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WE FOUGHT, WE WON!
Continuing a trend that has been building for years, 53 candidates who came through NYSUT’s Pipeline training are running for local offices in the Nov. 5 elections.

The Pipeline Program provides extensive training and support for working people who share the union’s values and agenda and are willing to put in the effort required to mount a campaign.

Forty-one of the 53 are members of NYSUT local unions. Here are some examples of union members stepping up to lead in their communities.

Joe Cantafio, president of the West Seneca Teachers Association and a member of the NYSUT Board of Directors, is running for West Seneca Town Council.

A lifelong resident of the community, Cantafio teaches history and government and has coached football, wrestling and lacrosse. He said the union’s support has been key.

Now more than ever, West Seneca needs a proven leader, and NYSUT has prepared me for the task,” Cantafio said. “Through the Pipeline training, the Member Organizing Institute, and leadership training, I am able to bring a proven record to our community.”

Ralph Smith, a member of the Putnam Valley Federation of Teachers, is running for Putnam Valley Town Board after three decades as an educator and community resident. He’s taught elementary and secondary levels, and he staunchly supported Putnam Valley launching its own school system.

Nicole Herkey is running for West Seneca Town Council. The 12-year literacy specialist in the Buffalo Public Schools is a member of the Buffalo Teachers Federation Executive Committee, a NYSUT and AFT delegate and a MOI graduate. She’s lived in West Seneca for 22 years.

Angela Riley is a UUP member in Binghamton University’s School of Pharmacy running for Binghamton City Council. She has been a PTA leader and a member of nearly a dozen community boards. Riley won a contested primary with the support of the Binghamton TA.

Michelle Roman, a member of the Holley Central School TA, previously won an upset in a special election to fill out the rest of the term for the outgoing mayor in Lockport and is running for re-election. With labor support, she prioritizes issues important to unions and working families.

Early voting is here!

The General Election is Tuesday, Nov. 5, and your usual polling places will be open from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m.

For the first time in New York State, there will also be nine days of early voting between Oct. 26 and Nov. 3.

Early voting must be completed in person, but it will probably not take place at your usual neighborhood polling place. It will be at a central location in your county. To find the early voting sites in your area, visit voteearlyny.org.

Here’s what it means:

- Early voting allows you to vote in person at a poll site in your county. You do not need a reason or excuse to vote early.
- Each county will determine the poll sites and the hours for early voting. On Election Day, Nov. 5, however, you must go to your usual assigned poll site to vote.
- Obviously, if you vote early, you are NOT eligible to vote by absentee ballot or at the polls on Election Day.

“For educators in their first year — or first few years — of teaching, the job can feel overwhelming and isolating. While inspiring, the work is challenging. And the professional development and certification requirements new teachers must fulfill to stay in the classroom can be complicated and daunting. If you’re a fledgling educator, I’ve got a message for you — you’re not alone. Your union is here for you.”

— NYSUT President Andy Pallotta (Visit nextgen.nysut.org for more.)

By Ned Hoskin
nhoskin@nysutmail.org

COMING UP

Nov. 1–2
NYSUT Civil and Human Rights Committee meets, Latham

Nov. 5
Election Day

Nov. 8–10
NYSUT Community College Conference, Cooperstown

Nov. 15–16
NYSUT Women’s Committee meets, Latham

Nov. 18–22
American Education Week (Visit nea.org for ideas)

Nov. 19
NYS School-Related Professionals Recognition Day

Nov. 25
International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women

Dec. 6–7
NYSUT Subject Area Committees meet, Latham

Dec. 7
Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day

Dec. 13–14
NYSUT Subject Area Committees meet, Latham

Dec. 23–Jan. 1
NYSUT offices closed

ON THE COVER

Bus driver Charles Jones, president of the Bethlehem Central United Employees Association.

Photo by El-Wise Noisette

WWW.NYSUT.ORG
Stop-arm camera law already making a difference

By Ned Hoskin
nhoskin@nysutmail.org

The new NYSUT-backed law to authorize the use of cameras to enforce traffic safety around school buses is a major victory for students and bus drivers and monitors. While it will take time for individual districts to implement across the state, it’s already working.

“I know at our place they got some new buses with cameras, not on the arm, but on the side,” said Charlie Jones, a bus driver in the Bethlehem Central School District near Albany. He is president of the Bethlehem Central United Employees Association.

already this year, one of our drivers had a car pass her while she was stopped with the lights on. We were able to get the plate number and the car and we took it to the cops, and it worked.”

He said town officials have embraced the concept that allows them to use the bus footage and vehicle identification to prosecute.

“In our town, the cops have always worked with us, they think it’s great,” Jones said.

Chris Horstman, a bus driver and president of the Ithaca City School District Employees Association, said some buses have had cameras that could capture license plates, but prior to the new law, that was rarely enough.

The district could send the license information to the state Department of Motor Vehicles in Albany, but “unless you could identify the person (driving), even with the plate, you couldn’t proceed,” he said.

Because the law was enacted in the summer, many districts had already ordered any new buses for this school year. Some districts may retrofit in-service buses this year, Horstman said, and next year, we may see more new buses equipped with cameras.

“It’s not mandated, it’s just another tool to help you,” he said.

Some school systems planned ahead.

“In our district, they were talking about it even before the law passed,” said Deb Paulin, a bus driver in the Buffalo area and president of the Alden Central Schools Employees Association who also serves on the NYSUT Board of Directors.

Because the law requires districts and municipalities and the vendors installing the equipment to share in the costs and the revenues, it can take a little time to get started, Paulin said, but there’s no question it will help protect students.

“I’m looking forward to using the cameras,” she said, “because people are driving like maniacs.”

Spectrum News reported that Niagara Falls City Schools installed the cameras on two buses, and during a pilot run, one of the cameras picked up 20 violators.
Members of NYSUT local unions are at the table as the state Senate convenes a series of roundtable discussions in October and November on Foundation Aid school funding. The events will culminate in a public hearing Dec. 3 in New York City.

The Senate’s Education and Budget and Revenue committees, chaired by Sen. Shelley Mayer, D–Yonkers, and Sen. Brian Benjamin, D–Manhattan, respectively, are holding joint discussions. The roundtables started Oct. 16 in the Hudson Valley. They continue Oct. 18 in Buffalo; Oct. 29 in Syracuse; Nov. 13 on Long Island; and Nov. 19 in Queens.

NYSUT has maintained that the 2007 Foundation Aid formula, which allocates state aid based on need, was a significant policy achievement, but that it has not been fully funded since the recession of 2009.

“The problem is the lack of funding,” said NYSUT President Andy Pallotta. “If fully funded, the Foundation Aid formula would work, but it has never been close to fully funded.”

Union members say Foundation Aid must be funded

Coming to work on a college campus as an adjunct faculty member is never easy. Campuses and administrators do not provide the structure and support that are available to full-time faculty and staff.

However, that is something your union can do.

Adjuncts make up more than two-thirds of the faculty at community colleges in the state. Working to communicate with, organize and engage these members — who often teach on multiple campuses and rarely have office hours — is both a challenge and a priority for local unions.

That’s why it will be one of the key topics for activists and union leaders headed to Cooperstown for the 41st annual NYSUT Community College Conference in November. The theme for the conference is “Union strong: Membership matters.” Among the topics will be ways a local union can organize and engage adjunct faculty.

“Locals and members can best learn from each other how the union can provide resources for adjuncts,” said Roberta Elins, president of the United College Employees at Fashion Institute of Technology, a NYSUT Board member and chair of the conference.

“This is an important annual opportunity for activists to come together to share insights and concerns regarding the issues and challenges that we face in the workplace every day, many of which are unique to the community college experience,” she said.

South African teacher union leader visits NYSUT

Mugwena Maluleke, general secretary of the South African Democratic Teachers Union and vice president for Education International, visited NYSUT in October to tour schools in the Albany area and discuss organizing and social justice. Above, Maluleke visits a classroom with Albany Public School Teachers Association President Laura Franz, second from right. Right, Maluleke meets with NYSUT officers at the union’s Latham headquarters. From left, Vice President Paul Pecorale, President Andy Pallotta and Secretary-Treasurer Philippe Abraham.
Schumer calls for action on teacher shortage, student debt crisis

By Sylvia Saunders
ssaunder@nysutm.org

As the state’s teacher shortage deepens, U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer joined with educators and union leaders in Rochester to urge expansion of student loan debt relief and recruitment and retention programs.

“We have to do this,” Schumer said. “We’re short of teachers as the school year begins … and the shortage is getting worse.”

The New York Democrat said Congress must force U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos to spend all of the money allocated to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program the way the law was intended.

“Secretary DeVos — who everyone knows is anti-public education — has spent only 1 percent of the PSLF funding,” Schumer said. “One percent — that’s incredible.”

Under the bipartisan law enacted in 2007, borrowers are eligible for federal loan forgiveness after making 10 years of on-time payments. Schumer said DeVos and her department have unfairly denied loan forgiveness to thousands of eligible public servants, citing a variety of shameful, technical excuses.

Schumer introduced Brighton physics teacher Adam Eck, who along with his wife Courtney, also a teacher, were denied public service loan forgiveness because they had consolidated their loans.

“We just kept getting reasons — one after another — saying why we didn’t qualify,” Eck said. “I’ve been paying for over 23 years, and my wife and I still have over $140,000 in student loans and probably won’t be able to retire when we are eligible.”

While it’s been a difficult financial road, Eck said he doesn’t regret the path he chose because he loves teaching. “My friends say, ‘Why don’t you take your degrees in math and physics and go double your salary elsewhere?’” Eck said. “I don’t want to because I love what I do. … I can’t quit what I’m so passionate about.”

To help people like the Ecks, Schumer is calling for Congress to pass the What You Can Do For Your Country Act, which would expand and speed up the PSLF program for public servants.

In addition, Schumer is urging Congress to reject the administration’s proposed elimination of the Title II state grant program, which provides New York $147 million in funding for teacher recruitment and retention.

Schumer highlighted NYSUT’s Take a Look at Teaching initiative, warning that while thousands of teachers are retiring, enrollment in teacher prep programs has plummeted. He also noted that an estimated 40 percent of teachers leave the profession in five years.

“Most of them leave, not because they don’t love teaching, but because of economic and financial reasons,” Schumer said.

Union-backed program aims to help members get out of debt

Student loans are intimidating and confusing. With dozens of loan types and more than 100 repayment solutions, just knowing if you’re doing the right thing is difficult.

Fortunately for NYSUT members, their union is here to help them understand their options and get loan counseling that serves their best long-term interests.

NYSUT has partnered with Cambridge Credit Counseling, a non-profit debt relief agency, with a mission to help members get out of debt fast and give them the support they need to stay debt-free forever.

Cambridge Credit Counseling offers NYSUT members several ways to get immediate student loan help:

■ A series of in-person student debt workshops across the state, where members can meet with a student loan counselor to help understand Teacher Loan Cancellation and Public Service Loan Forgiveness programs and get free access to student loan management tools;
■ An online portal available at a significantly discounted rate, where members can input their student loan data and get a personalized plan; and
■ Access to Cambridge’s student loan counselors to help members through the process.

For more information, visit studentloans.NYSUT.org.
By Kara Smith
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It cost the Syracuse City School District $50,000. Rockville Centre schools shelled out $80,000. Monroe-Woodbury, Orange County’s largest district, was forced to cancel its first day of classes.

Ransomware attacks are on the rise. And school districts are prime targets, due to the rich trove of personal information they house, and budget constraints that can hamper their ability to fend off digital intruders.

This year alone hackers victimized at least four New York State school districts.

Syracuse City schools still haven’t fully recovered from a July ransomware attack. Although restoring payroll was a priority, members who attended summer professional development workshops are still awaiting reimbursement due to system lags.

“We can only log into our employee self-service portal to check pay stubs, sick bank accruals and other information, while we’re in the school building,” said Bill Scott, president of the Syracuse Teachers Association.

“Before we could access it from home.”

The prevalence of ransomware attacks is making many school staffers ask themselves: What can we do to help keep our system safe?

Knowledge is power

One of the best defenses is knowing how ransomware attacks occur.

“It’s often a people problem rather than a tech problem,” said NYSUT Chief Information Officer Donna O’Leary, who heads the union’s Information Technology department.

A common cybercrime trick is visiting sites like LinkedIn to identify organization leaders, and using their names to farm an entire organization. “They email staff pretending to be that person and try to get others to respond, a process called phishing,” she said noting that since the appeals come from a leader, and sound convincing, they sometimes are successful.

“By clicking on links or attachments in these messages a ‘back door’ can be opened that allows the attacker to place a ransomware on the local computer and beyond,” said O’Leary.

Once ransomware is installed, the software ties up the computer system, forcing districts to either pay the ransom or figure out how to recover their data using decryption keys. Since the ransom is often less than the fix, many victims choose to pay.

“Awareness is key when it comes to cybersecurity,” said NYSUT President Andy Pallotta, whose office oversees the union’s IT department.

“If you get an email that sounds off, make a quick phone call to the sender to make sure it’s correct.”

You or your IT Department should also be vigilant about updating your computer’s software, Web browser and antivirus protection. And be wary of downloading information off the Web, opening unfamiliar attachments or clicking on certain advertisements.

“Just visiting certain websites can put your system at risk for a ransomware attack,” said O’Leary. “Nothing can replace vigilance.”

“These days, the question is not if — but when — an attack will occur,” said O’Leary.

At the federal level, Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer recently announced his support for the DHS Cyber Hunt and Incident Response Teams Act, legislation that would create and fund specialized Department of Homeland Security teams to respond to, and prevent, ransomware attacks. The bill passed the House and Senate and awaits the president’s signature.

To learn more about protecting yourself and your district, from ransomware attacks, visit the Federal Trade Commission at ftc.gov/tips-advice/business-center/small-businesses/cybersecurity/ransomware.

Data Protection Reminders

Exercise caution before clicking on a link in an email or opening an attachment.

Lock workstations when leaving them unattended.

Establish strong passwords. Do not write them down and leave in an accessible location.

Use appropriate tools when handling data. Never send sensitive data through unencrypted email.

Do not establish accounts for students to access online resources without consulting with administration.

Source: ricone.org
When your cause is just, you persevere — no matter how long it takes. For the roughly 300 members of the Lawrence Teachers Association on Long Island, “persevering” has meant working without a contract for the past nine years.

Bogged down by a school board demanding draconian givebacks — including eliminating class size limits, requiring all secondary teachers to teach six classes instead of five, and having new hires make 20 percent less — the local has been forced to find new ways to get the board’s attention.

This fall the LTA launched a campaign of twice daily picketing outside the homes of the district’s seven school board members carrying placards that proclaim, in English and Spanish, “no contract for nine years, still working” and “invest in public education.”

Board members have been relatively quiet, although they did call the police. “One of the officers was a former student of one of our elementary teachers,” said Lori Skonberg, LTA president. “He gave her a hug.”

Member support remains strong and enthusiastic. Picketing also took place during the district’s four back-to-school nights. “We’re planning to picket outside through November,” Skonberg said. “When the weather turns, we’ll move inside to picket board meetings, and other school events. We wear our union T-shirts daily.”

Since the beginning of the school year the board has refused to abide by the contract: “We currently have 31 grievances filed — 28 because the district knowingly exceeded our class size provision,” said Skonberg.

Although the Lawrence community is Long Island’s third wealthiest, the students who attend public school have a poverty rate of more than 70 percent. Of the more than 8,000 children living in the district, only about 2,800 attend public schools — 77 percent of those students are economically disadvantaged; 83 percent are students of color.

The district has slashed the physical education budget by more than two-thirds and has refused to invest in updated textbooks; fix leaky ceilings; or hire enough aides for special education students.

“It really shows where the board’s priorities lie,” Skonberg added.
Turning a moment into a movement

By Liza Frenette
lfrenett@nysutmail.org

It takes more than brawn to make lasting change in a community. It takes planning and passion, and an esprit de corps that could very well be in your own local union.

“The union is a vehicle for change,” said Michelle Couture of the National Education Association — New Hampshire.

Couture noted that union members wanting to build community outreach are often overwhelmed by the “enormous amount of problems” that can be found where they live and work. She works to help members position their local union to provide help.

In a presentation at NYSUT’s annual Local Action Project, Couture and co-presenter Bill Shiebler, American Federation of Teachers, encouraged unions to narrow their interests. NEA and AFT are both national affiliates of NYSUT.

Participants expressed concerns about a range of problems.

From North Syracuse EA: hate and poverty.
From Port Washington TA: women’s reproductive rights and sexism.
From Lowville TA: climate change and dairy farmers in crisis.
Affordable child care, gun violence, and flooding were other concerns shared.

Shiebler gave out pointers to locals seeking to make their mark on a social justice issue:

■ Judge the issue.
Is it widely felt? Is it the right size for the union to take on? Does it build the union and its leaders?

■ Identify potential partners.
Can the union work with state, regional or community groups already addressing these social justice concerns? The Lion’s Club, the League of Women Voters, Knights of Columbus, Farm Bureau, and the National Organization for Women are a few examples of existing organizations locals may be able to partner with.

■ Prioritize which partners to collaborate with,” said Shiebler, deputy director of human rights and community relations.
He said local unions should examine the roots of potential partner organizations and find out if they have resources, including the ability to mobilize. Determine if they share the same values. If it looks like a good match, then consider sharing resources.

■ Team up.
Working with another, nearby local union can also strengthen social justice outreach.

■ Localize the issue.
World hunger can mean local food insecurity which can mean some students go without breakfast.

■ Create an action plan.

NYSUT has several resources available to locals and members looking to broaden their social justice reach. For more information, visit nysut.org/socialjustice.

Celebrate inclusivity in education, literature

Educators and Capital District community members came together for a night of “conversation, celebration and inspiration” at a NYSUT LGBTQ Committee “book tasting.” The event, an opportunity to expose readers to different genres and get them excited about reading, featured a panel about how to make LGBTQ faculty and students feel safe and welcomed in school. Participants also received a free book.

Panelists stressed the importance of inclusivity. Trans student Aryn Bucci-Mooney said just seeing a triangle symbol on a teacher or counselor’s door, indicating that it is a safe space, “makes a huge difference” in helping LGBTQ students feel comfortable.

School librarians Alicia Abdul and Kristin Majkut, Albany Public School Teachers Association, make sure to include diverse authors and speakers. “The more we hear other voices, the better it is for everyone,” said Abdul.

The books at the event were purchased through a grant from former NYSUT Executive Vice President Catalina Fortino, which is earmarked to promote LGBTQ inclusivity across the state. Visit nysut.org to read more about the event.
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Getting to know ... Harriet Culbreth

Harriet Ann Culbreth is a para-professional at the John James Audubon School No. 33 in Rochester. She was interviewed by her local president Angie Rivera of the Rochester Association of Paraprofessionals. Rivera is also a member of the NYSUT SRP Advisory Committee.

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

My job as a paraprofessional is to perform a variety of tasks that assist in the implementation of educational programs beneficial to our students. I supervise students in various settings. I have assisted with behavior management. I collect data. I prepare materials for instruction and support students one-to-one when needed.

I love the work I do because I am working with students. I am never bored because no two days are alike. I love when I see them grow academically and physically all year long.

How do you make a difference?

I make a difference every day when I strive to help students reach their potential. I help my students build their confidence, and show them how to be lifelong learners and how to advocate for themselves. I listen to them and encourage them to be the best they can be. Every child has great potential and I have high expectations for them. I show them respect and I let them know I care.

Tell me about your union involvement and how you got involved?

Both my parents were union members. I grew up with the understanding of the value of the union-fighting for better wages, benefits and protecting our rights. As an active member I ran for the building rep position in my building. I am no longer the building rep, but I do support all union events. I am co-chair of the Nominations and Elections Committee. Every opportunity I have, I speak about how important it is to be in the union and how much they help us.

Tell me about your community engagement, hobbies.

I volunteer and manage two community gardens. My husband and I are big into agriculture and we promote healthy eating. I am involved with the Harriet Tubman Ministry at my church. I enjoy music!

Understanding cultural abilities

By Liza Frenette
lfrenett@nysutmail.org

Write an innocuous word in the middle of a circle, then draw lines around it like the rays of the sun. On each of those lines, have students list a word they associate with the center word.

“Block” could elicit the words “city,” “toy,” “road,” “schedule” or “cell.” Some students are familiar with walking a city block; others played with blocks as toys. Cell block can mean a student may have an incarcerated parent or loved one.

“Choose a word to brainstorm. Find a word to get insight into kids,” said Sandie Carner-Shafran, who led a NYSUT workshop for School-Related Professionals on becoming familiar with students’ cultural abilities and associations to enhance classroom learning.

The workshop was one of dozens held during the annual SRP Leadership Conference in Saratoga Springs last month.

“Focus on what students know instead of what they don’t know,” said Carner-Shafran, who represents SRPs on NYSUT’s Board of Directors.

Frances Rutigliano, co-president of the Clarkstown Teaching Assistants Association, said her school has students from India, Guatemala and Ecuador. She learned that in some cultures there is not as much respect for women, so she spent time talking with the class as a whole about respect for culture and for gender. In another culture, girls are more submissive, so Rutigliano devoted time to working with students on building self esteem and setting boundaries.

“Talk to the whole group. Don’t single out students,” she said.

The SRPs examined their own explicit and implicit (unconscious) biases, and were shown how advertising, societal interpretation, and exposure can develop ingrained biases.

Biases extend beyond ethnicity. Social class, disability, LGBTQ, divorced parents, and gender can all generate bias.

SRPs were encouraged to put up posters in classrooms that look like students in class; celebrate a mix of holidays; share different food; and have relatives come in class for cultural events.
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Special education math teacher Joanna Krul is always looking for ways to make abstract concepts more concrete.

Her secret weapon: NYSUT's Education & Learning Trust.

As she starts her fifth year of teaching at Hewlett High School, Krul credits a long list of ELT courses, and Long Island instructor Randi Azar, with inspiring her to try a number of innovative lessons — and getting great results.

"Typically students in my self-contained class have struggled with math for a long time," said Krul, a member of the Hewlett Woodmere Faculty Association. "My goal is to get students engaged and actually enjoy doing math."

ELT's "Mediated Learning" course proved to be a catalyst, Krul said. "With all the nice weather we’ve had, I came up with a hands-on lesson that would get students outside — moving and creating." The objective was to find the height of a tree using similar triangles.

"For a not-so-math-savvy person, similar triangles have corresponding side lengths in proportion," Krul explained. On the Geometry Regents, students need to be able to find a missing side of a triangle, given a similar triangle with the corresponding sides.

Using additional strategies from "Activating a Motivated and Engaged Brain" and "MAGIC" ELT courses, Krul created a project-based lesson where students would have to find the height of a tree given that the tree’s shadow is so many feet long and at the same time a five-foot tall person's shadow is a certain length.

Students loved the hands-on team activity. "It was the culmination of so many things I learned from ELT," Krul said. "It was amazing!"

Turning abstract ideas into concrete activities enables students to experience a difficult concept so they can better understand it, Azar said. "The excitement of engagement helps to store the learning into long-term memory."

In addition to sparking creative lessons, Krul said the ELT courses have helped her to earn thousands more each year since her local union contract provides compensation for her post-master’s level learning. "I'll be at +75 credits when I finish two courses this fall," she said, noting all but one course was through ELT.

ELT courses are considerably less expensive than typical graduate courses, Krul noted. "They’re always high-quality, taught by dynamic, experienced teachers," she said. The classes are also a great way to connect with area educators.

"I'm so grateful for ELT classes and Randi in particular," Krul said.

Azar, who retired after 33 years of teaching in Lawrence and is now starting her 17th year as a substitute teacher, loves to hear from her ELT participants about how courses have helped improve their teaching techniques.

"Our courses are constantly updated and responsive to what members need," Azar said. "That’s my dream to hear how well things are working in the classroom."

By Sylvia Saunders
ssaunder@nysutmail.org

Special education math teacher Joanna Krul, left, has taken several NYSUT Education & Learning Trust courses with longtime instructor Randi Azar.

High school math students use shadows to determine the height of a tree. The hands-on project engaged even the most reluctant students.

ELT courses offer chance to learn from the best

Free seminars for new members

NYSUT's Education & Learning Trust offers courses for undergraduate, graduate and in-service credit. Offerings can help you meet certification requirements, obtain new certificate titles and earn Continuing Teacher & Leader Education (CTLE) hours.

As part of the union’s Next Generation NYSUT initiative, educators who are new NYSUT members are eligible for a free 5-hour online seminar. New member School-Related Professionals are also eligible for a free online SRP seminar. NYSUT members in their first five years on the job can save 50 percent off an 8-hour stand-alone seminar.

All NYSUT members receive discounts on ELT courses. For more, go to elt.nysut.org.
Summit highlights need for recruitment, retention

By Sylvia Saunders  
ssaunder@nysutm.org

A n urgent call for a more diverse teaching workforce was front and center at NYSUT’s Take a Look at Teaching summit in Yonkers, as students, educators, community activists and state policymakers explored ways to make that happen.

“New York State’s student demographics are changing but our education workforce is not keeping up,” said NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango. While 43 percent of students statewide are Hispanic/Latino or African-American, just 16 percent of the teachers are.

Yonkers Federation of Teachers President Samantha Rosado-Ciriello, who co-hosted the summit with DiBrango, said the union is working to expand the district’s “Grow Your Own” program to convince promising Yonkers students to become educators and come back home for their career. She asked how many teachers in the audience were Yonkers natives and many hands went up. “We’re making progress but we still have a long way to go,” Rosado-Ciriello said. In Yonkers, 77 percent of the students are Hispanic/Latino or African-American, while only 26 percent of the teachers are.

DiBrango said the union’s initiative is aimed at elevating the profession and encouraging students and career-changers from all backgrounds to take a look at teaching.

She noted enrollment in New York’s teacher preparation programs has declined 53 percent since 2009.

“That’s scary,” DiBrango said. “We need teachers in the pipeline.”

The statewide union is also focusing on beefing up support for educators early in their career. “We want to work on retention just as much as recruiting,” DiBrango said. “Those first five years are tough.”

The summit, which was the sixth in a series of events around the state, was a who’s who gathering of educators early in their career. “We want to work on retention just as much as recruiting,” DiBrango said. “Those first five years are tough.”

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The statewide union is also focusing on beefing up support for educators early in their career. “We want to work on retention just as much as recruiting,” DiBrango said. “Those first five years are tough.”
Students take the lead: Rethinking parent-teacher conferences

By Sylvia Saunders
ssaunder@nysutmail.org

In a move to boost family engagement and student responsibility, the Troy Teachers Association is one of several local unions around the state experimenting with student-led conferences. Rather than the traditional parent-teacher conference, the student takes center stage — with the teacher providing support as needed.

It feels more like a “show and tell” presentation than a student progress meeting.

“It’s a big change,” said Ann Marie Jabour, a teacher at Troy’s School 2. “After 30 years of teaching, letting go of the control can be difficult — but the power in the student-led conference is incredible.”

“It’s nice to hear directly from your child, to see what school is like from her point of view,” said Queen Daniels, a fifth-grade parent and teaching assistant at the school. “I especially like how she sets clear goals and we talk about what she needs to work on.”

With training from NYSUT’s Research and Educational Services Department and a family engagement grant from the National Education Association, Troy teachers piloted the project on a voluntary basis starting with just a few students in each class. This year teachers will be doing it with their whole class.

“We learned it’s important that teachers are given enough time to prepare and practice with the kids,” Jabour said. “It’s also helpful to have a uniform conference agenda and reflection sheet, plus a clear sense of what kind of student work samples should be included.

While formats can vary based on grade level and local needs, Troy’s student-led conferences look like this: Students follow a set agenda, sharing work samples and appropriate test information. They talk about their favorite subjects and areas where they may be weak. They also discuss any behavior or attitude issues — both positive and negative.

Students show family members items such as “exit tickets” which sum up what they learned in class or “sprints,” where they work to improve fluency with math activities like multiplication. In the end, the students wrap up with goal-setting and specifically detail what family members might be able to do at home to help them. Parents are given a chance to ask questions.

“I’ve been quite impressed with how students have handled themselves,” Jabour said. “They added important information (about their learning) during their conference. That helped us know we’re headed in the right direction.”

“The parents have been really receptive,” said Troy TA’s Shannon Comparetta. “You see a sense of pride from the child and a feeling that the student is taking ownership for their learning.”

Teachers agreed it can be a learning experience watching students interact with family members.

Comparetta noted the student-led format worked out well for a Spanish-speaking family, where the child essentially served as a translator.

“This program has been a wonderful and enlightening experience for our students and their families,” said Seth Cohen, the past Troy TA president who worked with NYSUT to get the program to School 2. “It not only showcases the student’s academic skills but gives them a chance to build some soft skills of communication. Our district’s motto is ‘Today’s Students, Tomorrow’s Leaders’ and this program is a fundamental testament to putting that into action.”

The student-led conferences are among several high-impact family engagement strategies linked to student learning that are being encouraged under the NYSUT program.

Massena Federation of Teachers, for example, has started family home visits to build strong family-school connections, and the Solvay TA has implemented a family-friendly approach to setting learning goals and data sharing. Saranac Lake Central Schools TA is launching student-led conferences this school year.

“The goal is to give local unions and members the tools they need to improve student learning and build collaborative relationships among educators, families and community members,” said NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango.

“We want to encourage partnerships where power and responsibility are shared.”
‘Addiction is a disease, not a disgrace’

Union working to end the stigma

By Liza Frenette
lfrenett@nysutmail.org

In the past several years, members of the Wappingers Congress of Teachers have tried to grapple with the loss of two educators — as well as students and graduates — to addiction.

“When you see that email: ‘We regret to inform you …’ you are distraught. You are left speechless,” said Pasquale Delli Carpini, union president. “Oh my God.”

Some are upset they didn’t notice the signs — or that they weren’t sure what to do when they noticed their peers arriving late for school or being irritable.

“Shocking” is how Diane DiChiara, a special education English teacher, described feeling about the death of a fellow teacher to addiction. She shook her head in dismay.

“You have to look in their eyes and see how distraught they are,” Delli Carpini said of his colleagues.

In response to members’ concerns, the WCT decided to reverse the hush-hush of shame that often accompanies life-threatening problems of alcoholism and addiction and speak out about what the diseases mean, how they affect families and what resources are available. In September, the local union, together with school administrators and the Council on Addiction Prevention and Education of Dutchess County, co-hosted a half-day conversation-changing assembly on the drug addiction epidemic.

The air was charged with facts and emotion during speeches, a documentary and a series of workshops for 1,200 educators, administrators, union leaders, and state and community representatives.

“It’s all about the stigma. We wanted to reduce the stigma, so people aren’t afraid to get help,” said DiChiara. That includes allowing educators to take the time they may need to enter treatment without fear of losing their job.

“It’s become a dreaded disease,” said Delli Carpini. “This is the kind of disease that knows no boundaries. It really can hit anyone.”

“Addiction is a disease, not a disgrace,” said a brave Sue DeCosta, who leaned on her husband Mike as they spoke to educators. Just nine days before, they lost their 29-year-old son, Michael, a Wappingers graduate, to the disease after years of struggle. “It is a medical condition masquerading as a physical choice. It wrecks families.”

Removing the stigma and shame can correct common misperceptions, she said. She noted that although she and her husband are active, involved parents who gave their four children many tools, they had not made it safe for Michael to talk about his addiction.

When they first realized there was a problem, she said they had “no idea of the beast we just encountered.”

In the hushed auditorium, clutching her prepared speech, DeCosta asked educators and school health professionals to understand the disease enough to suspend judgment of students who are struggling with addiction.

“No one is prepared to raise a child who becomes an addict,” she said.

The language attached to the disease fuels more stigma, explained Elaine Trumpetto, executive director of CAPE of Dutchess County. Addicts are described as either “clean” or “dirty.” Her organization has contracted with the Wappingers district for decades to provide information for educators and students on prevention, education, counseling and recovery services.

The addition of two districtwide programs geared specifically to employees — in 2018 and this year — was about taking action after two educators died from addiction.

Mike and Sue DeCosta lost their 29-year-old son, Michael, to drug addiction this year. They share their story to help end the stigma and correct common misperceptions.
Shortly after the September assembly ended, teachers were already filling out surveys to help union organizers meet their needs for the next professional learning opportunity.

DiChiara said that with the union-led workshops, and training from the Employee Assistance Program for administrators, “We have changed our behaviors” in addressing addiction.

Change the narrative

Speaker John Shinholster of the Virginia McShin Foundation said schools should create an environment where a student grappling with addiction could feel free to openly talk to a teacher or school health care professional, “like you send a kid with a cold to the (school) nurse.

“Are we ready to be supportive? Are we ready to love them?” he asked.

The stigma surrounding other diseases like breast cancer and prostate cancer has been greatly reduced, he noted, by fundraising walks and open conversations. The same can be done for addiction.

Several speakers spoke about addiction as a disease that changes the pathways in the brain and makes it difficult for people to stop using the drugs. Stopping drugs and getting treatment can help reroute those pathways.

“We need to educate people about the impact (of drugs) on the brain — it changes the brain chemistry … it’s now defined as a chronic brain disorder,” said Rena Finsmith, a special education social studies teacher, in a conversation before the assembly.

The impact on the family is also staggering — emotionally, mentally, financially and physically.

Wappingers educators screened “The Anonymous People,” a documentary on addiction and recovery, and heard from the filmmaker and an actor.

“This is our black plague,” said Kristen Johnston, an Emmy award-winning actress and advocate in recovery. Many speakers in the film and on stage talked about how society often imprisons addicts rather than provide recovery treatment.

“The illness does not have a cure — but it has a solution.

“Addiction lives in darkness,” filmmaker Greg Williams told the group. NYSUT and its local unions can help light the way to change that.

NYSUT President Andy Pallotta and Secretary-Treasurer Philippe Abraham attended the emotional assembly.

“With the foundation you’ve laid, we will bring this around the state,” pledged a somber Pallotta.

Through NYSUT’s social justice work, the statewide union is making a 46-minute version of the film available at no cost to every NYSUT local union across the state to screen. “This may help our local leaders to start the conversation and continue to shine a light on the disease of addiction,” Abraham said.

For more information, local leaders can contact Paul Webster, NYSUT director of community outreach, at pwebster@nysutmail.org.

RESOURCES

- NYSUT Social Services is a free, confidential union benefit offered to all NYSUT members, retired and in-service. We can help you utilize your Employee Assistance Program benefit or provide information and referrals for professional assistance in your community, including treatment options for addictive behaviors. Call 800-342-9810, ext. 6206 or email socsvcs@nysutmail.org.

- The American Federation of Teachers this year launched an online program, “Combating the Opioid Crisis,” for educators. Visit aftelearning.org/group/61.

- The New York State HOPEline provides referrals to treatment and prevention providers. Available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, call 877-8-HOPENY or text HOPENY (467369).

- The New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services offers several resources including a #CombatAddiction program in conjunction with the State Education Department. Resources include tips for educators and families. For more info, visit combataddiction.ny.gov.
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Broome County social studies teacher
named 2020 Teacher of the Year

By Matt Smith
msmith@nysutmail.org

Hugging the back roads in her signature bright blue Jeep, Maine-Endwell High School social studies teacher Rachel Murat was on a mission: her out-of-town guests were going to experience the true taste of her beloved Southern Tier community.

And so, naturally, that meant chicken spiedies. “If I don’t take you here,” said Murat, as she pulled her Wrangler into the local spiedies joint, “I risk losing my ‘Endwell card.’ I can’t let that happen.”

Small chance.

Murat — named the 2020 New York State Teacher of the Year by the State Education Department — is an omnipresent figure around town. In fact, schools Superintendent Jason Van Fossen thinks of Murat as the district’s “ambassador” to the community, adding what sets her apart is her impact on students outside her classroom’s four walls.

In 2009, Murat and her students created the Maine-Endwell Assisting Local Spartans food pantry, which feeds as many as 150 kids and 100 families on a weekly basis. The impact has been far-reaching. Besides ensuring students come to school fed and ready to learn, the district has been able to better serve families in need by seeing kids in their home environment and addressing concerns that otherwise might have been missed.

“We have a culture here of community involvement, and Rachel provides a great example of how we reach beyond the borders of the classroom to help students and those in need,” said Patricia Sergent, president, Maine Endwell Teachers Association. “She is a stellar example of what we should be doing as educators.”

Van Fossen said Murat is typically the first person to say: “How do we round up the troops to provide support to the community” in times of trouble, like when 100-year floods ravaged the area in 2005 and 2011. “Rachel is a shining example of how we all should seek to impact our communities to build a better New York and world,” said NYSUT President Andy Pallotta.

“This is where my heart is. It’s where I’ve grown up as an educator. It’s where I’ve grown up as an adult,” said Murat. “I’ve never felt supported anywhere the way I’ve felt supported here. By showing my love for this community, it helps (students) understand they can actually love this community instead of wanting to fly the coop when they get out of high school. It’s important to build the community up instead of tearing it down. If there’s a problem, you need to be part of the solution.”

Murat also created a Digital Citizenship program in the district, which teaches kids how to build and positively represent themselves online — something she says is especially important today as colleges and employers scour the social media pages of prospective students and employees. And, she serves as coordinator of the district’s Mentoring Program, helping students better navigate the transition from middle to high school.

“Rachel’s ability to wear different hats is what makes her an incredible educator,” said April MacNamee, a social studies teacher at Maine-Endwell High School and a former student teacher under Murat. “Rachel is an innovator … a community builder. She is an entrepreneur believe it or not. And she’s a role model.”

Senior Gabriella Calleo agrees.

“She really tries to incorporate everybody in the classroom, and makes sure everyone’s opinions are voiced and heard. It opens up your learning experience and makes you want to learn more.”

NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango said Murat is an inspiration to new and prospective teachers. “Rachel’s experience is a model for how fulfilling education can be for both teachers and their students.”

“My students are not just kids in a classroom, they are human beings,” said Murat. “If we are going to raise a generation of human beings that are kind, compassionate and empathetic, we need to model that and need them to understand sense of community, and that they can give back and make this a better place.”

Also recognized by the State Education Department as 2020 Teacher of the Year finalists were NYSUT members:

John Braun, United Teachers of Northport, a science teacher at East Northport Middle School, Northport-East Northport Union Free School District.

Mary Howard, Grand Island TA, a sixth-grade teacher at Veronica E. Connor Middle School, Grand Island Central School District.

Jeanne Lance, Watervliet TA, a fourth-grade teacher at Watervliet Elementary School, Watervliet City School District.

Laura Macey, Schenectady Federation of Teachers, a culinary arts teacher at Steinmetz Career and Leadership Academy, Schenectady City Schools.

www.nysut.org

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NYSUT Disaster Relief Fund here to help

Since 2005, NYSUT has been supporting unionists reeling from the shock of the loss of family, home and property by distributing more than 4,200 grants through the union’s Disaster Relief Fund.

The fund has helped union members whose lives and finances have been uprooted by fires, hurricanes, floods, blizzards, ice storms and other traumas.

For some, the grant was the only money they received to help them find their way back from losses ranging from deep damage to total ruin of their homes. The fund itself is built by volunteer donations from NYSUT members, who have contributed more than $2.6 million since the fund was established.

When two NYSUT members were killed a year ago in one of the deadliest transportation disasters in the U.S., the fund donated to help cover their children’s future education costs.

The Disaster Relief Fund was there for members when Hurricanes Irma and Maria slammed Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, and when Hurricane Florence contributed to massive flooding in the Southern Tier.

“Our union is proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with its members,” said NYSUT Secretary-Treasurer Philippe Abraham, who oversees NYSUT’s Disaster Relief Fund.

To make a tax-deductible contribution to the fund, donate online at nysut.org/disasterrelief or send a check payable to “NYSUT Disaster Relief Fund” to: NYSUT Headquarters, Attn: Disaster Relief, 800 Troy-Schenectady Road, Latham, NY 12110. NYSUT assumes 100 percent of the administrative costs.

Nov. 11 is Veterans Day

For classroom resources including lesson plans, visit sharemylesson.com/collections/veterans-day.

As an educator for 36 years, Warren said. “But my students were in harm’s way serving their country.”

He began a project to honor them by setting up photos of military alumni in the front of the school. Names were read over the public address system. But soon, the school ran out of space to continue the display.

“We have (more than) a dozen students who go into the service every year,” Warren said. He came up with the idea of using a computerized scrolling system to be on permanent display.

A search was on for the name and military service branch of all students and alumni. Today, the electronic veterans honor roll recognizes 359 veterans and takes one hour to run through. The Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard and Marines are all represented.

A salute to those who serve

By Liza Frenette
lfrenett@nysutmail.org

As a Schenectady high school senior in 1965, Vince Bianchi was issued a Vietnam War draft card with the low lottery number of 45. It is a number he said he has never forgotten.

Because he was going to college to become a teacher, he was granted a deferment. Others were not as fortunate.

“I had football buddies — guys I threw passes to — who didn’t make it a year,” he said, studying the ground on a sunny day in early autumn.

When Bianchi graduated from college, he secured a teaching job at Niskayuna High School. Again, he went to the draft board.

“I was fortunate enough to get a teaching deferment,” he said.

Bianchi is still behind the safe walls of the high school, where he spent 33 years as a teacher and active member of the Niskayuna Teachers Association, and now works as a part-time student activities coordinator.

His colleague, retired Niskayuna history teacher Peter Warren, graduated high school in 1971 and had many friends who served in Vietnam. Both men expressed lingering anger at how the conflict was a class war, and created stark differences in fate.

As an educator for 36 years, Warren taught students about the controversial Vietnam War — where three Niskayuna high school graduates were among 58,200 soldiers killed. He had veterans of different wars come in to talk with students about war, foreign policy, insurgency and counter insurgency.

One day, he realized he wanted to connect those lessons with the landscape in front of them.

“I had former students who were going off to war in Iraq and Afghanistan. The flags and the yellow ribbons following 9/11 had faded. It was business as usual in America,” Warren said. “But my students were in harm’s way serving their country.”

A search was on for the name and military service branch of all students and alumni. Today, the electronic veterans honor roll recognizes 359 veterans and takes one hour to run through. The Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard and Marines are all represented.

Niskayuna Teachers Association members Vince Bianchi, right, and Peter Warren established a year-round tribute to alumni veterans from their Capital Region district.
Helping keep schools clean and green

By Liza Frenette
lfrenett@nysutmail.org

NYSUT health and safety activists are no strangers to the fact that schools can host health dangers from mold to improperly stored hazardous chemicals.

Thanks to a partnership between NYSUT and Clean, Green & Healthy Schools, a program of the state Department of Health, members will be able to access resources to improve their school environments. The program’s focused action plans assist members in identifying and dealing with troubling health and safety problems that may seem overwhelming to take on, and also provide steps to take preventive action in major areas of school environmental health.

“This provides a checklist, assessments and a road map for how to start functioning around these issues,” said Veronica Foley, NYSUT health and safety specialist. Her goal is to get the CGHS program guide into the hands of union members serving on school health and safety committees across New York.

While each school is required by law to have such a committee, Foley said they often do not meet with any regularity, and members sometimes do not know where to begin in order to address problems.

“We need to use what we already have,” she said.

Indoor air quality, pest management, energy conservation, healthy water supplies, chemical hazards, mold and construction are some of the primary health and safety areas that affect school health — which in turn affects student health, absenteeism, and educator health and retention.

Green cleaning is a foundation of a clean environment, and NYSUT long advocated for the passage of the state’s “green cleaning” bill that requires all schools to use environmentally sensitive cleaning and maintenance products.

There are many other complex environmental issues at schools. The DOH program helps health and safety committees look at the host of elements involved in healthy schools.

Adults aren’t the only ones raising alarms about school health and safety. Students are also becoming more outspoken about their concerns with the environment, and that includes the buildings and grounds of schools where they spend so much time in class and in after-school activities.

Michele Herdt, CGHS program director presented an overview of the program to NYSUT’s Health and Safety Committee at its inaugural meeting of the 2019–20 school year. Schools that participate in the CGHS program will be provided resources, including information on grants.

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Emergency training saves lives

While the first instinct in a catastrophe may be to run for safety, Mary Jo Ginese learned that she could instead head for cover, check out the area of damage, and then possibly return and drag a person to safety.

aybe I could save somebody,” said Ginese, a member of NYSUT’s Health Care Professionals Council and vice president of special education at the United Federation of Teachers.

Ginese was recently trained at the UFT in Stop the Bleed, a national awareness campaign and call-to-action set up to encourage bystanders to become trained to help in an emergency and during events with mass casualties.

“So many people die while waiting for trained personnel to show up,” said Nancy Barth-Miller, a UFT nurse and member of the council.

“You can serve as a lifesaver.”

For more information on Stop the Bleed and to find a list of available classes, visit bleedingcontrol.org.

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Clean, Green & Healthy Schools
Did you know teachers and staff should not be responsible for transporting any type of hazardous material, including chemicals? That’s just one tip available via the CGHS program website at health.ny.gov/environmental/indoors/healthy_schools.

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Free trauma toolkit
First Book, Inc., in partnership with the Maryland State Education Association, has created a free, online Trauma Toolkit for educators. It was developed to support learning and development of students who are going through or have been through childhood and adolescent trauma.

Available at neaadjustment.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/trauma_toolkit.pdf, the toolkit was created by culling work from books, published papers and member feedback to examine how trauma affects learning.

The toolkit is designed to work in conjunction with First Book’s Healthy feelings and relationships books and free reading guides, geared to social and emotional learning for pre-K–7th graders. Visit fbmarketplace.org/healthy-feelings-relationships.
Aisha Cook
I stand in solidarity with Chicago Teachers’ Union. You know what it takes to educate children. Don’t stop until you get it! #PutItInWriting @nysut @AFTUnion (@alwaysaishacook)

Lori McCambley
A big thank you to every para who has ever kept the halls safe at MPMS! They have one of the hardest jobs in the building. They form good relationships with some of our most challenging students and put their hearts on the line every day! #SFTParasRock (@lori81060)

jdonkey
Framing the #CTUstrike as being about greed and money is intentionally disingenuous. Our schools deserve reasonable class sizes, social workers and nurses. This is about keeping our children safe and healthy in the place they spend the most time. (@jdonkey)

1. You supervise grad students at the University Eye Center and see how changes in our habits and environment affect vision. Should educators and parents be concerned about increased screen time by adolescents and teens?

   The short answer is “yes.” Using small screens at arm’s length or shorter for extended periods of time, or viewing screens at longer distances for long periods of time, increases the focusing and converging demands upon the eye, and our visual system. Electronic devices can cause eyestrain and visual discomfort for many of us, including young children. People blink less and their eyes become less lubricated, causing long term structural damage.

   Optometrists are able to look at the oil glands and cells that aid cellular regeneration. In many young people, these glands are diminished or eliminated. We believe this is caused by screen time. Fortunately, if caught early enough, some relief is possible.

2. How can undetected vision problems lead to issues in school?

   Problems of eye tracking, ocular motility and binocular dysfunction can have effects on reading and our ability to learn and absorb information. The simple issues can cascade into a whole range of academic and social problems that could perhaps be circumvented. When dealing with young people, a comprehensive visual exam is always essential.

3. October was School Vision Health Month in New York. Do you work with school-based vision centers?

   Vision and eye health in children have been related to academic performance and confidence building. The college is often asked to support eye screenings at schools and community centers to help provide an earlier identification of potential vision issues. SUNY College of Optometry and the University Eye Center invested in creating a new Center for Pediatric Eye Care which will open in early 2020 and focus on expanding our ability to care for the youngest patients.

4. What are some of the community service initiatives you participate in that improve access to health care?

   Health care and eye care are about access and affordability. Eyes can reveal underlying health problems. For clinic patients who need financial assistance, help is available through various sources. Located in New York City, the UEC conducts more than 85 eye screenings across the boroughs through our community outreach program. The college also hosts an annual Health and Wellness Expo.

5. You’re also active in your union. How did you come to serve as vice president of your UUP chapter?

   I come from a family of union members. My father encouraged me to join a union because it benefits workers to keep checks and balances between employers and employees.

   As an executive group we actively encourage new faculty to become part of the union. For one, they are benefiting from the progress our union has made from tenaciously pursuing and obtaining health insurance, pension plans and workplace benefits.

   Second, the union is a resource that provides a buffer, advice and representation when a member has an issue with our employer.

   I have been a member for 31 years, I encourage new faculty to be part of the team that binds us together.

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INSTRUCTION

VOLUNTEER — OPERATION SPLASH (Freeport). A nonprofit environmental group is looking for retired teachers to mentor school-aged education programs. Small stipend. Interested? Email operationssplash@optonline.net.

TRAVEL


Peter McMahon
Respected educator and union leader Pete McMahon died Oct. 13; he was 75.
McMahon was a science teacher for nearly 40 years at Red Hook High School. He began his union career as a building representative, and was on the negotiating committee for the Red Hook Faculty Association from 1971 until his retirement. He was the local’s vice president and served as Red Hook FA president for nearly 20 years.
A stalwart fighter on behalf of union political issues, McMahon served as a longtime VOTE-COPE coordinator for the Mid-Hudson region, and on NYSUT’s statewide VOTE-COPE and Political Action committees. In 2015, he was honored with the NYSUT Retiree of the Year Award for his decades of union activism and commitment.

Irwin H. Polishook
A founding officer and long-time president of the Professional Staff Congress/City University of New York, Irwin Polishook died Sept. 13; he was 84.
A scholar of colonial America, Polishook taught history at Hunter and Lehman Colleges. When PSC/CUNY was formed in 1972, he served as vice president; he became president in 1976.
A leading voice for unions in higher education, he served as chairman of the American Federation of Teachers Higher Education Program and Policy Council. He also served on the NYSUT Board of Directors and Executive Committee, on the Steering Committee of the NYC Municipal Labor Committee and held offices in the American Association of University Professors.

Lucille Swaim
A lifelong unionist and skilled negotiator, Lucille Swaim died July 1 at the age of 87. Swaim had a place at the table for every single contract negotiation in the United Federation of Teachers history from 1962 until her retirement in 2015.
“Lucille was a quiet hero,” said UFT President Michael Mulgrew. “She put her heart, soul and intellect into helping generations of educators and UFT members. She helped build this union.”
A professor of economics in the 1950s, she was an integral part of the teacher unionization movement, working with various teachers unions across the country.
In 2011, Swaim received “Not for Ourselves Alone”: The Sandy Feldman Outstanding Leadership Award, NYSUT’s highest honor for female leaders.

Margaret “Peggy” Capell
Aug. 29, 2019
Wappingers Congress of Teachers

Gloria Counts | Aug. 29, 2019
Graham School Federation of Teachers

Warren E. Hoffmann
June 25, 2019
Middle Country Teachers Association

John T. Huntington
May 22, 2019
Teachers Retired in Florida

Gerald A. Wahlenmayer
Sept. 17, 2019
Orchard Park Teachers Association

Obituary submissions must include decedent’s full name, union affiliation, date of death, and contact information for the person submitting the notice. Fax notices to 518-213-6415; send to Julie Malec, NYSUT United, 800 Troy-Schenectady Road, Latham, NY 12110-2455; or email jmalec@nysutmail.org.
Retirees take action to attract future teachers

By Kara Smith
ksmith@nysutmail.org

Pat Puleo may have retired from teaching, but the former Yonkers Federation of Teachers president hasn’t lost touch with her YFT in-service brothers and sisters. In October, she was on hand for the Yonkers Take a Look at Teaching Summit, held in conjunction with NYSUT and the YFT, headed by President Samantha Rosado-Ciriello. “It was a wonderful experience — there were so many different community groups attending,” said Puleo.

She participated in a small group discussion table that included New York State Regent Roger Tilles, who voiced strong support for the union’s involvement in teacher recruitment, particularly with regard to boosting diversity within the teaching ranks.

“Although Yonkers has greater teacher diversity than most districts, we have to continually work to maintain that,” said Puleo.

A suggestion brainstormed at her table that she believes has strong potential, is enlisting retired teachers to mentor high school seniors who are interested in the teaching field. “We could meet with them and explain what teaching is like and provide guidance,” said Puleo, noting that Yonkers used to have a high school geared toward students interested in the teaching profession. “We already have retiree mentors for new teachers; this could be an offshoot.”

Since many student attendees said they appreciated having the opportunity to learn more about the teaching profession, having a retiree mentor — someone who has the time to help out and years of teaching experience — is a natural fit.

Florence McCue, ED 51–53 at-large director and Marty Sommer, RC 16, NYSUT PAC committee chair, also participated in the event.

NYSUT’s Take a Look at Teaching initiative is aimed at elevating the profession and encouraging students and career-changers from all backgrounds to consider teaching. The Yonkers summit was the sixth in a series of events held around the state.

Yonkers retirees Florence McCue and Pat Puleo, both members of the NYSUT Board, are dedicated to helping attract future teachers to the profession. Here they pose with NYSUT EVP Jolene DiBrango, second from left, and YFT President Samantha Rosado-Ciriello, right.
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Navigating life together
Lyncourt Teachers Association

The 55-member Lyncourt Teachers Association kicked off a new initiative to show support for the community and show union pride in action. Once per month the local hosts a #UnionSpiritDay where members (100 percent of whom have recommitted to the union) donate and wear their LTA T-shirts. The fundraisers allow the local, led by co-presidents Chenelle Horton and Margaret Delvecchio, and its members to show union solidarity and support for students, parents and the community. Funds collected during September were donated to the eighth-grade class.

North Syracuse Education Association

Hosting an annual retiree reception helps new retirees stay connected. That’s one tip the 1,719-member North Syracuse Education Association learned as part of its work with NYSUT’s Local Action Project.

At least four times a year, the local hosts Change for Charity, where it collects money for specific charities in the community such as ambulance and fire departments, Meals on Wheels and child welfare programs.

In another effort, members coordinate with school social workers and collect food for families in need for the holiday meal and for the winter break. The program was started by the North Syracuse Teaching Assistants, a local led by Mindy Bristol under the NSEA umbrella. All of the donated items are stored in the NSEA’s union building; when other organizations use the building they make a donation and that money is also used for the food drive. Seventy families were provided for last year.

“It’s stunning to see how much food is in that room,” said Carol Goehner, NSEA second vice president. The local is led by John Kuryla.

Webutuck Teachers Association

The Webutuck Teachers Association has implemented new outreach programs for its union and for the community. The local launched a messenger program for one-on-one outreach to members. Each union messenger has about eight people they are in direct contact with for any union news or events; the 78-member local now has 100 percent membership.

In February, WTA helped students and families in this Dutchess County rural, high-poverty district by setting up a shopping experience for students with gently used toys, clothes, bike helmets and high chairs in the public Millerton library for Take Your Child to the Library Day. The local, led by Tammy Nethercott, is a 2019 graduate of NYSUT’s Local Action Project.

At their fundraiser and community events, union members wear WTA T-shirts, put up banners and make sure to use their logo. “We were already doing things, but no one knew the WTA was doing it,” said member Sarah Martin.

Schenectady Federation of Teachers

The Schenectady Federation of Teachers, led by Juliet Benaquisto, challenged members to share Twitter love for SRPs — and they delivered. Educators played “Para tag” and shared stories and photos (below) about SRPs who make their life better using the hashtag #SFTP arasRock. The paraprofessional chapter, led by Patricia Zentko, is fighting for members to earn a living wage and in September entered into mediation with the district.

KUDOS!

It’s an honor
Alison Silvestri, Hicksville Congress of Teachers, was selected as a Town of Oyster Bay “Women of Distinction Award” honoree for 2019. The award recognizes extraordinary women in the community for their contributions and achievements.

Jenna Stack, North Bellmore Teachers Association, and Kerry McGarvey, United Federation of Teachers, were accepted into the Apple Distinguished Educators Class of 2019. Out of thousands of applicants from around the world, only 550 educators were selected for the prestigious program.

In print
Rebecca Freimann, Clarkstown TA, has written Family Tree: Rooted in Survival. The book tells the true story of three family branches and their struggles to survive the horrors of the Holocaust. The independently published book is available at amazon.com.

“Kudos!” recognizes the accomplishments of NYSUT members. Have good news you’d like to share? Email united@nysutmail.org; include “Kudos!” in the subject line.

#SFTP arasRock

Share news about your local’s union or community events at united@nysutmail.org; include LIA in the subject line.
A year ago I couldn’t think about standing in front of my classroom. Now after minimally invasive back surgery, my pain is gone and I’m introducing algebra to my eighth-graders... THANKS TO NSPC.”

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There is still plenty of time to make your holiday purchases or travel plans utilizing the numerous benefits available from Member Benefits. Through our endorsed relationships, NYSUT members can save on Bose electronics; books and entertainment options; movie and theater tickets; concerts and sporting events; and much more.

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If you are looking for travel options, Orlando Employee Discounts offers NYSUT members up to a 30 percent savings on tickets to Disney World, Universal Studios, Sea World and many other Orlando-area attractions. up to 60 percent off at select Orlando hotels; and a variety of hotel and theme park ticket travel packages.

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Visit memberbenefits.nysut.org or call 800-626-8101 to learn more about these endorsed programs along with many other savings opportunities available to NYSUT members.

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

Stay tuned

The trustees, directors and staff of Member Benefits have heard your requests to offer more choices along with more local benefits you can use to save on everyday purchases.

We are pleased to inform you that Member Benefits is currently in the process of providing NYSUT members with access to more robust discount opportunities available on a local, regional and national basis. You will be hearing more about this in the upcoming weeks.

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You can visit our website at osc.state.ny.us/retire/index.php, where you’ll find a wealth of useful information for retirees, including:
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- Our Publications page, where you can download a variety of booklets and pamphlets, such as What if I Work After Retirement? and A Guide for Retirees; and
- Our Tax Services page, which can help with a variety of tax-related questions and issues, including obtaining a copy of your previous year’s 1099-R tax statement or using our federal tax estimate calculator.

You can also subscribe to our blog, New York Retirement News (nyretirementnews.com), like us on Facebook (facebook.com/nyslrs), follow us on Twitter (twitter.com/nyslrs), and sign up for E-News, our email newsletter (osc.state.ny.us/retire/e-news/sign-up/index.php), for the latest ERS news and information.

You can also use our automated phone service, 24 hours a day, by calling 866-805-0990 (518-474-7736 in the Albany, New York area). You will be asked to verify your identity for security purposes. Once verified, you’ll be able to get certain information about your account — such as Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) eligibility, your tax withholding status, and direct deposit instructions — without waiting to speak to a representative.

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NYSUT TRS consultants

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