPs to "fight and not hold back; to measure their loyalty with their safety."

Williams-Hayes will share her



NYSUT Second Vice President  
Ron Gross

experiences, ideas for toolkits and ways to mobilize members. The CTU, for example, was able to get Chicago Public Schools to hire 150 more teaching assistants in this changed learning environment.

"We are all seeing our professions through different lenses, and this conference will address many of the ways we have adapted since the pandemic and focus on the toll that the physical, psychological and emotional stress has had on our leaders and members," said Ron Gross, NYSUT second vice president.

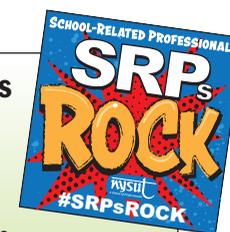
"Our SRPs are working harder than ever to meet the ever-changing landscape in education," said Gross. And as new crises emerge, "our leaders have become more cohesive and

are helping each other get through each day."

Conference workshops include building power through political action; work, COVID and compassion fatigue; effective communication; understanding and challenging implicit bias; and managing stress and anxiety.

## Celebrate SRPs

There's still time to plan for New York State School-Related Professionals Recognition Day Nov. 16 – but not much! Order posters and "SRPs Rock" pins at [nysut.org/srpd](https://nysut.org/srpd). Also, share your celebrations with us at [united@nysut.org](mailto:united@nysut.org).



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# Local unions win grants to grow their own future teachers

By Sylvia Saunders  
sylvia.saunders@nysut.org

**M**ore than a dozen P-12 local unions, one community college and five United University Professions chapters at SUNY have been awarded grants to increase and diversify the teacher talent pipeline by recruiting students from local communities.

The union-led effort is supported by a \$675,000 three-year grant from the National Education Association, one of NYSUT's national affiliates.

The "Grow Your Own" grants are an outgrowth of NYSUT's Take a Look at Teaching initiative, which began four 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 enrollments in teacher education programs, increased retirements and severe shortages in difficult-to-staff subject areas and districts.

"Grow Your Own programs are a highly effective way to develop aspiring educators who are strongly connected to the school and

community," said NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango. "Whether it's tutoring a younger student, shadowing a teacher or visiting a college campus, there are all sorts of ways to encourage students to think about a career in teaching. Sometimes they just need a tap on the shoulder or a little nudge."

DiBrango noted GYO programs can help address the need for more diversity in the teaching force by recruiting and supporting students of color, especially males of color. GYO programs can also be crucial in rural communities, which are facing serious recruitment and retention challenges.

The first round of \$5,000 grant winners have ambitious plans. They are:

- Brentwood Teacher Center/ Brentwood Teachers Association: Create a TALAT Club, and partner with Suffolk County Community College, community organizations and businesses.
- Faculty Association of Suffolk County CC: Raise awareness and increase enrollment in SCCC's Early Childhood and Adolescent

Education programs; assign advisers to help prospective education majors with the application process, financial aid and needed prerequisites; continue mentoring throughout SCCC attendance.

- Fulton TA: Develop a TALAT Club, inviting educators with diverse backgrounds as guest speakers; create a new teacher study

group to support and retain new teachers; partner with Cayuga CC and SUNY Oswego to offer college and career activities.

- Greece TA: Create a TALAT Club to dovetail with the district's early childhood education/teacher cadet pathway; expand partnerships with Monroe CC and SUNY Brockport.

- North Syracuse Education Association: Develop a Teacher Exploration Program and Club; establish partnerships with SUNY Cortland and Syracuse University; provide tutoring, mentoring and job shadowing.

- Pittsford District TA: Implement a TALAT Club at both high schools; create a TALAT Partnership Coordinator position within the union leadership.

- TA of Sag Harbor: Encourage juniors and seniors to join TALAT Club; provide opportunities to assist elementary and middle school classes.

- Syracuse TA: Create a TALAT Club at the junior high level; expand existing Future Educators Club at the high school level; work with SUNY Oswego students to mentor Syracuse high school students interested in education careers.

- Troy TA: Create a TALAT Future Educators Club, providing mentoring and shadowing experiences; encourage students to pursue the Questar Teaching Assistant program through the University at Albany.

- United Federation of Teachers: Collaborate with the City University of New York to develop materials for the UFT membership to use in teacher recruitment visits and events; work with black fraternities and sororities to recruit diverse teaching candidates.



Yonkers FT piloted a TALAT Club with about 35 students from six high schools just before the pandemic hit. Above, students work in groups to identify the skills teachers need to be successful.

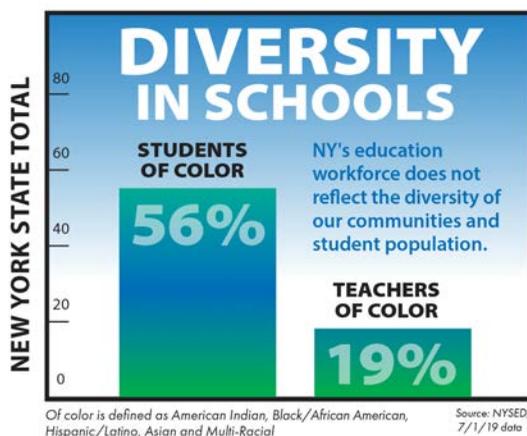
- Utica TA: Create TALAT clubs at two middle schools, with mentoring by district teachers; partner with Utica College, Herkimer CC and Mohawk Valley CC for tours and volunteer opportunities.

- West Irondequoit TA: Create a TALAT Club at the junior high level and expand the high school Future Educators Club; provide transportation for after-school homework help and tutoring for elementary students; host field trips to area colleges.

- Yonkers Federation of Teachers: Develop a TALAT introductory program for pre-K to eighth grade; expand after-school and summer instructional experiences for high schoolers in a current TALAT Club.

UUP-funded projects include grants for Buffalo State Art Education/ Buffalo Public Schools; Empire State College; Binghamton University/ Youth Apprenticeship Program; and SUNY Plattsburgh/North Country Future Educators Club. Grants will pay for recruitment events and visits.

For more information and to apply for the second round of NYSUT's GYO grants, go to [takealookateaching.org](http://takealookateaching.org). You will also find a number of resources for use in the classroom, with a TALAT club or as part of community events.



## NOTICE OF NOMINATION AND SPECIAL ELECTION

### **NYSUT Board of Directors NYSUT At-Large Director ED 9 & 10**

A vacancy exists on the NYSUT Board of Directors for the position of At-Large Director for Election District 9 & 10, which was created by the resignation of Donald Carlisto, effective Sept. 1, 2021.

Pursuant to NYSUT Constitution, Article IX §6(o), the NYSUT Board of Directors is empowered to fill all At-Large Director vacancies that may occur between election year Representative Assemblies.

Notice is hereby given that a Special Election to fill the At-Large ED 9 & 10 Director vacancy will be conducted by the NYSUT Board of Directors as follows:

**Date: December 3, 2021**

**Time: 4 p.m.**

**Place: The Saratoga Hilton  
534 Broadway  
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866**

The election will be by roll call vote of the members of the NYSUT Board of Directors. A majority vote is required for election. Should a second balloting be necessary to determine the results of an election, the two nominees with the highest number of votes in the first election will be nominees. In the event that there is a tie for the second highest number of

votes, the candidate with the highest number of votes and all candidates tied for second shall be placed on the second ballot. The meeting must remain in session until there are no more than two candidates on the ballot, and one candidate is elected by the Board.

Nominations to fill this vacancy will be accepted in accordance with the Campaign and Election Procedures approved by the NYSUT Board of Directors for the 2020 Representative Assembly. In order to qualify for the Special Election a Nominating Petition must be fully completed and then signed by at least eight (8) NYSUT members. The completed and signed Nominating Petition must then be received by the NYSUT Elections Committee by the close of business (5 p.m.) on Monday, Nov. 22, 2021. Any NYSUT member in good standing from Election Districts 9 & 10 may be a candidate.

Nominating Petitions are available by contacting the NYSUT Elections Committee at [elections@nysut.org](mailto:elections@nysut.org) or by contacting the NYSUT Office of the President at 800-342-9810.

The candidate elected will serve as successor At-Large Director immediately upon being elected and continue to serve as successor At-Large Director to the conclusion of the 2023 Representative Assembly.

### **NYSUT Board of Directors At-Large Director ED 28 & 29**

A vacancy exists on the NYSUT Board of Directors for the position of At-Large Director for Election District 28 & 29, which was created by the resignation of Analia Gerard, effective Monday, Sept. 13, 2021.

Pursuant to NYSUT Constitution, Article IX §6(o), the NYSUT Board of Directors is empowered to fill all At-Large Director vacancies that may occur between election year Representative Assemblies.

Notice is hereby given that a Special Election to fill the At-Large ED 28 & 29 Director vacancy will be conducted by the NYSUT Board of Directors as follows:

**Date: December 3, 2021**

**Time: 4 p.m.**

**Place: The Saratoga Hilton  
534 Broadway  
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866**

The election will be by roll call vote of the members of the NYSUT Board of Directors. A majority vote is required for election. Should a second balloting be necessary to determine the results of an election, the two nominees with the highest number of votes in the first election will be nominees. In the event that there is a tie for the second highest number of

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Nominations to fill this vacancy will be accepted in accordance with the Campaign and Election Procedures approved by the NYSUT Board of Directors for the 2020 Representative Assembly. In order to qualify for the Special Election a Nominating Petition must be fully completed and then signed by at least eight (8) NYSUT members. The completed and signed Nominating Petition must then be received by the NYSUT Elections Committee by the close of business (5 p.m.) on Monday, Nov. 22, 2021. Any NYSUT member in good standing from Election Districts 24-35 may be a candidate.

Nominating Petitions are available by contacting the NYSUT Elections Committee at [elections@nysut.org](mailto:elections@nysut.org) or by contacting the NYSUT Office of the President at 800-342-9810.

The candidate elected will serve as successor At-Large Director immediately upon being elected and continue to serve as successor At-Large Director to the conclusion of the 2023 Representative Assembly.

### **NYSUT Board of Directors At-Large Director ED 34 & 35**

A vacancy exists on the NYSUT Board of Directors for the position of At-Large Director for Election District 34 & 35, which was created by the resignation of Sterling Roberson, effective Tuesday, Oct. 12, 2021.

Pursuant to NYSUT Constitution, Article IX §6(o), the NYSUT Board of Directors is empowered to fill all At-Large Director vacancies that may occur between election year Representative Assemblies.

Notice is hereby given that a Special Election to fill the At-Large ED 34 & 35 Director vacancy will be conducted by the NYSUT Board of Directors as follows:

**Date: December 3, 2021**

**Time: 4:00 p.m.**

**Place: The Saratoga Hilton  
534 Broadway  
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866**

The election will be by roll call vote of the members of the NYSUT Board of Directors. A majority vote is required for election. Should a second balloting be necessary to determine the results of an election, the two nominees with the highest number of votes in the first election will be nominees. In the event that there is a tie for the second highest number of

votes, the candidate with the highest number of votes and all candidates tied for second shall be placed on the second ballot. The meeting must remain in session until there are no more than two candidates on the ballot, and one candidate is elected by the Board.

Nominations to fill this vacancy will be accepted in accordance with the Campaign and Election Procedures approved by the NYSUT Board of Directors for the 2020 Representative Assembly. In order to qualify for the Special Election a Nominating Petition must be fully completed and then signed by at least eight (8) NYSUT members. The completed and signed Nominating Petition must then be received by the NYSUT Elections Committee by the close of business (5 p.m.) on Monday, Nov. 22, 2021. Any NYSUT member in good standing from Election Districts 24-35 may be a candidate.

Nominating Petitions are available by contacting the NYSUT Elections Committee at [elections@nysut.org](mailto:elections@nysut.org) or by contacting the NYSUT Office of the President at 800-342-9810.

The candidate elected will serve as successor At-Large Director immediately upon being elected and continue to serve as successor At-Large Director to the conclusion of the 2023 Representative Assembly.

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# In her words: Breast cancer survivor shares her journey to healing

By Liza Frenette  
liza.frenette@nysut.org

When the younger of Jennie Rook's two boys graduated from preschool a decade ago, the sight of the mortarboard on his small head set off alarms: What if she wasn't around for her sons' graduations from high school because of her newly diagnosed breast cancer?

"I was hoping there wasn't going to be an empty seat in 2021," said Rook, a member of the Clarence Teachers Association.

A middle school English teacher who loves books, Rook's own life story took a dark twist at just 36.

"I found it myself," Rook recalls, "on the side of my breast near my armpit. I was shaving when I found it." She pauses. "I have trouble saying the word 'lump.' It's like Voldemort."

When she presented this discovery to the doctor, she was shocked that she needed a mammogram, biopsy and MRI. She thought: "You're supposed to tell me 'everyone has this.'"

The lump was malignant, and Rook said she was kind of numb for a month. She had a mastectomy, and when pathology revealed more cancer in the breast tissue, she had four months of chemotherapy. The nasty spate of toxic liquids dripped into her body was followed by 39 rounds of radiation.

When she lost all her hair, it was startling.

"They don't really tell you how devastating that is," she said. "It's physically painful and emotionally rocky. It's like a thousand pinpricks in your head."

Illness and fatigue slammed her often, and her sons motivated her to stay involved.



PHOTOS PROVIDED

During her cancer battle, Jennie Rook enjoys a light moment with her husband, Dave, and sons Jake and Tom.

"It was a very intense time in my life. Thank God for my contract and sick time and health care benefits that our union negotiated. When you live it, the appreciation is ten-fold," said Rook, a former building rep. "I can't imagine the costs."

Back at school once she was healing, she resumed teaching poetry, essays and novels to her students.

"I love their quiriness and their sense of humor," she said.

As a longtime English teacher, Rook knows her way around words. She wrote *Keeping Abreast and Loving What's Left: Redefining Normal After a Cancer Crisis*, published by the Clarence Historical Society Press in 2014.

"Writing was really cathartic for me," she said.

By 2016, Rook was strong enough to walk 39 miles from Washington, D.C., to Chevy Chase, Maryland, with a friend in a two-day breast cancer fundraiser. Even before her own diagnosis, she participated in Making Strides Against Breast Cancer walks

with friends and colleagues to raise money for the American Cancer Society. She walked in the Buffalo Strides event this year.

Rook said her two biggest take-aways from the walks are that she can handle whatever comes her way, and she's never alone.

This past June, Rook attended her son Jake's high school graduation — and she plans on taking a seat at her son Tom's graduation in two years.

## Walk with Team NYSUT!

NYSUT has been a flagship sponsor of Making Strides Against Breast Cancer since 2002, and dedicated members have donned pink to walk in events across the state year after year.

This year's events — held virtually and in-person through October — will add to the \$15 million that NYSUT members have raised for research and resources for the American Cancer Society, said NYSUT Secretary-Treasurer J. Philippe Abraham, whose office coordinates the union's Making Strides effort.

For more information on Team NYSUT, visit [nysut.org/joinmakingstrides](http://nysut.org/joinmakingstrides).



Clarence TA member and breast cancer survivor Jennie Rook.

# Retirees celebrate 30 years, chart year ahead

By Kara Smith  
kara.smith@nysut.org

**A**lthough they met behind computer screens rather than around conference tables, Florence McCue, NYSUT ED 51-53 at-large director, encouraged retiree activists attending the 2021 fall virtual contiguous retiree meeting to stay involved with their in-service locals and “get new delegates involved in your retiree local.”

The union will celebrate the 30th anniversary of retiree councils throughout the year. Ron Gross, NYSUT second vice president, reminded attendees to submit pictures and stories about days gone by and discussed the possibility of opening

a swag store to allow retirees to purchase 30th anniversary gear. “I’m a big supporter of wearing your union colors and celebrating our longevity.”

A big part of the anniversary celebration is the NYSUT Legacy Fund, a new NYSUT program that enables locals, chapters, retiree councils or members to recognize activists. Fund ambassador Pat Puleo, RC 16, presented about the initiative during the event. “It’s a wonderful way to honor people who worked hard for our union and to continue to build and enhance our union,” she said.

Ken Ulric, RC 17, inspired a lively discussion with a presentation about the Long Island Strike project, his detailed compilation of Long Island teacher strikes going back to 1966. He shared his methodology for sourcing the stories and encouraged other retiree councils to document their history. “It’s important to remind in-service members that it took people struggling to get the benefits we enjoy — and that it was the retirees who made that happen,” said Ulric.

NYSUT’s full officer slate greeted

meeting participants. “So many of my mentors are on this call,” said Andy Pallotta, NYSUT president, who discussed the union’s ongoing political activism. “You helped guide me, and today I use that knowledge to help guide our great union.”

“We stand on the shoulders of giants; thanks for all you’ve done to build NYSUT,” said Jolene DiBrango, NYSUT executive vice president. She discussed the NYSUT women’s movement and the union’s work to foster a robust pipeline into the teaching profession through its Take a Look at Teaching initiative.

J. Philippe Abraham, NYSUT secretary-treasurer, highlighted the union’s social justice initiative “Many Threads, One Fabric,” and its disaster relief efforts in the wake of recent major storms. “Please spread the word about the NYSUT Disaster Relief Fund — we help our union siblings in times of trouble.”

Senate Education Committee Chair Shelley Mayer pledged to work with NYSUT to protect public sector retiree benefits. “I’m forever thankful

to you for the years of service you put into our schools and students.”

Other speakers included Roger Boudreau, Rhode Island AFT Retirees president and Alliance for Retired Americans of Rhode Island vice president, who encouraged participants to sign a petition to repeal the Government Pension Offset and the Windfall Elimination Provision, [nysut.cc/unfairgpo](https://nysut.cc/unfairgpo).

Felicia Bruce, RC 43 president; Ken Goodfriend, coordinator Florida UFT/Retired Teachers Chapter; and Janice Poirier, president of Florida Retired Teachers, detailed Florida’s dire political climate. They urged retirees to help with phone banking and political contributions. Participants also heard regional updates from Loretta Donlon, ED 51 director; Rosemary Catanzariti, ED 52 director; and Thomas Murphy, ED 53 director.

Four resolutions were amended and approved for submission at the NYSUT Representative Assembly in April. Retirees also approved a reaffirmation.

## DID YOU KNOW?

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

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

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

**Peter Randazzo**, RC 5, 6  
585-454-5550

**Anne Marie Voutsinas**, RC 7, 8  
315-431-4040

**Ruth Shippee**, RC 9, 10  
518-783-7977

**Mark Padgett**, RC 11, 45  
607-786-5742

**Jennifer Shaad-Derby**, RC 12, 13  
518-783-7977

**Ellen Pincus**, RC 14, 15-16  
914-592-4411

**Claire Zatorski**, RC 17, 18, 19  
516-496-2035

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

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



From left, Mary Ellen Caporta, chair of the Retiree Council 10 Social Justice Committee, with Betsy Dickson, director of the Regional Food Bank children’s program. RC10, representing members from Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga and Washington counties, donated \$18,742 to the food bank’s Back Pack program for the 2020-21 school year.



Florence McCue, standing, with (from left) Westchester County Legislator MaryJane Shimsky and former U.S. Rep. Nita Lowey at a Westchester County Democratic Committee event celebrating Lowey and former congressman Eliot Engel.

PHOTOS PROVIDED

## New webinars offer certification help

Every year, NYSUT helps thousands of members navigate the state's complex certification process. In response to increasing demand, NYSUT's certification team is hosting a new series of free webinars this fall.

The webinars cover three specific certification topics:

- *Initial to Professional Certification Guidance*, offered Oct. 26, covers the requirements of professional certification for initially certified teachers, provisionally certified school counselors, psychologists and social workers;
- *Teaching Assistant Certification Guidance*, held Oct. 28, clarifies the requirements for Levels I, II and III and the pre-professional certificate; and
- *Options Related to Expiring Certificates/ Changing Assignments*, offered Nov. 10, explores available options if your certificate is about to expire or you are considering obtaining an additional certificate to change teaching roles.

Each session is held from 4 to 5:30 p.m. For



more information and to register, go to [nysut.org/certification](https://nysut.org/certification). Space in each webinar is limited, so please sign up only if you plan to attend.

NYSUT's certification site also includes fact sheets, responses to the most frequently asked questions and a presentation on how to apply for COVID-19 emergency certification. There is also an online form where members can seek individualized help. While the State Education Department manages the certification system, our experts can give you honest answers and help you through the process.

## Need help with student loans?

With a complete overhaul of the student loan forgiveness program in the works, NYSUT is offering a series of free webinars to provide tips and answer your questions. The next two sessions are 4:30 to 6 p.m., Tuesday, Nov. 9; and 6 to 7:30 p.m., Thursday, Nov. 18. Live webinars are led by Cambridge Credit Counseling and offer members the following:

- Presentation from a student loan counselor to help you better understand the various student loan repayment options with a focus on Teacher Loan Cancellation and Public Student Loan Forgiveness programs;
- Opportunity to schedule a free counseling session with a certified student loan counselor; and
- Free access to a student loan portal that will quickly identify all of your options and provide a detailed action plan that you can then discuss with a certified student loan counselor.

For more information and to register, go to [studentloans.nysut.org](https://studentloans.nysut.org).

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## Quotable



### NEA Education Votes

Tens of thousands of educators sent letters about the broken #PSLF program to @usedgov and @SecCardona. Looks like we were heard! #CancelStudentDebt (@edvotes)

### UAW Clint McGill

Employees have learned companies cannot do these jobs without us. Demand more, stand together and fight. Together we can bring back the middle class and kill the wage disparity this country has perpetuated for years. #organize #union #SolidarityForever #UAW (@mcgill\_clint)

### APSTA

The current situations in our schools are pushing teachers closer and closer to their breaking point. APSTA members working to exhaustion everyday to keep students safe and in their classrooms. Something has to give. @nysut @AFTunion @AndyPallotta @sft803 (@apsta\_albany)

### AFL-CIO

@BCTGM members are on strike at all Kellogg's U.S. cereal plants. They work 16-hour forced overtime shifts and 7-day work weeks, sometimes up to 120 days straight. Now, amid record profits, @KelloggsUS wants to cut their pay & benefits. #striketober (@AFLCIO)

### Fight For 15

Working 2-3 jobs just to still be behind on the rent isn't living. #FightFor15 (@fightfor15)



## QUESTIONS FOR...

# Barbie Shaffer

Columbia-Greene Community College Faculty Association

### 1. Like many members, you've had a challenging time navigating the student loan system. Tell us about your experience.

As a first-generation college student, I remember being so excited when I had been accepted to the college I'd hope to attend and was told by a member of the financial aid team that, with my scholarship and loans, I would be able to make my tuition. I had no idea at the time, however, how much I would end up owing years later. When I did enter repayment and saw the total and expected monthly payments, with all of the interest that had accrued over the years, my heart nearly stopped. Why had I not been better informed?

### 2. They certainly don't make it easy. The Public Service Loan Forgiveness program has been under fire because it has rejected more than 98 percent of borrowers who have applied for the benefit. You signed up for NYSUT's student loan debt workshop. How did it help?

As someone who was aware of the appalling rate of rejection for PSLF, I came into the workshop worried that I would be told I made an error and I was unable to qualify for forgiveness. What I left with was a tremendous sense of relief! The workshop facilitators explained the requirements that needed to be met for a successful PSLF application. I was so happy to learn that I was on track for forgiveness.

### 3. What about follow-up?

After the workshop, I scheduled an individual counseling session with a member of the Cambridge team. The counselor, Todd Friedhaber, contacted me in less than 24 hours and provided me with a personalized Student Debt Solutions Action Plan. He also was able to confirm that I am on track to apply for PSLF. Even better, he advised me to switch repayment plans and I am now saving nearly \$300 a month!

### 4. So you're now on track for the PSLF program. How will this improve your financial outlook?

Thanks to NYSUT's student debt workshop and the follow-up counseling session, I am certain that my PSLF application will be successful.

Further, simply by taking advantage of the services provided to us as members of NYSUT, I am saving thousands of dollars each year having switched repayment plans. If that is not an incentive for participating in this program, I don't know what is.

### 5. Many people don't realize higher education faculty and staff like yourself qualify for PSLF. What advice do you give them about PSLF and this union benefit?

I have gained so much from participating in this program. Not only am I in a better place financially, I'm also now confident that, after I make my last 20 payments, I will have a successful PSLF application. Just having that piece of mind is a tremendous gift. I would recommend that all NYSUT members take advantage of this union benefit!



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## [ RESOURCES FOR YOU ]

## NYSUT journal explores project-based learning, authentic assessment

**E**ducators across the state are increasingly using different methods to get students more actively involved in their learning. And Volume XIV of NYSUT's journal written for practitioners, by practitioners, taps into that energy. "Leveraging Student Strengths through Project-Based Learning and Authentic Assessment," is the theme.

"Traditional textbooks and paper-and-pencil tests don't always capture what students have truly learned, nor do they necessarily afford the critical experiences today's students need as they learn to navigate an increasingly complex and changing world,"

said NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango. "Project-based learning takes students beyond paper-and-pencil-driven activities while authentic assessment pushes past the walls of the classroom by incorporating broader experiences into the learning landscape."

This volume features a unique multi-age, interdisciplinary summer program where collaboration is central; a project where students explore their "reason for being" by learning about career paths; a Design-A-School project for future teachers that demonstrates how to apply reflective practices to improve

a curriculum; a program that asks middle schoolers to explore their own curiosities through "passion projects;" and a school that has embraced inquiry practices putting students in the driver's seat and allowing them to direct their learning.

NYSUT's journal of best practices in education P-20 is dedicated to highlighting research-based classroom and schoolwide strategies that make a difference in student achievement. Look for Volume XIV this fall at [nysut.org/educatorsvoice](http://nysut.org/educatorsvoice). Keep an eye out for the call for proposals for Volume XV, "Sustaining Democracy through Civics Education."

**Nancy Cobb** | Dec. 10, 2020  
Port Jefferson Station Teachers Association

**Charlotte 'Pat' Cullen**  
Sept. 19, 2021  
United University Professions-Potsdam

**Felicienne Cullen**  
Dec. 29, 2020  
Wappingers Congress of Teachers

**Barbara Ann Dinehart**  
Jan. 31, 2021  
Wappingers Congress of Teachers

**Ivy Eig** | Sept. 28, 2021  
United Federation of Teachers

**Paul J. Faber** | Sept. 19, 2021  
Williamsville Teachers Association

**Wilhelmina Gilligan**  
Feb. 24, 2021  
Wappingers Congress of Teachers

**Fred C. Hoffman** | Nov. 6, 2020  
Port Jefferson Station Teachers Association

**Therese J. Langlais**  
Jan. 16, 2021  
Wappingers Congress of Teachers

**Edith 'Edie' Lewin**  
Sept. 18, 2021  
Buffalo Teachers Federation

**Tiffany Nalls-Ford**  
Sept. 21, 2021  
Niagara Falls Teachers

**Daniel F. Sherman**  
July 18, 2021  
Syracuse Teachers Association

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](mailto:julie.malec@nysut.org).

## How school employees earn service credit

If you are a member of the New York State and Local Employees' Retirement System (ERS), your pension will be based largely on your final average earnings and the amount of service credit you earned while working for a public employer. Generally speaking, one year of service is earned for each year you are working. But how is service credit determined if you are a school employee who only works 10 months out of the year, or part time?

Depending on your employer, a full-time, 10-month academic year (one year of retirement service credit) can range from 170 to 200 days. For BOCES and school district employees, as well as teachers working at New York state schools for the deaf and blind, a full year is 180 days. For college employees, a full year is 170 days, and for institutional teachers, it's 200 days.

The number of hours in a full-time day is set by your employer (ranging between six and eight hours). Your employer reports the number of days you worked to us. If you don't work full time, your employer converts the

number of hours you worked into the equivalent number of full-time days. For example, if your employer's full-time workday is 8 hours, and you work 4 hours each day of the academic year, you will receive half a year of retirement service credit for the year. You can check your current estimated service credit in your Retirement Online account ([web.osc.state.ny.us/retire/sign-in.php](http://web.osc.state.ny.us/retire/sign-in.php)).

If you worked for a public employer before joining ERS, or if you were in the military, you may be able to receive additional credit for this service. To request additional service, sign in to Retirement Online, scroll down to the "My Account Summary" area of your Account Homepage and click the "Manage My Service Credit Purchases" button. The Service Credit Purchase Accounts webpage will appear. Click "Request Additional Service Credit." We will write to your employers and request payroll records, and then let you know if you are eligible to add additional service to your ERS retirement, as well as any costs.

For more info, read our Service Credit for Tiers 2 through 6 publication on our website at [osc.state.ny.us/retirement/publications/service-credit-tiers-2-through-6](http://osc.state.ny.us/retirement/publications/service-credit-tiers-2-through-6).

In every issue, State Comptroller Thomas



P. DiNapoli, administrative head of the State and Local Employees' Retirement System (ERS) and trustee of the Common Retirement Fund, provides information

on the System, which delivers retirement benefits to many NYSUT School-Related Professionals and other support staff. If you are an ERS member with a question of general interest, email [united@nysut.org](mailto:united@nysut.org).

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

### 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](mailto:trudi.davis@nysut.org)

Patti Lennon • 516-496-2035, ext. 324  
[patti.lennon@nysut.org](mailto:patti.lennon@nysut.org)

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



## Resigning vs. retiring — what's the difference?

**Q:** Is it true that I must resign from my district before retiring? Doesn't retiring imply that I've resigned?

**A:** No, it doesn't. Resignation is between you and your employer; retirement is between you and the New York State Teachers' Retirement System. Since you can't be on payroll and be retired, you must resign before retiring.

Additionally, for NYSTRS purposes, your resignation date must be at least one day before your effective retirement date. For example, if your last working day is June 30, your earliest retirement day would be July 1. Schedule a consultation with your human resources or business office, or with your local union representative, to determine your district's retirement policy.

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

**A:** If you work for a private or a federal employer, you can return to the workforce immediately. If you plan to work for an employer who participates in the NYSTRS system, you MUST have a service break of at least one business day between the date you leave payroll as an active member and the date you return to public employment as a NYSTRS retiree — and weekends and holidays don't count.

Additionally, if you intend to work in a position that's the same or similar to the position you retired from, you must wait one year from your date of retirement before beginning employment. Lastly, if you're collecting a NYSTRS retirement benefit and you take a job with another NYS public employer, you can't earn service credit in another retirement system. For more information, consult the NYSTRS publication, *Working in Retirement*, [nystrs.org/NYSTRS/media/PDF/working.pdf](http://nystrs.org/NYSTRS/media/PDF/working.pdf).

### Did you know?

New York City public school educators belong to the Teachers' Retirement System of the City of New York, [trsnyc.org](http://trsnyc.org).

### 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)

Juliet Benaquisto • 518-807-7085  
[juliet.benaquisto@nysut.org](mailto:juliet.benaquisto@nysut.org)

Beth Chetney • 315-431-4040  
[beth.chetney@nysut.org](mailto:beth.chetney@nysut.org)

Eric Iberger • 518-376-4333  
[eric.iberger@nysut.org](mailto:eric.iberger@nysut.org)



# Savings opportunities abound with NYSUT Member Benefits

**A**s a NYSUT member, you are eligible to participate in dozens of endorsed programs and services through NYSUT Member Benefits that can help save you time and money on both everyday and more crucial purchases.

This past year, Member Benefits launched its partnership with the nation's largest discount network — Access Development — to provide substantial savings to NYSUT members. Through the MB Discounts & Deals program, NYSUT members can save up to 50 percent at more than 700,000 merchants nationwide, including 21,000 deals right here in New York state.

Register your account at [mbdeals.enjoymydeals.com](http://mbdeals.enjoymydeals.com) today to save on groceries and food delivery, restaurant dine-in or take-out, theme parks and museums, oil changes and vehicle maintenance, clothing and shoes, hotels and flights, and much more. You can even request to have your favorite merchant join the network and provide members with a special discount.

The Member Benefits-endorsed Office Depot/OfficeMax program can assist members with purchasing numerous items at an average savings of 30 percent. Participants can save on laptops, tablets, desktop computers, printers, ink and toner, and more, with up to 75 percent off preferred products, free delivery on qualifying orders over \$50 and discounted printing prices.

Meanwhile, Buyer's Edge, Inc. is a unique buying service that can be used to purchase major products and services — backed by a low-price guarantee — such as new or used vehicles, appliances, televisions, furniture, mattresses and more. This program offers the option to purchase online, by phone or in-person (in certain benefit categories and geographic regions).



Member Benefits also endorses programs to help members maximize their savings (Synchrony Bank); save when purchasing or refinancing a home (Mid-Island Mortgage); save on home heating/energy options; protect family and friends living on their own (Connect America); and safeguard their eyesight, vision and hearing.

Beyond just discounts and savings, Member Benefits endorses competitive insurance programs for NYSUT members and their families (including pets) along with important legal and financial services. Many of these programs can be purchased through payroll or pension deduction for greater convenience and savings

opportunities.

Member Benefits offers numerous educational opportunities for members, including financial counseling, legal education and home buying workshops (available virtually or in-person, circumstances permitting).

The online Financial Learning Center powered by Kiplinger's Personal Finance is a helpful resource designed to assist members with achieving their personal financial goals and better understand the nuances of insurance, savings, investing and more.

Finally, if you ever have an issue or problem when using a Member Benefits program, the staff take great pride in their ability to quickly assist members with any concerns that may arise.

Explore all that your union membership has to offer. Learn more about Member Benefits-endorsed programs and 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.*

## IT'S WHAT WE DO

Kermit Wamsley, Ravena-Coeymans-Selkirk TA

When Kermit Wamsley snaps his fingers, a lot of people snap to attention.

That's because he's a middle school band director, calling budding musicians and singers to action.

He's also front and center as a director for the all-male Electric City Chorus, an a cappella group that lifts spirits in its performances while raising money for charities and for music scholarships for students.

"It's just helping out. That's the way I was raised," said Wamsley, a member of the Ravena-Coeymans-Selkirk Teachers Association. "There needs to be a lot more of making people smile."

Wamsley's own smile is abundant. He cannot contain it when he talks, or when he steps on stage, as he did in early October for the chorus's first live performance in 18 months. The group performs at nursing homes and senior centers in the Capital Region, and is the finish line performance for the annual telethon held by the Center for Disability Services. They also perform at fundraisers and charity events.

The Electric City Chorus takes part in Youth in Harmony, providing a teaching quartet to perform in schools, educate students about a cappella singing and answer questions.

"A cappella singing has become very popular," said Wamsley, who noted the chorus gives scholarships to attend Harmony Explosion Camps.

Wamsley has been a school band director for 35 years; first in Taconic Hills, then in South Carolina, and for 16 years in Ravena.

For more info about Wamsley's work, visit [nysut.org/itswhatwedo](http://nysut.org/itswhatwedo).



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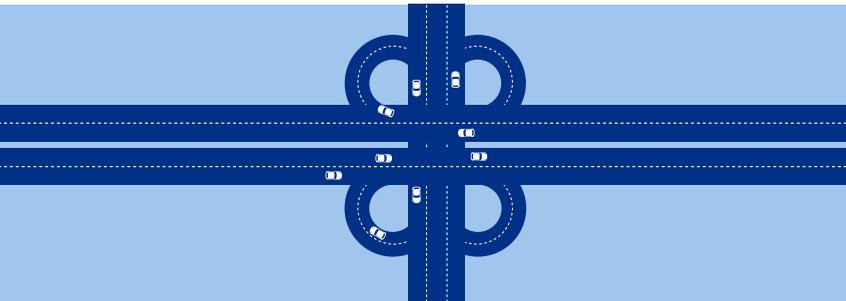
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## Salmon River Teachers Association



PROVIDED

Salmon River TA President Adam Schrader signs one of the bed frames with a message from the SRTA.

The Salmon River TA's Build-a-Bed project is providing a soft place for children to sleep, while also building a bond between school and community. SRTA members — teachers, school counselors, social workers, nurses and psychologists — donated time, skill, labor and bedding over two summer days building 16 spruce beds for students in need.

Smith Lumber in Fort Covington donated the lumber for the first 10 beds, and sold the rest of the wood at cost, said Adam Schrader, local president. One bed was pre-assembled as a model for the union member volunteers.

Using a flatbed truck and a trailer, the finished beds were delivered to students in different towns within the district and on the Akwesasne Reservation, which houses the district's Mohawk School. Mattresses were donated by Fleming's Fine Furniture in Malone.

"These are hard times, and there's not a strong economic base here," Schrader said.

Each bed was outfitted with blankets, sheets and pillows donated by SRTA members.

Inspiration for the bed project came from the South Jefferson TA, which had shared at a NYSUT regional conference about a similar undertaking, Schrader said.

## Buffalo Teachers Federation

Encouraging members to start the school year off on a positive note, the Buffalo Teachers Federation distributed thousands of "Buffalo's Best" pads for members to send a little good news home to families.



The "Buffalo's Best" awards give educators a quick and effective way to say "Good job" to a student and parent, said BTF President Phil Rumore. It's part of BTF's "From the Classroom to the Living Room" initiative to boost family engagement.

## STEWpendous campaign

A group of local unions in the mid-Hudson region have been bringing in cans and boxes of food to donate to local food pantries in a collective union effort across the Hudson Valley.

The group actions will support food pantries in Dutchess, Sullivan and Ulster counties. Local unions taking part include SUNY Ulster Faculty Association, Rondout Valley Federation of Teachers, Onteora TA, Eldred Central School District FA and Poughkeepsie Public School TA.



PROVIDED

Eldred Central School District Faculty Association members collected 13 boxes of food to support local food pantries. From left, members Marikate Oset, Bonnie Padua and local President Stephanie Zub.

"Food collections such as this shed a light on what the community needs," said Stephanie Zub, Eldred CSDFA president. Some Eldred students receive weekly food through the Backpack Program. The 55-member local collected 13 boxes of food and donated them to two local food pantries. "Schools are at the heart of their communities," Zub said.

The Poughkeepsie PSTA donated boxes of food to Dutchess Outreach, Inc. after union members in each of the seven school buildings brought in grocery items. The outreach program provides food, emergency relief and advocacy for those in need.

"It is important as our union to give back to our community and this is just one way we can do that," said PPSTA President Kim Popken.

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



## It's an honor

**Helen Levin**, United Federation of Teachers, had a solo exhibit of her abstract paintings at the Cultural Council of Palm Beach County, Florida. Her artwork is in the Staten Island Museum collection and the U.S. Art in Embassies Program.

**Gerald Mead**, United University Professions-Buffalo State, was awarded an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree from Niagara University in appreciation and recognition of his support of the university and its Castellani Art Museum.

**Jim Testa**, Endicott Teachers Association retiree and a member of UUP-SUNY Cortland, was selected to the New York State High School Softball Hall of Fame. Testa has coached softball at Union-Endicott HS since 1996.

## In print

**Dale Benjamin Drakeford**, UFT, has published *Scripted Lives: Plotted Dates with Destiny*, a social-conscious and political poetry and prose book.

**Diane Garcia**, UFT retiree, has published *Wendy Willow Water Ballerina - A Story About Synchronized Swimming*. The children's picture book is available online.

**Robert Lawrence**, Guilderland Central TA retiree, has published *What's with Those Adirondack Mountain Names?* The book delves into the origins of the names of more than 100 mountains.

**Vincent Palmieri**, Utica TA retiree, has published *Ruthie Deeply*, a book about a lifetime friend who teaches strength and perseverance. For more info, contact [vgjpalmieri@gmail.com](mailto:vgjpalmieri@gmail.com).

**Donald Tedesco**, Mamaroneck TA retiree, has published *The Last Resort*, an artificial intelligence suspense thriller. Visit [dantedesco.com](http://dantedesco.com) for more information.

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

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