

# NYSUT UNITED

A UNION OF PROFESSIONALS

THIS ISSUE OF NYSUT UNITED  
CONTAINS IMPORTANT  
INFORMATION REGARDING  
CHANGES TO THE MEMBER  
BENEFITS PROGRAMS. YOU  
SHOULD READ AND RETAIN THIS  
ISSUE FOR FUTURE REFERENCE.

**INSIDE** **Fight for fair funding**  
Educators from pre-K to  
higher ed share real cost of  
budget shortfalls | **6, 7**

**Aid for Puerto Rico**  
Unions step up to help  
when natural disaster  
strikes again | **11**



Hittin' the

Road

for Public Ed

## CONTENTS

**9: Union scores victory in class action lawsuit**

**12: RA delegates to elect NYSUT officers, Board**

**17: Our SRPs: Jose Torres, UFT**

**20: Celebrate 100 years of suffrage with local heroines**

**24: Kudos to NY's 97 new NBCTs**

**29: Educators act fast to save a student's life**

**36: Tax time: Remember these deductions your union won**

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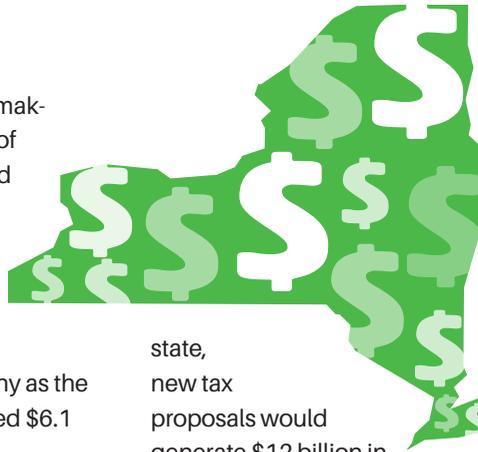
# SURVEY SAYS: Tax the ultrawealthy to boost revenue

By Ned Hoskin  
nhoskin@nysutmail.org

**U**nion activists, lawmakers and members of the media sardined into the press room of the Legislative Office Building in Albany in February to hear the news: 92 percent of New York voters support new taxes on the ultrawealthy as the state grapples with a reported \$6.1 billion budget deficit.

NYSUT officers Andy Pallotta, Jolene DiBrango and J. Philippe Abraham, along with President Fred Kowal of United University Professions and Secretary Nivedita Majumdar of the Professional Staff Congress, were surrounded by leaders of other unions and numerous elected officials.

There is plenty of untapped revenue available in the state, they said; with 112 New York billionaires sitting on \$525 billion in wealth and more than 46,000 multimillionaires in the



state, new tax proposals would generate \$12 billion in revenue.

The survey of 1,000 registered New York voters, conducted by Hart Research Associates, shows broad support for a wealth tax on New Yorkers with more than \$1 billion in wealth, a new ultramillionaires tax on those with incomes over \$5 million and a pied-à-terre tax on luxury second homes.

Later the same week, NYSUT launched an ad campaign highlighting the need for these new taxes to raise revenue for critical investments

## New taxes on ultrawealthy

92%

support them to fix budget deficit

64%

say they would help the economy

72%

would vote for candidates who support them

in public education, from pre-K through higher ed.

The campaign features a series of ads contrasting the growing income inequality in New York with the failure to fully fund public schools. The first of those ads, a 30-second digital and television ad called "Broken Promises," noted that while income inequality in New York is highest in the nation, the state owes public schools billions of dollars in funding. It quotes NYSUT members in classrooms saying that the failure to fund public schools means children aren't getting what they need to succeed. (See page 6 for coverage of the Fund Our Future bus tour.)

"More than 90 percent of New Yorkers support new taxes on the ultrawealthy because they know that it is time for those at the top to pay their fair share," Pallotta said.

Go to the NYSUT Member Action Center at [nysut.org](http://nysut.org) to send a letter to state lawmakers urging them to enact the needed revenue generating legislation.



The union ad campaign calls out the state for its "Broken Promises" to education.

## COMING UP

### March 1-31

National Reading Month



### March 2-3

NYSUT Committee of 100 legislative meetings, Albany

### March 3

NYSUT Board Executive Committee meets, Albany

### March 8-10

Somos El Futuro Conference, Albany

### March 21

World Poetry Day



### April 1

State budget due

### April 4

Professional Issues Forum on Health Care, Latham

### April 9

LGBTQ Advocacy Day, Albany

### April 30

NYSUT Board meets, Albany

### April 30-May 1

Local & Retiree Council Presidents Conference, Albany

### May 1-2

NYSUT Representative Assembly, Albany



## ON THE COVER

Albany City School students demand their fair share.

Photo by El-Wise Noisette.

# Fund Our Future tour reveals the realities of underfunding

By Ned Hoskin

nhoskin@nysutmail.org

**H**olding a meticulous, hand-made model of an Iroquois longhouse, teacher Susan Binney said, “This is what you can’t do when you have 27 kids in your class.”

Binney and fellow Schenevus United Teachers member Rebecca Lampron co-teach two sections of fourth- and fifth-graders, a total of 54 students. Last year, they had fewer than half of that.

Six teachers retired last year, and five the year before. Owed \$700,000 in state Foundation Aid, the district has not been able to replace them. The faculty of 42 two years ago is now down to 31, a loss of 25 percent, and more will be lost at the end of this year.

“You can talk with lawmakers until you are blue in the face about the \$3.4 billion in Foundation Aid that the state owes to more than 400 districts,” said NYSUT President Andy Pallotta. “But we’re out here on a bus tour of the state because, obviously, we need to show them what it means for the kids. The failure to fund Foundation Aid is directly failing these students.”

Standing in the hallway with Binney and Lampron at Schenevus, NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango said, “These staffing cuts and the lack of funding can change a child’s life” by closing off opportunities.

“Education cuts leave scars,” she said.

From Riverhead on Long Island to Niagara Falls, from tiny Schenevus



The NYSUT Fund our Future bus arrives in snowy Niagara Falls.

DAN CAPPELLAZZO

to Co-Op City in the Bronx, NYSUT’s Fund Our Future bus tour covered thousands of miles and visited dozens of schools to illustrate and illuminate the fact that educational inequality is the most pressing issue of our time.

Along the Fund Our Future tour:

- Port Washington on Long Island is owed \$4.9 million in Foundation Aid. Teacher and Port Washington Teachers Association member Daniel Dowling said that means fewer staff to handle an increasing amount of student needs, larger class sizes, the loss of Academic Intervention Services and overcrowding. “Adding more school psychologists, more guidance counselors, having smaller class sizes could help,” said Dowling.

- IS 181 in the Bronx is owed \$925,000, its part of \$1.1 billion owed to New York City schools. United Federation of Teachers chapter Leader Vanessa Dierking said, “We

all wear multiple hats, and we have been since the dinosaur age. But it feels like now we’re wearing multiple gloves and multiple scarves, too. Full funding would allow full staffing.”

- Christina Patterson, president of the Mohonasen TA in Schenectady County, said that 20 years ago, 9

percent of students were eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. Now, 46 percent qualify, among them many homeless students. Mohonasen is owed \$5.5 million. “When we should be providing more, we’re actually providing less,” she said.



EL-WISE NOISSETTE

Teacher Susan Binney said, “This is what you can’t do when you have 27 kids in your class.”



EL-WISE NOISSETTE

NYSUT President Andy Pallotta met with elementary school students during a visit to the Riverhead district on Long Island.

As chair of the education committee in the New York State Senate, Sen. Shelley Mayer, D-Yonkers, is on board. She rode along for the tour of Westchester districts in Yonkers and White Plains. Mayer recently conducted a series of forums around the

state and concluded: "Every district is crying out for the Foundation money they are owed."

As a member of the New York State Educational Conference Board, NYSUT is calling for a \$2.1 billion increase in state aid in the 2020-21



DAN CAPPELLAZZO

School counselor Lance Mitchell and NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango discuss the elimination of clubs and other organizations that keep students engaged.

state budget, which includes the first installment of a three-year phase-in of the more than \$3.4 billion in Foundation Aid owed to districts.

In order to generate the revenue needed to fully fund Foundation Aid, in addition to other state services like

public higher education and health care, NYSUT supports new taxes on billionaires and ultramillionaires.

For more information, or to see what educators had to say at stops along the tour, visit [fundourfutureny.org](http://fundourfutureny.org).

## 2019 Teacher of the Year: Achievement gap is a misnomer



2019 New York State Teacher of the Year Alhassan Susso knows something about challenges. An immigrant himself, he teaches in one of the nation's poorest schools — the International Community High School in the Bronx. Here's his take on the state's failure to properly fund its public schools.

“ I have a significant problem with the term ‘achievement gap.’ That term misses the point of education. It should be called the ‘opportunity gap.’ My students do not lack the skills to succeed. They lack the opportunity to compete with their (peers) across the state.

Talent is universal. But opportunity is not. Eighty percent of our students read at, or below, a fourth-grade level when they entered our school. Twenty-two percent live in temporary housing. Despite these challenges, they strive every day to get a quality education. However, that opportunity is robbed from them when our school

is not properly funded.

This year, our school is funded at 90 percent. That has significant consequences. A program I run takes place an hour before school starts. That's a program that 75 percent of our seniors come to every single day. Now think about that: 75 percent of our graduating students coming in an hour early to school. That's because they are gaining skills and value impacting their lives. However, because of budget cuts this year, that program was going to be gutted.

I am fortunate to have enough influence now to reach out into the community and get the resources

that I need for our students (and) private funding for that program. But not every teacher has this opportunity. I should not be going out looking for funding so my students could have a level playing field. I should be worried about creating the best lesson plans for them and ensuring that they are able to succeed academically.

When we do not fund schools properly what we are doing is worrying about an achievement gap that doesn't exist and instead forgetting about the real problem: the opportunity gap. ”

— Alhassan Susso

## Mannion running in special election April 28



The presidential primary in New York is slated for April 28, and five special elections to fill vacancies will be on the ballot.

NYSUT-backed John Mannion, president of the West Genesee District Teachers Association, is running for the vacant state Senate seat in SD 50, the Central New York district where he narrowly lost two years ago. Mannion has already been endorsed by the statewide union.

Other special elections include one for Congressional District 27 in Western New York, and three vacant Assembly seats: AD12 in Northport, Suffolk County; AD 31 in Queens, and AD 136 in Rochester.

April 3 is the last day to mail a voter registration form in time to vote in the special and the presidential primary.

Winners of the special elections will need to run again in the November general election if they want to run for a full two-year term.

Watch [nysut.org](http://nysut.org) for news of union endorsements as the date of the special election approaches.

# BOCES opens doors for students

By Sylvia Saunders  
ssaunder@nysutmail.org

As usual, the kids were the stars of the show — as students, educators, administrators and parents told state lawmakers at BOCES Lobby Day how important it is to fully fund programs.

BOCES programs open all kinds of doors for students, whether it's offering popular Career and Technical Education, a foundation for college and the military, or a lifeline for students who aren't thriving in traditional school settings.

In meeting after meeting with lawmakers, the students' enthusiasm and passion were obvious. There was a future helicopter mechanic, an aspiring veterinarian and an FBI hopeful. Students in health care programs said they have guaranteed jobs as soon as they graduate. At one meeting, a former student who spent seven years in jail credited a BOCES program for incarcerated youth with turning his life around.



EL-WISE NOISETTE  
Leslie Patino (right), a criminal justice student at Southern Westchester BOCES, visits state lawmakers with her mom, Rosa (center).

Leslie Patino, a criminal justice student at Southern Westchester BOCES who wants to become a police officer, explained how much she enjoys her hands-on program and mentoring from CTE teacher Ray Sulla, a retired New York City detective.

But advocates at BOCES Lobby Day warned that the many options and opportunities offered by BOCES are in serious jeopardy if the governor's proposed funding plan is

approved. The executive budget would merge expense-based aids like BOCES, into the Foundation Aid formula — a move that would force many districts to consider cutting CTE and alternative programs due to other pressing needs.

"If there's a finite amount of money and you make districts choose, it will eliminate anything not mandated," said Erie 1 Professional Education Association's Donna Walter. "CTE and alternative education programs should not be discretionary funding."

Meanwhile, the need for CTE graduates is skyrocketing, noted BOCES United Professionals Co-President Joe Alati. He told Assemblyman Harry Bronson, D-Rochester, that a large capital building project at Honeoye Falls-Lima School District has been delayed due to a lack of construction workers.

"This is no time to be closing the doors to BOCES," Alati said. "We should be investing more funding — not forcing districts to choose."

## Educators fight to fund special schools

By Liza Frenette  
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Specialized school advocates took to the Capitol last month to urge lawmakers to offer support and stability to schools that serve New York's most vulnerable students. Educators at 4201, 853 and other Special Act Schools deal with chronic underfunding, lack of funding parity with public school districts, and a rate reconciliation process that takes years.

The Little Flower School in Wading River has lost a vibrant

after-school program, said Sean Colfer, president of the Little Flower Teachers Association.

At Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf, staff often have to choose between helping their own families or their students, said Gabrielle Barry, a member of the Mill Neck Manor Education Association. Wages are low for teachers, and for teaching assistants, it is below what fast-food workers make.

Susan Drust, a speech therapist at the Cantalician Center in Western New York, said 17 teachers left in the last year; staff has a 28 percent turnover rate.

Special Act Schools, created by special action of the Legislature, are funded through an outdated rate-setting process rather than school aid formula. They do not receive increases from the state as traditional public schools do.

NYSUT wants lawmakers to provide an increase of at least 4 percent to Special Schools, including the residential schools and state-approved preschool programs.

"Schools that serve students with disabilities and other special challenges must not be short-changed," said NYSUT President Andy Pallotta.

# Higher ed budget decisions have real-life consequences

By Ned Hoskin  
nhoskin@nysutmail.org

**Y**ears of chronic underfunding for public higher education have shortchanged students and changed the culture at City University of New York and State University of New York campuses.

Sitting with a group of volunteer lobbyists in Sen. Jessica Ramos' office on higher ed lobby day, Lucy McIntyre of Professional Staff Congress at CUNY explained how the university's inability to fund infrastructure and class sections has ruined its traditional high level of access.

"Students don't have the chance they used to have to come to CUNY in August to register for classes in the fall. We have to cut off registration in June because we don't have any seats left," McIntyre said.

"It all goes back to this: The university needs more money," said PSC's Sharon Persinger — from state aid, not from tuition, because the students cannot afford more tuition.

In light of the executive budget proposal to flatline state aid to public

higher ed, stories like this one, shared face-to-face, bring home the real-life implications of the abstract funding decisions made in the statehouse every year.

On the same day that NYSUT's higher ed volunteer lobbyists-for-a-day spread throughout a very busy Capitol complex, NYSUT and local union leaders testified at a legislative hearing on the budget, calling for an end to chronic underfunding.

"Educational inequality has become the most pressing issue of our time," NYSUT President Andy Pallotta testified. "When the state shirks its responsibility and fails to invest in public higher education, it harms our students and our communities." He was joined in the hearing by Fred Kowal, UUP president at SUNY, and Barbara Bowen, president of the PSC, NYSUT's affiliate at CUNY.

"If the state fails to make such a commitment," said Kowal, "SUNY's accessibility and affordability will be negatively impacted, and the system will be unable to sustain the high-quality education and patient care it is known for worldwide."

"CUNY can't withstand another year of the state's current funding policy," said Bowen. "The policy on CUNY funding is planned poverty, impoverishment by design."

In addition to increased operating funds for SUNY, CUNY and the community colleges, the visiting activists hammered home the message that it is time to fill the gap in TAP, the Tuition Assistance Program.

The gap is the difference between TAP awards (\$5,000) which qualifying students can



From left, United University Professions members Mindy Heath, SUNY Upstate Medical, and Darleyne Mayers, SUNY Farmingdale, advocate for closing the TAP Gap.



From left, Professional Staff Congress members Pamela Stemberg, Nancy Silberman, Habiba Boumlik and Sharon Persinger share stories of lack of resources and lost opportunities for CUNY students.

use to satisfy their tuition bills, and the full tuition rate of nearly \$7,000 at SUNY and CUNY. The campuses have to "eat" that, to the tune of more than \$150 million a year statewide.

"It's unacceptable when we know the reasons for it" — inadequate state aid — "and the consequences" — reduced access — said Darleyne Mayers of SUNY Farmingdale, in a meeting with a legislative staffer.

Local union members from community colleges advocated for a state aid increase of \$250 per full-time equivalent student and a revised funding methodology. This would mitigate the impact of a loss of state aid due to enrollment fluctuations,

the activists said.

"Even though enrollment on some campuses has decreased, operational costs have not," said Roberta Elins, president of United College Employees of FIT.

The executive budget plan also would flatline subsidies to SUNY hospitals. Tom Tucker, UUP vice president for professionals, shared the story of an underinsured family member whose life was saved by surgeons at SUNY Upstate hospital, despite his inability to pay.

"It would be devastating for the hospitals and their communities if we can't restore those subsidies," Tucker said.



PHOTOS: ANDREW WATSON

Roberta Elins, president of United College Employees of FIT.

# Buffalo lawsuit: All students deserve art, music

By **Sylvia Saunders**  
ssaunder@nysutmail.org

**P**arents and teachers have sued the Buffalo Public Schools, charging that more than 90 percent of high school students are deprived of state-required art and music courses. Ironically, even the Leonardo daVinci High School is failing to offer an art or music sequence.

“For over a year, parents and teachers have sought to have the Buffalo School Board provide secondary students with state-required art and music instruction,” said Buffalo Teachers Federation President Phil Rumore. “While the art and music programs are readily available in the suburbs, not so in Buffalo.”

The NYSUT/BTF suit, filed in



December in Erie County state Supreme Court on behalf of five BTF teachers and parents, seeks a court order directing the district to equitably offer arts courses and sequences to all Buffalo high school students.

The lawsuit contends the district fails to offer students the state-mandated opportunity to complete a three- or five-unit sequence in the arts to earn a Regents diploma. During the 2019–20 school year,

only two of the city’s 20 high schools offered such an option: the admission-restricted Buffalo Academy of Visual and Performing Arts, and the Lewis J. Bennett High School of Innovative Technology, which offers a sequence in media arts.

Since these two high schools account for only 758 of the district’s 10,014 high school students, the district fails to provide opportunities to pursue an arts sequence to 92.5 percent of its secondary students. “An opportunity offered to only 7.5 percent of district students cannot be considered equitable by any stretch of the imagination,” the lawsuit states. To make matters worse, the district has cut courses necessary for juniors and seniors who were

already in the process of completing an arts sequence to finish their path to graduation, the lawsuit says.

The BTF noted that for some of the few music and art classes offered, students must attend classes outside of school hours if they want to participate. Two parents provided statements that their sons were denied the opportunity to participate in concert band and that the district forced their sons to continue to take a foreign language for a Regents diploma with advanced designation rather than allow their sons to complete an arts sequence. Another parent stated that her son was denied the opportunity to study any music in high school.

“We cannot allow the district to deprive our students of these important programs,” Rumore said. “They are not second-class students.”

*Celebrate*

## BLACK HISTORY MONTH



PHOTOS: EL-WISE NOISSETTE

NYSUT celebrated Black History Month with a program honoring African ancestry: the past, present and future. The event, co-sponsored by the Capital District Coalition of Black Trade Unionists and the state Public Employees Federation, featured local youth and honored several area activists. Speakers included NYSUT President Andy Pallotta, PEF Vice President Sharon DeSilva and CBTU President Shana Davis. Albany-area physician Dr. Charles Adomfeh elaborated on the event’s theme: Year of Return.

Kewsi Burgess, an English teacher and member of the Albany Public School Teachers Association, received the Rising Star Award. Schenectady Federation of Teachers member Oriana Miles received the Unsung Heroine Award. Albany High School student Zelalam Kebade received a \$500 scholarship.

Clockwise from left, NYSUT Secretary-Treasurer Philippe Abraham, right, presents a Lifetime Achievement Award to Terry Melvin, secretary-treasurer of the New York State AFL-CIO; from left, attendees from the United Sisters of New York youth mentoring group, Wanda Yarbor, Jacquie Vantull, two mentees and Troy TA member Tenika Wilcox; dancers from Art in Motion Dance Academy perform.

# Union scores victory in class action lawsuit

By Michael Del Piano  
NYSUT Office of General Counsel

The United States District Court for the Southern District of New York dismissed a thinly veiled attempt to extort funds from public sector unions, NYSUT included, when it rejected repayment claims for agency fees paid prior to the 2018 *Janus v. AFSCME* ruling.

The court in January applied the good faith defense to public sector unions, the first federal court in New York to do so. Prior to *Janus*, agency fees were constitutional under prevailing Supreme Court precedent and New York law. The court's decision was a major victory in the fight against anti-union forces that seek to financially cripple public sector

unions and silence the collective voice of working people.

In *Seidemann, et al. v. Professional Staff Congress*, two college professors filed a nationwide class action lawsuit against multiple local public sector unions and their affiliates, including NYSUT, for repayment of agency fees paid pre-*Janus* under federal and state law. More than 30 similar lawsuits have been filed around the country.

The unions moved to dismiss the complaint on several grounds, including that they were shielded from liability under the good faith defense. The unions argued it was objectively reasonable for them to collect agency fees under then-valid Supreme Court precedent and New York law.

The court agreed and dismissed the complaint in its entirety. The court expressly applied the good faith

defense and noted that the unions were entitled to rely on Supreme Court precedent. The court flatly rejected plaintiffs' argument that the unions were on notice that agency fees would eventually be declared unconstitutional and held it was objectively reasonable to rely on a statute not yet declared invalid. The court further held that recent Taylor

Law amendments prohibited plaintiffs' claims under state law.

Plaintiffs filed a notice of appeal to the United States Court of Appeals, Second Circuit. The unions were represented by NYSUT's Office of General Counsel attorneys Michael J. Del Piano, Esq., Edward J. Greene Jr., Esq., and Andrea A. Wanner, Esq., along with private attorneys.



## Billions of reasons to pledge to be counted

**NYSUT  
COUNTS**

census

2020

**For equity, fairness and justice,  
everyone must be counted!**

The result of the 2020 U.S. Census will affect various regions of the state differently, but it will definitely affect us all.

That's why NYSUT has launched [nysutcounts.org](http://nysutcounts.org), an initiative to ensure that every resident is recorded. The results affect the allocation of \$700 billion in federal funding to schools, hospitals, municipalities and needy families.

Every region of our state will be affected if there is an undercount.

Go to [nysutcounts.org/at-stake](http://nysutcounts.org/at-stake) to see how much your region could benefit from an increased return rate.

Undercounting the census is a

life-or-death issue for many New Yorkers. If we fail to count everyone, many will be deprived of food, shelter and health care.

Boosting participation is key. Here's the difference:

- 76 percent of New York households responded to the 2010 census, which led to a federal allocation of \$73.3 billion to the state.
  - If the response rate were 85 percent, that number would have been \$82.4 billion.
  - At a 95 percent rate, federal funding would have been \$92.1 billion.
- How could an undercount affect

education in New York?

Via the 2010 census count, New York receives much-needed federal funds for critical programs every year:

- \$550 million for Head Start
- \$1 billion in Title I grants
- \$900 million for school lunches and breakfasts
- \$750 million in Individuals with Disabilities Education Act grants.

In all, \$13 billion in education funding comes from census-allocated federal sources. If we undercount again this year, schools will continue to get less than our students deserve.

Pledge to be counted and find out how to help at [nysutcounts.org](http://nysutcounts.org).



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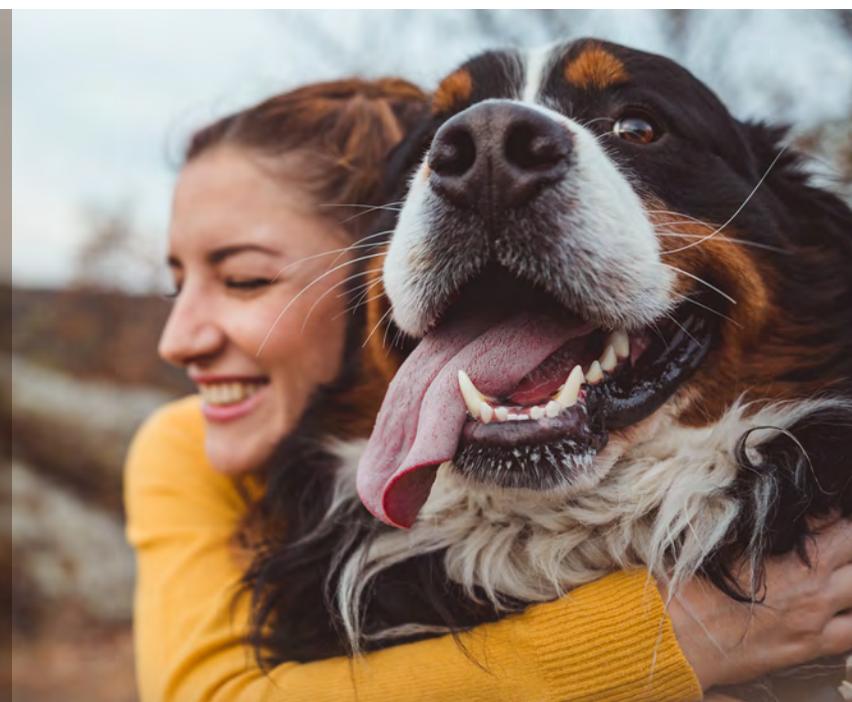
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# Union steps up to help members devastated by earthquakes

By Liza Frenette  
lfrenett@nysutmail.org

**T**eacher Maria Velez saved money for decades in order to afford a house. Six months ago, she moved into a new home with her son and daughter. On Jan. 7, a 6.4 magnitude earthquake upended the ground in southwestern Puerto Rico, destroying her home and her family's belongings.

More earthquakes continued to rumble on the island in what scientists call an earthquake swarm, crushing many homes, businesses and schools. Only about one-quarter of the island's schools have been able to reopen since the quakes.

Like many others, Velez is sleeping in a tent in a park area near her former house. Union leaders, staff and volunteers have been to the island helping her and other members of the Asociación de Maestros de Puerto Rico (AMPR), the teachers union.

The American Federation of Teachers is providing personal



Union leaders speak with AMPR member, center, who lost her home in the earthquake. From left, Elba Aponte Santos, president of the Asociación de Maestros de Puerto Rico, AFT Executive Vice President Evelyn DeJesus and President Randi Weingarten. PROVIDED

supplies, along with stipends to help them find housing. The union has also shipped large tents to be used as makeshift classrooms. AFT estimates that up to 20 percent of Puerto Rico's 856 schools have been rendered structurally unsound due to the earthquakes.

"We spoke with AFT members — teachers — who want to return to their jobs of teaching and caring for children but have no idea if they'll have a school to go back to this year," said Randi Weingarten, president of

AFT, who visited the island.

"Children need to be in school. We want some normalcy and the opening of the schools would help with that," said Evelyn DeJesus, AFT executive vice president. A native of Puerto Rico, DeJesus is also a NYSUT Board member and United Federation of Teachers vice president. She has been on several helping missions since the earthquakes hit.

NYSUT members are supporting residents with supplies and with donations made through the NYSUT Disaster Relief Fund.

"The continued generosity of our NYSUT members for the educators and students of Puerto Rico is reflected in the more than \$11,500 that has been donated to the NYSUT Disaster Relief Fund since the first earthquake struck the U.S. territory," said Philippe Abraham, NYSUT secretary-treasurer. "In addition to direct outreach, NYSUT and its members have donated more than \$40,000 to assist the AFT's Puerto Rico relief efforts."

In addition to distributing supplies in local

parks, union responders are making "Go Bag" backpacks for teachers with emergency First Aid kits, water, flashlights, and folders of students' names in case an earthquake hits a school that has reopened and they all have to bolt.

Union volunteers and staff have been walking through neighborhoods to hand out forms to people in need. The information residents provide on family size and damage to their home helps to determine the amount of stipend to be awarded, explained Adriana O'Hagan, an assistant to DeJesus. She said the government is marking homes according to the level of damage they have sustained with red, green and orange x's. Many are uninhabitable.

Union leaders are calling on the federal government to step up with much-needed assistance as the situation on the ground is critical.

"Suicide rates are at an all-time high, as are the rates of depression and clinical anxiety," AFT leaders Weingarten and DeJesus, joined by Elba Aponte Santos, president of the Puerto Rico teachers union, wrote in a letter to Congress. They said mental health professionals are needed, and help is needed to safely reopen schools so they can serve as hubs to provide these mental health services.

To donate:  
[nysut.org/  
disasterrelief](https://nysut.org/disasterrelief).



With schools among the buildings damaged across the island, some communities, including this one in Peñuelas, Puerto Rico, are holding classes in tents.

# RA delegates to elect NYSUT leadership

**D**elegates and alternates, representing their union colleagues from across the state, will gather in Albany May 1-2 at the 2020 NYSUT Representative Assembly, the union's annual policy-making convention.

Among their many tasks, RA delegates will elect NYSUT officers and all members of the union's Board of Directors, including At-Large Directors and Election District Directors. (See candidate statements on pages 13-16.) RA delegates will also elect delegates and alternates to the American Federation of Teachers convention.

Delegates will consider about 50 resolutions directing the union's course on education, legislative priorities, health care and workplace safety, civil and human rights and retirement issues.

The annual RA also offers the union an opportunity to recognize the winners of the NYSUT constituency awards, including: 2020 New York State Teacher of the Year Rachel Murat, Maine-Endwell Teachers Association; School-Related Professionals Members of the Year Dorothy Kamps, United Federation of Teachers, and Cheryl Rockhill, Brushton-Moira Support Staff Association.

Retiree Members of the Year

are Donald Nobles, UFT, and Deb Peterson, NYSUT Retiree Council 43 (Teacher Retirees in Florida).

Nancy Barth Miller, Federation of Nurses/UFT, is Health Care Professionals Member of the Year. Higher Education Members of the Year are Jamie Dangler, United University Professions, and Michael Fabricant, Professional Staff Congress.

"Not for Ourselves Alone:" The Sandy Feldman Outstanding

Leadership Award will be presented to former NYSUT Vice President Catalina Fortino, UFT, and Florence McCue, Yonkers Federation of Teachers.

The convention will also recognize winners of the union's Ken Kurzweil Social Justice Awards and NYSUT Community Service Awards — both individual members and local unions.

In addition, this year NYSUT will be presenting the Al Shanker Award for Distinguished Service — the union's highest honor — to an individual who has made extraordinary contributions to education.

This is the second year the annual convention will be held in Albany. Before the RA, leaders from around the state will attend the Local and Retiree Council Presidents Conference.

Visit [nysut.org/ra](https://nysut.org/ra) for more info.



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The online versions of candidate statements from the March 2020 edition of NYSUT United are available at [www.nysut.org/elections](http://www.nysut.org/elections).

Member login is required.



Jose Torres is a paraprofessional in the New York City Department of Education District 75 program, serving students with disabilities. He was interviewed by Paula Thomas, United Federation of Teachers chapter leader at P4 Queens and a member of the NYSUT SRP Advisory Committee.

# Getting to know ... Jose Torres

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

I work as an assistant to the teacher and work hard to adhere to the students' IEPs. I collect data based on my one-to-one students' behavior.

I love both the students and staff. Together they make it worth coming in every day. The work I do is both challenging and rewarding. I say this because the population of students we serve requires that I be many things at any given time for a student. The rewarding aspect of the work I do is knowing that I have made a difference in a child and, in return, our students know and trust that they are genuinely cared for and supported.

## How are you involved in your union?

Thanks to technology, I have been able to acquire knowledge of the many benefits, policies and programs

that our union has to offer. I was able to further my education through the Career Training Program offered through the UFT, and I completed my undergraduate degree from York College in 2015.

I have a better understanding of how my union operates and I have shared this information with my colleagues. I also participate in union events when possible.

## How do you make a difference?

I make a difference by being there for my students. Students need all of the adults in their lives to take notice of them as real people that need help in navigating their issues. I'm often asked to assist in other classrooms when it comes to behaviors. There is never a wrong or bad time to be there for a child in need.

One student in particular stands

out. The student did not want to participate in classroom activities, and would challenge all adult authority.

I made it a priority to focus on this child's needs. Working with his teacher and other related staff members, we were able to find ways to de-escalate his aggressive behaviors. This resulted in the student becoming more productive in the classroom and more participatory in other school events. This improvement helped to alleviate many of the outbursts and tantrums that he exhibited in the home as well.

## What about your community engagement, hobbies?

I enjoy music, athletics, calisthenics and soccer. I offer my services as an accountant to the community both pro bono and for-profit.

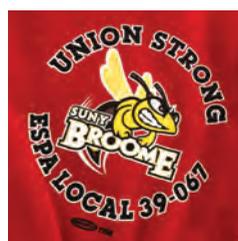
# SRPs — and these SRP locals — rock!

Local unions across the state made sure to celebrate their SRP members in style during New York State School-Related Professionals Recognition Day in November. Three locals stood out in NYSUT's annual contest.

Two locals will receive two-for-one entries to the 2020 SRP Leadership Conference, Oct. 23-25. The two first-place winners are: SUNY Broome Community College Educational Support Personnel Association, led by Mary Gilbert; and Greenburgh Federation #11, led by Jennifer Cole.

Broome CCESP held a contest to design a logo for the union and made T-shirts for members featuring the winning design.

"We had 60 members come (to the



recognition day event) ... pretty impressive as we (are) only 135 members

strong and have approximately 25 members that work second or third shifts," Gilbert noted.

At Greenburgh 11, a Special Act school located in Westchester County, art teacher Glenn Cotler made posters with the students to hang around the school, and school counselor Tara Ritchie made Word Art using all of the SRP staff's names.

"All staff, including our administrators, proudly wore their NYSUT SRP stickers and buttons," Cole said. "In

such a challenging environment, it was a day to show unity and union pride throughout the school."

The Schenectady Federation of Teachers received "Honorable Mention" from the contest committee. Led by Pat Zentko (para president) and Juliet Benaquisto (SFT president), the local advocated for and celebrated SRPs

through a social media campaign called #SFTParasRock. The campaign consisted of SFT members tagging a para who makes their life better and sharing why.

More than 60 members

posted heartfelt stories and words of gratitude — and their posts received more than 2,000 likes!

On Recognition Day, local leaders were happy to report that after 18 long months and four full day mediation sessions, the paraprofessional unit achieved a fair contract that extends through June 2023.





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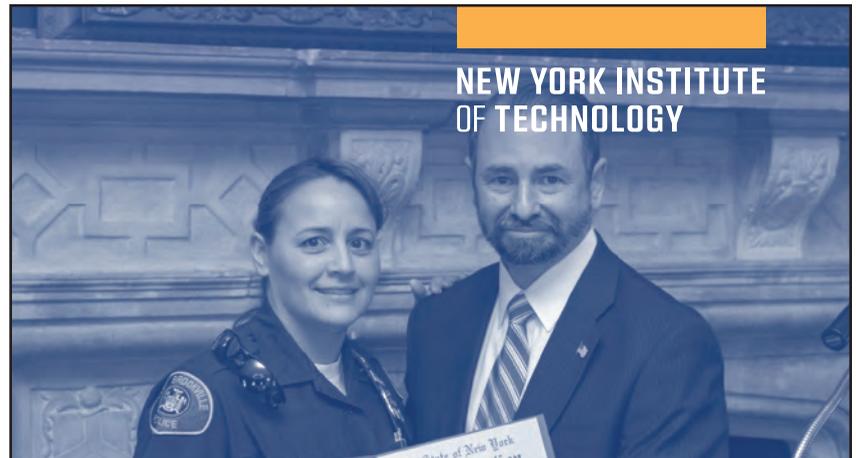
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# Sachem teacher's legacy lives on

By Matt Smith  
msmith@nysutmail.org

**M**atthew DiStefano passed away Jan. 27. Matthew DiStefano is very much alive.

You can see that from the smiles he stills brings to the faces of students and staff at Sachem North High School on Long Island, where he taught special education for 19 years and coached volleyball. You can see that in the energy he still ignites throughout the school's hallways, adorned with photos and signs remembering the man affectionately known as "Dezy." And you can hear it in the way those who love Matthew DiStefano speak of him, still — always in the present tense.

"He is somebody I consider a brother," said Matt Rivera, a history teacher at Sachem North and the head varsity volleyball coach. "He welcomed me into his family and ever since, I've been 'Uncle Matt.' We live a quarter mile away from one another. We come to work together. Our wives

joke with us: 'You guys are like an old married couple.' We've become inseparable and it's a friendship that I really cherish."

DiStefano — a former standout college volleyball player and Rivera's assistant coach — learned in Feb. 2019 he had a rare form of kidney cancer.

The diagnosis could not have been more bleak: Stage 4, no cure. In volleyball terms, "match point." So as always, Dezy — whom Rivera described as "the most competitive and inspiring person I know" — dug down. He wasn't defeated. In fact, he recognized opportunity.

"His response was to immediately find a way to help people. It's his most important legacy, and it's how he chose to spend his last year," said Rivera.

Matthew DiStefano is very much alive. You can see that in the impact he now has on others battling cancer.

Following his diagnosis, DiStefano — a father of three and whose wife, Jennifer, also teaches at Sachem

North — created the "Dezy Strong Foundation," which helps cover expenses for those suffering from cancer.

Founded in August, the foundation has already raised more than \$300,000, and has attracted fundraising support from the Sachem community, the New

York Islanders, numerous collegiate athletic programs and various high school volleyball programs — even as far away as Shenendehowa near Albany.

"Dez was always the guy in our friendship who came up with the ideas, who was moving and hustling. He never stopped," said Rivera. "Because he was sick and getting treatments, he turned a lot of the responsibility for the foundation over to me and other guys to carry out his vision. The cool thing about it is, it provides opportunities for people to get involved and to build on Dez's legacy as we go."

Helping to build on DiStefano's legacy are the 1,300 members of the Sachem Central Teachers Association. Thursdays in the district have now been designated "Dezy Days." Schol staff wear shirts promoting the foundation and raise money.

"We have 15 buildings and everybody jumped on board. It's been amazing," said SCTA President Philip

Barbera. "We just want to be there for him and his family."

Community response to the foundation has also been overwhelming.

"Dezy touched the lives of thousands of kids," Barbera said. "Everyone's desire to help and get involved shows just what kind of impact a teacher can have on a community."

Rivera agreed.

"In a big community like this, sometimes you can lose that personal connection. But that's not the case here with Dezy. The support has been outrageous. I know it means a lot to him. He grew up here, and his parents are still here. It's been incredible, and the family has found a lot of strength in that."



DEZYSTRONG.ORG



BECKY MILLER

SCTA President Philip Barbera (left) and Matt Rivera, teacher and varsity volleyball coach, talk fondly about the legacy and life of their late colleague and friend Matthew "Dezy" DiStefano.

## Are you Dezy Strong?

To make a donation, buy gear or get involved, visit the Dezy Strong Foundation website at [dezystrong.org](http://dezystrong.org).



# Think globally, highlight locally

## Celebrate your community's suffragists

By Kara Smith  
ksmith@nysutmail.org

Whether you're an educator in Buffalo, Long Island, Plattsburgh or any point in between, NYSUT's Social Studies Subject Area Committee has a challenge for you. Find female suffragists from your community and highlight those hometown heroines in your classroom for the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment. Ratified by Congress on Aug. 18, 1920, the measure constitutionally guarantees a woman's right to vote.

The idea is based on the concept of acting locally to effect global change, said committee chair Jennifer Allard, a North Colonie Teachers Association member and seventh-grade social studies teacher at Shaker Jr. High near Albany.

"The local history angle is super important," said Allard, who hopes the focus will empower students

toward greater civic engagement. "By taking action within their local communities, many suffragists became agents of change at a national and global level."



**Belva Ann Lockwood**  
1830-1917

Committee member Jessica Groves, vice president of the Vestal TA, wrote a high school lesson plan highlighting attorney Belva Lockwood, the first woman to run for president as a third-party candidate. The opening of the Belva Lockwood Inn in a local building Lockwood once operated as a girl's school — The Owego Female Seminary — inspired the lesson.

"Although she was only here for a couple of years, highlighting someone local helped my students connect our community with the bigger picture," said Groves, noting that she discussed Seneca Falls and the women's suffrage movement in earlier lessons and that most of her students hadn't heard of Lockwood. "It starts with getting to know the community you live in. There are lots

of local stories in everyone's town." Believing that women shouldn't solely depend on men for support, Lockwood fought for equality for women in the classroom, the courtroom and in politics. She was the first woman to gain admittance to, and argue cases before, the U.S. Supreme Court. The community of Lockwood, located about 45 minutes west of Vestal High School in Broome County where Groves teaches, is named in her honor.

Using local activists can be a great hook because students are often more interested in local figures than national figures, said committee member Joseph Karb, a social studies teacher and president of the Springville Faculty Association.

"As Eleanor Roosevelt so eloquently stated, 'human rights start in small places close to home,'" Karb said. "This is true of the suffrage movement as well, with activists coming from all over the state including our largest cities and some of the smallest towns."

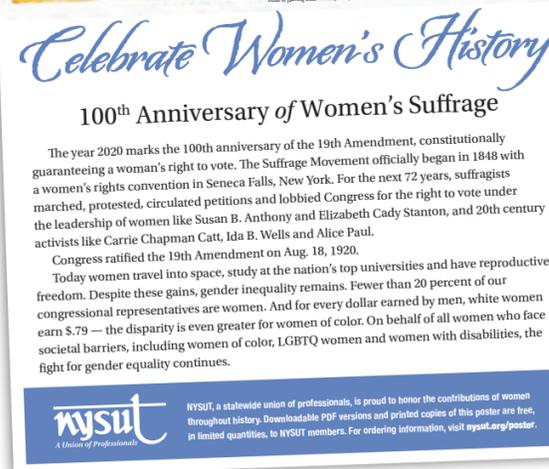
Allard said studying local heroines can also give students an opportunity

to delve into local research by interviewing community members, or finding information through local historians, librarians or the county clerk's office. "They often know an individual's family history, how to access census records or get the 'ungettable' source," she said.

"Women's history is OUR history. Highlighting local heroines of the suffrage movement is a wonderful way to celebrate the centennial of the 19th Amendment," said NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango, chair of the union's Women's Committee.

"Local libraries, state and community history museums, university special collections and archives are great resources for finding and teaching students about the suffragists who once lived in their backyards."

For mini-lesson plans or profiles of several New York suffragists, visit [nysut.org/women](http://nysut.org/women). The "Women's History 2020" section offers other materials to help educators highlight the 19th Amendment centennial in their classrooms.



For a free download of the 100th anniversary poster and past Women's History Month posters, including two that feature suffragists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Mary McLeod Bethune, visit [nysut.org/poster](http://nysut.org/poster).

## Free poster celebrates women's history

NYSUT celebrates Women's History Month — March — with a free poster celebrating the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment, which constitutionally guarantees a woman's right to vote. The Suffrage Movement officially began in 1848 with a women's rights convention in Seneca Falls.

For the next 72 years, suffragists marched, protested, circulated petitions and lobbied Congress for the right to vote under the leadership of women like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and 20th century activists like Carrie Chapman Catt, Ida B. Wells and Alice Paul. Congress ratified the 19th Amendment on Aug. 18, 1920.

Today women travel into space, study at the nation's top universities and have reproductive freedom. Despite these gains, gender inequality remains. Fewer than 20 percent of our congressional representatives are women. And for every dollar earned by men, white women earn 79 cents — the disparity is even greater for women of color. On behalf of all women who face societal barriers, including women of color, LGBTQ women and women with disabilities, the fight for gender equality continues.

For a free download of this and past Women's History Month posters, visit [nysut.org/posters](http://nysut.org/posters).

## Resources to kickstart your lessons

For a variety of centennial and women's history resources, go to [nysut.org/whm2020](http://nysut.org/whm2020). Members of NYSUT's Social Studies Subject Area Committee and the NYSUT Women's Committee have compiled the following:

- A list of State Education Department resources on women's history, including info from the NYS Archives, NYS Museum and NYS Library.
- Profiles and mini lesson plans of several unsung heroines of women's suffrage.
- The 2020 Women's Vote Centennial Initiative, a central organizing and information-sharing site offering programs, projects and activities.
- The National Women's History Alliance, info to promote women's history and the goals of education, empowerment and equality.

- The National Votes for Women Trail, an interactive map and database compiled by the National Collaborative for Women's History Sites, identifies important suffrage sites across the nation.

- For primary source documents, go to [c3teachers.org/inquiries/womens-rights](http://c3teachers.org/inquiries/womens-rights).
- Create interactive maps at [scribblemaps.com](http://scribblemaps.com).
- Use [polleverywhere.com](http://polleverywhere.com) to develop word clouds based on terms and keywords.
- The American Federation of Teachers' Share My Lesson website is a treasure trove of info by educators, for educators. Visit [sharemylesson.com](http://sharemylesson.com).
- The National Education Association has compiled a large number of Women's History Month ideas and lesson plans by grade level. Go to [NEA.org](http://NEA.org) for more.

## Unsung Heroines of Women's Suffrage

**Matilda Joslyn Gage**  
1826-1898  
Born in Cicero near Syracuse, she was the youngest speaker at the 1852 Women's Rights Convention in Syracuse.



**Sarah J. S. Garnet**  
1831-1911  
A Brooklyn resident, she founded the Equal Suffrage League in the late 1880s to advocate for voting rights for African-American women.



**Marietta Holley**  
1836-1926  
A writer known as the "female Mark Twain," this North Country native questioned political arguments against suffrage in her writings.



**Harriot Stanton Blatch**  
1856-1940  
Born to activism, the daughter of legendary suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton formed the Equality League of Self Supporting Women and the National Women's Party.



**Mary Burnett Talbert**  
1866-1923  
The Buffalo resident was a noted educator and activist in the suffrage, anti-lynching and anti-racism movements.



**Harriet Burton Laidlaw**  
1873-1949  
Born in Albany, she was a New York-based suffragist, reformer and peace activist who served as director of the National American Woman Suffrage Association.



# Binghamton University teacher prep program tackles two issues at once

By Sylvia Saunders  
ssaunder@nysutmail.org

**F**or many districts, finding substitutes is a daily struggle.

Teachers are expected to give up their prep periods to fill in, classes are combined or students are placed in study halls. Teaching assistants, specialists like literacy instructors and even administrators are dispatched on an emergency basis.

For 17 Southern Tier school districts, the situation has greatly improved thanks to a new partnership between SUNY Binghamton University and Broome-Tioga BOCES.

The Substitutes With A Purpose program allows graduate students in BU's School of Education to serve as paid substitute teachers two days a week in participating districts — and then spend a third day of the week with a mentor teacher to observe, teach small group lessons and assist

in the classroom. The SWAP program, which started out as a pilot for five graduate students to complete their necessary fieldwork requirement, has proven so popular that it's grown to two dozen district placements.

"This creative model is a win-win for all," said Maine-Endwell Superintendent Jason VanFossen. "New teachers receive clinical experience and are able to implement their learning, while the district receives the guaranteed services of a substitute teacher."

If anything, at a time when enrollment in teacher prep programs is dwindling across the country, the challenge has been keeping up with the demand from area school districts that want to participate, said Andrea Decker, BU's director of field education. The program is cost effective for districts because they receive state aid through a Broome-Tioga BOCES cost-sharing agreement. Decker, a member of United University

Professions, heard about the funding mechanism from a colleague at SUNY Brockport, which has a similar immersion program.

"It's really been a great program for our district and the college students," said Deposit Teachers Association President Erin Wehrli. "It gives the future teachers a comprehensive field experience, a strong mentor and, of course, getting paid is a big plus when you're a graduate student."

Students gave the program rave reviews. "I thoroughly enjoyed the SWAP program," said JoAnna Cockram, who was assigned to Deposit first as a SWAP participant and then as a student teacher. "Not only was I able to apply what I was learning in my college courses in the classroom, but I was also becoming a part of the school community. I gained invaluable relationships with administration, teachers, staff and students." After graduating last year,

she is now working as a substitute in the rural district.

"Being a substitute gave me a better feel for the whole community and it was such a great opportunity to be in all different level classes, from pre-K to fifth grade," said student Jacqueline Luchetti, who will be graduating in May with a master's degree in special education. "Subbing also really boosted my confidence for (this semester's) student teaching. I'm a hands-on learner so this program was a perfect fit for me."

Decker noted the rigorous commitment is not for everyone. Committing the time for three days in the field can be challenging and difficult to schedule. For others, the program has been a good recruitment tool.

"I remember one student specifically chose our program because he could count on getting paid as a substitute," Decker said. "He also liked the idea that it was more clinical and less theoretical."



Deposit TA's Ben Diemer, a chemistry/physics teacher, serves as a mentor for Binghamton University grad JoAnna Cockram.

ERIN WEHRLI

## Schools struggling with sub shortage

Ninety six percent of superintendents reported difficulty finding daily and long-term substitute teachers, according to a report by the New York State Educational Conference Board. The success rates for finding substitutes was as low as 59 percent, the report noted. The ECB noted several factors: a drop in teacher prep program enrollments, a cap on how much retirees can earn and state regulations that limit subbing. For the full ECB teacher shortage report, go to [nysecb.org](http://nysecb.org).

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**New Kid**

By Jerry Craft

**Suitable For:**  
Grades 4–8**Recommended by:** Todd Feltman,  
United Federation  
of Teachers

**Why I chose this book:** This action-packed graphic novel is about Jordan Banks, a seventh-grade student who is enrolled in an elite private school. Jordan loves drawing cartoons and hopes to go to art school. He is one of the few kids of color in his grade, and travels from Washington Heights in Manhattan to Riverdale in the Bronx every day. Adjusting to and navigating the school culture is a challenge for him. The illustrations are detailed, colorful and captivating. This riveting story will keep students on the edge of their seats.

**What I liked best:** The chapter about Jordan's first day at Riverdale Academy Day School vividly captures the main character's emotions and his strategic navigations as a new student.

**How teachers can use this book:** Students can create a "New Student Classroom Guide to Success," or write about how it feels to be a new student and what supported them. Teachers can facilitate discussions about respect, race, diversity and culture. The book can be used to launch a graphic novel writing unit.

**About the author:** Author/illustrator Jerry Craft has worked on numerous picture books, graphic novels and middle grade novels. *New Kid* won the 2020 Coretta Scott King Award and the 2020 John Newbery Medal. It's the first graphic novel to receive the prize for the most outstanding contribution to children's literature. Visit [jerrycraft.com](http://jerrycraft.com) for more.

"Check it Out" features books recommended to teachers and parents by school librarians and other educators. Have a recommendation? Send suggestions, along with your name and local union, to [lfrenett@nysutmail.org](mailto:lfrenett@nysutmail.org).

# Kudos to the state's 97 new NBCTs

By **Sylvia Saunders**  
[ssaunder@nysutmail.org](mailto:ssaunder@nysutmail.org)

**F**or Stillwater teachers Rachel Fridholm and Liz Retell, earning National Board Certification was a team effort.

Throughout their two-year journey, the middle school special education teachers depended on each other — as well as a local support group — for ongoing encouragement.

"The National Board Certification process was challenging, but so worth it," Fridholm said, noting she grew professionally and personally.

"I'm extremely grateful because it not only improved my teaching, but my own children (saw) me working hard to improve our lives and improve myself as a professional," she said. "Setting an example of continuous growth is important to me."

Fridholm and Retell are among 97 teachers statewide who earned National Board Certification in December 2019. They're fortunate to work in a district that values the national credential and advances NBCTs two steps on the salary

schedule under their union contract.

Created by teachers, for teachers, National Board Certification is the nation's highest credential for the teaching profession. It is a voluntary, rigorous, peer-reviewed process that includes a portfolio, student work samples and videos of classroom teaching. It generally takes hundreds of hours to complete the process in up to three years.

With a total of 2,115 NBCTs, New York leads the northeast. Nationwide, the Class of 2019 features 3,831 new NBCTs.

Hundreds of districts like Stillwater offer a salary step increase, release time or a stipend for achievement. NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango said the union strongly supports national board candidates by offering awareness programs, support and advice through online discussion forums, writing retreats, and professional development through its Education & Learning Trust. The union also works with teacher centers to support candidates.

The union pushed hard to



From left, Stillwater Teachers Association members Liz Retell and Rachel Fridholm. PROVIDED

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

Interested in pursuing National Board Certification? Find resources online, including support programs, tips and a list of districts that offer incentives. Visit [nysut.org](http://nysut.org) or your local teacher center.

## Speak out on changing grad requirements

By **Sylvia Saunders**  
[ssaunder@nysutmail.org](mailto:ssaunder@nysutmail.org)

**A**s the Regents consider whether to change state graduation requirements, NYSUT is urging members to attend regional forums in March and April.

"It's important for the Regents to hear from educators," said NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango. The forums will feature small group discussions around five guiding questions: What do we want students to know and be able

to do before they graduate? How do we want students to demonstrate such knowledge and skills? How do you measure learning and achievement to ensure they are indicators of high school completion? How can measures of achievement accurately reflect the skills and knowledge of our special population, such as students with disabilities and English language learners? What course requirements or exams will ensure that students are prepared for college and careers or civic engagement?

NYSUT has posted talking points on the guiding questions, as well as

the results of a member survey that found the overwhelming majority believe there should be greater flexibility for students to meet graduation requirements.

The Regents forums, which began in January, are being held in each judicial district through April. DiBrango noted that if you can't make it to a forum, take the State Education Department's online survey to make sure your voice is heard.

For the survey, forum schedule and registration details, go to [nysed.gov/grad-measures/regional-meetings](http://nysed.gov/grad-measures/regional-meetings).

[ CONGRATULATIONS CLASS OF 2019 NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFIED TEACHERS! ]

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**ECYA:** Early Childhood through Young Adulthood

**EMC:** Early and Middle Childhood

**MC:** Middle Childhood

# Granville students sit front row for *Hamilton*

By Kara Smith  
ksmith@nysutmail.org

**T**hey're listening to rap songs in the lunchroom, reading primary documents in history class and singing tunes from the hit Broadway musical in chorus. At Granville High School in rural Washington County near the Vermont border, the entire school has *Hamilton* fever. And they've got two creative educators to thank for it.

Marie Grimmke and Cory Burton really only wanted to breathe some life into their 11th grade English lessons. After years of teaching *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, they noticed that 21st century kids couldn't relate. They decided to use the *Hamilton* musical — written by Lin-Manuel Miranda

— as the main text and supplement lessons with primary historical sources and the Ron Chernow biography, *Alexander Hamilton*.

Although using a musical composition as a primary text was risky, it struck a chord with students. They embraced the infectious raps and soon other educators integrated *Hamilton* into their classes as well. Seeing the students' excitement, for years Grimmke has applied for \$10 student show tickets through the Hamilton Education program.

The third time was the charm.



Granville students enjoy the sights and sounds of Broadway.

PROVIDED

In November, 70 11th graders and seven chaperones traveled to New York City for a performance of *Hamilton* on Broadway. The biggest surprise when they arrived — front row seats and a special welcome from the organizers since they'd traveled the furthest. Students from 18 schools, most from the New York City region, attended the special showing.

"It's just amazing," said Grimmke noting that as a high-poverty district, most students don't travel much — 100 percent of Granville students

qualify for free lunch. For many students it was their first trip to New York City. "The message of the play, being able to rise up and take advantage of opportunity, really resonates with these kids."

Although the tickets were available to any 11th grader who wanted to go, the \$50 bus fee was out of reach for some. At a June celebration for retiring educators, raffle tickets were sold for three chaperone spots. Enough was raised to pay the bus fees for 10 students.

"This was a perfect storm of everyone coming together to make this special — the teachers, the superintendent, the principal, everyone," Grimmke said.

For information about the Hamilton Education Program, visit [gilderlehrman.org/hamilton](http://gilderlehrman.org/hamilton).

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# VAPING PREVENTION

## Educators can play important roles

By Kara Smith

ksmith@nysutmail.org

**L**emon drop. Funnel cake. Cotton candy. The names may sound like desserts, but they're actually flavors of e-cigarette "vape juice." Packed in colorfully labeled bottles and offering a sweet nicotine rush, electronic cigarettes, or vape pens, are akin to Venus flytraps for kids. Like the carnivorous plant, the sugary flavors lure them in. The addictive chemicals trap them. And for some, the addiction consumes them.

The National Institute of Health's 2019 Monitoring the Future survey, measuring how teens report drug, alcohol and nicotine use, found that roughly one in four 12th graders vape daily.

In a bid to keep the products out of student hands, many school districts take extensive — and expensive — steps; from installing vaping detectors and cameras near restrooms,

to hosting community and student forums, to filing suit against e-cigarette and vape manufacturer Juul.

While districts struggle to fight back, and state and federal laws restricting the products wind their way through the courts, teaching materials from sources like the State Education Department and Cornell University can help educators highlight the dangers of addiction.

East Hampton Teachers Association members Ralph Naglieri, a school psychologist, and James Stewart, a health and physical education coordinator, focus on prevention, fact-finding and creating a culture of care for students when it comes to vaping. They're spearheading their Long Island district's participation in the Centers for Disease Control's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, a survey that helps identify and track risky teen behavior.

"We want to get the science and data behind the issue so we can help

develop better strategies to address it," said Stewart. For survey information, visit [cdc.gov/healthy-youth](https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-youth).

They're also exploring an alternative to suspension program called Healthy Futures, offered through Stanford School of Medicine's Tobacco Prevention Toolkit. "Students caught vaping would do in-school suspensions instead of traditional suspension," said Naglieri.

Suspension periods would be



used to teach students the dangers of vaping and provide quitting resources.

What is your local or district doing in response to teen vaping? Drop us a line at [united@nysutmail.org](mailto:united@nysutmail.org).



### Vaping prevention resources

■ AFT's Share My Lesson offers a selection of teacher-created middle school and high school lesson plans. [sharemylesson.com/](https://www.sharemylesson.com/)

■ SED's New York State Center for School Health offers a free, 38-minute webinar "E-cigarettes and vaping" for educators. The webinar provides one hour of CTLE credit upon successful completion. [schoolhealthny.com](https://www.schoolhealthny.com) (You must first create a free account with NYSCSH's Learning Management System under the "Professional Learning" tab.)

■ Stanford School of Medicine's Tobacco Prevention Toolkit offers a series of free, online lesson plans and supplemental materials targeting middle and high school students. Lessons range from the dangers of e-cigarettes

and vape pens, to understanding nicotine addiction. [med.stanford.edu/tobaccopreventiontoolkit](https://med.stanford.edu/tobaccopreventiontoolkit)

■ Scholastic Inc. partners with the National Institute on Drug Abuse to create Heads Up: Real News About Drugs and Your Body. The series of science-based lessons and materials for educators includes a lesson for students in grades 6–12 on vaping, "E-cigarettes: What you need to know." [headsup.scholastic.com/teachers](https://headsup.scholastic.com/teachers)

■ Access a free science lab for high school students examining the impact of vape juice on living cells from the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine. [tetrahymenaasset.vet.cornell.edu/effects-of-vaping](https://tetrahymenaasset.vet.cornell.edu/effects-of-vaping)

- As of Feb. 18, the CDC reports a total of **2,807** hospitalized e-cigarette, or vaping, product use-associated **lung injury** (EVALI) cases or **deaths** from **50** states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Of those cases, **15%** were under **18** years old.
- As of Jan. 17, 2020, the New York State Department of Health reported **four** confirmed vaping-related deaths: a **17**-year-old from the Bronx; a man in his **30s** from Manhattan; a woman in her **20s** from NYC and a woman in her **50s** from Ontario County.

# Educators act fast to save a student's life

By Sylvia Saunders  
ssaunder@nysutmail.org

Irvington senior Jonathan Mosberg knows just how lucky he is to be alive after going into sudden cardiac arrest during a field trip to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

Fewer than 10 percent of people who suffer cardiac arrest outside of a hospital survive. The odds are even lower for teenagers.

Thanks to a lucky chain of events — including quick action by school counselor Andrew Lund and retired school nurse Marilyn Onoda — Mosberg is grateful to be here today and on a mission to raise awareness about the importance of CPR training.

It was a typical year-end field trip for two busloads of Irvington High AP American History students to the historic battlefield. As they headed to their last monument stop for the day, a student a couple of rows back on the bus called out to Lund that something was wrong with Mosberg.

"When I turned around, I saw he was slumped over — with his head down," Lund said. "At first I thought it was the heat, but when I went to prop him up, he was totally unresponsive."

As a middle school football coach, Lund is certified in CPR and first aid, but this was the first time he faced such a critical situation.

With help from the bus driver and a student, Lund carried the lifeless 17-year-old off the bus and laid him down on a grassy patch off to the side of Gettysburg Memorial Field. He noted they were behind a statue of Robert E. Lee — a recognizable landmark to tell the 911 dispatcher so the ambulance could get there faster.

As Lund tried to find a pulse, he was quickly joined by retired school nurse Marilyn Onoda, who was



Irvington senior Jonathan Mosberg, right, and his school counselor Andrew Lund. Lund administered CPR when Mosberg went into sudden cardiac arrest on a field trip last year.

PROVIDED

traveling on the other bus with a diabetic student. Onoda couldn't get a pulse either. The pair immediately started CPR, or cardiopulmonary resuscitation, an emergency lifesaving procedure performed when the heart stops beating. They administered three cycles of CPR, with Lund doing compressions and Onoda performing rescue breathing.

Before the ambulance arrived, several off-duty firefighter/EMTs who happened to be nearby, noticed the commotion and came over to help.

"They jumped in and took over, but it was touch and go," Lund said. "They kept getting and losing his pulse. I was afraid we were going to lose him."

A few minutes later the ambulance arrived; the paramedics noted how important it is to start CPR as soon as possible. If it is performed in the first few minutes of cardiac arrest, CPR

can double or triple a person's chance of survival, according to the American Heart Association.

Mosberg, who was transported to Gettysburg Hospital and then flown to a larger medical center in Hershey, apparently had a viral cold infection that triggered myocarditis. The problem can strike suddenly and without any prior history and is the third leading cause of sudden death in children and young adults.

"I know how lucky I am," said Mosberg, who is now fully recovered. "If not for my counselor, school nurse and EMS, I would not be here today."

The experience has also inspired Mosberg to take an emergency responder course himself and do everything he can to get more people trained. He has applied for an educational foundation grant to offer CPR and AED training for teachers and other staff, as well as training sessions for members of the community.

"While Irvington provides CPR training to high school students, I want to help more people learn," the Westchester teen said. "By increasing education and providing training, I hope that if anyone goes into cardiac arrest — as I did — there will be someone nearby who can help. CPR does so much to give the person a fighting chance."

Lund, who has been nominated by Irvington Faculty Association

President Amy Falk for a NYSUT Lifeline Award, said the experience has shown how important CPR training can be.

It has also highlighted how important it is to have an AED available on field trips and a school nurse available whether there's a student with special medical needs or not.

"Things can happen without warning," Lund said. "Earlier that day, Jonathan was laughing with friends at a rest stop and everything seemed fine."



## CPR in schools

New York is one of 39 states requiring students to be trained in hands-on CPR and AED usage before they graduate from high school.

The 2015 law makes the training part of the health education curriculum.

Nearly two decades ago, NYSUT worked closely with parent advocates for a law that requires an automated external defibrillator in every school building. An AED is an electrical device that is used to restore a normal heartbeat in an individual who experienced sudden cardiac arrest.

Former Port Jervis teacher Rachel Moyer, who lost a son in a cardiac incident during a high school basketball game, and the Louis Acompora Foundation, named after a 14-year-old on Long Island who died after a blow to the chest in his first high school lacrosse game, have lobbied nationwide to require CPR training and AEDs in schools.

## “Quotable”



### Yonkers Federation of Teachers

Due to chronic state underfunding, the huge ratios of psychologists, guidance counselors & social workers per student in Yonkers has been a moral failure. #YonkersKidsMatter #FundOurFutureNY @YonkersSchools @nysutEVP @nysut @quezada1229 @AndreaSCousins @ShanaeVWilliams (@yft860)

### UA Local Union 393

Congratulations to the employees of Kickstarter, who just voted 47-36 to form the first union made up entirely of white-collar, full-time workers in the tech industry! #UnionStrong #1u #Organize (@UALocal393)

### WPTA presidents

@WhitePlains\_TA knows that strong unions make strong schools! @nysut @aft @mspetter #PublicSchoolProud #PSW20 (@WPTApresidents)

### Marc Perrone

#SuperBowl Every Pass, Every Down, and Every Kick starts with a Football. Every #NFL Football starts with Leather made by @UFCW Members. #UnionStrong @UFCW1546 #SBLIV @NFLPA #1u #Chiefs Kingdom #BeLegendary #SuperBowl2020 (@Marc\_Perrone)



## ANSWERS FROM ... Francois Barcomb

Hendrick Hudson Education Association

### 1. How long have you been a Jeopardy! fan?

I have watched Jeopardy! from the time Alex Trebek came on as host — when I was in 11th grade. My parents, my siblings and I played a lot of trivia games, crossword puzzles and other board games and it got super competitive between us. We still get on each other's cases even when we are on the same team for pub trivia!

### 2. What was your experience like on the show?

I was on four episodes in May (2019) and won the Teacher's Tournament. I was then invited to the tournament of champions, which resulted in me being on four more episodes. In the end I took third place to James Holzhauer and Emma Boetcher. I was not very anxious on the show for a couple of reasons. I've been in high pressure situations before; this one had only embarrassment as a bad possible outcome. My time in the Navy, graduate school and teaching have made me used to being tested in front of an audience.

There was a musical question I got wrong; it was basically "In which musical did Val sing 'Dance: 10, Looks: three.'" My answer was "All That Jazz" but it was actually "A Chorus Line" — which was a musical just

performed at our school. I did get some ribbing. Winning \$100,000 has a way of silencing criticism!

I am most proud of getting "vexillographer" (one who makes flags) after James answered incorrectly with "vexillologist" (one who studies flags). It's about the only thing that went right in the finals.

### 3. What are your plans with your winnings?

I won \$100,000 for winning the teacher's tournament and \$50,000 for getting third in the tournament of champions. I don't have immediate plans, but my daughter is only 10.

By showing an episode of Jeopardy! at school we were able to raise money for a student's family to help defray costs associated with her cancer treatment. My donation was one of many.

### 4. How are you involved with your local union?

I was one of two co-building reps between 2008-14; and I was on the negotiation team for two contracts.

### 5. What was your path to teaching like?

I grew up near Glens Falls and graduated from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Then I went on to serve in the Navy for four years as a nuclear propulsion officer on submarines. After leaving the service, I went to the State University of New York at Albany to earn a Ph.D. in physics. I became an assistant professor at Massachusetts Maritime Academy.

I moved back to New York to be closer to (and eventually marry) my wife. Hendrick Hudson was the only school in the area that took a chance on a

37-year-old career-changer from an alternative certification program.



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**Sheila R. Goldberg**

A staunch unionist, activist and an inspiration to many, Sheila Goldberg died in January 2020.

Sheila made countless contributions to NYSUT over her many decades of service, including as RC 17 president and her work with the Retiree Advisory Committee. Sheila was a tireless VOTE-COPE advocate and she played a critical role in fundraising efforts for Making Strides Against Breast Cancer.

Sheila received many awards over the years, including the NYSUT Retiree Member of the Year, AFT Retiree Member of the Year, and the union's highest honor for women leaders, "Not For Ourselves Alone." The Sandy Feldman Outstanding Leadership Award.

**Lawrence Bonacquisti**

Jan. 9, 2020  
Retiree Council 6

**Diane Broderick** | Jan. 25, 2020  
Saranac Teachers Association

**Geraldine Cadzow** | Sept. 8, 2019  
Valley Central Teachers Association

**Rose Camarda** | Nov. 16, 2019  
Syracuse Teachers Association

**Virginia Cavigliano**  
Nov. 11, 2019  
Yonkers Federation of Teachers

**Barbara Dann** | Nov. 27, 2019  
Saranac Teachers Association

**Irwin Dubno** | Jan. 3, 2020  
United Federation of Teachers

**James Feehan** | Oct. 8, 2019  
Yonkers Federation of Teachers

**David Fogarty** | Feb. 5, 2020  
Retiree Council 7

**Maria Hadala** | Oct. 21, 2019  
Yonkers Federation of Teachers

**Robert Large** | Dec. 25, 2019  
West Genesee District Teachers Association

**Joan B. Pierson** | Jan. 20, 2020  
Jamesville-Dewitt Faculty Association

**Rosemary E. Reimer**  
Jan. 11, 2020  
Dolgeville Teachers Association

**Lynne Pierce Tagliapietra**  
May 26, 2019  
Mount Vernon Federation of Teachers

**Shirley E. Wimer** | Jan. 3, 2020  
Retiree Council 6

*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](mailto:jmalec@nysutmail.org).*

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# Union pioneer reflects on a life of labor

By Liza Frenette  
lfrenett@nysutmail.org

**A**s a newly minted 100-year-old, Mae Stark comes with many hard-earned titles: teacher, mother, great-grandmother, widow, daughter and self-described “lifelong unionist.” She credits her passion for unionism to her Russian immigrant parents.

Stark taught science for three decades in the Bronx. When her career first began, she said the seeds of unionism were around, but many teachers resisted, believing that as professionals they did not need a union. She taught at the same middle school as math teacher Al Shanker, founder of the United Federation of Teachers.

“He talked union all the time,” said

Stark, smiling.

The union was formed in 1960, and a two-month strike followed that same year. Teachers were being arbitrarily transferred, the union wasn’t being recognized, and teachers were not getting raises. It was the first teacher strike in NYC history and those on strike risked their jobs. Her husband worked in the garment industry, but it was tough losing an income with two children to support.

“It was a very hard time. I was counting the pennies,” Stark said.

She began her career as a general science teacher, but changed to earth science when asked, attending a National Science Foundation summer course that opened her mind.

“I began to see all the sciences interrelated,” Stark said. “I’d come before a class and the kids would be wild and crazy. I’d stand there with

a rock. They’d start to notice. I’d ask them, ‘How do you expect a fish fossil to be in this rock on the top of Bear Mountain?’ That’s the story of the earth.”

Stark eventually moved to Ulster County.

“I retired July 1. On Sept. 1, I went to the middle school (in Kingston) and said, ‘Here I am. Do you need me?’”

She substituted for 30 years, organizing the Kingston Substitute Teachers union and becoming its first president. Substitutes often put in for permanent jobs when they became available — but were rarely hired. The new union helped change that, and it also got substitute job duties spelled out, multi-year contracts, and formal channels established for dealing with issues.

Now retired again, Stark no longer



drives and she has an aide part of the day. She attends concerts and theater, has traveled extensively, and plays classical music, though her eyes are now failing.

“I have good health insurance through my union,” she said.

She also appreciates how unions have helped to elevate women, very few of whom used to be hired to work in high schools. Men and women are treated equally with class size and salary, she said, “and that’s a wonderful advance.”

## 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



PROVIDED

Nearly 50 Nassau County retirees make calls about the upcoming 2020 census, encouraging retiree members to fill out and return their census forms. They are supporting NYSUT Counts, the statewide union’s campaign to get every state resident counted.

Florence McCue, far left, ED 51-53 At-Large Director, “hopped on the bus” in January to call on lawmakers to fully fund public schools. The Westchester visit was part of NYSUT’s statewide “Fund our Future” bus tour.



PROVIDED



PROVIDED

Snow fun is for all ages. Retired Syracuse art teacher Frank Neri, RC 7, shows off his sculpture of “Lady Liberty.”

## REGIONAL CONFERENCES

**RC 12, May 13**  
RSC Jennifer Shaad-Derby

**RC 9, May 15**  
RSC Ruth Shippee

**RC 4, 46, May 20**  
RSC Louise Ortman

**RC 1-3 & 44, May 21**  
RSC Tracy Beatty

**RC 11 & 45, May 27**  
RSC Mark Padgett

**RC 10, May 28**  
RSC Ruth Shippee

**RC 7 & 8, June 1**  
RSC Anne Marie Voutsinas

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## Freezin' for a reason

The Webster Teachers Association was recognized as the top fundraising team for this year's Special Olympics Polar Plunge. The team splashed into the frigid waters of Lake Ontario to raise more than \$11,000. Proceeds help Special Olympics New York provide year-round sports training and competition, as well as health and inclusion programs. The Webster TA is led by President Christopher Wojtas.

## East Williston Teachers Association



PROVIDED

In February, East Williston TA members from the Willets Road Middle School, above, toured the Ronald McDonald House in New Hyde Park and prepared a meal for the current residents. Willets Road members used staff donations to purchase the ingredients for a dinner of sausage and peppers, macaroni and cheese and salad.

"We look forward to working with the Ronald McDonald House again in the near future," said event organizer and EWTA Vice President Ron Roaldsen. "It was an extremely valuable opportunity for all those involved." The EWTA is led by Meryl Fordin.

## Rochester Teachers Association

In the midst of midyear cuts and layoffs, members of the Rochester TA, led by Adam Urbanski, chose to spread holiday cheer. More than 50 educators gathered to pack and deliver 150 baskets of food to students and their families. Each basket included a gift card for a turkey, and enough food for several meals. The last two years, RTA has partnered with Foodlink on this project to supply more than 6,000 pounds of food.

"One of the goals of the RTA Action Committee is to

engage our members and serve our communities," said Michael Tobin, chair of the basket project. "This is a great opportunity for our members to come together and show the community what RTA members do beyond the classroom, and how much we care beyond the classroom. It is in our very nature as teachers."

## Pembroke Teachers Federation

Members of the Pembroke Teachers Federation volunteered at the ninth annual Shooting for a Cure basketball event, raising \$32,000 for Roswell Cancer Institute. They helped to sell food, raffle tickets and baskets.

"This event raises funds and awareness for breast cancer research at Roswell Park in Buffalo. Donations poured in from all over Western New York, including items from the Buffalo Bills, Buffalo Sabres and Original Pizza Logs, just to name a few," said Arron Brown, secretary of the PTF and a sixth grade teacher. To date, the Shooting for a Cure fundraiser has collected more than \$150,000 to benefit cancer research.



PROVIDED

From left, Pembroke TF members Danielle Milbrand, Ann Fenik and Lindsey Yu volunteer at the Shoot for a Cure event.

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

## KUDOS!



### It's an honor

**Mark H. Newhouse**, Central Islip Teachers Association retiree, won both the Gold Medal Historical Fiction and Best Published Book of the Year awards from the Florida Writers Association for his novel *The Devil's Bookkeepers, Book 1: The Noose*.

French teacher **Francoise Piron**, South Jefferson TA, won the New York State Association of Foreign Language Teachers 2019 President's Award.

### In print

**Marguerite Abatelli**, Lindenhurst TA retiree, published *Practicing the Piano: The Russian Tradition Revisited*. The book encapsulates seven years of study with the famed pianist and teacher, Kyriena Siloti.

**Todd Feltman**, United Federation of Teachers, published *Mentoring My Elementary and Middle School Students to Become Powerful Navigators of Success: An Interactive Handbook for Teachers and Students in Grades Two to Eight*. It is available at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

**Casey Jakubowski**, United University Professions-Albany Chapter, published *Thinking about Teaching: A Rural Social Studies Teacher's Path to Strive for Excellence*. The book is available at [bookdepository.com](https://www.bookdepository.com).

**Saul Schachter**, North Shore TA, has written *Why Does My Social Life Pick Up When I Leave the Country? And Other (Mostly) Whimsical Essays*, a compilation of more than 100 stories he penned for *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *Newsday*. It is available online or from the author at [saulmschachter@gmail.com](mailto:saulmschachter@gmail.com).

**Madlyn Epstein Steinhart**, UFT, published *Put Your Boots on and Dance in the Rain*, a book of 100 poems focuses on healing. It is available at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

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



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## [ RESOURCES FOR YOU ]

### Tax time: Remember these deductions your union won

The educator expense tax deduction has been renewed for 2019 returns — and there's a state deduction for your union dues, too.

As a result of legislation championed by NYSUT and unions across the state, union members in New York can deduct union dues from their state income taxes if they itemize. While not a dollar for dollar deduction, it will offset your taxable income. Consult with your personal tax preparer to confirm your own situation. Learn more at [nysaflcio.org](http://nysaflcio.org).

For another tax assist, eligible educators can deduct up to \$250 of qualified expenses paid in 2019. If you and your spouse are filing jointly and both of you were eligible educators, the maximum deduction is \$500.

An eligible educator is a K-12 teacher, instructor, counselor, principal or aide who worked at least 900 hours in a school that provides

elementary or secondary education as determined by state law.

Visit [nysut.org](http://nysut.org) for a list of qualified expenses. For further info, consult your tax preparer and/or IRS Publication 17, *Your Federal Income Tax for Individuals*.

### NYSUT audit

NYSUT continues its practice of providing members with access to the union's certified audit for their review. The annual audit for the fiscal year ending Aug. 31, 2019, is available and can be found on the NYSUT Member Center at [nysut.org/audit](http://nysut.org/audit). Members may request a hard copy by contacting the NYSUT Accounting Department at 518-213-6000, ext. 6252, or by sending an email to [finance@nysutmail.org](mailto:finance@nysutmail.org).

### 2020 business mileage rate

The IRS has announced that the business standard mileage rate for 2020 will be 57.5 cents per mile, down from 58 cents in 2019.

## 2020 Summary of Material Modifications

**2020 Summary of Material Modifications NYSUT Member Benefits Trust Summary of Material Modifications And Notice to Participants**  
(Plan No: 503; I.D. No.: 22-2480854)  
Dated: March 2020

The following is a summary of important changes made to endorsed benefit programs since the publication of the New York State United Teachers Member Benefits Trust Summary Plan Description in March 2016 and the subsequent NYSUT Member Benefits Trust Summaries of Material Modifications and Notices to Participants dated March 2017, March 2018 and March 2019. Please retain this information until a new Summary Plan Description is issued to you.

### Trustees News

Arthur Pepper resigned from the NYSUT Member Benefits Trust Board of Trustees on May 1, 2019. The current list of Trustees of the Member Benefits Trust includes Chairperson J. Philippe Abraham, Secretary Roderick P. Sherman, Loretta Donlon,

Matthew Hill, Thomas McMahon, Kevin Peterman, Angelina Rivera and Thomas Tucker.

### Financial Arrangements

Financial arrangements between the NYSUT Member Benefits Trust and the providers of the following endorsed programs have changed:

The Group Vision Care Plan, which is provided and administered by Davis Vision, is self-insured by Member Benefits for groups with guaranteed rate contracts, meaning total premiums collected and claims paid are pooled annually. At the end of the plan year, any surplus funds revert to Member Benefits. For the last 10-year period, a surplus equaling 12.91% of paid premiums has resulted.

As of January 1, 2020, Member Benefits now has an endorsement arrangement of 7.9% of premium for the Davis Vision Voluntary Vision Plan.

Sincerely,  
Board of Trustees  
NYSUT Member Benefits Trust

## Save with payroll, pension deduction

**W**ith warmer temperatures and longer days on the horizon, now is the time many people rid themselves of unnecessary items. As part of that spring cleaning, why not remove the clutter that comes from print mail for insurance premiums and other bills?

Join the 100,000 NYSUT members who have already enrolled in payroll or pension deduction to purchase endorsed programs through NYSUT Member Benefits. These members enjoy the convenience and/or discounted premiums that come from using these payment options — while no longer needing to worry about writing checks or dealing with unintentionally canceled policies.

### Benefits of payroll/pension deduction

Paying your premiums through payroll or pension deduction makes them easier to budget; they are divided into smaller payments deducted from paychecks or monthly pension benefits. It also eliminates the cost of printing and mailing out bills. These savings are passed on to NYSUT members through reduced premiums and/or elimination of service fees for a number of endorsed programs.

Payroll or pension deduction is currently available for the following Member Benefits-endorsed programs: Term Life & Level Term Life

Insurance; Disability Insurance (payroll deduction only); Auto Insurance; Homeowners, Renters & Boatowners Insurance; Personal Excess Liability (Umbrella) Insurance; Catastrophe Major Medical Insurance (not available to new applicants); Dental & Vision Plans (pension deduction only for Vision Plan); Financial Counseling Program; Legal Service Plan; Purchasing Power (payroll deduction only); MetLife Long-Term Care Insurance (not available to new applicants); and WrapPlan® II Universal Life Insurance.

### How to get started

Select your preferred payment option at the time of application for any of the eligible plans. If you select payroll or pension deduction, you will need to complete the appropriate authorization card and return it with your application. If you already participate in any of these programs and pay the premiums directly by personal check, credit card or EFT, you can convert your payment to payroll or pension deduction when your premium is up for renewal (as long as these payment options are available to you).

When you receive your premium renewal notice, mail it along with a signed payroll or pension deduction authorization card (included in your premium renewal notice) to the address indicated. If the card is not

included, contact Member Benefits and ask for the appropriate card. Do NOT send any payment! Member Benefits will be notified of the change and advise your employer's business office or retirement system to begin your deductions.

### Am I eligible?

Payroll deduction is available to eligible members of any local association that has made arrangements with its employer. Pension deduction is available to retirees collecting a monthly pension benefit from the New York State Teachers' Retirement System, NYS Employees' Retirement System, New York City Teachers' Retirement System or NYC Board of Education Retirement System. It's also an option for retirees who receive a monthly lifetime annuity from TIAA.

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

**Note:** You must have an active in-service or retiree NYSUT membership to participate in payroll or pension deduction of NYSUT Member Benefits-endorsed programs.

[For information about contractual endorsement arrangements with providers of endorsed programs, please contact NYSUT Member Benefits.](#)

### PRIVACY NOTICE:

NYSUT Member Benefits  
800 Troy-Schenectady Road  
Latham, NY 12110-2455  
800-626-8101  
Plan No.: 503; EIN: 22-2480854  
**Notification of Availability of Privacy Notice**

[As required by 45 Code of Federal Regulations Part 160.520(c)(1)(ii)]

In the course of providing you with access to health benefits, Member

Benefits has access to information about you, which may be considered protected health information (PHI) under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) regulations. As a participant of Member Benefits, you were previously provided, either through publication in the *NYSUT United* publication or USPS mail, with a Privacy Notice describing our privacy practices, legal duties and rights concerning your PHI.

If you would like to receive another copy of our Privacy Notice, you can download a copy from our website at [memberbenefits.nysut.org](http://memberbenefits.nysut.org), or you can contact Member Benefits' Privacy Official Betsy Porter at 800-626-8101 or by submitting to the above address a written request for a copy.

Sincerely,  
Board of Trustees, NYSUT Member Benefits Trust

## IT'S WHAT WE DO

### Jared Fox and Aida Rosenbaum

United Federation of Teachers

Reaching students on the global issue of environmental stewardship can be as direct as reaching out in the neighborhood. Jared Fox and Aida Rosenbaum take their students on river trips, to water treatment and recycling facilities, and planting trees in rundown parks.

Fox teaches at Washington Heights Expeditionary Learning School in Upper Manhattan, and Rosenbaum teaches at The Bronx Latin School. Both members of the United Federation of Teachers, they were honored with the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Award for Excellence in Teaching Science and Mathematics and were tapped to drop the iconic crystal ball in Times Square on New Year's Eve.

Rosenbaum is in her 17th year teaching science. "The whole purpose of science is to gather evidence and provide explanation," she said.

To foster inquiry, she takes students to a pond for water quality analysis; to the waste water treatment plant in Yonkers; and to a materials recovery facility for an understanding of the recycling process and how much waste single-use plastics produce.

Fox's environmental activism is also visible in many arenas. He co-leads a student club with Erick Espin, UFT. They are creating a clean air green corridor between their school and an area park. Other outdoor work with students takes them to the Catskills to hike and study the watershed that provides clean water to New York City and to examine the pervasive bottled water industry.

To read more about Fox and Rosenbaum's work, visit [nysut.org/itswhatwedo](http://nysut.org/itswhatwedo).

**On the job and in the community, NYSUT members make a difference.**



**Make sure you have enough coverage to protect your family. Apply today.**

NYSUT Member Benefits has partnered with MetLife to offer life insurance programs. This is an opportunity to help those you care about most if you're not there to provide for them.

So why not sign up for or increase your life insurance now? It's an important benefit designed for the people who give so much of themselves every day.

**All members can apply for up to \$1 million in coverage with:**

- Only a few medical questions to answer<sup>1</sup>
- Affordable group rates
- Easy enrollment online or by phone<sup>1</sup>
- Convenient payroll and pension deductions available

**To apply, visit [www.nysutmbteisurance.com/NYSUT](http://www.nysutmbteisurance.com/NYSUT). Or call Mercer Consumer toll-free at 888-386-9788, weekdays from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. or Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. EST.**

You must apply from **March 1-31, 2020** for your coverage to be effective on April 1, 2020.

<sup>1</sup>Your application is subject to review and approval by MetLife based upon its underwriting rules.

The MetLife Term Life Insurance Plan is a NYSUT Member Benefits Trust (Member Benefits)-endorsed program. Member Benefits has an endorsement arrangement of 7.61% of gross premiums for this program. All such payments to Member Benefits are used solely to defray the costs of administering its various programs and, where appropriate, to enhance them. The Insurer pools the premiums of Member Benefits participants who are insured for the purposes of determining premium rates and accounting. Coverage outside of this plan may have rates and terms that are not the same as those obtainable through Member Benefits. The Insurer or Member Benefits may hold premium reserves that may be used to offset rate increases and/or fund such other expenses related to the plan as determined appropriate by Member Benefits. Member Benefits acts as your advocate; please contact Member Benefits at 800-626-8101 if you experience a problem with any endorsed program.

Like most group insurance policies, MetLife's group insurance policies contain certain exclusions, limitations and terms for keeping them in force.

Please contact Mercer Consumer toll-free at 1-888-386-9788 for more information. You may find these provisions in your insurance certificate. Not available in all states.

If you apply after March 31, 2020, your coverage will be effective on the 1st of the month following the receipt of your completed application. For example, if you apply on April 15, 2020, your coverage will be effective on May 1, 2020.

**Metropolitan Life Insurance Company** | 200 Park Avenue | New York, NY 10166  
L0220001037 [exp0221] [All States] © 2020 MSS

## Navigating life together

## ERS annual statement: New look, new options

**Y**our Member Annual Statement helps you stay informed about your New York State Local and Employees' Retirement System benefits and provides all your most important retirement account information as of March 31, 2020, the end of the state fiscal year. This year, all members will receive their statement either electronically or in the mail. To make sure you get your statement, we need to have your correct contact information on file.

To view and update your mailing address and email address, sign in to your Retirement Online account at [osc.state.ny.us/retire/retirement\\_online/customers.php](https://osc.state.ny.us/retire/retirement_online/customers.php). To get your statement faster, go to "My Profile Information" on your account homepage to change your statement delivery preference to email. When your statement is ready, you'll get an email that points you to Retirement Online to see your 2020 statement. You will be able to print and save it from there. Remember, when you have a Retirement Online account, you'll have the most current ERS account information, including information reported to us by your employer up through the previous month.

Here's what's in your Member Annual Statement:

Your statement shows the name of your retirement plan. Most members

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@nysutmail.org](mailto:united@nysutmail.org).

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



are in a plan called "A15" (Article 15 of the Retirement and Social Security Law). Your plan determines things such as how long you'll need to work in order to receive a pension, how your pension is calculated and the available death and disability benefits. You can find details about your retirement plan on our publications page, [osc.state.ny.us/retire/publications/index.php](https://osc.state.ny.us/retire/publications/index.php). Most members will see a retirement benefit projection that is based on the date they will become eligible for full retirement benefits (usually age 62). Your statement will provide information about your named beneficiaries. Check to make sure your beneficiary information is correct. You can manage your beneficiaries through your Retirement Online account.

Your Member Annual Statement helps you plan for retirement. This year, you'll notice a new streamlined look that provides valuable information about your ERS benefits in a clear, comprehensive and easy-to-read format. To make sure you receive your statement, please use Retirement Online to update your contact information and choose your delivery method.

### 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  
[troers@nysutmail.org](mailto:troers@nysutmail.org)

Patti Lennon • 516-496-2035, ext. 324  
[nroers@nysutmail.org](mailto:nroers@nysutmail.org)

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

## Working in retirement — retiree beware!

**Q:** How much can I earn in retirement if I'm under age 65?

**A:** It all depends on who you work for. If you're working for a New York State public employer, or for a private-sector employer that does business with a New York State public employer, then you are subject to an earnings cap of \$35,000 per calendar year.

Conversely, if you work for a private-sector employer — and you don't do business with a New York State public employer — then you have no earnings limit. Remember, these rules only apply to retirees under age 65. From the start of the calendar year in which you turn 65, there is no earnings cap regardless of who your employer is.

You can find more information about post-retirement earnings, including the rules governing work

as a consultant and the conditions in which you can have unlimited earnings, in the *Retired Members' Handbook*, and in the pamphlet *Working in Retirement*, [nystrs.org/NYSTRS/media/PDF/working.pdf](https://nystrs.org/NYSTRS/media/PDF/working.pdf).

**Q:** What happens if I go over the earnings limit? Will I be penalized?

**A:** Yes. If you're subject to an earnings limit and you exceed it at any time during a calendar year — and continue working

in NYS public employment — NYSTRS will suspend your pension for the rest of the year. Worse still, for each day you exceed the limit, you'll have to repay your retirement benefit to NYSTRS.

The moral of the story: Keep good records. Retirees under 65 are required to report all state public employer earnings to NYSTRS. If you have a MyNYSTRS account, you can use it to submit a monthly report of your non-pension earnings.

If you don't have a MyNYSTRS account, report your earnings using the form *Reporting Your New York State Public Employment Earnings* (RMS-64.1). Submit it to NYSTRS as soon as you reach the calendar year earning limit. For questions about working in retirement, contact NYSTRS at 800-348-7298, ext. 6150.

### DID YOU KNOW?

According to the New York State Teachers' Retirement System 2019 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, the system is 99.2 percent funded. The national funding average for public retirement systems is 73 percent.



## Advance your career

With NYSUT ELT:

- learn research-based, classroom tested, methods in our seminars and/or graduate courses;
  - meet certification requirements; and
  - collaborate with fellow educators across New York state — online or site-based!
- Your choice. Your professional learning.



Register:

<http://elt.nysut.org> • 800.528.6208

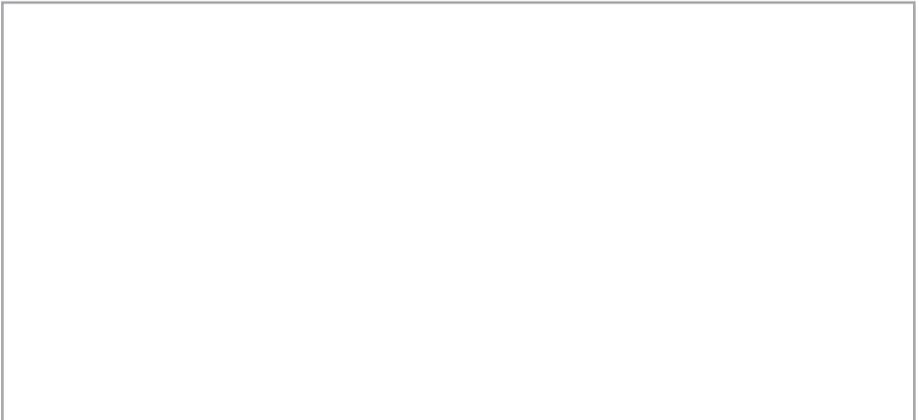
NYSUT members receive a 40% discount off of tuition for graduate courses. ELT is now a CTLE provider and many courses are applicable for NYSED Certification.



NYSUT United | March/April 2020

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



# 5

## Reasons You Should Get to Know Member Benefits

OUR FAB FIVE:

MEMBER  
BENEFITS  
**nysut**  
Working to Benefit You

### #1. Insurance Programs

### #2. Legal & Financial Services

### #3. Shopping & Travel Programs

### #4. Payroll & Pension Deduction

### #5. Student Loan & Debt Assistance

Scan the QR code above, visit [memberbenefits.nysut.org](http://memberbenefits.nysut.org) or call **800-626-8101** to learn more about our "Fab Five" along with dozens of other endorsed programs.



### Student Loan Workshops:

NYSUT members can attend a student loan debt workshop at **no cost** or schedule a time to speak with a loan counselor from Cambridge Credit Counseling.

Workshop attendees receive **free access** to the Cambridge Student Loan Portal (a regular cost of \$14.95) along with the opportunity to schedule a **one-on-one counseling session**.

Scan the QR code above to register for a student loan workshop and/or learn more about student loan assistance.

