

# NYSUT UNITED

A UNION OF PROFESSIONALS



# Back to School for All

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# NYSUT optimistic as Gov. Hochul takes the reins

By Ned Hoskin  
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**W**estern New York's Kathleen Hochul became the 57th governor of New York upon Andrew Cuomo's resignation Aug. 24. She is the state's first female governor.

The statewide union immediately welcomed her ascension to the top job in state government and expressed optimism for a productive partnership.

"Gov. Kathy Hochul has long been a dedicated public servant and has shown leadership throughout her career," said NYSUT President Andy Pallotta. "We look forward to working with her on the challenges we face ahead."

Hochul has long been a supporter of women's issues.

During Women's History Month last March, she was a guest speaker at the NYSUT Southern Tier Women's Committee online event titled "Women Battle the Pandemic," discussing strategies women can use to deal with pandemic-related issues.

Last year, she helped launch the 2020 Women's Vote Centennial Project, a program driven by NYSUT, the American Federation of Teachers and First Book. First Book provides free books for students, and the competition invited teachers to develop projects and activities to mark the suffrage centennial.

"New York women have always led the nation when it comes to furthering women's rights, and there is no better way to educate our young people about that history than in the classroom," Hochul said. "The goal of the project is to educate our students about the past and encourage them to use that knowledge to help create the building blocks for our future."

Hochul is a founder and a member of the board of Kathleen Mary House, a transitional home in Buffalo for women and children who are survivors of domestic violence.

In May 2011, Hochul won a special election to fill a vacant congressional seat, becoming the first Democrat to



Incoming NYS Governor Kathy Hochul

represent New York's 26th congressional district in 40 years. She served as its U.S. representative from 2011 to 2013.

In 2014, Cuomo selected her as his running mate in the gubernatorial election. After they won, Hochul was inaugurated as lieutenant governor. Cuomo and Hochul were reelected in 2018.

Gov. Cuomo resigned this summer after a report released by the state attorney general alleged numerous cases of sexual harassment against him. NYSUT was among the first unions to call for his resignation.

"The attorney general detailed conduct that is repugnant and indefensible in any workplace and especially in the state's highest elected office," said Pallotta.

## NYSUT-backed bills signed into law

**E**arlier this summer, some significant union-supported bills that passed both houses of the Legislature were enacted into law.

- Public employers are now prohibited from penalizing employees who use sick leave or compensatory time to quarantine, seek medical treatment, or take other absences related to a COVID-19 diagnosis or contact.

The law builds on other employee protections NYSUT achieved since the start of the pandemic, including guaranteed paid leave for employees quarantined due to the coronavirus and guaranteed time off to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

- Special Act schools, which provide services for students who have disabilities, illnesses or behavioral challenges, will be reimbursed for pandemic-related expenses.

- The state Teachers' Retirement System may now accept alternate methods of tracked mail to submit forms and applications. Previously, TRS members had to use registered or certified mail via the U.S. Postal Service.

Since the last time the law was amended in 2003, other methods of tracking mail have been established that are comparable and often more convenient for members.

### COMING UP

**Aug. 20–Sept. 6**  
NYS Fair – Visit the NYSUT booth!



**Sept. 13–14**  
NYS Board of Regents meets

**Sept. 17–18**  
NYSUT Board of Directors meets

**Oct. 1–31**  
LGBT History Month

**Oct. 8**  
Deadline to register to vote in Nov. 2 general elections

**Oct. 10–30**  
Making Strides Against Breast Cancer walks take place at locations across the state. See page 18 for details.

**Oct. 18–19**  
NYS Board of Regents meets

**Oct. 23–31**  
New York state early voting period

**Oct 29–31**  
SRP Leadership Conference

**Nov. 2**  
Election Day

**Nov. 5–7**  
Community College Conference

**Nov. 19–20**  
NYSUT Women's Committee meets



Please note, some or all of these events may be conducted as virtual meetings in compliance with COVID-19 and social-distancing guidance.

### ON THE COVER

Union leaders are working to ensure classrooms — where students learn best — are safe and healthy for all.

# Union, pediatricians launch back-to-school ad campaign

**N**YSUT and the NYS American Academy of Pediatrics have launched a statewide television and digital advertising campaign to highlight the importance of ensuring all students safely return to in-person instruction in the fall.

The ad, titled “Let me Show You,” focuses on the benefits of in-person learning — hands-on instruction, social interaction and extracurricular activities — with health protocols in place and agreement among educators and public health experts that in-person learning can be done safely.

See the 30-second ad at [nysut.org/school\\_reopening](https://nysut.org/school_reopening). It will air in all regions of the state through mid-September.



A joint ad campaign of NYSUT and the NYS American Academy of Pediatrics is encouraging the return to full-time, in-person learning.

“We know the best place for students to learn is in the classroom, and every student deserves access to full-time, in-person instruction

this year,” NYSUT President Andy Pallotta said. (See article, page 14) “We support the protocols recommended by health experts, including

pediatricians and state education officials.”

“In-person education is critical for every child’s social and educational development,” said Dr. Warren Seigel, chair, NYS American Academy of Pediatrics, District II. “We want parents to understand that this can be done in a safe way when schools layer critical health strategies.”

The ad is funded by a grant from the American Federation of Teachers as part of the national union’s nationwide “Back to School for All” initiative championing a return to five-days-a-week in-person instruction in all schools. More information on the AFT campaign can be found at [nysut.org/cc/3xPFzcV](https://nysut.org/cc/3xPFzcV).

## Regents uphold charter school cap

By **Sylvia Saunders**  
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**N**YSUT applauded the Board of Regents for rejecting the SUNY Charter School Committee’s thinly veiled scheme to ‘revise’ existing charters and circumvent the existing charter school cap in New York City.

“Until meaningful reforms are enacted to ensure that charter schools are transparent and accountable to taxpayers, the state should not allow for the expansion of charter schools,” said NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene T. DiBrango. “If the SUNY Board of Trustees Charter Schools

Committee is going to try to circumvent the cap on new charter schools in New York City by any means necessary — like in this case by allowing a thinly veiled scheme to revise existing charters to pass muster — someone must step in and call out what’s happening. That’s exactly what the Regents and State Education Department have done. We applaud Chancellor Young, Commissioner Rosa and the Regents for standing up for what’s right.”

Under the plan approved by the SUNY Charter Schools Committee, a new charter management organization, Ventoux Partnership Network, Inc., would create a new regional charter high school for nearly 1,000

high school students by expanding grades at four existing charter middle schools in New York City. SED noted that the network’s website acknowledged the attempt to circumvent the law, stating that this “will allow more high-quality high schools to open despite a cap on charters.”

The plan will now go back to the SUNY Charter School Committee for possible reconsideration.

DiBrango noted that the Board of Regents has been willing to stand up to a number of illegitimate charter school actions by the SUNY Charter Schools Committee, whether it’s seeking “early renewals” for certain charter networks or attempting to create an entirely new teacher

certification system for charter schools. The union joined SED in court to successfully block the plan to allow charter schools to certify their own staff.

There are currently 91 charters available for new applicants seeking to open a school in New York state outside of New York City. The SUNY Charter Schools Institute has received applications for new charter schools in Albany, Central Islip, Rochester, Schenectady, Wyandanch and Yonkers. An application for Auburn was withdrawn.

SED has received three applications for charter schools proposed in Rochester.

# College unions advocate for safe reopenings

By Ned Hoskin  
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The state has mandated that all students who want to register and attend class on SUNY, CUNY and community college campuses must be vaccinated against COVID-19.

Campus employee unions are striving to ensure their members are as safe as possible, through vaccinations, testing and environmental protections.

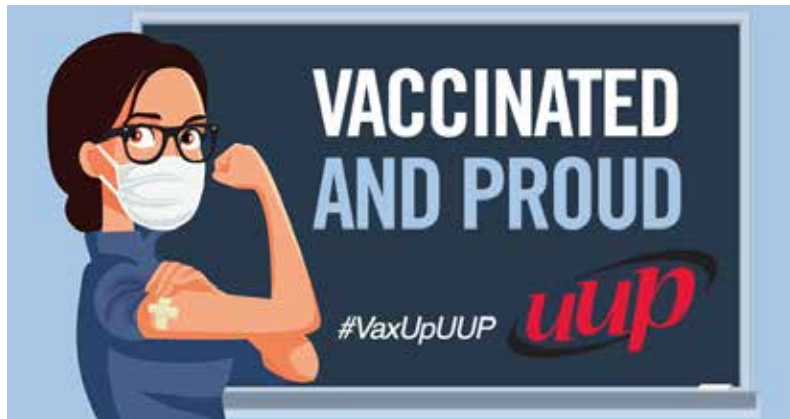
United University Professions reached out to its membership this summer with the message that vaccines are safe and effective, and protect vulnerable members of society who cannot be vaccinated. In partnership with NYSUT and the American Federation of Teachers, (see article, page 14) the union also is assisting with health and safety trainings, information tables and regional meetings.

"We are very concerned about ensuring that all of our members on campuses are vaccinated, but we are just as concerned about our retirees all across the country," UUP President Fred Kowal said. UUP represents SUNY faculty and staff.

He reiterated that concern as he announced the union's #VaxUpUUP campaign to encourage vaccination. Visit [uupinfo.org/resources/VaxUpUUP](http://uupinfo.org/resources/VaxUpUUP) for more.

"UUP members have been on the front lines of the pandemic caring for patients at SUNY hospitals and supporting students through remote and

in-person learning at campuses for over a year ... keeping our communities healthy and educating the next generation of leaders," Kowal said. He asked members to "honor that commitment" by getting vaccinated to protect colleagues, students, fami-



lies and communities.

Based on recent survey results, UUP estimates that 90 percent of the bargaining unit has been vaccinated. The union and SUNY reached an agreement that any unvaccinated employees who are part of UUP will be tested weekly for COVID-19 throughout the fall semester.

Drawing on the latest research, the Professional Staff Congress at CUNY has developed a set of standards to promote safe reopening.

The union says reopening plans for 2021-22 must incorporate these standards and be easily available for inspection by all CUNY students, staff and faculty. Colleges must also make available all relevant environmental inspection reports and records of compliance with approved reopening plans.

The standards include meaningful participation by the union in reopening plans; steps to maximize

vaccination and minimize introduction of infections and the transmission of COVID-19 on campus; adequate and compliant ventilation; accommodations for remote work to protect the safety and health of individuals and the public; a right to inspect any workplace where PSC-represented employees must work; specific standards for laboratories and studios; and compliance with the contractual workload.

The union has trained more than 100 PSC members to accompany

campus facilities staff and administrators on pre-occupancy walkthroughs of buildings scheduled for reopening.

"Only when we feel secure about our working conditions can we get back to meeting the needs of our amazing students in person," said PSC President James Davis.

Community colleges around the state, with autonomous unions and local administrations, are still wrestling with these issues on individual campuses, said Roberta Elins, president of the United College Employees at Fashion Institute of Technology and a NYSUT Board member representing community colleges.

"As our campuses are urban, suburban and rural, each of us face unique challenges, but what binds us all together as union presidents is to ensure the safety of our members and our students," Elins said.

## Feds extend student loan repayment reprieve

In what the Biden administration is calling the "final extension," the Department of Education has extended the federal student loan repayment moratorium until Jan. 31, 2022. Federal loans will remain interest-free, and no penalties for nonpayment will be allowed.

This marks the fourth time that the moratorium has been extended. The original rationale — that the pause in payments would help the 40 million federal loan borrowers already struggling to cope with the pandemic's various economic pressures, was recently augmented when two loan servicers, FedLoan Servicing and Granite State, announced that they wouldn't be renewing their contracts with the federal government. The prospect of resuming payments while borrowers were being transitioned to new servicers helped convince administration officials to extend the moratorium.

FedLoan Servicing also administers the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, which means the transition to a new, as-yet-unidentified servicer is even more important to those who plan to take advantage of that relief option. The USDOE has issued assurances that the program will continue, and that careful attention will be paid to ensure that records are transferred to the PSLF program's new administrator without problems.

Cambridge Credit Counseling, which offers educational programs and financial counseling through NYSUT's Member Benefits, advises borrowers to get ready to resume making payments in February. If you're a PSLF candidate — even if you've only made a few years worth of payments of the 120 required for relief, contact FedLoan Servicing via the PSLF application, checking off the box that indicates you just want to find out where you stand. This will allow you to document the number of qualifying payments you've made before that program is moved to a new servicer.

For more info and resources on managing your student debt, visit [studentloans.nysut.org](http://studentloans.nysut.org).

# Contract gains showcase union strength

By **Liza Frenette**  
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In a major gain for new parents, the North Shore Schools Federated Employees has successfully negotiated 20 paid days of leave without need to use accrued time for members who have given birth or adopted a child.

"It's a basic justice issue. This is way overdue," said Greg Perles, president of the 370-member local and a longtime member of the negotiating team. He has been receiving phone calls, texts and emails from members who range from moms in mid-pregnancy to grandparents — all thanking him profusely.

Perles said the contract gain helps dissipate what he calls "the baby penalty," which he said is structurally misogynistic. Women who have babies, he said, historically had to drain down their accrued leave, go

off payroll once they used up their leave, and lose service time toward their retirements and also toward their tenure if they're on probation. They also lose seniority if they have to go off payroll.

A history teacher, Perles said the lack of adequate leave for new parents has long been an issue in the workplace. And adoptive parents have struggled to get leave, particularly LGBTQ couples, he said.

"It's punishment for having a child," he said. "I was motivated to pursue this for equity for women; but it's also equity for adoptive couples."

Younger teachers may not have that much time off accrued, or they may have used it for the birth of another child.

"We've had significant turnover in recent years," he said. In addition to planned retirements, "COVID-19 has chased a lot of teachers away." The staff now has many young teachers.



The contract was ratified in late June, and covers last year and the coming school year. The benefit for new parents is "a new, permanent addition to our contract," he said.

Perles hopes the contract will inspire other locals to pursue this benefit for new parents, and welcomes NYSUT members to contact him at [perles2vp@gmail.com](mailto:perles2vp@gmail.com).

"The more people that know, the more they will ask for it and it will start building momentum."

## B.E.S.T. practices

After nine years, the Buffalo Educational Support Team has succeeded in ratifying a contract that its local president calls a "great achievement."

Jo Ann Sweat, president of the 900-member local unit of teacher aides, teaching assistants and health

care aides, said the union workers will see raises of 10.5 percent the first year, and then have three years of 2.25 percent.

The agreement also includes signing bonuses, longevity bonuses, additional training and professional development.

Solidarity and a plan of action helped the NYSUT local achieve the long-awaited contract. Sweat said members went to board meetings — once showing up 300 strong — and attended rallies and sent postcards to board members.

Teacher aides in the first year of service will go from \$13.81 per hour to \$15.26. Teaching assistants in their first year will get an increase from \$14.49 to \$20. Health care aides will move from \$15.11 to \$16.70.

"By no means is it everything we were seeking," Sweat said. "Overall we did a great job for our membership."

## HOMETOWN HEROES PARADE

Frontline workers — including health care professionals and educators — were the stars of a July ticker-tape parade held in New York City. The parade was a huge thank you for the essential workers' efforts to help usher the city through the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. From left: The UFT float honored health care and education members; UFT President Michael Mulgrew walks the parade route; UFT school nurse chapter leaders Ponzella Johnson, left, and Cynthia Bennett.



MIKE LOVERDE



ERICA BERGER



KAREN DAVIS

# North Country students enjoy First Books

By Kara Smith  
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Students at nearly a dozen St. Lawrence County districts started off the school year with a new book thanks to a NYSUT First Book collaboration this summer. Ogdensburg Teachers Association retiree Mary Wills coordinated a county-wide book distribution through her work with the St. Lawrence County People Project, a union-led local coalition of educators and activists launched in 2016 to promote community education and economic security.

After sorting and dividing about 25 cases of new, free books by grade level and district need, the group hosted 12 back-to-school distribution events at schools throughout the end of August and start of September.

“Some events were held outside, some were drive-through pick-ups, and some took place in gyms, but all distributed free books and school supplies to community residents,” explained Wills, noting that thanks to an AFT grant, the group also purchased basic school supplies like pencils, erasers and masks through the First



From left, People Project volunteers Nicole Joly and Mary Wills present First Books to April Fullerton, Parishville-Hopkinton TA.



Book Marketplace.

“It’s wonderful to have NYSUT behind us in this venture to help ensure that each child has brand new quality literature to help them get excited about reading,” said Wills. “I’m proud to be a NYSUT member, and to help

provide an equitable start to the school year for all of our students.”

NYSUT Secretary-Treasurer J. Philippe Abraham, whose office coordinates the union’s First Book initiative, noted that the average teacher spends about \$500 a year on classroom supplies — including books.

“NYSUT is happy to help members bring the gift of reading to their students,” he said. “The First Book program is a great way for educators to get books into the hands of all students, regardless of where they live or their family’s socioeconomic status.”

In partnership with the nonprofit organization First Book Inc., and the American Federation of Teachers, its national affiliate, NYSUT provides low to no-cost books to high-need schools and nonprofits that serve low-income families and students in need. To learn more about the First Book program, or to get books for your school or program, register at [firstbook.org/aft](http://firstbook.org/aft).

## NYSUT Disaster Relief Fund seeking donations to help Haiti

By Kara Smith  
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August was a month of heart-break and loss for the citizens of Haiti. Aug. 14, a 7.2 magnitude earthquake devastated the island nation. According to UNICEF estimates roughly 1.2 million people were impacted. Days later Tropical Storm Grace hit the same region and caused further disruption.

To help, the statewide union encourages members to consider donating to the NYSUT Disaster Relief Fund, the union’s 501(c)3 charitable organization.

“People helping people is the ultimate form of solidarity,” said NYSUT Secretary-Treasurer J. Philippe Abraham, whose office manages the disaster relief fund. “NYSUT members are always among the first to show compassion and empathy for others in times of need. I encourage all who are able to contribute to the fund to lend a helping hand to the people of Haiti as they face these hardships.”

Funded through voluntary donations, the NYSUT Disaster Relief Fund provides relief for eligible losses stemming from man-made occurrences, such as an accidental house fire; natural disasters, such as weather-related storm damage; and federally declared qualified disasters, such as flooding. To donate, visit [nysut.org/disasterrelief](http://nysut.org/disasterrelief). NYSUT assumes 100 percent of the administrative costs associated with the NYSUT Disaster Relief Fund.

## Save the date! NYSUT Hispanic Heritage celebration

“Celebrando Nuestra Hispanidad: A Conversation with Latino Leaders” is scheduled for Oct. 12 at NYSUT headquarters. Due to COVID-19 protocols, there will be limited space and the event will be available virtually.

Hispanic Heritage Month is celebrated annually Sept. 15 to Oct. 15. The NYSUT “Celebrando Nuestra Hispanidad” event is part of the statewide union’s “Many Threads, One Fabric” social justice event series, moderated by NYSUT Secretary-Treasurer J. Philippe Abraham. For more information, visit [nysut.org/manythreads](http://nysut.org/manythreads).



# Support, advocacy for workers continues

By Liza Frenette  
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**O**n Sept. 11, 2001, Liam Lynch was a 10-year-old worried about his father, who was driving into Manhattan for a meeting at the World Trade Center when terrorists attacked.

“I was frantic. Where is he?” he recalled. His father turned his car around and came home that day — but Lynch was marked.

Twenty years later, Lynch is a safety and health specialist working for the New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health. His work includes reaching out to people who have suffered from living and working in the vicinity of the New York City attacks.

He provides education to first responders and workers — including teachers, faculty, staff and students — who returned to their jobs while toxic dust and debris infiltrated the

air, the ground and surrounding buildings.

“The dust cloud that engulfed lower Manhattan and parts of Brooklyn exposed around 400,000 people to the World Trade Center contaminants on Sept. 11, and many live with chronic illnesses as a result,” said Veronica Foley, NYSUT health and safety specialist.

“It is important that we continue to connect with NYSUT members who have been struggling with one or more of the conditions covered by the World Trade Center Health Program. Thankfully NYSUT has the resources to help our members by connecting them to the WTC program or to the Victims Compensation Fund.”

The more data that the 9/11 health programs have, the more that conditions can be connected to the attacks. “I’ve encountered through my outreach and education plenty of teachers, faculty and staff who were

impacted by 9/11 and are unaware they are eligible for health care and compensation,” Lynch said.

Conditions include 68 types of cancer and more than 100 different ailments, including asthma, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), PTSD, night terrors and anxiety. Asthma from 9/11 is different than other kinds of asthma, Lynch said, and since it’s unique to that exposure, treatment can be tailored.

Many people do not realize how conditions can surface much later, or how they are connected to the attacks. At one of many educational events hosted by the Professional Staff Congress, representing City University of New York faculty and staff, Lynch helped a union member who has had sinus issues for years but did not realize they were connected to exposure.

Lynch stressed that there are long periods between exposure and certain conditions — some health

problems can surface 20, 30, or 40 years later.

Asbestos, silica, lead, mercury and more than 70 known carcinogens in high volume concentrations were released into the air and dust with explosive force, Lynch said. Surrounding buildings were “heavily contaminated” as the dust blew into ventilation systems.

The World Trade Center Health Program was established by the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act of 2010, and is administered by the National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety. NIOSH contracts out with clinicians in all 50 states to provide this service, Lynch said. The Victims Compensation Fund, which requires separate application, is run by the Department of Justice.

Need assistance connecting to the WTC Health Program or Victims Compensation Fund? Email Lynch at [llynch@nycosh.org](mailto:llynch@nycosh.org).

# Students commemorate solemn anniversary

By Liza Frenette  
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**M**iddle school educators in Brooklyn teamed up this past spring for a months-long research project to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on America.

More than 300 students were guided to use print and digital resources, and interview neighbors and family members.

“These students, all born years after that tragic day in our city, have been inspired by this project to create art illustrations, models, posters, audio histories, original songs, book reviews and a commemorative

ceremony,” said Rose Reissman. Director of The Writing Institute and a member of the United Federation of Teachers at Ditmas IS 62, Reissman launched the project as a way to inspire students about the resiliency of people coming through a tragedy.

The project-based learning model included UFT members Michael Downes, digital and social studies; Angelo Carideo, technology and social studies; Amanda Xavier, English language arts; and Dina Annese Francis, ESL.

The projects were done in person and remotely under the backdrop of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

“Students found the parallels between the two events — isolation,

trauma, the need to be resilient and come together, along with biases unwarranted by facts — illuminating and comforting,” Reissman said.

Even students whose parents were living in other countries at the time of the terrorist attacks had family members who were able to share about its impact around the world.

Oral histories were shared by neighbors who lived in the area of the attacks; one from a father who responded to help; and another from a mom who was an Army soldier on leave and served as a first responder.

“While the vast majority of family oral history comments were filled with descriptions of their tears and fears during those days in 2001,

they also assured their children that they had glimpsed persons coming together to help one another, and that they learned lessons ... about the value of family love, community, and the impermanence of material structures,” Reissman said.

The project also unearthed biases. Many Muslim student’s families were able to point out examples of anti-Muslim bias in the media and the mind of the public, Reissman noted.

To learn about the project, visit [bit.ly/ditmas911](http://bit.ly/ditmas911).

NYSUT has compiled a list of resources for teaching about 9/11 and an archive of our coverage of the heroics of union members. Visit [nysut.org/911](http://nysut.org/911).



# Getting to know ... Diana Corzen



PROVIDED

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

I am a clinical nurse in an ambulatory school health center. I work with a variety of specialists from endocrinology to sports medicine. Each day is a different mix of the providers I work with and

Diana Corzen, an LPN at the NYU Student Health Center, is a vice president with the Union of Clerical, Administrative and Technical Staff at NYU. She was interviewed by Sharmaine Griffin, UCATS treasurer and a member of the NYSUT SRP Advisory Committee.

their individual set-ups and needs. It is challenging and every day is a learning experience, because medicine is never stagnant. I love meeting people and trying to impact their everyday lives.

## How did you get involved in the union?

I grew up in a union household and have always been in a union. Working at NYU was the first time I had ever encountered an open shop and I was surprised at how resistant some people were 24 years ago to becoming union members.

I can say with confidence, that being consistent, available to talk and to basically explain the facts to people, made it easier to have members join. Then

we negotiated and got a closed shop, and now it is more of educating members about their rights and how the contract works for all of us.

## Tell me how you make a difference.

I make a difference by showing up and speaking proudly about what UCATS has done for us at NYU. Being able to point out the improvements in our contracts after each bargaining session and being able to have open dialogue with a supervisor on what is or is not in the contract to protect the member helps to make the difference every day.

## What brings you joy outside of work?

I am a member of the New York City Medical Reserve Corps, which tries to fill in for staff and participate in community health and prevention clinics. I volunteered for contact tracing at NYU and I used to volunteer with the Mount Sinai Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention Program. Now my greatest joy is keeping my vegetable garden alive!

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# SRPs shares ideas, concerns

By Liza Frenette

liza.frenette@nysut.org

In Rhinebeck, the SRP local asks each member to do one thing a year.

“The executive team puts in a lot of hours. We say to them, ‘This is your unit. We can’t be a great team if we don’t all participate,’” said Stacy Stoliker, president of the Rhinebeck Association of Non-Instructional Employees.

Members can choose to deliver a union food bank donation, assist with a financial audit, help distribute the bimonthly newsletter, join a committee, help plan retiree sendoffs, attend a regional SRP conference or assemble goodie bags for SRP Appreciation Day.

The local also takes advantage of branding.

“The first Friday of every month we wear the ANIE T-shirt or button,” Stoliker said.

Coming off of a year like no other, leaders from School-Related



LESLIE FOTTRELL

From left, Rhinebeck ANIE members Tina Donohue, Stacey van den Thoon, James Chapman and president Stacy Stoliker meet with NYSUT 2<sup>nd</sup> VP Ron Gross.

Professional unions around the state are sharing concerns and ideas for growth during their first in-person visits with NYSUT Second Vice President Ron Gross.

“I’ve been waiting to do this since COVID-19 shut everything down,” said Gross, who was elected in May 2020. “Now I’m hitting the ground running.”

Many SRPs have had their jobs reconfigured to serve students during the pandemic. Paraprofessionals

learned new technology; bus drivers began carrying food instead of students to help families in need; custodians had to learn new sanitizing protocols.

“We’re speaking about issues as a result

of COVID-19, how it changed the work environment and how they got through this past year. Every one of the SRPs was impacted,” Gross said.

Gross has already visited SRP local leaders in Great Neck, Kenmore, Buffalo and Half Hollow Hills. In September he will be meeting with other SRP locals in Rochester, Central New York, Tarrytown, Nassau, Suffolk, the Southern Tier, Capital District and Western New York.

His ears will be tuned for how they

are making their unions stronger and better.

“What are the elements of successful SRP locals?” he asked. “How do we help locals attain a level of success? What kinds of training are needed?”

Gross is a proponent of activism, branding and communication and gave kudos to Rhinebeck’s plan to showcase their local year-round.

“You don’t want to have to break out your T-shirt because you’re in trouble,” Gross said. “Be proud. Represent your union in good times and in bad, at the supermarket and at school.”

## SAVE THE DATE



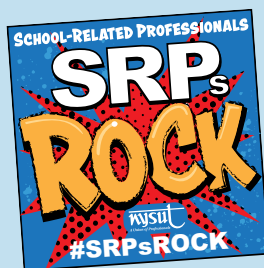
“Together again: SRP leaders creating a better tomorrow,” is the theme for the SRP Leadership Conference scheduled for Oct. 29–31.

# Start planning now for a Rockin’ Recognition

By Liza Frenette

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There’s Kevin Lawton, senior custodian and president of the Carthage School-Related Personnel; and teaching assistant Suzette Robbins, United Federation of Teachers. Hilda Monfredo, Western Sullivan SRPs, is a teacher aide and Karen McLean, Herricks TA/Clerical, Nurses, Therapists, is a payroll administrator. They are among NYSUT’s nearly 100,000 School-Related Professionals — the bedrock of



keeping schools and students on course — who will be celebrated Nov. 16 as part of New York State SRP Recognition Day.

In NYSUT speak, these workers are heralded with the shout out “SRPs Rock!”

Thanks to union advocacy, each year New York state honors them with an official School-Related Professionals Day. This year, especially, the SRPs deserve over-the-top spotlighting for their work during this pandemic.

“NYSUT SRPs have gone over and above to ensure their schools and workplaces are clean and sanitized and well maintained during this pandemic — and making sure students and their families were fed,” said Ron Gross, NYSUT second vice president. “They make sure students are supported, both in person and virtually, on various high-tech platforms. And through it all, our clerical staff members have ensured school employees continue to be paid and that student records are maintained. SRPs Rock!”

NYSUT encourages locals to start planning for SRP Recognition Day as early as possible. Celebration

ideas and materials are available for download at [nysut.org/srpday](https://nysut.org/srpday).

Local presidents can also order SRP Recognition Day posters and “SRPs Rock” pins.

Past celebrations have included schools decorating hallways; car magnets; goodie bags; specially crafted SRP cookies; and cards.

SRPs are represented at NYSUT by the SRP Advisory Committee, led by Cheryl Rockhill, president of the Brushton-Moira Support Staff Association.

Remember to share your photos with us via Facebook, Twitter and at [united@nysut.org](mailto:united@nysut.org).

# NY schools slated for \$9 billion from feds to support school reopening

By Sylvia Saunders

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**L**aFargeville is using federal relief funds to reduce K-2 class size. Liverpool is adding mental health support staff and expanding counseling clinics. Binghamton is extending its school day. Numerous districts are hiring more teachers to provide academic intervention services.

In all, New York schools are in line for \$9 billion in American Rescue Plan emergency relief funding to help schools reopen safely and meet the vast array of additional student needs

brought on by COVID-19.

The state's ARP plan approved by the U.S. Department of Education over the summer focuses on three priority areas for schools as they prepare to open this fall:

- addressing the academic impact of lost instructional time;
- implementing evidence-based interventions; and
- offering social-emotional support.

New York's plan specifically calls for investing in early learning by expanding existing programs and funding new full-day pre-kindergarten programs for 4-year-olds. In addition, it calls for Mental Health First

Aid training to help educators spot warning signs of mental illnesses and identify resources for support. The state has also substantially increased aid for the coming school year.

"Our message to lawmakers has been simple: Fund our students' future," said NYSUT President Andy Pallotta. "They delivered this year. Now we need school districts to put it to good use to help students thrive."

Districts were expected to work with staff, parents and community members to determine local needs and the best ways to use the federal relief funding. Local plans are due to be submitted to SED by Aug. 31.

In Baldwinsville, local union president Beth Chetney asked members to suggest ideas for providing enrichment, learning support and social-emotional learning. Over the summer, the Baldwinsville TA worked with district administration to create an application for proposals for before- and after-school experiences that will benefit students.

The ideas go beyond what is in the BTA contract for extracurricular clubs. Some examples include extended reading day; art therapy; robotics; intro to world language for elementary students; diversity, equity and inclusion; and walking/running clubs.

## State approves teacher apprenticeship program

By Sylvia Saunders

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**A**s New York grapples with a statewide teacher shortage, aspiring teachers will now have the opportunity to enter the profession through a new apprenticeship approach to initial state teacher certification. The program will also provide tuition assistance in what's believed to be a first-in-the-nation of offering through Classroom Academy, a partnership between NYSUT, Washington-Saratoga-Warren-Hamilton-Essex BOCES, local school districts and local colleges.

Under the first-ever New York State Apprenticeship program for teacher preparation through the state Department of Labor, SUNY students will now be eligible for \$5,000 in SUNY tuition assistance, in addition to the \$22,000 per year living

stipend they already receive through Classroom Academy. Program leaders have also applied for grant funding that, if awarded, would enable all participants to access additional tuition support.

"In numerous industries, an apprenticeship showcases to employers the commitment, hard work and ability of prospective job applicants, and education should be no different," said Colleen McDonald, Classroom Academy program coordinator. "This will also help districts hire highly qualified new teachers at a time of great need."

Launched in 2016 through a National Education Association grant, Classroom Academy offers teacher preparation students a paid residency placement with local school districts to provide on-the-job experience under the guidance of an expert lead teacher. Unlike

with traditional student-teacher placements, typically spanning 16 weeks in classrooms, Classroom Academy provides two full academic years of hands-on training to allow prospective teachers to better hit the ground running in their own classrooms once they are hired by a district.

"This innovative program is one more way to increase the pool of teachers to meet the shortage New York is facing," said NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene T. DiBrango. "What's more, by unlocking tuition assistance, in addition to the living stipend Classroom Academy already provides, we can reach prospective students who may otherwise face financial barriers that are too steep for them to achieve their dream of entering the profession."

DiBrango noted there is a pressing need to diversify the teaching



Zach Sharkey, who completed a residency in Schenectady, is headed to a teaching job in the Bronx.

workforce. While students of color are 56 percent of enrollment statewide, just 19 percent of the teachers are. The state Board of Regents released data in 2019 showing that more than 200 school districts statewide do not employ any teachers of color.

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# Wu-Tang Clan rapper surprises teacher with thank-you video

By Sylvia Saunders

sylvia.saunders@nysut.org

They call themselves the Depew-Tang Clan. Depew middle school teacher Joe Cena has found a creative way to combine two of his biggest passions: Getting kids to read — and the hip-hop group Wu-Tang Clan.

It started in a moment of desperation during pandemic teaching last year when Cena realized fewer than half of his eighth graders were completing independent reading requirements. To try to boost motivation, Cena created a Wu-Wall, where students earned a hallowed place every time they completed an assignment and online quiz.

He ordered a bunch of Wu-Tang magnets and stickers for special certificates, took photos of the students and used an online Wu-Tang name generator to give the kids special names. “As silly as it is, it definitely increased their motivation to read books,” Cena said.

A few weeks later, Cena took it a step further as he came up with a new rule for student participation. Rather than raising their hands, students needed to give him the Wu-Tang “W” sign. Like a secret handshake, it caught on immediately — throughout all his classes.

As part of a poetry unit, Cena turned to Wu-Tang lyrics to explain



PROVIDED



Artist Method Man, top, surprised Depew ELA teacher Joe Cena with a video shoutout after a student told him about the Wu-Tang Clan activities that made pandemic learning fun.



how rhyming can be creative and take different forms. He used a verse from the song “Triumph” with color-coded words on the video to show the intricacies of rhyme scheme and how rhyming doesn’t have to be at the end of a line.

Hoping to give Cena a big surprise, student Aleigha Sharpe secretly reached out to members of the legendary group to let them know how the Wu-Tang activities had made their class so much fun. “As everyone knows due to COVID-19, school hasn’t been the same,” Sharpe wrote. “But my English teacher has put so

much effort to make this year for his students the best and memorable.”

While Sharpe wasn’t sure if she’d get a response, she was shocked to get a personalized video message from Method Man himself.

“I want to shout out Depew-Tang Clan ... and also especially Joe Cena, AKA Excessive Gallant,” Method Man says. “I love what you are doing over there. You’re keeping learning fun and you’re including Wu-Tang. Salute to you, brother. Hats off!”

Cena couldn’t believe it when the kids presented him with the video message. “I knew something was up because they were recording me watching the video on my phone,” he said. “One of the students said, ‘I think he’s going to cry.’ And she was right! It was the coolest thing ever.”

When a local television station asked for permission to use the video, Sharpe wrote back to Method Man to

get his approval.

“It’s cool,” Method Man texted back. “As long as they make it about Joe and not me! I’m good with it.”

When classes resume this fall, there’s no doubt the Wu-Wall will be back. Cena is already planning more Wu-Tang inspired activities, including a random acts of kindness project.

After Cena wrote a thank-you message, Method Man said there were no thanks needed. “I love the work that you’re doing and hopefully this inspires other teachers to be as innovative ... our children are worth it!”

**Bo Henry at Three Forks**  
Written by  
Daniel Bradford  
**Recommended by:**

Charyl Wojtaszek, retired English teacher, Wappingers Congress of Teachers

**Suitable for:** Grades 8–11

**Why I chose it:** This novel is a window into the challenging and often violent American West of the 1870’s where young Bo is a newly appointed U.S. Marshal. Bo must make choices that will change his life and those of the people he encounters. As he sets out with warrants to hunt down, arrest and transport three criminals to court, Bo interrupts the lynching of a Black man. Bo’s tasks now include the rescue of his new partner’s wife from her kidnappers — with many complications.

**What I liked best:** This story portrays imperfect, diverse people who form relationships based upon shared values and respect. When challenged, they are able to compromise without betraying their beliefs and grow from their experiences.

**How teachers can use this book:** This story is ideal, particularly for reluctant readers who will find young Bo’s adventures and conflicts engaging. Discussions and activities about the history of the post-Civil War treatment of Black people, class system prejudices, and moral choices will provide many ways to stimulate students’ critical thinking.

**About the author:** Bradford’s military stories are included in the *Proud to Be* anthologies; the first edition won the Stars and Flags Book Award Gold Medal. For more, visit [authorandbradford.com](http://authorandbradford.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).



# Union outreach makes parents feel

A joint ad campaign of NYSUT and the NYS American Academy of Pediatrics is encouraging the return to full-time, in-person learning.

**By Ned Hoskin**  
ned.hoskin@nysut.org

**K**nocking on doors in the community this summer, it didn't take long for Rakia Hardaway to encounter a classic problem from last year's remote and hybrid learning in Rochester's city schools.

"At one of the first houses we visited, we came across a mom who was so happy to talk to us," the Rochester Teachers Association member said.

The parent had two students in school with very different needs. Last year, due to COVID-19 restrictions, she had to transfer one son, who could not attend remotely due to an

IEP and health issues, to a different school while his brother attended remotely at home.

She needed help, but the school administration couldn't answer her questions. The woman was worried and had no idea how to avoid similar confusion this year.

"We're sorry they weren't helpful," Hardaway told her. "She was so happy to meet someone who was willing to listen to her. We were able to recommend people for her to talk to" about her specific concerns. Hardaway even had a colleague in the building she promised to call and ask, "Hey, can you look out for this kid?"

No question, that makes a mom

feel better.

This summer, NYSUT mobilized ambassadors of its Member Organizing Institute to launch a community outreach campaign in cities across the state to assure parents that they have partners in local education unions and that sending their students back to in-person classrooms will be safe and effective.

Hardaway and other members of the RTA and the Rochester Association of Paraprofessionals are reaching out to families in the district as part of an initiative to build the NYSUT-backed Rochester Community Coalition to Save Our Schools.

"Most of the parents are

surprised," Hardaway said. "That was what made it so exciting for them. 'Wow we've never seen anyone do anything like this before.'"

"The families we talk to are very grateful," said Gia Vallone, another RTA member. "Some were apprehensive at first, but once we get comfortable talking with them, they are appreciative that their voice is being heard. Going forward, we hope to work together."

Many communities have struggled with more questions than answers as districts waited weeks for state Department of Health guidance that didn't come. Families are concerned.

"In urban and economically disadvantaged communities we have a

# Feel better about reopening



lot of people who worry about how to send their kids back safely,” said Laura Franz, president of the Albany Public School TA.

Canvassing neighborhoods with members of the TA and the Albany Public School United Employees, “we’re trying to find out, if students are not coming back to the classroom, why not?” she said. “We’re showing them what we’re doing to make it safe, and why we think it’s important for kids to be back.”

Again, it’s a new connection for parents, she said, as “APSTA and APSUE really are taking the lead in having these conversations.”

## Guidance

Franz said that when the state DOH finally declined to provide reopening guidance in August, it was a green light for districts to come up with local plans — following the CDC guidelines — and her union began to work with the administration. It would have been better to get that decision

a month earlier, but at least they could begin.

A week later, NYSUT applauded the State Education Department for stepping in and actually issuing statewide guidance — also adhering to the CDC recommendations — on reopening schools.

“As educators, we know that the best place for students to learn is in the classroom,” said NYSUT President Andy Pallotta. “We must do everything we can to ensure every student has access to full-time, in-person instruction this year.”

That includes ensuring schools are safe and healthy for students and the people who serve them. In response to the guidance, NYSUT reaffirmed its support for recommendations by public health experts and SED to implement universal masking, robust surveillance testing and other measures as part of a layered, holistic approach that ensures the health and safety of everyone in schools.

The NYSUT outreach project is

part of the American Federation of Teachers’ 30-state “Back to School for All” initiative to go door-to-door to engage families, students, educators and school staff to promote vaccines; return to full-time, in-person learning; and support students’ social, emotional and academic needs.

The initiative includes a statewide television ad that will air until mid-September. It is intended to highlight the social and emotional learning that can only happen in the classroom.

United University Professions, the NYSUT local representing academic and professional faculty on State University of New York campuses and health centers, is also running one of the AFT’s 60 outreach projects.

Working with parents, administrators and communities, the \$5 million “Back to School for All” program champions a return to five-days-a-week in-school instruction after 18

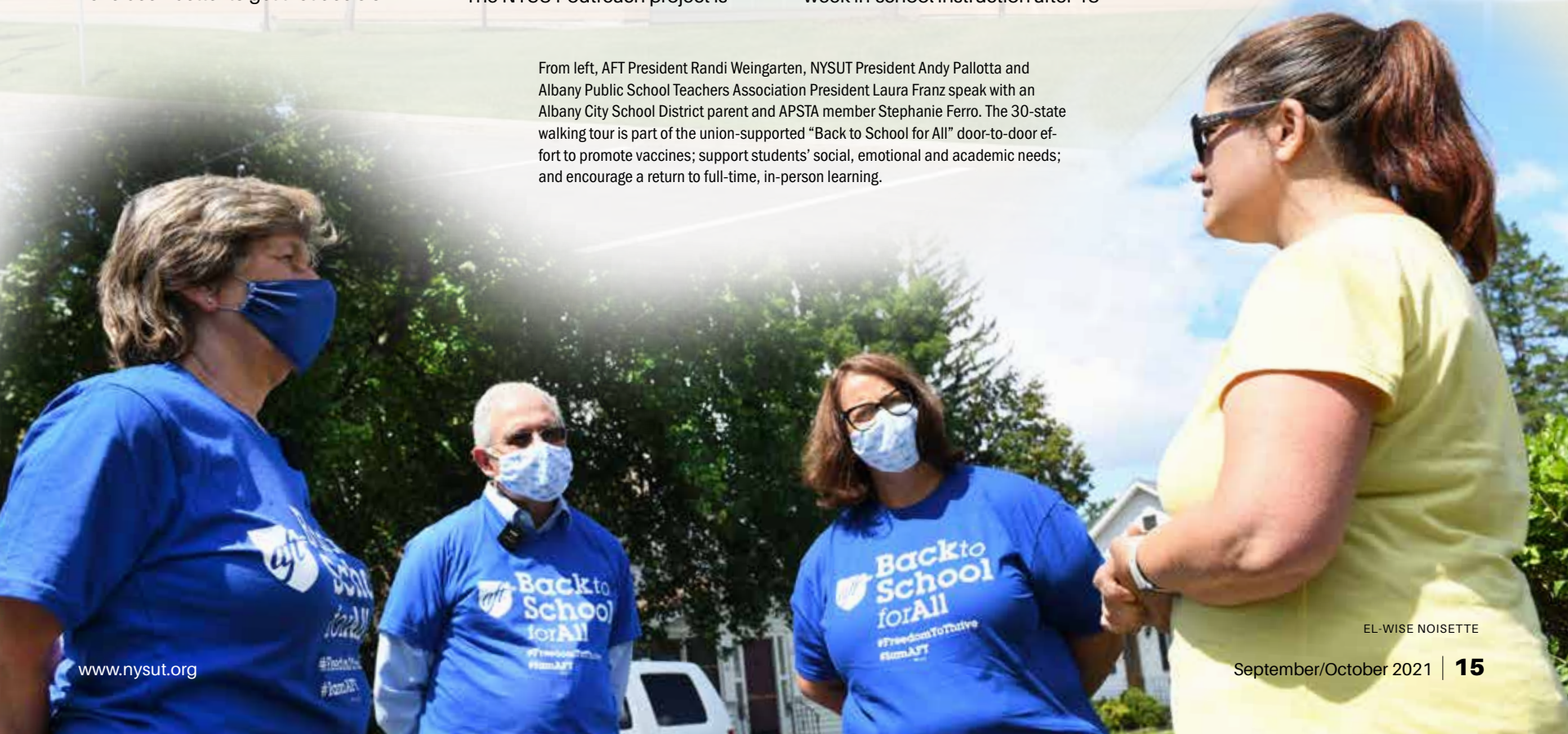
months of unprecedented turmoil and a mutating virus as demonstrated by the troubling surge in the delta variant.

“Schools are critical for our kids’ recovery,” said AFT President Randi Weingarten, “and this moment is an opportunity to fund our future fully and equitably, to create public schools where educators want to teach, parents want to send their kids, and kids can learn.”

Albany’s Franz expressed appreciation “to the statewide union and the AFT for recognizing this is a priority for all of us.

“Teachers want to see their students in classes,” she said. “That’s the gold standard.”

From left, AFT President Randi Weingarten, NYSUT President Andy Pallotta and Albany Public School Teachers Association President Laura Franz speak with an Albany City School District parent and APSTA member Stephanie Ferro. The 30-state walking tour is part of the union-supported “Back to School for All” door-to-door effort to promote vaccines; support students’ social, emotional and academic needs; and encourage a return to full-time, in-person learning.



# Program helps SRPs become teachers

By **Sylvia Saunders**  
sylvia.saunders@nysut.org

**L**ike many teaching assistants and teacher aides, Dedria Coleman long dreamed of becoming a teacher.

In her more than two decades with Buffalo Public Schools, many people encouraged her to follow her passion. She was a natural in the classroom, helping at-risk students understand their unique gifts and talents and pushing them to succeed. During her lunch hours, she hosted a literacy group for boys. As a union leader with the Buffalo Educational Support Team, she helped implement a mentor program for teaching assistants.

No question, Coleman, pictured at left, knew teaching was her true calling. Yet every time she thought about pursuing her dream, there were too many obstacles: family obligations, financial challenges, academic concerns and an already full schedule.

"I had the desire, but I just didn't know how I could do it," Coleman said.

But thanks to her union and a state-funded urban teacher pipeline program at Buffalo State College, Coleman is now on track to becoming a teacher. In June she was one of four BEST members who graduated with a bachelor's degree en route to achieving full teacher certification. Next, she's pursuing a master's degree and will start taking the state's teacher certification exams.

"It's going to be a long journey, but I know this is what I'm meant to do," Coleman said. "Hey, it took me more than 30 years to finish my bachelor's degree!"

Coleman credited BEST President Jo Ann Sweat with recognizing the need for a career ladder for paraprofessionals — and encouraging her to start the climb.

"We keep talking about 'Grow Your

Own' programs and having a more diverse work force," Sweat said. "Who better to pick from than the people who are already here, already strongly committed to our schools and our kids?"

Buffalo State launched the Urban Teacher Pipeline program for teaching assistants and aides three years ago, with legislative funds provided by Assembly Majority Leader Crystal Peoples-Stokes, D-Buffer. The funding allows undergraduate and graduate students to complete teacher education programs by taking two classes per semester at no cost. To support the needs of busy, nontraditional students, classes are conducted evenings, Saturdays and in both in-person and hybrid formats.

Students have regular contact with professors Hilary Lochte, Ph.D., and Sandra Washington-Copeland, Ph.D., who are both members of United University Professions at Buffalo State and serve as advisors and instructors in the program at the graduate and undergraduate level, respectively.

Professor Washington-Copeland "goes above and beyond for all of us," Coleman said. "She's like our mother hen, ensuring we have everything we need."

NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene T. DiBrango, who heads the union's Take a Look at Teaching initiative, said programs like Buffalo's are promising and should be expanded. "Some of the best teachers are former TA's and aides," DiBrango said. "They come with a wealth of experience, are invested in their community and serve as great role models for the students."

Such programs can also help diversify the state's teaching workforce, DiBrango noted. While students of color are 56 percent of enrollment statewide, just 19 percent of the teachers are. "We need to change that," DiBrango said.



DAN CAPPELLAZZO



# ELT courses offer flexibility, value to NYSUT members

By Kara Smith  
kara.smith@nysut.org

The drive from Vestal, NY, to Long Island is over four hours and the best route is a “shortcut” through Scranton, PA, and Hackensack, NJ. For Connie Kretz, Chenango Forks Teachers Association, the distance would have made taking a class with Patricia Burr-Peters, a NYSUT Education & Learning Trust instructor based in Freeport, Nassau County, impossible. But thanks to the many online learning opportunities available through ELT, she had “an amazing experience” and is well on her way to earning her Students With Disabilities certification through SUNY Empire State College.

“I never knew ELT existed until I emailed (NYSUT staffer Glenn Jeffers) about becoming certified in special education,” said Kretz, a second grade reading and math intervention teacher, who has since taken the four courses needed for her certification through ELT and plans to take the required tests for the credential in upcoming months.

“My instructor Trish Burr went above and beyond,” said Kretz. “I learned an incredible amount of information from her that I will carry with me from now on.”

Kretz enjoyed learning virtually with educators from across the state. “They had different perspectives and new ideas I could implement in my classroom,” she said.

Her summer class met via Zoom. Additional out-of-class assignments

used the Google Classroom platform and culminated with a final portfolio. A class Kretz attended during the school year lasted nine days, running 3:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. during the workweek and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

on the weekend. Other coursework included breakout discussion rooms, group projects and nightly reflection prompts.

While the convenience and quality of the courses was great, Kretz also appreciated the cost. “Because I’m a NYSUT member, I got a 40 percent tuition discount,” she explained. “I’ve been telling everyone about ELT.”

“We’re proud to offer this valuable service to our members,” said Jolene



Connie Kretz

DiBrango, NYSUT executive vice president. “Our coursework is taught by the most respected and knowledgeable educators throughout New York state; for more than 40 years, NYSUT ELT has offered an array of research-based, practical programs to help members hone their craft.”

ELT offers affordable, flexible and research-based programming, both onsite and online, for teachers, School-Related Professionals and members of the health care community. ELT coursework can be used for undergraduate, graduate and in-service credit.

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**A conversation with a man in pink:**  
**Joe Cantafio, president,**  
**West Seneca TA**

**You are a repeat “Real Men Wear Pink” ambassador. Why is this cause important to you?**

I do this in memory of Sonia

Basko — a revered teacher and respected union and social justice activist. Although I’m the one wearing the pink, we are #TeamSonia. Sadly, we just lost a friend and West Seneca teacher to cancer so this drive will be even more important.

**How much have you raised?**

Last year, I raised \$8,153. That brings my three-year total to \$72,092.

**Which of your pink outfits drew the most comments?**

My favorite shirt is my pink NYSUT golf shirt given to me by Mike Deely, Western New York regional staff director. I’m a pretty boring guy, but I post what I wear every day and do more than just wear pink socks. When I wear pink, everyone knows it.

**How has your perception about breast cancer changed since you started doing RMWP?**

You realize how important this cause is, especially after COVID-19. So much less money was raised. Although we are in a pandemic, cancer didn’t go on lock down. Metastatic breast cancer seems to be more prevalent. It’s amazing how many people have shared with me their experience dealing with this disease after seeing me as a RMWP ambassador.

**Your union colleagues truly support you in this endeavor. Are you surprised?**

It’s what unions do. We help those in need. I’m humbled and honored that so many of my brothers and sisters support this cause. My first two years, I was in the top 10 in the nation for fundraising. I was proudly the only union member.

Visit [bit.ly/teamsonia21](https://bit.ly/teamsonia21) to support Cantafio and #TeamSonia.



# Pink cloud coming: Making Strides is back in person

**By Liza Frenette**  
[liza.frenette@nysut.org](mailto:liza.frenette@nysut.org)

**S**oon, you will feel the ground vibrating from thousands of walkers who are Making Strides in the quest for a cure for cancer: the pink cloud is back after last year’s walks were silenced by the pandemic.

In 16 locations around the state, sneaker-clad walkers will be raising money throughout the month of October for research and support for cancer patients through the American Cancer Society’s Making Strides Against Breast Cancer walks. Additionally, ACS will host a live digital walk experience called “Making Strides on the Go” for anyone who is not comfortable being in person. The app will feature a music play list and survivor stories.

NYSUT is a flagship sponsor of Making Strides, and even when the walks were cancelled last year, devoted NYSUT members held creative drive-by and virtual events to raise more than \$273,000 for the cause, ACS reports.

In Making Strides of Westchester, for example, more than 2,500 participants drove through Manhattanville College, donned in pink and

donating to ACS.

“Since 2002, when NYSUT became a flagship sponsor of the statewide Making Strides event, our members have raised more than \$15 million for research and support,” said J. Philippe Abraham, NYSUT secretary-treasurer, whose office oversees the statewide union’s social justice initiatives. “That’s a fundraising record to be proud of and I’m honored to lead this important union effort.”

“We are so grateful for the ongoing support of NYSUT, especially during the pandemic,” said Donna Gulotta, vice president of regional communications and marketing for the ACS.

This year, Brooklyn and Jamestown walkers will be kicking off the fall event with an Oct. 10 walk; a host of regions from Albany to Queens have walks scheduled for Oct. 17; Binghamton, Syracuse and the Adirondacks will stage walks Oct. 24; and Eastern Long Island has a walk set up for Oct. 30.

“Out of caution, we are proceeding with a number of safety tweaks for each event, which may include scheduled waves of walkers and requirement of a vaccine before attending, etc.,” said Jeff Winters, ACS

director of development. “We’re adhering to state and local guidelines for all our events.”

Money raised provides information to cancer patients, and 33,310 of them sought resources in 2020. Through a new virtual program, 5,412 people were provided wigs. Transportation to chemotherapy and lodging for patients and families are other support services provided by ACS, although Winters said many patients paused their treatment last year due to COVID-19 concerns.

One primary purpose of the Making Strides effort is to raise money for research, and recipients have included faculty at both the State University of New York and City University of New York. The current list of funded researchers is at \$69 million in breast cancer specific research, Gulotta said.

ACS is also funding \$48.5 million in health equity and research to develop better strategies to eradicate cancer disparities, she said.

**Share your Strides stories**

Team NYSUT is only successful because of you. We want to see your pictures and hear your stories about what motivates you to walk. Email [united@nysut.org](mailto:united@nysut.org).



Visit the Team NYSUT page for more information about walks across the state and to join a team in your area, [nysut.org/joinmakingstrides](https://nysut.org/joinmakingstrides).

**Oct. 10:** Jamestown Community College, *Jamestown* • Coney Island Boardwalk, *Brooklyn*

**Oct. 16:** Outer Harbor, *Buffalo*

**Oct. 17:** Woodbury Common

Outlets, *Hudson Valley* • Midland Beach, *Staten Island* • Frontier Field, *Rochester* • Flushing Meadows, *Queens* • Orchard Beach, *Bronx*

• Washington Park, *Albany* •

Manhattanville College, *Purchase*

• Central Park, *Manhattan* • Jones Beach State Park, *Nassau County*

**Oct. 24:** Glens Falls City Park, *Glens Falls* • Recreation Park, *Binghamton* • Clinton Square, *Syracuse*

**Oct. 30:** Grangabel Park, *Riverhead, Suffolk County*

# Pandemic life:

## The transition to the next chapter

By Ani Shahinian

It's unclear what the future will bring with this pandemic, but we are in the midst of another transition that is causing many of us to experience anxiety and mixed emotions. It is not unusual to feel depressed and anxious, perhaps even surprised at ourselves for not "bouncing back" or rolling with the punches even when there is no end in sight.

It is important to pause and reflect on the ways the pandemic has had both negative and positive impacts on our lives as a way of moving forward.

As a result of having to go into survival mode with little or no warning, many of us experienced a sense of panic and confusion that spanned more than a year. Managing chronic stress with no time to process what is happening can challenge our resilience and mental health. For some of us, it exacerbated already existing issues with mental well-being.

Social media and news coverage of the coronavirus focus heavily on the number of deaths and chronic shortages in health care, forcing us to face our own mortality — especially if we lost family and friends.

The losses we experienced may have also included the loss of jobs, businesses, social connections and routines. Many of us are now dealing with feelings of grief and loss, especially if we did not have opportunity to grieve when the losses occurred.

The pandemic created a series of "forced choices" such as working from home and online, and some of us felt we just couldn't do enough or do our jobs as properly as we should.

The pandemic brought some unanticipated positives as well. Many realized that a slower pace to life is not so bad — and even important. Spending more time with family at home and experiencing more simple pleasures has helped some of us make changes and reflect on what should be our priorities.

Working from home has helped us to see that it may be an option we want to pursue in the future, whether it be with present employers or changing the way that we work over time. The pandemic forced us to experiment with at-home work.

Some of us felt that the stress that we previously experienced at work was reduced by not having to commute, avoiding "toxic" people and situations at work, having flexibility during the day and even saving money on clothing, gas and eating out.

### Tips for "Re-entry"

- It is normal to feel uncomfortable about re-entry. Make changes slowly so you don't overwhelm yourself and others. Be compassionate.

- Allow yourself time to grieve and to create rituals to acknowledge the losses we have experienced during the pandemic. This can include celebrating milestones that were missed such as birthdays, weddings, graduations and births. Allow yourself to reflect on what you can be grateful for amidst the losses.

- As you return to in-person work, be patient with yourself if you are finding it difficult. Plan a pleasurable activity at the end of the day and take short breaks during the day if you can.

- Try to clarify what feels most

comfortable for you in regards to socialization. Don't be afraid to express your preferences with individuals that you interact with or to limit your interactions initially to people that are closest to you.

If you and or your family are finding it difficult to cope, call NYSUT

Social Services at 518-732-6239. We can discuss resources available to you in your community.

Ani Shahinian works in the NYSUT Social Services department. Visit [nysut.org/socialservices](https://nysut.org/socialservices) for more info.

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## Celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month

NYSUT celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month with a new poster honoring Maria Hinojosa, the longtime host and executive producer of Latino USA, the longest running national Latino news and cultural public radio program. The Mexican-born Hinojosa is also the founder, president and CEO of Futuro Media Group, which produces the show.

In 2011, Hinojosa became the first Latina to anchor a Frontline report on PBS, "Lost in Detention," a



documentary exploring the issue of deportation and immigrant detention and abuse. She is also the executive producer of "America by the Numbers with Maria Hinojosa," which examines America's changing demographics and the

stories behind them.

Hinojosa has won numerous honors and awards for her work, including four Emmy Awards; an American Women in Radio and Television Gracie Award for Individual

Achievement; a Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award for Reporting on the Disadvantaged; and a Radio Award from the National Association of Hispanic Journalists. *HuffPost* named Hinojosa among the top 25 Latinos in Contemporary American Culture. In 2007, she was inducted into the "She Made It" Hall of Fame at the Paley Center for Media/Museum of Television and Radio.

The poster is available for download in English-language and Spanish-language versions; limited quantities are free for NYSUT members and leaders at the statewide union's online Publications Ordering Catalog, [nysut.org/publications](http://nysut.org/publications).

## Union endorses two for NYSTRS Board

Juliet Benaquisto has been

selected as the NYSUT-endorsed candidate to run alongside Eric Iberger for terms on the New York State Teachers' Retirement System Board of Trustees.

Benaquisto, the current president of the Schenectady Federation of Teachers and a NYSUT Board member representing ED 12, was selected to run for election to fill the remaining year of former TRS trustee Sheila Sullivan Buck's three-year term.

Iberger, president of the Bayport-Blue Point Teachers Association and a current TRS trustee, is seeking re-election to the board for a new three-year term.

Three teacher-members and a retired teacher serve on the 10-member TRS Board. The election will take place at the NYSTRS Annual Delegates Meeting on Oct. 29. The meeting will again be held in a virtual setting this year due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

To learn more about coordinating an onsite spine education and screening, please call 516-967-9034

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George V. Kakoulides, MD, FAANS, FACS  
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## Read Across America

National Education Association, one of NYSUT's national affiliates, has expanded its popular Read Across America program from one month to a yearlong program celebrating diversity and inclusion. Resources include book club basics, tips for guest readers, links for free hard copy and digital books and materials, and much more. NEA also includes tips to help you celebrate each month. The RAA 2021-22 calendar highlights a theme for each month, along with three featured books — one each for elementary, middle grade, and young adult readers. For more information, visit [nea.org/readacrossamerica](http://nea.org/readacrossamerica).



## Mental health resource

On Our Sleeves, a national movement to break stigmas around children's mental health has started the Million Classroom Project with a goal to provide a million classrooms with free mental health educational resources. Visit [onoursleeves.org](http://onoursleeves.org) for more information and to download *Supporting Kids in the Classroom*, a free mental health guide.

## NOTICE OF NOMINATION AND SPECIAL ELECTION

### NYSUT Board of Directors Election District 22

A vacancy exists on the NYSUT Board of Directors for Election District 22. The vacancy was created by the resignation of Nancy Sanders, effective Friday, Sept. 17, 2021.

In accordance with the NYSUT Constitution, Article IX, §§4(a) and 4(b): "Directors representing Election Districts shall be elected on a roll call vote by a majority of ballots cast by the representatives from their respective constituencies...[and in]...the event of a vacancy in the position of Election District Director, the President shall call a special election to elect a successor who shall serve for the remainder of the unexpired term."

The delegates and alternates of ED 22 are hereby notified that this vacancy will be filled by a Special Election Meeting to be held as follows:

**Date:** Monday, Oct. 25, 2021  
**Time:** 5 p.m.  
**Place:** Residence Inn  
 2012 Old Country Road  
 Riverhead, NY 11901

Pursuant to NYSUT Constitution, Article IX, §4(b) and the approved NYSUT Campaign and Election Procedures, NYSUT members who were reported as elected delegates to the 2021 Representative Assembly representing the members of ED 22 will be eligible to vote in this Special Election. A reported alternate delegate may vote in the absence of the delegate.

Nominations to fill this vacancy will be accepted in

accordance with the Campaign and Election Procedures approved by the NYSUT Board of Directors adopted for the 2020 Representative Assembly. In order to qualify as a candidate for this Special Election, a Nominating Petition must be fully completed and then signed by at least two (2) in-service members from ED 22.

The completed and signed Nominating Petitions must then be received by the NYSUT Elections Committee by the close of business (5 p.m.) on Friday, Oct. 8, 2021. Any member in good standing from a NYSUT local within ED 22 may be a candidate. **Only in-service members in good standing from ED 22 may sign a candidate's Nominating Petition.** Nominating Petitions are available by contacting the NYSUT Elections Committee at [elections@nysut.org](mailto:elections@nysut.org) or by contacting the NYSUT Office of the President at 800-342-9810.

At the Special Election Meeting, each candidate shall be given an opportunity to address the meeting for a period not to exceed three (3) minutes at a Candidates' Forum scheduled for 5 p.m. on Monday, Oct. 25, 2021, at the above location. The Special Election Meeting will remain in session until a successor director is elected. The number of votes to which a local is entitled will be evenly distributed among that local's delegates present and voting.

The candidate elected will serve as successor Election District Director immediately upon being elected at the Monday, Oct. 25, 2021 Special Election Meeting and continue to serve as the successor Director to the conclusion of the 2023 Representative Assembly.

# NYSUT Certification Guidance

State certification is complicated — but our union is here to help.

**NEXTGENERATION** 

Visit [NextGen.NYSUT.org/Certification](http://NextGen.NYSUT.org/Certification) for:

- Information for classroom teachers and TAs
- Answers to frequently asked questions
- Resources including a schedule of webinars for new NYSUT members

# Quotable



## AFL-CIO

The labor movement, the AFL-CIO and the nation lost a legend today. Rich Trumka devoted his life to working people, from his early days as president of the United Mine Workers of America to his unparalleled leadership as the voice of America's labor movement. (@AFLCIO)

## Kara McCormick-Lyons

"There has never been a better time for school leaders to use the seven most powerful words in education: What can I do to help you?" Rather than talk about grace, extend it. (@kmclyons)

## Becky Pringle

Our #SchoolsAreInfrastructure and so much is needed to update & upgrade them. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is a start. It provides much-needed support for rural schools, replaces lead pipes, and will connect many more students to high speed broadband internet. (@BeckyPringle)

## miriammeister

History classes are becoming lessons in fantasy fiction in too many states. #TeachTheTruth (@miriammeister)

## Kathy Hochul

Mr. Peter James, my 8th grade social studies teacher, taught me how government can better peoples' lives and inspired me to work on Capitol Hill someday. Teachers have such power to shape the futures of their students, like Mr. James did for me. He will be missed. (@LtGovHochulNY)



## QUESTIONS FOR...

# Amber Chandler

ELA middle school teacher, Frontier TA president

### 1. As students and teachers return to school this fall, we keep hearing how important it is to focus on SEL — or social-emotional learning. How do you define SEL?

Social-emotional learning occurs when educators deliberately establish a safe atmosphere where students are free to take risks, celebrate success and express emotions as a part of the learning process. SEL isn't a program or process, but rather it is a lens we can hold up to our classrooms, a way of looking at learning as a means to support the journey every person is on in life.

### 2. You led a summer workshop for new teachers on how to incorporate SEL in everyday activities. What does that look like in the classroom?

Students learn to work together in cooperative groups by talking about self-awareness, for example. Or, students can look at historical situations and discuss responsible decision-making. SEL is about taking the opportunity to help students as they are, with the skills they have, to work to become the best student they can be. The teacher's role is to facilitate important conversations that will help students grow. It is going to be crucial to work with students on their social skills because the isolation and whiplash changes that happened during the pandemic robbed them

of opportunities to hone those skills. I expect we'll be "pulling them out of their shell" to begin the year.

### 3. Family engagement is crucial, especially this year. What's your advice for connecting and partnering with families?

Begin with establishing relationships with students and families. Each fall I survey my families and my students and use that information to set the students up for success. I will connect by phone and email by the end of October. These "touches" help my families and students know that I care and that I am their advocate. Families will work with you when they know you are on their child's side.

### 4. With so much attention on "catching up" academically, is there enough time for SEL?

SEL can be implemented as a part of curriculum, not as another program or initiative. Self-awareness, self-management, respon-

sible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness can be woven into the lessons we teach, no matter our subject area. It is far more effective to make SEL a part of who we are and what we do than to make it "another thing" to squeeze in.

### 5. What are some of the additional benefits of SEL?

Research suggests, and my own experience affirms, incorporating SEL into the school day creates caring classrooms where students are comfortable taking academic risks, supporting each other, and engaging in their learning. SEL is inherently relationship based and learning is social, so allowing relationships to drive learning is a logical way to create powerful learning experiences for students. Behavior problems decrease as authentic, caring relationships are established.



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# NYSUT Legacy Fund launches

## Yonkers local recognizes longtime activists

By Kara Smith  
kara.smith@nysut.org

The NYSUT Legacy Fund — NYSUT’s newest way to help members celebrate members — officially launched this summer, and so far the response has been strong.

“As we celebrate the 30th anniversary of NYSUT retiree councils, the statewide union is proud to give members, locals and retirees a way to recognize the countless individuals whose selfless commitment and dedication keep NYSUT moving forward,” said Ron Gross, NYSUT second vice president, whose office coordinates retiree issues.

“With more than 600,000 members it’s impossible for NYSUT to

honor the work of every activist, but their hard work is what keeps our union strong.”

The Yonkers Federation of Teachers chose to honor late activists Ruth Dworkin and Maria Hadala through the fund. “Ruth was one of YFT’s and NYSUT’s founders, and she was instrumental in fighting for so many of the rights we enjoy today,” said Samantha Rosado-Ciriello, YFT president. A former YFT elementary vice president and staff director, Dworkin was the point person for a \$6 million job security arbitration, served as the longtime editor of *The Yonkers Teacher*, and was part of every YFT negotiating team while vice president.

She continued her union involvement in retirement, serving as first vice president and president of NYSUT Retiree Council 15-16 and, for 15 years, co-chairing the YFT Grievance Committee.

Hadala, a YFT building representative and physical education teacher at Enrico Fermi Elementary School, died of cancer as an in-service member and was an integral part of the

YFT community who made everyone feel welcome.

“She had a table set up in her gym office and she would greet people with coffee, and we could always count on her support at any union rally or action,” said Rosado-Ciriello, noting that Hadala was instrumental in signing up new union members. Known for her creativity in teaching, she often used gym periods to teach real-life skills, such as bike riding and roller blading, and coached the bowling team.

“The gym at her school was recently dedicated to her — it’s now known as the Maria Hadala Gymnasium,” said Rosado-Ciriello.

A portion of NYSUT Legacy Fund donations will expand support for NYSUT retirees, including retiree council grants and enhancements to NYSUT’s Retiree Services Program. To honor an activist (in-service or retired) from your local, chapter or retiree council with statewide union recognition, visit [nysut.org/legacyfund](https://nysut.org/legacyfund). For questions about the fund, contact Pat Puleo at [Pattip860@gmail.com](mailto:Pattip860@gmail.com).

### NYSUT Legacy Fund

Make a contribution in honor of a retiring, longtime local president. Commemorate the passing of a dedicated negotiations team member. Or mark an important professional milestone for a committee chair.

The NYSUT Legacy Fund recognizes honorees at three contribution levels. All donors receive a letter of thanks, on behalf of the statewide union, for their contribution.

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

**\$500** — Honorees receive a NYSUT Legacy Fund pin, keychain and coin; a certificate of recognition; and a mention in *NYSUT United* magazine.

**\$1,000** — Honorees receive a NYSUT Legacy Fund pin, keychain and coin; a certificate of recognition; a mention in *NYSUT United* magazine; and recognition at the annual NYSUT Representative Assembly.



### 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

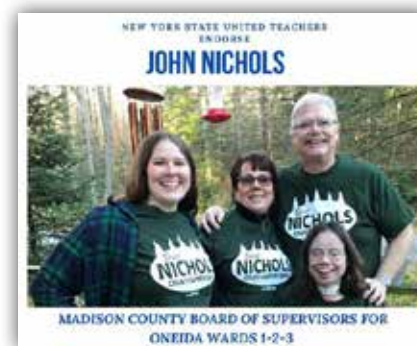
Joan Perrini, RC 20, 21, 22, 23  
631-273-8822

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



PHOTOS PROVIDED

The Suffern Retired Teachers Chapter honored the work of in-service educators throughout the pandemic by erecting signs outside each school district building. Pictured from left, Elaine Salerno; Phil Lima, SRTC-SEA chapter president; Maria Rossi; Joyce Nencetti; John Canty, Suffern Educators Association co-president; and Judy Veltidi.



John Nichols, RC 7, is a NYSUT-endorsed candidate running for the Madison County Board of Supervisors representing the City of Oneida, Wards 1-2-3.



Ellen Yousey, RC 9, made Biden/Harris pillows for her granddaughters to celebrate the historic election of Kamala Harris, the nation’s first female Vice President. “This shows they can grow up to do anything they want,” said Yousey.



# Endorsed benefits and services for NYSUT members

Each September, NYSUT Member Benefits offers an update about its role in the NYSUT organization, its endorsement process and the many endorsed benefits available to NYSUT members.

NYSUT created the Member Benefits Trust in 1983 to better leverage the unified buying power of its members and offer quality, competitive benefit programs. The Member Benefits Corporation and Catastrophe Major Medical Insurance Trust were created in 2008 and 2015, respectively, to add greater depth to the offerings available to members.

These entities are each overseen by a board of appointed trustees or directors who help to ensure these endorsed programs and services are meeting the needs of the NYSUT membership. The Member Benefits department falls under the leadership of NYSUT Secretary-Treasurer J. Philippe Abraham, chairperson of the NYSUT Member Benefits Trust, and is directed by Jeffrey Hartnett.

## What does my NYSUT membership offer in terms of benefits?

As a NYSUT in-service or retiree member, you can participate in many of the endorsed programs and services offered by Member Benefits. These categories cover everything from everyday savings to important insurance products, legal and financial programs, as well as student loan and general debt concerns.

When it comes to protecting NYSUT members and their families, Member Benefits endorses competitive insurance programs, such as auto, home and renters; term life and level term life; and disability, dental, vision and even pet insurance. Many of these programs can be purchased through payroll or pension deduction for greater convenience and savings

opportunities.

Whether you're just starting out in your career or retirement is around the corner, it's never too early or too late to create a sound

financial plan or adjust your existing plan. Member Benefits endorses a legal service plan and financial counseling program that can offer expert guidance and advice to assist NYSUT members. In addition, our new Financial Learning Center powered by Kiplinger's Personal Finance is a helpful resource that features numerous articles on a variety of financial topics.

Furthermore, Member Benefits offers a variety of other educational opportunities to NYSUT members, including financial counseling, legal education and home-buying workshops/webinars.

And if you ever have an issue or problem using a Member Benefits program, our staff take great pride in their ability to quickly assist NYSUT members with any concerns that may arise. Our members inform us regularly how grateful they are to have a trusted advocate ready to support them in any way possible.

## How can Member Benefits help me save on everyday purchases?

In 2020, Member Benefits launched its partnership with the nation's largest discount network, Access Development, to provide substantial savings to NYSUT members on daily purchases.

Through the MB Discounts & Deals program, NYSUT members can save up to 50 percent at more than 700,000 merchants nationwide



— including 21,000 New York state deals. Save on groceries and food delivery, restaurant dine-in or takeout, oil changes and vehicle maintenance,

clothing and shoes, and more. You can start by creating an account at [mbdeals.enjoymydeals.com](http://mbdeals.enjoymydeals.com). Members can even request to have their favorite merchants join the network so they can save money while supporting local businesses.

Approximately 12,000 NYSUT members have already registered for this program, saving almost \$530,000 through coupons and print-on-demand offers. In addition, more than 230 New York merchants have been added to the network in the past year along with more than 70 in discussions to join the network. Every dollar counts, and Member Benefits wants to do all we can to help in that regard.

## How are Member Benefits department operations funded?

Member Benefits receives funds to cover expenses from negotiated endorsement arrangements with many of its endorsed program providers (including, in some cases, a percentage of premium paid). No member dues dollars are used in conjunction with Member Benefits.

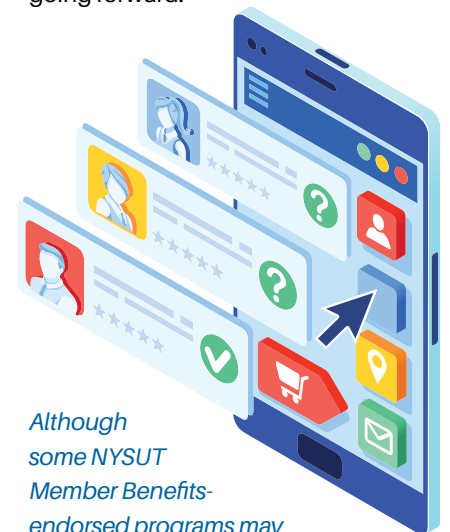
These funds are used solely to defray the costs of operating Member Benefits, including staff compensation, rent, office expenses, and the cost of retaining consultants, auditors and attorneys to advise the trustees, directors and staff. Member Benefits revenue is also used where appropriate to enhance programs, maintain low rates and help develop new

offerings for the NYSUT membership.

## How can I find out more about Member Benefits programs and what's new?

NYSUT members can learn more about the benefit and savings opportunities available to them by visiting [memberbenefits.nysut.org](http://memberbenefits.nysut.org) or by contacting us at 800-626-8101. Sign up for our MAP Alert email service for advance notice about new endorsed programs, updates to existing programs and special prize drawings.

Member Benefits is currently in the process of endorsing a new universal life insurance program that will include a long-term care component. You may have also seen the recent news that the Farmers Insurance Group acquired the MetLife Auto & Home business from MetLife as of April 2021. We are excited about these opportunities to provide even greater service to NYSUT members going forward.



*Although some NYSUT Member Benefits-endorsed programs may provide legal or financial advice, Member Benefits itself does not offer investment, legal or tax advice. Participants should consult their own investment, legal, financial and tax advisors to assist them with an evaluation of these voluntary benefit programs.*

# 100 years of pension security

**T**his year marks the 100th anniversary of the New York State and Local Employees' Retirement System (ERS). When ERS opened its doors in 1921, it set to work providing pension security for New York's public employees. Today, providing pension security is still the retirement system's core mission.

## The Early Days

Before ERS was established, more than half of the state public workforce didn't have a pension. In its first six months of operation, ERS registered 4,672 members and was responsible for paying roughly \$17,600 in annual benefits. In the coming years, new legislation would allow local governments to join ERS, making secure pensions available to many employees for the first time. The first city to join ERS was Newburgh, with its school district, in 1922. Other school districts became eligible to join ERS starting in 1935.

An important benefit protection was added to ERS pensions following the New York Constitutional Convention of 1938. Voters approved a new state constitution that prevents public pension benefits from being diminished or impaired. This guarantee took effect in 1940, and has been protecting the pension benefits of ERS members ever since.

In every issue, State Comptroller Thomas



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

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

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

## Today and Beyond

The New York State and Local Retirement System (which includes ERS as well as the New York State and Local Police and Fire Retirement System) continues its mission of helping to provide financial security in retirement. Our defined benefit retirement plans ensure that when you retire, you will receive a pension for the rest of your life.

There are more than one million members, retirees and beneficiaries in the retirement system today, and it is one of the strongest and best-funded retirement systems in the country. As of March 31, 2021, the Common Retirement Fund (the pool of money from which pensions are drawn) had an estimated value of \$254.8 billion.

As trustee of the fund, New York State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli guides ERS and the fund with its members in mind: "I will continue to manage our state's pension fund with prudence and a focus on stable, long-term results that ensure continued retirement security for our members for generations to come."

## NYSUT ERS consultants

Most NYSUT School-Related Professionals\* belong to the New York State and Local Employees' Retirement System (ERS). NYSUT ERS consultants are available to help SRP members navigate the retirement system. Consultants can answer questions, provide forms and help members contact the ERS. Contact any one of our consultants for assistance.

Trudi Davis • 914-592-4411  
[trudi.davis@nysut.org](mailto:trudi.davis@nysut.org)

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

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



# "Fall" into retirement

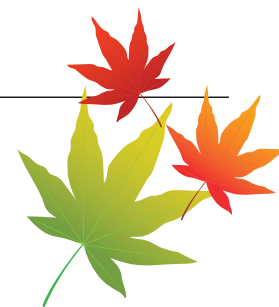
**Q:** I'm planning to retire at the end of the 2021-22 school year. What steps should I take this fall?

**A:** Congratulations on your impending retirement. The New York State Teachers' Retirement System publishes a useful guide outlining quarterly steps for your final year. Here's what you should do now:

- Review your contract — find out when you should notify your employer of your retirement date, and make an appointment with them to discuss health insurance coverage in retirement.
- If eligible, claim and purchase prior service credit for past New York state public employment or military service. For details, watch "PSI: Prior Service Investigation" at [nysut.org/Library/Videos/Member-Information](https://nysut.org/Library/Videos/Member-Information).
- NYSUT offers video versions of its PREP modules. Watch them at [nysut.org/Retirement-Planning/Pension-Retirement-Education-Program](https://nysut.org/Retirement-Planning/Pension-Retirement-Education-Program).
- Schedule a telephone or video benefits consultation with a NYSUT

representative to review the retirement process and get estimates for possible retirement dates. To schedule a consultation, call 800-348-7298, Ext. 6100.

- Read *Maximum or an Option: Choosing a Benefit Payment Right for You, Countdown to Retirement* and other useful publications at [nysut.org/Library/Publications/Nearing-Retirement](https://nysut.org/Library/Publications/Nearing-Retirement).
- Check your Benefit Profile. Is your service and salary information accurate? Ask your employer to send NYSUT revised information if you find mistakes.
- If you are eligible to receive Social Security benefits at the end of the school year, contact the Social Security Administration for information.
- Monitor pending New York state legislation — new laws, such as statewide retirement incentives, could affect your NYSUT benefits.
- Use the online MyNYSUT pension estimator to project your benefit, [nysut.org](https://nysut.org). You must have a MyNYSUT account to access this.
- Download the free NYSUT app, available through Google Play for android and the App Store for Apple products, for a variety of info, including a retirement countdown clock.
- Explore the retirees' page at [nysut.org/retirees](https://nysut.org/retirees).
- Watch "Retirement Countdown," "Your NYSUT Benefit Payment: Making the Choice That's Right for You," and other helpful videos at [nysut.org/Library/Videos/Member-Information](https://nysut.org/Library/Videos/Member-Information).



## 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)

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

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



## Did you know?

The New York State Teachers' Retirement System celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2021. Visit [nysut.org](https://nysut.org) for historical highlights and photos.



## Greece Teachers Association

The Greece TA, led by Brian Ebertz, is matching \$25 contributions to the New York State 529 College Savings Program for Greece kindergarten students. "It's a great way to get parents thinking about college and career opportunities, and saving," said Ebertz, who noted the Rochester-area local also put together an educational video on how to open an account.

Since 2016, the Greece Teachers Community Programs Fund has distributed more than \$1,000 in matching grants for college savings accounts. The local also supports graduating seniors. Since 1983, the GTA has awarded more than \$200,000 to students planning to major in education. More than 30 scholarship recipients have come back to teach in Greece schools.

## Taconic Hills locals fight food insecurity

Members of both the Taconic Hills Faculty Association and Taconic Hills Support Staff Association helped sort, bag and provide food in a massive July food drive.

"We've done food drives on our own to help local food banks, but never anything like this," said Ryan Kendrick, THFA lead negotiator and physical education teacher.

The local unions helped advertise the event on social media sites and then organized and packed up frozen ground beef, chicken, milk, cereal, fruit and

vegetables, yogurt, spaghetti sauce and pasta for people who drove to the site to pick up the needed food. Educators also delivered food to community members who lacked transportation.

"It was a spur of the moment decision, and we went with it," said Kendrick.

The food drive supplied about 450 bags of food. In addition to the two Taconic Hills locals, participants included the Capital District Area Labor Federation, Catholic Charities and the Regional Food Bank — a coalition which has hosted about 150 mass food distributions since the pandemic began.



Taconic Hills members host a food drive for needy families.

PROVIDED

## Wappingers Congress of Retired Teachers

The Wappingers CRT, led by President Susan Roger, donated hundreds of dollars toward literacy efforts throughout the community. Recipients included Literacy Connections of the Hudson Valley, the Poughkeepsie Branch of the American Association of University Women and the Blodgett Memorial Library.



### It's an honor

**Jim Areno**, Poughkeepsie Public School Teachers Association retiree, was inducted into the Dutchess County Baseball Hall of Fame for excellence in umpiring.

**Linda Townsend**, Port Byron TA, received the 2020 SUNY Oswego Alumni Association Community Service Award. She also recently received a Recognition Award from Sen. John Mannion, D-Geddes, for her work on the Cayuga County Purple Heart Project.

**Gregg Weatherby**, United University Professions/SUNY Cortland retiree, won the \$500 Aurora Poetry Chapbook Prize for his poem "Before We Forget."

**Quindell Williams**, Syracuse TA, received the 2020 SUNY Oswego Alumni Association GOLD Award recognizing alumni who have achieved career success and demonstrated significant volunteer service to their communities.

### In print

**Allen Ballard**, UUP/SUNY Albany retiree, has republished *Where I'm Bound: A Civil War Novel*. The historical fiction tells the story of the war from the viewpoint of a Black soldier. Visit [firststepspublishing.com](http://firststepspublishing.com).

**Chris Albrecht**, Brockport TA and 2018 New York State Teacher of the Year, has published *The Rediscovery of Hope and Purpose: Awakening the Human Spirit*. Visit [christopheralbrecht.com](http://christopheralbrecht.com).

**Denise Gelberg**, Ithaca TA retiree, has published *Lucky Girl: A Novel*. The book follows the life and

story of Irene Adelson, who wins the Nobel Prize for Medicine when she's nearly 90.

**Anthony Gero**, Auburn TA retiree, with illustrator Alan Archambault, has written and published *Black Soldiers of North America 1774-1954, a Sketchbook*.

The book features 73 color and black-and-white illustrations. For more information, contact [agero3@roadrunner.com](mailto:agero3@roadrunner.com).

Retired math teacher **Deborah S. Lambert**, United Federation of Teachers, has published *Insights into High School Math*, covering topics from algebra through calculus.

**Richard O'Connell**, a school counselor retiree and member of the Locust Valley School Employees Association, has published *Advice for Everyone on Motivating Students*, a book of anecdotes, reflections and concepts.

To order, register at [bookstore@Archwaypublishing.com](mailto:bookstore@Archwaypublishing.com).

**Ann Pinna**, Spackenkill TA retiree, has published a children's picture book. *Quarantined!* focuses on a little girl coping with COVID-19 and learning how to adapt to unexpected things in life.

**Patricia Prisk**, Capital Region BOCES retiree, has published *A Handwashing Story Told with Tiny Hands*. The illustrated, interactive children's book is geared toward pre-K and kindergarten teachers, as well as parents.

**Jim Sack**, Fonda-Fultonville TA retiree, has published *The Real Classroom: Tales and Lessons from School*. The book is a guide filled with stories, student experiences and lessons.

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

## Advance your career

### With NYSUT ELT:

- obtain advanced certificates & meet additional certification requirements
- increase student achievement
- collaborate with fellow educators across New York state — online or remote!

<https://elt.nysut.org/register/courses>

Your choice. Your professional learning.



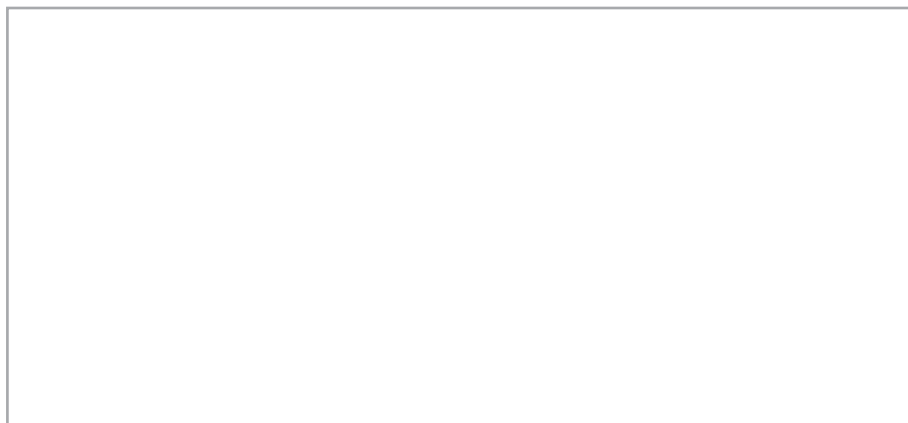
NYSUT members receive a 40% discount off tuition for graduate courses. ELT is now a CTLE provider and many courses are applicable for NYSED Certification.



Register:

<https://elt.nysut.org> • 800.528.6208

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



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Check out all your union membership has to offer!