

# NYSUT UNITED

A UNION OF PROFESSIONALS

## INSIDE

### Teacher of the Year

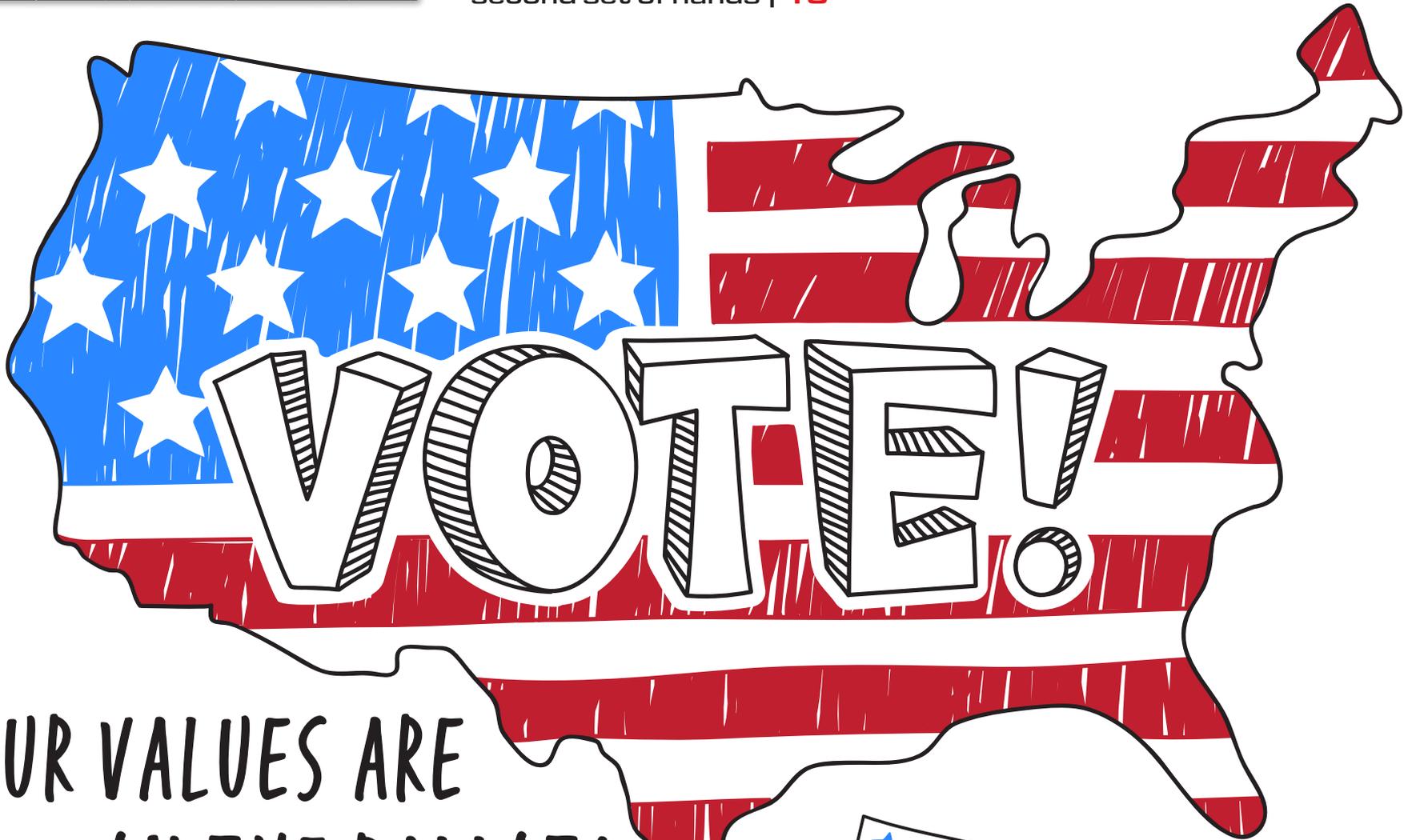
Long Island educator promotes teacher leadership | **12**

### Say yes to student teachers

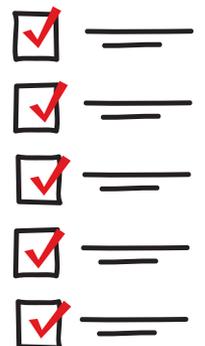
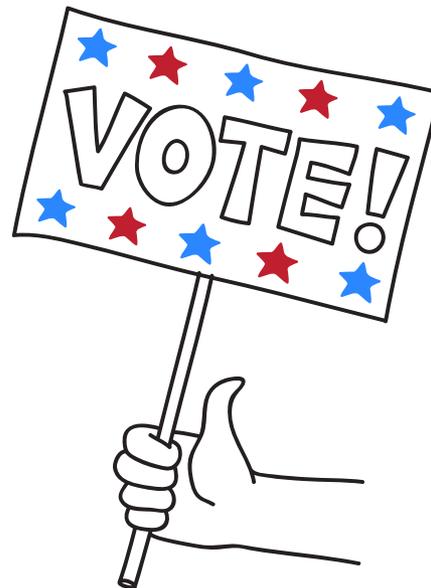
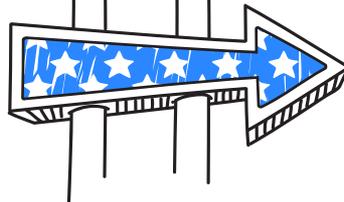
What better time to have a second set of hands | **13**

### NYSUT fights back

In courts and in the field, union pushes for safety and resources | **14**



OUR VALUES ARE  
ON THE BALLOT!



## CONTENTS

**4:** NYSUT pushing for legislative action

**7:** Virtual event explores unearned privilege

**11:** It's a great time to be an SRP

**17:** P.E. teachers go all out

**21:** Unionists work to GOTV in Florida

**22:** 5 Questions for Williamsville TA's Michelle Licht

**27:** Local unions in action

## NYSUT UNITED [ November/December 2020, Vol. 11, No. 2 ]

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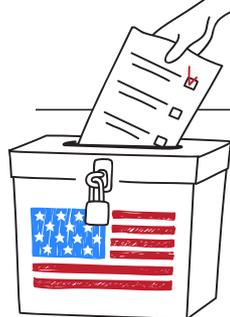
# NYSUT Student Loan Debt Webinars

We know how stressful and complicated it can be to navigate your student loans. That's why we've created a series of live webinars that offer NYSUT members:

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- Opportunity to schedule a free counseling session with a certified student loan counselor.
- Free access to a student loan portal that will quickly identify all of your options and provide a detailed action plan.

Learn more & sign up for an upcoming webinar here:

[StudentLoans.NYSUT.org/Webinars](https://StudentLoans.NYSUT.org/Webinars)



# GET OUT THE VOTE!!



**T**he 2020 General Election will be one of the most influential elections in United States history. The results will determine the future of democracy as well as the values that will dictate our country's place in the world.

But we need YOUR HELP to ensure union members use their VOTE as their VOICE.

By now union members have received in the mail their copy of the 2020 NYSUT Voter Guide. It lists all the candidates who have been endorsed, after an exhaustive democratic process, by your statewide union — including seven NYSUT members!

## GET INVOLVED

So much is at stake as the most powerful corporate special interests are working, with support in the corridors of power on federal and state levels, to destroy the labor movement, privatize public services for their own profit, and to disenfranchise working people.

**YOU CAN HELP** fight back to defend our rights, our professions and our future.

**YOU CAN HELP** turn out voters who support the candidates who support our union's values and agenda.

**WE NEED YOU** to help get-out-the-vote, locally, statewide and in regional swing states.

**ORGANIZE** others to help make phone calls, distribute literature and help people participate in the elections process.

## GET STARTED

NYSUT has organizers who are ready to help you get involved.

If you are interested in the presidential election, contact Regional Political Organizer Peter Kim: **Peter.Kim@nysut.org**

If you are interested in local and regional races, contact your regional political organizer:

- In the Rochester and Elmira areas, Anthony Plonczynski-Figueroa:

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- In the Capital Region and North Country, Peter Kim: **Peter.Kim@nysut.org**

REFER TO PAGE 4 FOR VOTING INSTRUCTIONS



## Partner with Pennsylvania and make voting history

year of meeting candidates in focus groups and open meetings.

You can help them win the battleground state across New York's southern border!

NYSUT has opportunities for volunteers to do virtual phone banking and even some in-person actions to get union members to turn out and vote all across Pennsylvania.

"Our advocacy in our neighboring battleground state can be the difference," said NYSUT President Andy Pallotta. "If Biden wins in Pennsylvania, he has a 96 percent chance of winning the election."

Contact Regional Political Organizer Peter Kim: **Peter.Kim@nysut.org**, to learn more about this important volunteering opportunity.

**T**he Keystone State holds the key to an electoral college win for the AFT and NEA's endorsed candidates at the top of the ticket, former Vice President Joe Biden and Sen. Kamala Harris, D-Calif. Our national affiliates backed Biden and Harris after more than a

## COMING UP

### October 2020

Making Strides Against Breast Cancer wraps up a month of fundraising events



### Oct. 23-25

SRP Leadership Conference, Saratoga Springs

### Oct. 24-Nov. 1

New York State early voting period

### Nov. 3

Election Day



### Nov. 16-17

NYS Board of Regents meets

### Nov. 17

New York State SRP Recognition Day



### Nov. 20-21

NYSUT Women's Committee meets, Latham

### Dec. 14-15

NYS Board of Regents meets

\*Please note, some or all of these events may be conducted as virtual meetings in compliance with social distancing guidance

## ON THE COVER

NYSUT urges all members to make a plan to VOTE, and to urge colleagues and supporters to do the same.

Design by Nicole Clayton.

# VOTE

IT'S NEVER BEEN MORE IMPORTANT  
TO VOTE ... AND IT'S NEVER BEEN EASIER



## Three ways to cast your ballot

Choose one of three ways to cast your ballot and make a plan to get it done!

- You can vote by mail,
- You can vote early in person at a designated polling site, or
- You can vote on Election Day at a neighborhood polling place.

If you want to vote by mail, request an absentee ballot from your county board of elections. Completed applications for a ballot must be postmarked by **Oct. 27** or delivered in person to your county board of elections office by Nov. 2. You can cite concern over COVID-19 exposure as a temporary illness.

To submit your actual ballot, mail it no later than **Nov. 3**; put it in a drop box at an early polling site or at a polling place on Election Day, or drop it at your county board of elections on or before **Nov. 3**.

If you decide not to vote by mail and you live in New York State, double-check your polling place at <https://voterlookup.elections.ny.gov/>

Early voting runs from **Oct. 24–Nov. 1** at designated polling sites. Check with your county board of elections for hours and locations.

On Election Day, polls are open from **6 a.m. to 9 p.m.** at neighborhood polling sites.



[ FIGHTING FOR YOU ]



# NYSUT still pushing for legislative action this year

By Ned Hoskin

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**T**he 2020 session of the state Legislature has been one of the most unusual ever.

Slated for Jan. 8 through June 2, it was suspended April 2 due to concerns about the coronavirus pandemic. It resumed, however, on May 26 only to adjourn June 10. The Legislature reconvened from July 20 to 24, addressing mainly COVID-related measures.

Since then, it remains technically in session, and lawmakers may well come back to Albany after the elections.

New York and other states await federal action to provide another stimulus package that would support schools, higher ed and health care — which, depending on the day, appears to be imminent or a dead deal.

And now, we wait for the results of the Nov. 3 election. If the federal aid fails to come through, NYSUT stands by its demand to raise revenues with new taxes on the wealthy. (See page 14)

NYSUT has shifted to virtual lobbying and Zoom meetings with legislators and union members. With the state capitol closed to the public, NYSUT plans to hold virtual lobby days this year.

## Unions push teacher prep change

One of the potential “wins” that has come out of the Legislature this session has been to the governor’s desk before, and it did not get any further.

NYSUT and its higher education affiliates hope the circumstances of the pandemic will clarify the value of this bill intended to help aspiring educators begin their careers.

The legislation, which passed both houses of the Legislature this year, would remove the requirement that applicants admitted into graduate-level education programs must have a 3.0 minimum grade point average as undergrads. The bill was vetoed last year.

“We are working for a different result when the bill goes to the governor this time,” said NYSUT President Andy Pallotta. “COVID and the chaos it has brought with it has certainly caused GPAs to drop for many qualified students, through no lack of effort, ability or commitment.”

NYSUT, United University Professions and the Professional Staff Congress are working to educate the executive on the importance of this change.

With the teacher shortage, NYSUT has been pushing ways to

allow teacher preparation programs more latitude for admitting strong candidates.

“Even without the pandemic,” Pallotta said, “many capable individuals, including English language learners and career-changers who may not have attained a 3.0 in college, would be able to meet graduate standards if given an opportunity.”

New York State requires teachers who hold an initial certificate to earn a master’s degree within five years to obtain permanent certification. In 2015, the law was changed to require candidates for the required graduate programs to hold at least a 3.0 GPA upon admission.

NYSUT has maintained that higher ed institutions use a wide range of factors in the development of quality teachers candidates, and there is no evidence that GPA is especially significant in predicting excellence. It only limits access for many potential teachers.

“This severely limits access to programs for highly talented students who would make excellent teachers,” said Jolene DiBrango, NYSUT executive vice president, who is NYSUT’s liaison to the Board of Regents and the State Education Department.

# Local unions play crucial role to safeguard students, staff and communities

By Kara Smith  
kara.smith@nysut.org

One of the symptoms of the pandemic has been a rash of peevish fingerpointing and panicky decision-making by school administrators.

Educators have often been left out of the planning process and sometimes targeted for criticism while speaking up to protect the safety of students and staff alike. In communities big and small, NYSUT local unions have stepped up to restore some stability and common sense during trying times.

In the Williamsville School District outside Buffalo, the Williamsville Teachers Association was an island of sanity in a sea of turmoil as administrators developed, rejected and reconfigured remote-learning reopening plans for grades 5-12 five different times. The last plan came six days before school started and required 90 new teacher hires.

"It was very stressful for our members; things were constantly changing," said Michelle Licht, WTA president and a NYSUT Board member. After hearing member concerns, the WTA raised red flags about the last-minute plan in a meeting with the superintendent the Wednesday before Labor Day. "Safety plans weren't in place, teachers and students didn't have schedules and we didn't have enough staff," said Licht, noting that the local was largely shut out of the reopening planning process.

When the district superintendent issued an 11th hour, indefinite cancellation of remote learning for grades 5-12 due to insufficient staff,

the Williamsville Board of Education stepped in, replacing the superintendent and announcing that all classes would start out remotely so all students could receive instruction. The change meant that WTA members had to switch from hybrid to remote learning with just a few days notice.

A new plan for hybrid and remote learning launched in mid-October. "The district acknowledged that we need to be involved and has included over 20 educators on the planning committee," she said. (See page 22 for a Q&A with Licht.)

## Local negotiates 'remote school'

At the Port Washington Union Free School District in Nassau County, Long Island, the Port Washington TA successfully negotiated with administrators to offer a "remote school" for K-5 remote learners instead of livestreaming instruction, as originally planned.

"Livestreaming is challenging because you have no way of knowing in real time if students understand the lesson," said PWTA President Regina McLean. She explained that while livestreaming, district educators simultaneously teach a class of in-person students and a class of logged-in remote students. "Kids can see us, but we can't see them. You have to pay attention to the kids in front of you — it's very difficult to interact with the children at home."

The agreement was also a win for members seeking workplace accommodations. Administrators agreed to allow educators hesitant to return to the classroom due to medical conditions, the opportunity to lead a remote class. "Originally remote

options were offered to students, not teachers," said McLean, which led to some members taking precautionary unpaid leaves.

## A unique solution to quarantining

After COVID-19 cases in Horseheads, Chemung County, jumped from 177 to 380 in the span of two weeks following a local church gathering, Horseheads TA members were happy their local had the foresight to negotiate a working agreement for educators forced to quarantine.

"Teachers who are asymptomatic can teach online from home," said HTA President Bill Finnerty, explaining that another educator supervises the class during the livestreamed lesson. "We wanted to set something up so that members aren't penalized for following department of health guidelines."

So far, two teachers who've used the arrangement give it a thumbs up. "We're just trying to do what we can to make people feel safe in the school environment," said Finnerty.



Regina McLean, president of the Port Washington TA with member Tony Facciola, a middle school Italian teacher.

# NYSUT resources offer COVID-19 guidance

By Kara Smith  
kara.smith@nysut.org

Members want to know how to stay safe in the workplace. NYSUT has answers. Since the COVID-19 outbreak began in mid-March, the statewide union has posted scores of guidance documents on a wide range of issues at [nysut.org/covid-toolkit](https://nysut.org/covid-toolkit). Here's a sampling:

## Instructional issues

- Wondering what content to keep live and what content to have students work on independently? Check out *Best Practices for Remote Learning* for strategies to adapt your lessons for hybrid and remote instruction.

- As districts move forward with live streamed and recorded instruction, the changes raise a number of labor and employment questions. To learn more, see *Electronic Delivery of Instruction (Live or Recorded)*.
- Educational equity and access for all students must be a concern for every educator. *Planning for School Reopening: The Instructional Questions that Must Be Answered* poses a series of thought-provoking questions for educators to consider.

## Resources for SRPs

- Learn about school ventilation and how it can help lower the risk of COVID-19 in the free, on-demand webinar *How to Use Ventilation to Protect the School Community*.

Viewers will also learn what ventilation questions to ask management and what upgrades to seek.

## Resources for Everyone

- Learn how COVID-19 spreads, precautions you can take to stay safe and guidance for school day mask breaks in *COVID-19 Transmission Facts and Mask Breaks*.
- Forming a workplace health and safety committee ensures your local's voice is heard when health and safety concerns occur. *How to Organize Your Health and Safety Committee* is a blueprint for forming a committee, sharing best practices and state law requirements.
- Learn how to conduct a workplace risk assessment, create a plan to protect the school community and

offer training and communication on health and safety policies and procedures in the bulletin *Health and Safety Considerations for Reopening Public Schools*.

- The online toolkit's personal tab offers a range of resources to help you deal with stress in your personal life, from managing finances to anxiety to taking sick leaves.
- *FAQ: Reopening Public Schools* is a round-up of answers to members' questions on recommended cleaning, personal protective equipment and more.

The toolkit also includes all the latest COVID-19 guidance documents issued by the state Department of Health and State Education Department.



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NIAGARA  
UNIVERSITY

# Virtual event explores unearned privilege

By Kara Smith

kara.smith@nysut.org

**W**hites have more knowledge. Whites make more knowledge. Knowledge is white. These are the unconscious biases students learn daily in American society — both students of color and white students. And these lessons are reinforced by seeing mostly white faces in front of the classroom, in the courtroom, at the doctor's office and in popular culture.

Peggy McIntosh, a senior research scientist at the Wellesley Centers for Women, has made counteracting these types of unconscious biases a focus of her work. A leading voice on the study of anti-racism and unearned privilege, McIntosh was the featured guest for "Exploring Privilege," an October virtual tele-town hall hosted by NYSUT and the American Federation of Teachers.

The event, part of the "Many Threads, One Fabric" series that promotes equality and takes on institutional racism, explored the concept of unearned privilege and the advantages it conveys.

J. Philippe Abraham, NYSUT secretary-treasurer, whose office handles social justice issues, moderated the event. In his introduction, he quoted a reviewer who called McIntosh "an inspiration for new generations of thinkers, teachers, social justice advocates and anyone dreaming of a more just world." "I have great respect for her work," said Abraham. "It's a privilege to have her with us."

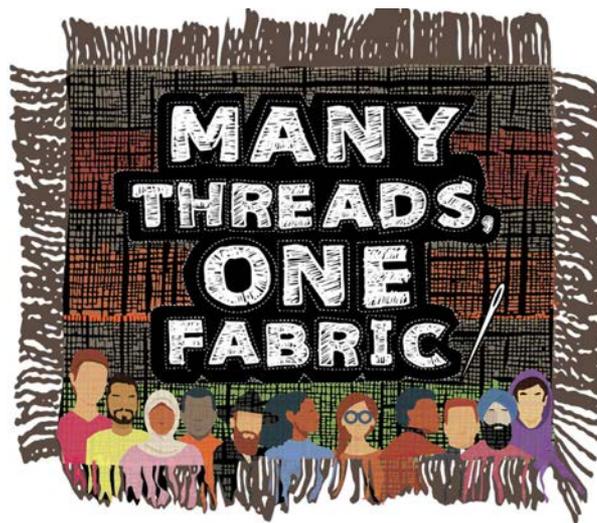
NYSUT President Andy Pallotta and AFT Executive Vice President Evelyn DeJesus, a longtime United Federation of Teachers leader, also participated.

"Peggy McIntosh has been called an American original and a national treasure," said Pallotta in welcoming remarks. "We're delighted she could help us better understand race, bias and other disparities exposed by the pandemic."

Unearned privilege is hard-wired. So much so that most people don't realize they have it, explained McIntosh, who spent much of her own life not recognizing her privilege as a white person. "I believed in the myth of meritocracy," she said. "It was earth shattering to see that a lot of what I had in life I hadn't earned."



Peggy McIntosh, a nationally known researcher, is the featured guest for "Exploring Privilege," a virtual tele-town hall.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Watch "Exploring Privilege"

at <http://nysut.org/manythreads>.

For details on the SEED Project and McIntosh's newest publication "On Privilege, Fraudulence, And Teaching As Learning, Selected Essays 1981-2019," visit [nationalseedproject.org](http://nationalseedproject.org). For links to teaching curriculum and other social justice resources, visit [nysut.org/socialjustice](http://nysut.org/socialjustice).

Privileges like not being harassed while shopping alone; or knowing that if she moved to a new community, her neighbors would be neutral or pleasant to her; or the knowledge that if pulled over by a police officer, or audited by the IRS, it wouldn't be because of her race.

"Maybe I get grants because the money system is on my side — I never met a foundation employee who wasn't white," she said. "I asked myself, 'What else do I have, that I didn't earn, because I'm white?'"

The question led to a groundbreaking paper, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," which explores what McIntosh terms "an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing

in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious."

The assets even benefit poor whites, who enjoy an "exemption from oppression" dark-skinned people don't, McIntosh said. The research led her to found the National SEED Project on Inclusive Curriculum — peer-led experiential seminars where group participants share their life experiences and learn from one another. The goal is broadening your worldview to encompass "more than you were taught to include," she said. "Learning from the rest, especially those you were taught to look down on, is an astonishing experience."

"I thought I knew about these issues ... but you have a way of going deeper and helping us see things in new ways," DeJesus said to McIntosh. "We're going to need you even more as we put our country back on the path to racial justice."

NYSUT's "Many Threads, One Fabric" series will continue with professional development, leadership programs, virtual town halls and training. NYSUT has set up a dedicated email at [socialjustice@nysut.org](mailto:socialjustice@nysut.org) to receive suggestions and feedback.

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RESPECT FOR HER WORK.  
IT'S A PRIVILEGE TO  
HAVE HER WITH US."

— J. PHILIPPE ABRAHAM



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Navigating life together

# Racial equality work continues in districts with extended NEA grant

By Liza Frenette

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**K**ingston teacher Lauri Naccarato has been part of a team of educators actively working to examine and change racial inequity in her school district. Their work began in earnest after the school was flagged by the state for having a disproportionate number of students of color who were suspended or in detention.

"We took it to heart," said Naccarato, president of the Kingston Teachers Federation. Black and brown students "were getting school referrals at four times the rate of white students."

The Kingston group is one of three districts around the state, including Amsterdam and Schenectady, leading early educators and mentors in examining racial injustice.

A National Education Association grant to the districts has been extended due to COVID-19, allowing the important work to continue for the fourth year. It is administered through NYSUT's Education & Learning Trust programs, providing workshops, readings, and professional

development to early career educators and labor-management teams about systemic racism, discipline and suspension rates and their impact on students of color and racial justice.

Teachers in the three districts — different by region and size — have specifically been examining what NYSUT ELT's Bernice Rivera calls "systemic racism within the American historical context, and translating the new learning to the existing systems in their district."

How that plays out is evidenced in places such as Kingston, where the program has now reached 100 educators.

"Our goal for this grant is to get all of our teachers trained in the mindset that racial equity is social justice," Naccarato said. "We're all part of it."

Although the student population mix is about 50 percent white and 50 percent Black and brown, the Kingston faculty is not diverse. Naccarato said the district has been working to recruit teachers, reaching out to historically Black colleges

among other efforts.

Educators in the grant program are learning about redlining, micro aggressions, and about institutional racism affecting the financial, educational and social foundations of people of color.

As recently as 2017, Naccarato said a local bank was flagged for not lending money equitably to people of color.

The interactive training has been led by UAlbany professor Alex Pieterse and ELT site liaison Rita Floess. UAlbany professor Katy Schiller and doctoral grad student Beth Anne Horning are gathering qualitative data on the grant's impact.

"He's raising people's consciousness," Naccarato said of Pieterse, a member of United University Professions. "Many of us didn't think we had biases. People want to do better. We're often not aware of what we don't know."

Schenectady Federation of Teachers President Juliet Benaquisto said the NEA/NYSUT grant work has

provided needed inquiry in a district with about 65 percent Asian, brown and Black students.

While Schenectady schools have been working on improving racial equity for quite some time through professional development programs provided by the district, "We've had, as a district, some moments that I'd say we didn't quite take the right approach or we've taken a misstep.

"What I've loved about the work throughout this NEA grant is that it has felt like a safe place for members to tackle racial inequality in a thoughtful way so that as members we can listen and learn from each other," she said.

The work has included seminars for new members and the start of "train the trainers" so that examinations of racial inequity can continue once the grant is completed.

"A goal for us as a district is to engage more of our faculty beyond our newer members," Benaquisto said. "It is very personal for everyone who engages in the necessary, honest discussions. Members need to be willing to be vulnerable and as such need to feel safe in the discussions."



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# It's a great time to be an SRP!

By Liza Frenette  
liza.frenette@nysut.org

**F**all is prime time for School-Related Professionals. They have the opportunity to attend NYSUT's annual SRP Leadership Conference, Oct. 23-25, and to enjoy New York State SRP Recognition Day, Nov. 17.

Hard-working SRPs, serving students in ever-shifting assignments under pandemic protocols, will be honored on the state's annual SRP Recognition Day the third Tuesday of November.

Among NYSUT's 100,000 SRP members are clerks, secretaries, bus drivers, maintenance workers, custodians and teacher aides.



Those SRPs who are leaders, or those interested in learning about becoming more involved with their union, can speak with their local union president about attending the 42nd annual conference, being held online this year.

Ron Gross will be speaking at his first SRP conference as NYSUT second vice president. "Our SRPs continue to demonstrate how invaluable

they are to our educational community," Gross said. "I'm looking forward to meeting with the heroes of this pandemic and thanking them for all they do."

Conference presenters will tackle many issues related to the pandemic. Ani Shahinian, of NYSUT social services, will provide strategies to manage stress and anxiety and build resources during these times.

There will also be a workshop led by NYSUT health and safety specialist Veronica Foley on how to use advocacy and organizing to keep the workplace healthy and safe — a primary concern during the pandemic.

"Do you know where to turn when you have questions about cleaning, indoor air quality, exposure to pathogens and other important health and safety concerns?" Foley asked. Participants will learn who to turn to with health and safety concerns and hear best practices for advocating for their rights.

National Education Association's Tim Barchak will speak on stopping privatization of SRPs.

To prepare for celebrating SRPs on the official state recognition day, local presidents can order newly designed car magnets proclaiming, "SRPs Care for their Community," as well as posters at [www.nysut.org/eReg/SRPREC2020](http://www.nysut.org/eReg/SRPREC2020). Celebrations for SRPs are encouraged and winners are chosen for the best SRP shout-outs.

Last year, SUNY Broome Community College Educational Support Personnel Association, Greenburgh Federation # 11 and Schenectady paraprofessionals won awards for creating logos that were used on t-shirts; honoring SRPs with posters and word art; hosting parties; and creating social media campaigns.

## Harbor Me

Written by  
Jacqueline  
Woodson

### Recommended

by: Charlotte  
Adamis, school  
library media  
specialist,  
Kingston

Teachers Federation

**Suitable for:** Grades 5-8.

Why I chose it: This is a realistic, contemporary novel about six children, each of whom has a story to tell, including Esteban, whose father has been taken by Immigration Services; and Haley, whose father is in prison. The students are members of a fifth-/sixth-grade special education class who have all suffered from trauma. Their teacher provides them an adult-free hour each week to meet in what they call A Room To Talk. Woodson shows us the transformative power of stories and trusted friends.

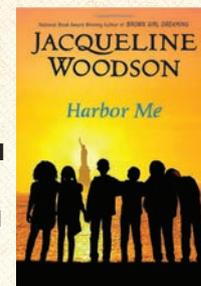
**What I liked best:** This is a story about the need to nurture loving communities that embrace our children — especially the most vulnerable. It is a story, above all, about hope.

### How teachers can use this book:

It would be ideal for students who want to read a realistic story that deals with current political and social issues. It would be a superb read-aloud, bringing much needed awareness of and compassion for the complex lives of children.

**About the author:** Woodson won The Hans Christian Andersen Award, the highest international honor recognizing a children's author's lifelong achievement. For more, visit [jacquelinewoodson.com/](http://jacquelinewoodson.com/)

"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 [liza.frenette@nysut.org](mailto:liza.frenette@nysut.org).



# Oceanside educator named 2021 NYS Teacher of the Year

By Matt Smith  
matt.smith@nysut.org

It may be hard to imagine now, but when Jen Wolfe — the 2021 New York State Teacher of the Year — set her sights on becoming nationally board certified, part of her motivation in doing so was, of all things, a sense of self-doubt.

“I pursued board certification in my seventh year, primarily because I wasn’t so sure I was as good a teacher as others said I was, if you want the honest truth. And so, I wanted to do what I thought was best for my students,” said Wolfe, who in September entered her 24th year teaching social studies at Oceanside High School on Long Island. “When I became board certified, it was such a great feeling. I knew that I demonstrated accomplished teaching and that I was capable of being a highly effective teacher. And, I wanted other teachers to feel that way too.”

So began Jen Wolfe’s mission. Since becoming Oceanside’s first

teacher to achieve National Board Certification in 2002, Wolfe has personally guided more than 20 other teachers in the district — as well as numerous others in districts across Long Island — through the rigorous 300-plus-hour process, considered the “gold standard” of the teaching profession. In fact, before Wolfe achieved NBCT status, which she renewed in 2012, there were only 66 NBCTs on Long Island. Through her mentorship as a National Board regional coordinator in recent years, there are now more than 200.

“Jen’s commitment to her profession is simply awe-inspiring,” said NYSUT President Andy Pallotta. “Her dedication to her practice, and her passion for constantly elevating not only her career but the career of her colleagues, is why teachers in New York State’s public schools consistently rank among the nation’s very best.”

Wolfe said she believes “districts can improve student learning by recognizing and empowering the

problem-solving skill set of the accomplished teacher.

“When teachers are put in positions of leadership to control their profession,” she said, “the education that students receive is usually more effective.”

Mitch Bickman, director of social studies for K-12 in Oceanside, said what makes Wolfe so effective in the classroom is “she makes learning authentic at all times.”

“With Jen, it’s not just about the subject or particular topic students are studying,” Bickman said. “She brings life lessons to the curriculum as well, and I think students naturally gravitate toward that.”

Sophomore student Gracie Greenberg agrees.

“Ms. Wolfe gives us creative freedom which most teachers don’t do. We’re able to connect our own stories to what we are learning, even if it’s the ancient (North African Kingdom of) Kush.”

NYSUT Executive Vice President



Jolene

DiBrango

called Wolfe’s passion for supporting young teachers “an inspiration.”

“Jen’s dedication to lifting her profession and ensuring the success of her fellow educators serves as a reminder that collaboration is a key ingredient to success in the classroom and that new teachers in New York State are not alone and will be supported as they develop their craft,” DiBrango said. “She is a testament to the excellence that is synonymous with the teaching profession in New York State.”

Jason Manning, a social studies teacher at Oceanside, credits Wolfe for his success in achieving National Board Certification and calls her “a mentor.”

“I wouldn’t be where I am in my career without Jen Wolfe,” Manning said. “She not only pushed me to become a better teacher, but she’s guided my hand throughout the course of my career.”



OCEANSIDE HIGH SCHOOL

Jennifer Wolfe, a member of the Oceanside Federation of Teachers, was named the 2021 New York State Teacher of the Year by the State Education Department for her work with students in the classroom and empowering fellow educators to take on leadership roles.

BECKY MILLER

## Congratulations!



Also recognized by the State Education Department as 2021 Teacher of the Year finalists were: **Sara Bambino**, North Syracuse Education Association; **James Brown**, South Colonie Teachers Association; **Chelsea Dyer**, East Greenbush TA; and **Victoria Gentile**, Kings Park Classroom TA.

# Student teachers can be a huge help

By **Sylvia Saunders**

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**W**hen an administrator contacted Watertown teacher Jennifer Knapp the week before school started and asked if she would take on a student teacher, she almost said no.

With so much uncertainty due to the pandemic — and facing a hybrid schedule for the first time in her 21 years of teaching, it was the last thing the Watertown Education Association member wanted to do.

But she felt bad that another student teaching placement for SUNY Potsdam’s Lula Presley had fallen through at the last minute — so she reluctantly agreed.

“I took a gamble but I’m so glad I did,” Knapp said. “Lula’s my right arm, especially as we feel our way through this hybrid teaching model. I don’t know what I’m going to do when she leaves in December!”

Though it’s not exactly the student teaching experience she expected, Presley jumped right in and has been a huge help with everything from lesson planning to managing the first grade class’s Seesaw online learning platform. “The students and I look at her as a co-teacher,” Knapp said. “And my colleagues are kind of kicking themselves they didn’t say yes.”

Presley is glad she didn’t postpone her placement, like many teacher education students have done. “I’ve learned so much with Ms. Knapp ... she lets me be a teacher,” said Presley, who will be graduating in December.

Unfortunately, the ranks of

student teachers like Presley have taken a big hit this year. Not surprisingly, many veteran teachers have been reluctant to take in a student teacher in such a tumultuous year.

The State Education Department, in its reopening school guidance, strongly urged teachers and districts to continue to welcome student teachers into schools and classrooms, whether in-person or remote.

“Student teachers can play important roles in terms of bridging gaps related to remote/online instruction, and in supporting the teachers of record and the students, especially during these challenging times,” the guidance notes. “In addition, given the teacher shortages we already face, and which may increase over the next few years, it is essential that student teachers are given the opportunity to complete their (required) clinical experiences.”

At a time when retirements are climbing, NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango said it is crucial to ensure that the pipeline of well-trained teachers remains open and active.

“The student teaching experience is such an important part of teacher preparation,” DiBrango noted. “Aspiring teachers need strong mentors and role models to shepherd them into our profession. We need to take care of our own.”

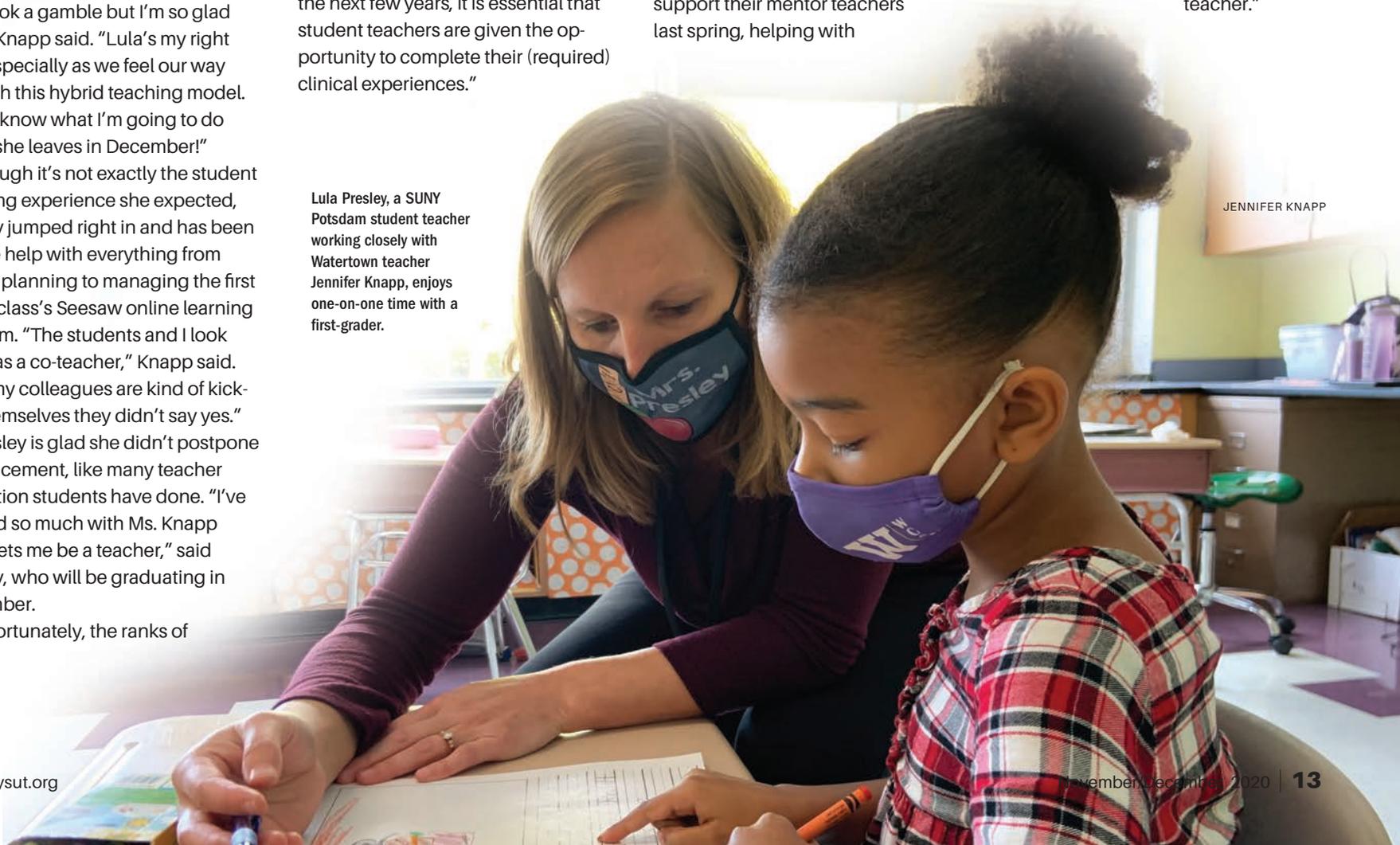
To spread the word about how mutually beneficial the student teaching arrangement can be, teacher ed programs like Buffalo State have presented programs to recruit more host teachers. “Student teachers presented what they did to support their mentor teachers last spring, helping with

everything from small group meetings on Zoom to dropping off care packages and packets of homework,” said Ann Laudisio, an adjunct professor and student teacher supervisor at Buffalo State. “It’s a different experience for sure, but the student teachers have shown amazing flexibility and resiliency. They feel like they’re learning and it will certainly prepare them for the future.”

In fact, one of Laudisio’s students who graduated in May quickly landed a full-time job at an excellent area district this fall. “I think one of the reasons she got hired was her student teaching experience,” Laudisio said. “She had an impressive portfolio and was able to talk about all the ways she supported her mentor teacher.”

Lula Presley, a SUNY Potsdam student teacher working closely with Watertown teacher Jennifer Knapp, enjoys one-on-one time with a first-grader.

JENNIFER KNAPP





Albany student Jude Caton was one of several speakers at a NYSUT event at the Capitol calling for more funding to stop devastating budget cuts.

EL-WISE NOISETTE

# NYSUT fights back

## When lawmakers don't deliver, NYSUT's legal, field, health and safety, and other experts help local unions find solutions

By Ned Hoskin  
ned.hoskin@nysut.org

For months, as the economy slid down the pandemic pipe, New York State began withholding 20 percent of aid to school districts and public colleges and universities, adding a measure of hopelessness to what was already a challenging and complicated year.

Efforts to pass a second COVID-19 stimulus bill in Washington were — and remain — stifled by the

Republicans in the Senate and White House. State lawmakers and the governor seemed to have no solutions.

Desperate school officials started prematurely slashing budgets and laying off teachers and staff.

The union was scrambling for a way to stop the cuts!

In September, NYSUT President Andy Pallotta decided to sue the state to stop it from holding back money for schools, seeking the release of funding withheld in July, August and September — and an injunction against future withholdings and delays of payments.

“At this point, a lawsuit unfortunately is the necessary next step to compel our leaders to do what’s right: Fund our future and stop these cuts,” he said.

The lawsuit got big results, fast. The very next day, the state division

of the budget committed to deliver the September school aid payment and hold off on further cuts until after the presidential election.

NYSUT celebrated the success but noted that much remained to be done. “That’s all great,” Pallotta said, “but it doesn’t change the fact that we are seeking the release of funds withheld from previous months, and funding for public higher education and health care, too.”

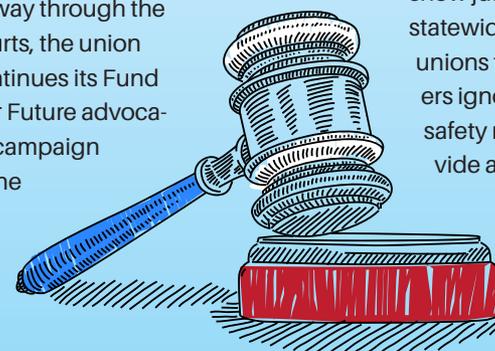
As the lawsuit works its way through the courts, the union continues its Fund Our Future advocacy campaign in the

Legislature to avoid mid-year cuts and restore the funds that have been withheld.

### Fighting for members

With help from NYSUT’s legal department, program services and field services, local unions have been pulling out all the stops to force districts and employers to do what’s right to protect workers and students all over the state.

The articles on these two pages show just a few examples of how the statewide union is working with local unions to push back when employers ignore important health and safety requirements or fail to provide adequate accommodations for at-risk employees.



## NYSUT files lawsuits over remote work denials

State health department guidance directs districts to offer workplace accommodations, including telework, to faculty and staff whose medical conditions make them higher risk for COVID-19. Despite this, many districts aren't honoring requests. Others are issuing blanket denials.

NYSUT filed two lawsuits in September, one against the Watkins Glen Central School District in Schuyler County, another against the Yonkers City School District in Westchester County, challenging their policies and alleging that their telework accommodation denials conflict with mandatory guidance from New York State's Department of Health.

"No educator should ever have to choose between their health and their livelihood," said Andy Pallotta, NYSUT president. "DOH guidelines are clear — districts must enact policies to not only control the transmission of COVID-19, but to also protect its most at-risk school faculty and staff from the virus.

Yonkers City School District administrators have denied some 40 telework requests from educators with a range of severe medical conditions. The denials forced many to use sick leave or to take unpaid leaves of absence to protect

themselves. The Yonkers Federation of Teachers is led by Samantha Rosado-Ciriello.

Watkins Glen district administrators have denied telework accommodation requests as being "inconsistent with the essential functions of the job," according to court filings. Jeanette Lasko heads the Watkins Glen Faculty Association.

NYSUT is hopeful the lawsuits could force other districts to reconsider similar arbitrary and unacceptable denials of accommodation requests.



Jeanette Lasko, president of Watkins Glen Faculty Association, said the district was unwilling to bend on remote work requests.

## Union provides ventilation expertise

By Liza Frenette

[liza.frenette@nysut.org](mailto:liza.frenette@nysut.org)

NYSUT is providing needed educational and expert support to locals working with their districts on problems with ventilation systems, which play a vital role during the airborne COVID-19 pandemic.

Using small grants, NYSUT is providing opportunities to work with several certified industrial hygienists across the state on a consultancy basis.

"One of the key ways to prevent airborne transmission is to have a well-ventilated space," said Veronica Foley, NYSUT health and safety specialist. Proper ventilation is a key concern, especially in older school buildings with aged HVAC systems.

NYSUT will cover the cost of the initial consultation with an industrial hygienist for up to two hours. If a local needs further investigation, the local can contract with the industrial hygienist directly.

"These industrial hygienists are ready to assist," said Foley, who has been fielding many phone calls from local unions with questions and concerns about ventilation systems, complicated technical information and state Department of Health ventilation guidelines.

**FOR MORE:**  
NYSUT Checklist and Ventilation Webinar:  
[www.nysut.org/news/2020/august/ventilation-webinar](http://www.nysut.org/news/2020/august/ventilation-webinar)



Local unions seeking a grant must work with their NYSUT labor relations specialist to provide evidence that they have initiated a review of the school's ventilation system. NYSUT has also posted a Building Ventilation Survey to engage school administrators.

"Our hope is that these services empower leaders and prepare them for advocacy efforts to create safer working and learning environments," said Ron Gross, NYSUT vice president who oversees health and safety. "Keep in mind, Foley is available to discuss reopening concerns, in addition to this consultancy benefit."

## Orleans-Niagara BOCES TA files complaint charging unsafe school reopening

Charging the Orleans-Niagara BOCES has ignored the state's COVID-19 protocols to protect students and staff, the O-N BOCES Teachers Association has filed a Public Employee Safety and Health (PESH) complaint with the Department of Labor.

The complaint, prepared by NYSUT legal and field staff, raises numerous concerns related to a lack of social distancing, face coverings, school cleaning, personal protective equipment and mandatory health screenings.

"Under Superintendent (Clark) Godshall's leadership, the BOCES is dangerously exposing staff and students to contracting and spreading the deadly virus," said O-N



Orleans-Niagara BOCES TA President Deborah Hillburn

BOCES TA President Deborah Hillburn. With many Western New York students traveling back to their home districts when their half-day at BOCES is over, the concern extends to area school districts, too. Orleans-Niagara BOCES serves students from 13 component districts, with nine sites offering a variety of special education, alternative education and career and technical classes.

The O-N BOCES TA compiled information to document the widespread concerns and surveyed the membership to determine whether the district was complying with its reopening plan submitted to the state. Eighty-seven percent of the union members cast a vote of "no confidence" in Godshall's leadership.

In response to the complaint, the labor commissioner could fine the BOCES for non-compliance or seek a court injunction.

In related action, the BOCES TA also filed a lawsuit calling for the Orleans County State Supreme Court to order the BOCES to follow its reopening plan submitted to the state Department of Health and Education Department.



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# P.E. teachers go all out

By Liza Frenette

liza.frenette@nysut.org

Physical education teachers continue to mix it up online and outdoors in an ongoing joust to keep students active during COVID-19.

Weight gain, diminished motivation, loss of strength and muscle tone, and mental health challenges are all worrisome effects of not having regular physical exercise. Educators report seeing students remain in bed while taking classes online, sometimes still in the same clothes for several days.

National Board Certified physical education teacher Kathy Young of the Newburgh Teachers Association began the sudden shutdown by

having students log a half hour of activity, listing the exercise (yoga, Frisbee, running) and why that exercise was chosen (cardio, strength).

"I was posting a few times a week



Newburgh P.E. teacher Kathy Young uses geocaching as a way to get kids outdoors and exercising.

on different types of workouts and ideas for strength training," she said.

On Fitness Fridays, she has students do short workouts and take resting and working heart rates.

This year Young is trying something new, with a geocaching unit that gets students outdoors and combines technology with history and geography as they hunt for items.

"I hope a lot of kids are finding these outlets as a way to cope," Young said. "As educators we can see how much kids need these."

Many students have also lost opportunities for exercise with limited to no access to sports teams or leagues, noted Saranac Lake high school physical education teacher Jason Wamsganz.

"Kids are not getting the exposure. Opportunity is one thing we all worry

about," he said.

In P.E. classes, he looks to introduce students to lifetime recreational activities. The school had purchased mountain bikes and fly-fishing gear, but with concerns about sharing equipment he is focusing students on walking. Longer class periods under COVID-19 scheduling gives teens time to walk three miles on a school nature trail network. He also sends out workouts on Google meets for the students who are at home on alternate days.

"As educators, we're trying to find a silver lining with this," Wamsganz said.

Find SED's guidance for physical education on page 101 of the Reopening Schools guidance at [nysut.org/covidtoolkit](https://nysut.org/covidtoolkit).



# Union provides host of mental health resources

By Liza Frenette

liza.frenette@nysut.org

Responding to new levels of stress and anxiety as the pandemic continues, NYSUT provides resources to school mental health professionals and educators and online support groups for local union presidents.

NYSUT's program services department, overseen by Second Vice President Ron Gross, has been assisting members as they adjust to a completely changed COVID-19 work environment.

"Our mental health network led by Ani Shahinian and her staff have stepped up and taken on this enormous challenge head on," Gross said.

Mickie Brown of Mt. Sinai Health Center recently shared info with members of NYSUT's health network.

During stressful times or situations, people typically focus on what they cannot do, Brown said. Instead, she offered suggestions on what can be done — deep breathing, relax your facial muscles, find the tension in your body and use safe-place imagery — to mitigate anxiety.

This fall, NYSUT staff has addressed concerns about stress and uncertainty in a changing workplace. The union launched online support groups in late September for local presidents who have been challenged by rapid changes in school due to pandemic precautions, outbreaks and health and safety

concerns.

NYSUT offers regional seminars on telecounseling concerns involving the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), with information provided by NYSUT's legal department and the union's Education & Learning Trust. Each session features a school counselor and social worker.

In early October, a consortium of Western New York elementary school counselors took part in a webinar presented by Shahinian addressing current concerns of working with students during

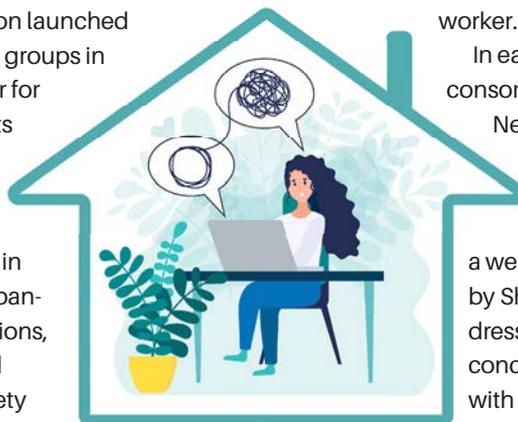
a pandemic.

The concerns of School-Related Professionals are also being addressed. Those attending NYSUT's annual SRP Leadership Conference online, Oct. 23-25, will be able to attend a session on managing stress and uncertainty.

Stress can manifest itself in people becoming overwhelmed, scared, depressed and irritable, and it has been spiking in a world that has been set back for more than half a year.

"There's so much we don't know and can't anticipate," said Shahinian of NYSUT Social Services. "Educators are planners. It's a stressor having everything so ambiguous. The only thing we really have control over is taking care of ourselves."

For more information on scheduling webinars, contact Shahinian at [ani.shahinian@nysut.org](mailto:ani.shahinian@nysut.org).





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# Pinwheels, not cartwheels: Making Strides goes on

By Liza Frenette  
liza.frenette@nysut.org

There may not have been any of the usual cheerleaders doing cartwheels at this year's Making Strides Jones Beach fundraiser — held as a drive-thru rather than a walk — but there was a field of pinwheels with Sheila Goldberg's photo in the middle.

The pinwheel memorial garden, along with the event itself, was dedicated to Goldberg, a longtime teacher and NYSUT activist who forged a connection between the American Cancer Society and NYSUT. A flagship sponsor of statewide Making Strides events since 2002, NYSUT dedicated all of this year's fundraising events to raise money to end breast cancer in Goldberg's name.

"She didn't stop," said retired teacher Debbie Puccio, recalling how Goldberg put streaks of pink in her hair the month of October every year. Puccio took over Goldberg's post at the Jones Beach event table for NYSUT in 2018 when Goldberg started getting ill from another bout of cancer. She died this past January, and Puccio said when her family was asked at her funeral what could be done in her name, they asked that her work for Making Strides be carried on.

"In memory of Sheila Goldberg -- the American Cancer Society has dedicated this year's walk to you. Thank you for establishing the relationship between NYSUT & ACS. Your legacy lives on in us as we continue the fight fueled by your passion. We miss you."



Goldberg on the Making Strides

"We raised \$10,000 in her name just from that," Puccio said. "Sheila never missed an opportunity to speak up and speak out about social causes." Goldberg started advocating for the Making Strides walks locally in Nassau County, and then the word and the work spread across the state with NYSUT. Puccio also set up an online message board where people could post photos of loved ones who died from cancer, featuring Goldberg's photo and a tribute.

committee for 10 years, beginning when her young daughters helped them stuff envelopes filled with information. "She made me promise that when she wasn't able to do it anymore, that I'd take over." The Jones Beach fundraiser is one of many across the state during October. With COVID-19, fundraising events have changed from throngs of walkers to other creative alternatives, such as decorated car drive-thrus, step challenges, a virtual mosaic, city scavenger hunts and more. NYSUT members have raised more than \$15 million since NYSUT became a flagship sponsor of the statewide event. Funding is spent on research, including grants to SUNY and CUNY faculty; lodging for patients and family; rides to treatments and education.



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# Union coalition works to turn Florida blue

## Group targets retirees to GOTV

By Kara Smith  
kara.smith@nysut.org

If you're not at the table, you're on the menu. Those are words to live by, as far as Felicia Bruce, Retiree Council 43 president (NYSUT Teacher Retirees in Florida), is concerned. That's why she's working in partnership with the Coalition of Retired Educators Living in Florida to ensure that sunshine state retirees cast their ballots in the upcoming general election.

The brainchild of Florence McCue, at-large ED 51-53 director, CORELIF has a simple goal — uniting Florida union groups, both ahead of the 2020 general election and beyond.

"Everyone was doing their own thing in Florida, and I knew that if we got organized and worked together, we could be more effective politically," said McCue who launched the group last summer, with help from the American Federation of Teachers.

"This is a great program, and I'm thrilled that Florence took the initiative to get it started," said NYSUT Second Vice President Ron Gross, whose office handles retiree issues. "Florida is an important swing state and NYSUT retirees, our 'daytime army,' are one of our most effective political weapons."

McCue explained that when it came to political activism, even NYSUT's Florida retirees were lone wolves. The United Federation of Teachers/Retired Teachers Chapter — Florida Section, led by Ken Goodfriend, and RC 43 members usually handled member outreach independently.

After recruiting NYSUT retirees to the group, McCue invited in-service and retiree activists from the Florida Education Association; the National Education Association; and the Florida AFL-CIO to join the coalition. McCue hosts biweekly Zoom check-ins to track progress.

CORELIF's first task was cultivating member relationships. Partner groups phone banked, encouraging retirees to vote by mail in Florida's August primary and, with COVID-19 widespread, making wellness checks. "We wanted to make sure we had a connection before the November election," said McCue, explaining that each group reached out to its own members with a unified message. "The union is here for you and we're all in this together."

"It's fabulous that we're working together," said Lynne Winderbaum, Tampa Bay coordinator for the

UFT/RTC—FS. Using some 40 volunteers, the group has called thousands of voters — UFT/RTC-FS members and others in their households. To ensure that those who've requested ballots return them, they're using the AFL-CIO's Labor Action Network which updates members' voting histories every few days. "We'll do a final round of calls in the last few days before the election to anyone who hasn't voted yet," said Winderbaum.

"We're doing a vote-by-mail push, highlighting that it's safe and reliable and encouraging folks to do it early so their vote is counted," said Bruce, noting that RC 43 also uses the LAN to track ballot returns. She uses her extensive retiree contacts to share CORELIF's mobilization message and recruit phone bank volunteers. In addition to heading RC 43, she's a director for Florida Retired Educators Association; president of the Treasure Coast Florida Alliance for Retired Americans; and a member of the Florida Educators Association Retired, the FEA's retiree organization.

"I've heard a lot of Trump voters say 'never again' ... his erratic behavior, mismanagement of the coronavirus and attacks on Social Security," Bruce said of her meetings with retirees. "He's hurt them,



The Coalition of Retired Educators Living in Florida is a group of Florida unionists focused on getting out the vote in the important swing state. NYSUT Florida retirees are coalition members. Bottom row, left to right: Meghan Rozarie, Janice Poirier, Deb Peterson and Lynne Winderbaum. Top Row: Stewart Cohen, Christine Rowland, Andrew Spar, Felicia Bruce, Renita Bates, Todd Crenshaw, Chris Mattingly and Florence McCue.

and they know it."

NYSUT's powerful network of retiree activists in New York State also lent the coalition a hand. When FEA President Andrew Spar needed help contacting in-service and retired AFL-CIO Florida members who requested absentee ballots, McCue recruited Long Island, Westchester and UFT retirees to phone bank.

"Inservice members are being pulled in so many directions ... retirees have to step up and take the yeoman's share of political action," said McCue. "We're determined to take Florida over the top."



RC 43 President Felicia Bruce received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Florida Alliance for Retired Americans. The honor was presented by FLARA president Bill Sauers. After serving as RC 43 VP for several terms, Bruce became president in July.

### DID YOU KNOW?

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

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561-994-4929, ext. 129



# QUESTIONS FOR... Michelle Licht

Williamsville Teachers Association President

## 1. The superintendent tried to blame teachers for the district's chaotic school reopening. How did that make your members feel?

Reopening has been stressful for all districts, but the districts that have been successful worked together collaboratively rather than pointing fingers. Williamsville TA members would have been valuable assets in

the planning for reopening. Being excluded from the majority of that planning — and then blamed when the plans didn't work — was frustrating and disheartening.

## 2. Multiple media outlets — even CNN — reported the superintendent's false narrative that hybrid reopening plans fell apart because there were too many teacher retirements, medical leaves and resignations due to COVID19. How did you set the record straight?

The numbers that were reported were so far from the truth that they raised questions immediately. We reported the truth on social media and shared the accurate information with the public and the Board of Education. Since all of the personnel actions taken

by the Board of Ed are published on the website, the narrative was easy to disprove but, unfortunately, most media outlets didn't report the correct information.

## 3. The school board quickly placed the superintendent on administrative leave and appointed an interim superintendent. How did you reach a more collaborative approach for reopening?

As soon as the acting superintendent was appointed, he invited all of the district's union leaders to a meeting that evening. This was the first meeting of its kind in the time I've been involved. That step alone set a different tone for how the district would operate. Within days, all of the members of the district's leadership team, as well as representatives from our union and the administrators, were meeting to develop a plan to reopen schools.

## 4. How does the latest reopening plan address teacher concerns?

No reopening plan is perfect, but our district went through so many plans in the two weeks before school began that no one could keep up. Every version had significant issues, but the plan on the first day of school was untenable because there was no instruction at all for our students who had chosen full remote learning.

The new plan that has been collaboratively developed

provides for daily instruction for all of our students and has our hybrid students returning to the buildings by the end of October. This new plan addresses some of the significant problems we had with previous plans: Teachers will not be forced to livestream lessons, students at home will not be expected to stare passively at a screen all day, students learning remotely will be taught by our teachers, and our teachers will have the autonomy to make instructional choices that are best for their students and their content areas.

It's going to be a challenge to implement because our members are being asked to change the way they teach and find meaningful ways to include and support those students learning from home each day — but our members will do everything they can to support our students this year.

## 5. What has this experience taught you about the union's role?

The primary purpose of a union is obviously to look out for our members, but we also serve as a safeguard for our students. A week before school started, we notified the Board of Education and superintendent that the district wasn't ready to open. We didn't have the staff we needed; students and teachers didn't have class schedules; and we didn't have the PPE we needed. We had serious concerns — not just for our members — but for the students for whom we are responsible. Without unions, who would raise those concerns?



DAN CAPPELLAZZO

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assignments and purposeful formative assessments; troubleshooting technology; and modifying instruction for different learners.

Panelists are: Kira Martelli, grade six teacher, Massapequa Federation of Teachers; Kurt Hassenpflug, ELA/ENL teacher, North Colonie Teachers Association; and Kathleen Young, physical education teacher, Newburgh TA.

You are invited to join one or both sessions, including a Q&A. Register at [nysut.org/hybrid](https://nysut.org/hybrid).



# IT'S WHAT WE DO

## Bill Pollak, Retiree Council 12



THE LEADER-HERALD

Museum advisory board member Jane Sitterly looks over a 2016 Johnstown High School yearbook with museum curator Bill Pollak.

As a proud Johnstown High School graduate – class of 1953 – and social studies teacher for 32 years, Bill Pollak knows a thing or two about Johnstown in Fulton County. To ensure future generations do too, the RC 12 member made a

unique pitch to the district school board. The “white house,” a former administration building owned by the district, was vacant. Wouldn’t it make a great school museum?

That was back in 2003. Today his labor of love, the Greater Johnstown School District Museum, houses more than 100 years of Johnstown school history, from yearbooks to plaques and school newspapers, to uniforms and report cards. It sometimes borrows from the Johnstown Historical Society.

“The school board didn’t need convincing, they just needed someone to take the lead,” said Pollak who serves as the museum’s curator. Since the district already owned the building, the project didn’t require money – just a lot of historical digging. Pollak spent countless hours sifting through school basements and storage rooms to find materials. What he found filled the rooms of the 1930’s-era structure to bursting.

Hundreds of former graduates, future graduates and history buffs have visited to marvel at the floor-to-ceiling showcase of Johnstown school memorabilia. Open Saturdays June 1 through September, the museum is a popular stop for field trips and high school reunions.

The yearbooks are Pollak’s favorites. “I like to look back at some of the people who went to school here,” he said.

Community members keep displays fresh with memorabilia donations and an advisory board handles operations. “Other schools should do this, show off their history,” said Pollak. “Did you know that Elizabeth Cady Stanton attended Johnstown schools? There’s lots of history in the area ... we need to hold on to it. Hopefully this will be an inspiration to others.”

To read more about Pollak’s work with the Johnstown school museum, visit [nysut.org/itswhatwedo](http://nysut.org/itswhatwedo).

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Our "Preparing for Retirement" page ([osc.state.ny.us/retirement/members/preparing-retirement](http://osc.state.ny.us/retirement/members/preparing-retirement)) is another great resource. An 18-month timeline guides you through the retirement process and highlights

In every issue, State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli, administrative head of the State and Local Employees' Retirement System (ERS) and trustee of the Common Retirement Fund, provides information on the System, which delivers retirement benefits to many NYSUT School-Related Professionals and other support staff. If you are an ERS member with a question of general interest, email [united@nysut.org](mailto:united@nysut.org).

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important information leading up to your retirement date, such as estimating your pension, reviewing your income sources and identifying the expenses that you should factor into your budget.

Your ERS retirement plan determines your benefit eligibility, any pension reductions and limitations, and how your pension is calculated. You can find your retirement plan listed in your Retirement Online account and in your Member Annual Statement, or you can ask your employer. Most school-related employees and health care professionals are covered by the Article 15 retirement plan. Once you know your plan, you can read more about it on our Publications page, at [osc.state.ny.us/retirement/publications](http://osc.state.ny.us/retirement/publications).

You can bookmark our homepage ([osc.state.ny.us/retirement](http://osc.state.ny.us/retirement)) to find links to helpful information about every aspect of your ERS benefits, and to join us on Facebook and Twitter, read our weekly retirement news blog and sign up for our monthly E-News newsletter. And finally, go to contact [NYSLRS.com](http://NYSLRS.com) for answers to a wide variety of benefit-related questions.

### 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).

## COVID-19 leaves and your pension

**Q:** I'm considering taking a leave of absence due to the risk of COVID-19. How would the leave affect my service credit?

**A:** If you take a leave of absence from your job due to COVID-19, the salary you earn during your leave will determine how much service credit you accrue and what gets factored into your final average salary. Service credit accrues in step with your salary.

For example, if you're paid your full salary during your leave, you'll accrue full service credit for your leave period. If you earn two-thirds of your salary while on leave, you'll only accrue two-thirds service credit. If you take an unpaid leave, you won't accrue any service credit at all.

To qualify, you must be on the payroll of a participating employer. Payments from third-party vendors aren't reportable to the New York State Teachers' Retirement System and won't earn service credit. Before taking any leave, discuss your plans with your district. Additionally, if you decide you want to retire after taking

a leave of absence, contact NYSTRS for service credit guidance. For more information, read NYSTRS's July 2020 Reporting Tips, [nystrs.org/Employers/Reporting-Tips/2020-Tips/july](http://nystrs.org/Employers/Reporting-Tips/2020-Tips/july) and its Administrative Bulletin 2020-3, "Leaves of Absence Prior to Retirement," [nystrs.org/Employers/Administrative-Bulletins/2020-Bulletins/bull2020-3](http://nystrs.org/Employers/Administrative-Bulletins/2020-Bulletins/bull2020-3).

**Q:** Given COVID-19 concerns, what are the eligibility rules to apply for disability protection?

**A:** If you haven't been diagnosed with COVID-19, don't file a disability retirement application with NYSTRS. Members can't apply for disability protection just because they might become sick; you must be diagnosed with a life-threatening medical condition, like COVID-19, or face a significant surgery.

Pre-emptively filing a disability retirement application provides protection for your beneficiary if you were to die. In most cases, the lump-sum retirement payment to a beneficiary is significantly more than an in-service death benefit. Before making a filing decision, contact NYSTRS' Disability Unit at 800-348-7298, ext. 6010. Another resource is NYSTRS' video "Filing for Disability Protection: What You Need to Know," [nystrs.org/Library/Videos/Member-Information/Filing-for-Disability-Protection-What-You-Need-to](http://nystrs.org/Library/Videos/Member-Information/Filing-for-Disability-Protection-What-You-Need-to).

### NYSUT TRS consultants

TRS members with questions may call their teacher-members on the New York State Teachers' Retirement System Board of Directors:

David Keefe • 516-741-1241  
(Retiree Representative)

Sheila Sullivan Buck • 585-454-5550  
[sbuck@nysutmail.org](mailto:sbuck@nysutmail.org)

Beth Chetney • 315-431-4040  
[bchetney@nysutmail.org](mailto:bchetney@nysutmail.org)

Ronald Gross • 631-273-8822  
[rgross@nysutmail.org](mailto:rgross@nysutmail.org)



### Did you know?

New York State's COVID-19 accidental death benefit applies to NYSTRS members who started work March 1 or later, contracted COVID-19 within 45 days, and succumbed to the virus by Dec. 31, 2020.



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U.S. Department of the Interior

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This opportunity covers transportation and an educational program. For additional information, locations of providers throughout Upstate New York, and free online curriculum materials:

[www.eriecanalway.org](http://www.eriecanalway.org)

Or contact Andy Kitzmann:

[Andy\\_Kitzmann@partner.nps.gov](mailto:Andy_Kitzmann@partner.nps.gov)

518-237-7000, ext. 201



## Suffolk union's road show shifts gears

**M**embers of the Faculty Association of Suffolk Community College, who had to stop presenting their popular Professors on Wheels classes to seniors in local assisted living facilities due to the pandemic, found a different way to continue to bring joy to these seniors' lives: enrichment boxes.

Led by FA member Christina Bosco Langert, the local put together boxes filled with items to keep residents stimulated during their time of isolation. Each enrichment box included large-print puzzle books; boxes of pen and paper; adult coloring books with boxes of crayons, markers and colored pencils; playing cards; books and magazines on a range of subjects; board games and

puzzles; DVDs; foam crafts and art supplies; and a letter of well-wishes on behalf of the FA. The boxes were delivered to seven long-term care facilities.

"We've all seen the news reports of seniors who haven't been able to see their family members or receive visitors of any kind," Langert said. "They need our care now more than ever."

Dante Morelli, president of the FA, said the local union is working on building a YouTube channel that can be watched in nursing homes with programs to enrich minds and bodies.



PROVIDED

Christina Bosco Langert, chair of Professors on Wheels, loads enrichment boxes into her car for delivery to Suffolk County seniors in residential or assisted living facilities.

## Backpacks help lighten the load

**W**ith NYSUT's help, local unions have been reaching out to help students in need — the numbers of which have increased due to COVID-19.

In September, the union provided

backpacks loaded with school supplies to 250 young school children in Albany's neediest areas.

Laura Franz, president of the Albany Public School Teachers Association, helped deliver the backpacks to Pre-K and kindergarten children at Arbor Hill Elementary School and Giffen Elementary School.

Inside each backpack were crayons, notepads, glue sticks, a whiteboard, construction paper, folders, rulers, activity pages and Play-Doh.

With the pandemic, students cannot share classroom supplies and the backpacks

will serve as a "locker" on their back for use at both home and school.

"NYSUT cares about teachers. We know there is a need here," said Secretary-Treasurer Philippe Abraham, who oversees social justice initiatives for NYSUT. He spoke at the backpack give-away event along with Franz and NYSUT President Andy Pallotta.

"Given all the complications with school reopening, and the amount of individual supplies that are limited for students to have in schools, having these backpacks is wonderful," said Franz.

"Having 250 students who don't have to worry was really greatly appreciated by those classroom teachers," said Franz, noting what a bonus it was that each pack came already loaded.



EL-WISE NOISETTE

NYSUT President Andy Pallotta and Secretary-Treasurer Philippe Abraham distribute school supplies to Albany students.

## Quotable



### Jen

Pandemic teaching is intense. We beat ourselves up a lot. Today I got a reminder that it doesn't matter if a remote lesson flops, or if the pacing isn't right. Today I got this message from a Mom. "Your class turned his day around." @jen\_7319

### APSTA

@apsta\_albany Thank you @AndyPallotta @NYSUTCDDRO @adklr for supporting our laid off members. We know that you won't stop fighting until this wrong is made right! @apsta\_albany

### Rebecca Mieliwocki

Today's Adventure in Teacher Leadership: The reason we have teachers simultaneously trying to teach children live and distance learners at home is because no one asked teachers if they thought that would work. Do surgeons conduct office appointments while doing surgeries??? @MrsMieliwocki

### Katie Hurley

@katiehurley Quick reminder: Middle school students are undergoing massive brain development in live time. Virtual learning asks a lot of them re: organization, focus, and memory, but they don't always have the executive function skills to deliver. Guide, don't criticize. Encouragers wanted. @katiehurley

### Robert Rodriguez

If your elected leaders still aren't listening to the professional educators, throw your support behind people who will. @RobRodEDU

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

## Protecting Your Family — Saving You Money — Planning For Your Future

### Holiday Shopping List:

- Order flowers for Becky
- Get Bose speakers for Buddy
- Check out Connect America emergency response system for mom
- Search Powell's Books for Lindsey
- Look for a new laptop on Office Depot/OfficeMax
- Check for local discounts on MB Discounts & Deals



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