

Member Newsletter Volume II, Issue 4 April 2018

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Message from the President

As the attacks on public education, public employee unions, and our profession continue, it is more important than ever for us to stick together. It isn't difficult to see the difference between teachers across the country that have done this versus those that have chosen the short-sighted route of going it alone. Diminished pension benefits, salaries, and health care coverage are just some of the results that occur when unions are weakened. More importantly, many have lost their collective voice. The voice we use not only to stand up for many of the benefits we enjoy, but the voice we can boldly use to stand up for our students. As we move through this historic time, I ask you to stand together and resist false slogans and gimmicks like the so called "right-to-work movement," that only promises to let you work for less. I have held meetings in all of our buildings, and the response has been overwhelmingly one of support and gratitude for what the STA has done and continues to do for each and every one of us. I am proud to say that we are on our way to 99% of STA members committed to sticking with our union. This has been both reassuring and reaffirming for the leadership of the STA that continues to work for each and every one of you. Thank you!

As you know, Lisa Cutten's loss left a huge void on the STA's leadership team. While I can attest to the fact that nobody could ever take Lisa's place, many of our colleagues have stepped up to help take on the massive amount of work that Lisa was responsible for. As a result, the STA's Executive Council made some unique decisions to make sure we could continue to serve your needs and interests without a hitch. Following the requirements of our constitution and by-laws, we elected Joe DiTucci as First Vice-President for the remainder of Lisa's term which ends in June of 2019. We will hold a general election to elect a permanent First Vice-President in May 2019. This will give us time to both train and mentor interested candidates. Stacy Lonardo is now serving on the STA's negotiating team as the elementary representative and is doing an outstanding job. Rob Allen agreed to join the STA's Local Action Project team to continue our work this summer and into the future. We will continue to develop internal capacity, increase solidarity and fidelity within the STA and establish strong and lasting relationships within the Spencerport community. We plan to continue our focus on these important pillars within the long-term strategic plan we have built to move the STA forward and into the future.

John Kozlowski, President

Contract Negotiations Update

As you know, our contract expires on June 30th, 2018. Your Professional Advancement Team (PAC) has been meeting since the Spring of 2017 reviewing surveys, looking at data, and discussing articles in our contract. During that time, we had the unfortunate loss of Lisa Cutten. While no one can replace Lisa, we have had the good fortune of having Stacy Lonardo join John Kozlowski, Steve Monks and myself on the negotiations team. As of March 19, we have met with the district for an initial meeting along with three full-day sessions. We have a number of other sessions scheduled this spring with the goal of having a successor agreement in place by the end of the school year.

If you get a chance, please thank the following members of your PAC: Danielle Blossome (Taylor), Sue Chatterton (Canal View), Ryan Ewanow (Bernabi), Stacy Lonardo (Munn), Doug Lennon (Cosgrove), and Jackie Lanpher (High School).

I want to thank all of you for the surveys you filled out, input you have provided, and general support that you have given us as we move through this process.

Joe DiTucci, PAC Chair



Campaign Without an End



Congratulations, Bernabi!



Across the state, locals are celebrating when they hit 100% membership, with 100% of the new union cards NYSUT has asked each of us to sign returned to NYSUT.

Here in Spencerport, Bernabi is the first building to have 100% of teachers sign their cards to say they are #StickingwiththeSTA. Cosgrove, Munn and Canal View are getting close to 100%, with building reps currently following up with those who were absent from the building meeting. As this newsletter issue wrapped up, the High School had just had its meeting, and Taylor's had not yet occurred because their original meeting had to be rescheduled due to the snow day. In our final issue of the year, June, we will see how many buildings have 100% commitment to the STA! Will we be 6 for 6 with 100% membership?

Follow NYSUT Vice-President Jolene DiBrango on Twitter or Facebook to keep up on which locals across New York hit 100% commitment to their union.

OPT-OUT 2018

The Spencerport Teachers Association has been a vocal participant in the Opt-Out movement since 2014, advocating for its members' rights as parents, when a petition began at Cosgrove criticizing the exam for being developmentally inappropriate, deliberately confusing, and downright useless for determining how to improve classroom instruction. This led to a standardized testing forum held at the Ogden Library in June 2014, which Randi Weingarten, president of the AFT, attended, and a rally and second forum in March 2015.

In September 2014, four Cosgrove teachers—Rob Allen, Carol Lennon, Claudia Montecalvo and Emmy Thevanesan—also filed a lawsuit against the gag-order on the 3-8 Math and ELA exams that prohibited educators from talking about any element of the exams, at any time. Their case was settled in December 2016 when SED agreed to release portions of each exam by June 1st of each year; once these portions were released, educators would be allowed to discuss them. This settlement was a compromise, as SED still holds most of the cards on exams that continually label the majority of 3rd through 8th graders across the state as failures: since SED controls which parts of the exams are released, they control which parts can be scrutinized.

A few weeks ago, Channel 10 ran a grossly misleading story claiming that “new federal rules could suddenly add thousands of failures to the test scores” (<http://www.whec.com/news/opt-out-tests-to-count-as-failing/4806824/>). We encourage the parents in our association to read two documents to understand how the new federal ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) regulations impact how opt-outs are calculated:

- a March 6th press release from the New York State Allies for Public Education (<https://www.nysape.org/nysape-pr-schools-not-penalized-for-opt-outs.html>)
- NYSUT's fact sheet on 2018 Opt-Outs (<https://www.nysut.org/resources/all-listing/research/fact-sheets/fact-sheet-opting-out-parents>).

NYSUT's fact sheet explains,

ESSA requires the state utilize a methodology for calculating student achievement that includes all continuously enrolled students, regardless of whether or not they took the test. Schools must report aggregate data for the schools that have student participation rates of less than 95 percent. Participation rates are reported for all accountability subgroups in all schools.

ESSA also makes it clear: it is up to states to determine how participation rates will factor into the state accountability system. SED has stated publically that they do not intend to identify schools for improvement if the schools have high academic achievement but low participation rates. SED will calculate student achievement using two different methodologies, one that includes all enrolled students to meet the requirement of the law and a second calculation based only on those students that participate in the State assessments. This second calculation will be used to differentiate schools with low participation rates from those with actual low achievement.

The press release from New York State Allies for Public Education explains,

In addition, the approved New York ESSA plan clearly states that the only schools that must develop a multi-tiered plan to raise participation rates are those whose low participation rates were determined to have resulted from school staff or district officials preventing or excluding students from taking the exams. Schools whose low participation rates resulted from students opting out based on their parents' choices will NOT be required to develop any such plan.

The STA Executive Council has discussed state testing and the Opt-Out movement continuously throughout the school year. We remain concerned about:

Receivership & Equity: The correlation between a district's socioeconomic status and its state exam scores cannot be denied, as study after study has proven that standardized test scores are most strongly correlated with parents' education levels and household income. Schools that do not perform well on state exams are placed on a list that ultimately ends with the school taken over by an outside entity, often a charter school; this is called receivership. We understand that no Spencerport schools will likely ever face receivership; however, as a union, we stand up for children all across the state, and we stand with our colleagues teaching in high-needs districts. The pressure to do well on high-stakes tests placed on the teachers and students in high-poverty districts is unjust, which is why we continually reiterate that we support the Opt-Out movement from a social justice standpoint. These exams should identify schools that need *more* resources and support, rather than label schools in need of punishment.

Narrowed Curriculum: We are approaching twenty years of national standardized testing in math and ELA, and the result has been the increase of instructional minutes in these two subjects, at a time when emerging cognitive research indisputably proves that children need art, music, physical education, recess, free play, as well as equal access to an actual science and social studies curriculum (content that more affluent children have a better chance of learning at home). To ensure equity, New York State allocates school districts textbook funds on a per-pupil allotment. In many districts, these funds are used to purchase high-quality literature and instructional materials. However, upon the implementation of the EngageNY Common Core Math & ELA curriculum modules, which have disproportionately been adopted by schools with high needs, SED allowed textbook funds to pay for the copying costs of the modules! Students in high-poverty districts should not have their teachers' scripted lessons paid for by the same funds that provide their peers in affluent districts with Caldecott- and Newbery-winning literature.

Screen Time: An increase in CBT (computer-based testing) inevitably means an increase in the amount of computer-based test prep. Test prep is not learning, and screen time in elementary classrooms is already a concern we hold, given that our youngest learners need physical movement for their bodies and brains to properly develop. A main reason pediatricians recommend screen time limits is not so much for what a child *is* doing in front a screen rather than what the child is *not* doing: she is sitting still and sitting silently. Movement and language are integral to a child's academic and cognitive development, which is why the STA advocates for increased recess and free play in the early grades.

Untimed Testing: In our own district, we have witnessed students who have tested well past two o'clock in the afternoon on exams that began at 8:00 AM. It does not matter that these students are rare or an anomaly, especially when our colleagues across the state report that in districts that face receivership,

students are pressured to spend the entire day on these exams, “giving it their very best.” This simply should not happen. It was irresponsible of SED to institute a “no time-limits” policy without collecting data on how many students “take advantage” of it, and for how long. The only parameters issued are that students who test into the afternoon are to have a supervised lunch ensuring that exam confidentiality is not breached.

Benchmarking: In 2014, Carol Burris—then an award-winning principal on Long Island, and now the Executive Director of the Network for Public Education—wrote an extremely important piece for the *Washington Post*’s “Answer Sheet” column in which she explained the complicated way that cut scores are set to determine the levels (1, 2, 3 and 4) for the 3-8 Math & ELA Common Core exams. This methodology is still in use, and it explains why 60-70% of 3rd through 8th graders “fail” these exams with a Level 2, despite that high school graduation rates across the state are literally at an all-time high. You may read her piece here: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2014/04/29/the-scary-way-common-core-test-cut-scores-are-selected/?utm_term=.873f8bffe262.

To summarize, when the Common Core and its 3-8 exams were rolled out, then-Commissioner John B. King asked the College Board to “replicate research” to determine which PSAT and SAT scores predict success after a student’s first year attending a four-year college. (Nevermind that a student’s SAT scores are not the strongest, or even a reliable, predictor of college success; a rigorous high school course load is. Nevermind that many successful adults do not enter a four-year college immediately after high school graduation: some attend two-year colleges, some serve in the military, and some immediately enter the workforce.)

The study conducted by the College Board determined that earning a B- in a first-year college English course is correlated with a 75% probability of four-year college success and that earning a C+ or higher in a first-year college Math course is correlated with a 60% probability of four-year college success. (Important questions Burris raises: are students taking Algebra, Calculus or Statistics in their first year? Why 60% for math and 75% for English? Her article discusses possible, and plausible, answers to these questions.)

Next, the College Board study determined the average SAT scores of students earning these college grades, and then determined the percentage of students who earned these scores. Incredibly, these percentages lined up almost perfectly with the cut scores set for the Common Core exams in grades 3-8, which is why an incredible 70% of students “failed” these exams in 2013. Dr. Maria Baldassarre-Hopkins, an Assistant Professor of Language, Literacy and Technology at Nazareth College, was part of this first cut-score committee for the Common Core exams and wrote about it in great detail here: <http://theline.edublogs.org/2013/08/08/new-york-state-cut-scores-from-the-inside/>.

Baldassarre-Hopkins’ analysis is another noteworthy piece to read on this important subject.

The following position statement, which outlines additional concerns about the exams, was adopted by the STA Executive Council in March. We also emphasize to the parents in our association that there is no such thing as an “opt-out” deadline, regardless of what information you may have received. While it is helpful to give your child’s district advance notice so that they may plan room supervisions, you may opt your child out up to the first day of each exam.

Spencerport Teachers' Association 2018 Opt-Out Position Statement

The Spencerport Teachers' Association supports a parent's right to opt his/her child out of the 3-8 Common Core tests. We stand by the assertions we have made since 2014.

- The tests are developmentally inappropriate, and they have never been independently tested for their validity or reliability.
- The tests are too long; while we acknowledge the progress of shortening each test from three days to two, we remain concerned with the lack of time limits. We believe it is educational malpractice to ask children to take an exam for an unlimited amount of time.
- The tests are a waste of taxpayer money, costing millions of dollars to produce, administer, and score, while providing minimal data to classroom teachers, and only once these students have moved on to a new grade.
- The tests shame and blame the students and teachers in our state's most diverse communities, and they are a "weapon of choice" for those who seek to privatize public education. Schools with low scores can face receivership, which can result in being taken over by a charter school. These tests do nothing to address New York State's segregated schools and inequitable funding.
- The test results are manipulated to fit a political narrative. They are scored in May, but the State Education Department (SED) does not release cut scores for months. The test results have repeatedly deemed 60-70% of 3rd—8th grade students as "failures," yet when these same students enter high school, their Regents exam passing rates are much higher. Furthermore, state-wide high school graduation rates are at an all-time high.
- The tests have led to a narrowed and unbalanced curriculum in too many classrooms across the state; the unfair reality for too many children is, "If it's not tested, it's not taught," resulting in hours of math and ELA instruction per day, and only minutes per day—or week—for other important subjects. Teachers need autonomy in their lesson planning to allow students to reach their full potential.
- The tests are secretive: teachers are prohibited from speaking about any part of the exam unless that part has been publicly released, allowing SED to keep questionable content from scrutiny.
- These tests are part of a disastrous attempt at "reform" in New York State that has, among many other unfortunate consequences, resulted in a severe teacher shortage that will undoubtedly affect children in poor communities first.
- Commissioner Elia thus far refuses to permanently decouple these tests from teacher evaluations; the STA stands with NYSUT in demanding an end to APPR and a return to local control. No two districts, no two schools, no two teachers, and no two students are alike, and SED's one-size-fits-all approach to teacher evaluation has failed teachers, students, and families.

In conclusion, the STA takes the position that after years of bad policy and poor exams, the onus is on the SED to prove that the exams are valid, reliable, and developmentally appropriate. SED must also take action to ensure that students across the state are not subjected to a "test-prep" curriculum that over-emphasizes ELA and math, at the expense of a well-rounded education. Children need music, art, physical education, social studies, science, recess and dramatic play to develop properly, grow, and thrive.

We are thrilled to share this incredibly informative interview with Greg Cruvey, a teacher and unionist who participated in the historic West Virginia teacher strike. Gretchen Breon, the STA's Social Media Coordinator, met him through the West Virginia BATS Facebook page and connected us for this interview. As John wrote in his President's Message, we need to pay close attention to what happens with public education in other states.

STA Feature Interview: Greg Cruvey on the West Virginia Teachers Strike

Greg Cruvey is a West Virginia middle school social studies teacher. He has a variety of certifications and has worked at every grade level. Greg is a union activist who serves as the building rep at his school; he was local president of the AFT in McDowell County for five years. He moderates the West Virginia page for the Badass Teachers Association. Greg is a career changer who, at the age of 57, has 14 years in the public school classroom. He worked previously in higher education and in journalism. He spent ten years after college working overseas with a volunteer service organization (a Christian mission group). He has a BA in psychology, an MS in education from Marshall University, a certificate in educational leadership, and a graduate diploma in general linguistics from the Australian National University. He has lived on four continents. Greg kindly agreed to be interviewed about the historic West Virginia teachers strike, which took place from February 22nd to March 6th, 2018.

STA: Can you please start by giving us some background on the strike?

Greg: There are many factors that led up to the strike.

One, the frustration level among rank and file teachers. Several years with no raises. Three or four years ago, the GOP took over the state legislature, and we have been having to constantly beat back bills meant to bust unions and undermine public education. This cycle, the bills that got some traction included a bill to end the use of seniority as the primary tool for determining who gets an RIF letter; a bill to “protect” our paychecks from having our union dues withheld from them; a bill to throw state union presidents out of the teacher retirement system; and three separate charter school bills. West Virginia is a charter school-free zone.

STA: Pardon me for jumping in, but I want to clarify this first reason. An RIF letter is a "Reduction-in-Force" letter—in New York, that means layoffs in a "last hired, first hired" method based on seniority. So, the West Virginia legislature, which swung to the right politically a few years ago, introduced bills this cycle that essentially eliminated seniority and "protected" workers from the big, bad union by saying schools could not automatically deduct dues from paychecks? That's not a bill for workers; that's a bill to break unions, correct?

Greg: Correct. The idea was to make us regularly restate our desire to have dues withheld. The goal was to increase the number of people who allowed their dues to lapse, thus reducing union membership.

Two, our Governor's State of the State address was a tipping point. A year ago, Jim Justice brought in the legislature's budget on a platter under a silver cloche, and when he lifted the cloche, it was revealed that he'd covered the pages of the budget with a steaming pile of bull feces. This year, he brought in cloche-covered plates for each legislative leader, and removing the cloche, revealed chocolate Hershey kisses and an 8-track tape of “Happy Days.” He kept using the word “miracle” to describe the state's financial condition. But when union leaders went to him and asked for a significant pay increase and a fix for our deteriorating insurance program, we were basically told to get back in line, and that maybe next year, if the miracle continued, there would be money for that.

STA: Begging your pardon for another interruption, but for a moment, I thought you were speaking in metaphors. But then I Googled... A year ago, in April 2017, the Governor of West Virginia, Jim Justice, presented the budget on a silver plate with actual bovine feces sitting on top of it. Please continue.

A year ago, in April 2017, the Governor of West Virginia, Jim Justice, presented the budget on a silver plate with actual bovine feces sitting on top of it.

Greg: Announcements began to flow out of our health insurance company. PEIA (the Public Employees Insurance Agency) offers coverage to 20,000 teachers and 13,000 service people. But it is available to all government employees in the state, and about 240,000 people in West Virginia get their health insurance through PEIA. That's about one out of every seven West Virginians. PEIA began looking at several changes.

First, significant premium increases – perhaps as much as \$150 to \$250 per month.

Second, new ways of calculating premiums. Premiums are based in part on income, and the agency wanted to begin basing it on household income instead of on the salary of the teacher who held the policy.

Third, an intrusive wellness program that required teachers to download an app to their private electronic device, asked teachers to accumulate an increasing number of “points” each year, and offered “reward cards” that most teachers deemed insulting (if you work out every day for a month, we’ll give you an Amazon gift card!). The program was “voluntary,” which to them meant that if you chose not to participate, they would choose to increase your premiums another \$25 a month and raise your deductible \$500 per year.

STA: That's a lot of factors! Could you please also touch on teacher salaries? I read in one article that an 18-year veteran teacher makes about \$40,000 per year. That's a first-year teacher's salary in our part of New York State.

Greg: West Virginia's statewide minimum pay scale is broken into categories that incentivize graduate work. A teacher with 15 hours of graduate work after their BA is paid on a different scale than a teacher with no graduate work. A teacher with a masters is paid still more, and it goes on. Yes, a teacher who never takes a for-credit graduate class will work 20+ years before they break the state average of \$46,000 or so, and those people top out at under \$54,000 with 35 years in the system. My county supplements that state's minimum salary scale from a levy, and with my masters +45 additional hours, I broke the state average at 12 years and could top out at about \$60,000 if I work 35 years. Since I'm a 57-year-old career changer, I'd have to work till I was about 80 to do that. Here is a link to West Virginia teacher salary schedules: [https://wvde.state.wv.us/finance/files/Data/2016-17/Professional%20Salary%20Schedules%20\(Summary\)%2017.pdf](https://wvde.state.wv.us/finance/files/Data/2016-17/Professional%20Salary%20Schedules%20(Summary)%2017.pdf).

STA: Thank you...It is so important for all of us to know what teacher compensation looks like state to state. Now, after explaining all of this background, how did the events of going on strike unfold?

Greg: The PEIA announcements regarding insurance changes may have been as much as surprise to the Governor Justice's Administration as they were to teachers. PEIA is an independent agency. Teachers began holding county-level meetings to discuss what to do about the situation, and four of the state's Southern Coalfield counties (Logan, McDowell, Mingo, and Wyoming counties) voted to hold a one-day wildcat walkout. That occurred on February 2nd. And ironically, it turned out most of the participating school systems would have been closed anyway because we got a snow storm that day. But perhaps a couple of thousand teachers from those counties and from counties that the weather closed down went to the Capitol and lobbied lawmakers despite the bad weather.

There was skepticism about whether a one-day walkout would accomplish anything. But it seemed to have opened up some sort of flood gate. People in the Capitol evidently viewed it as a little startling. Our union’s executive board decided to take an authorization vote to give state leaders the authority to call a statewide action. We opened a window for a secret ballot at the school level. As a building rep for the American Federation of Teachers, I spent three days that week collecting votes from teachers and staff, getting up with the night custodian to get his vote, catching bus drivers in the parking lot, etc. Our two administrators cast ballots. Everyone voted, regardless of union membership, and I counted the ballots together with the West Virginia Education Association’s building rep. We sent the results to our county presidents, and the local presidents of both unions from all 55 counties met at the Convention Center in Flatwoods, West Virginia, on Saturday, February 10th to discuss the results. The hope was that we would see a 70% yes vote in each county. They tell me we got that margin in 52 of the 55 counties. For the sake of solidarity, I suspect, no one ever revealed which three counties didn’t meet the threshold...

The hope was that we would see a 70% yes vote in each county. They tell me we got that margin in 52 of the 55 counties. For the sake of solidarity, I suspect, no one ever revealed which three counties didn’t meet the threshold...

On Friday, February 9th, while the votes were still being counted, seven or eight more counties held a one-day walkout, and a larger crowd showed up at the capitol. On Saturday, February 17th, there was a rally on the Capitol steps that I think about eight thousand people attended. Union leaders declared that a work stoppage would begin on Thursday, February 22. That gave Governor Justice four days to negotiate a deal and avoid the strike. Instead, he held town hall meetings across the state to persuade teachers not to support this action by talking trash about us and calling us names. If you watch footage of the strike, you see teachers with rabbit ears on their heads in some videos and pictures because at one meeting, the governor called us “dumb bunnies.”

STA: I also read that a West Virginia lawmaker said that teachers needed to understand that the days of free government handouts were over. So, to some lawmakers, a salary is a handout. I suppose teachers should just work for free? Please continue.

Greg: On February 26th, union leaders held another rally on the Capitol steps under the UMWA tent. The state union’s leaders all called for the governor and legislative leaders to sit down at the table with us. The United Mine Workers of America President, Cecil Roberts, spoke—some might say preached. My YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLwo20JgpEE&t=834s>) contains video of those speeches and events. Cecil Roberts and the United Mine Workers of America led the 1990 Pittston Coal Strike that saw 40,000 miners descend on Charleston. This is probably the most significant strike since that day – though I’m hoping the teachers of Oklahoma will outdo us soon.

The governor’s response was firm. He said that he refused to negotiate until after teachers returned to the classroom. Then the next day, however, he sat down with union leaders, and by the end of the day, February 27th, a tentative deal was reached.

Wednesday, February 28th, was among the most important single days in the strike. It was designated as a “cooling off” day. Instead, it became a day of turmoil and emotion. The crowd at the Capitol became bigger. Many were unhappy that union leaders had struck a deal – in part because the details of the deal were not well understood. It also became clear that legislative leaders might not be willing to bend to Governor Justice’s will so quickly. The cooling off period gave teachers in the 55 counties a day to determine whether to go back to the classroom or stay out until both chambers of the legislature passed the deal into law. In all 55 counties, teachers decided to stay out. It proved to be a wise decision, and leaders in the Senate refused to comply with the agreement.

On Friday March 2nd, with the strike in its 7th day and national attention now focused on the state, the President of the WV Senate, Mitch Carmichael, invited county school superintendents to come to the Capitol to meet with him. Forty-five of the fifty-five supers showed up for the noon meeting. Carmichael showed up for the meeting a few minutes before 4pm, leaving superintendents to sit and stew for four hours in a room, along with the waiting press. Superintendents played an important role in the strike. I'll talk about that role in a minute. Carmichael asked superintendents to get their people back to work; superintendents said they supported the strike, unanimously. Conversation lasted about half an hour, and I think you can watch archived footage of it on WSAZ's Facebook page. Superintendents told Carmichael that they thought employees would go back to work immediately if the Senate would vote to approve the 5% pay raise that governor had agreed to and the House had passed 98-1. The next day, the Senate passed a 4% pay raise. While it was expanded to include all state employees, it was viewed as a slight to teachers. Crowds just got bigger. And the Senate made legislative mistakes on Saturday night in the passage of the 4% pay bill; it began to be called the "Saturday night massacre" because Senate leaders murdered so many Senate rules.

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On Monday, March 5th, teachers organized several prayer events at the Capitol. I have no idea what role the unions actually played in facilitating these events, but they certainly didn't try to stop it. It may well have been the largest one-day crowd during the strike. The fire marshal shut the building down at one point because it had reached capacity. At 2:00 PM that day, several thousand people held hands outside and formed a circle around the entire building to pray. Tuesday morning, we had a deal, and by 1:00 PM, the Governor had signed a 5% pay raise for ALL state employees. Teachers went back to work the next day.

STA: Wow! So a 5% increase in pay... Is that for one year? For several years? What about the other factors, such as the healthcare premiums?

Greg: That's permanent. Pay goes up 5% of an average teacher's salary, or \$2020, for all teachers. Now, what we needed was a 20% raise to be on a par with surrounding states, so I hope we'll be back to the well next year for another 5%, or 10%...

STA: Teachers in Oklahoma may strike as early as April 2nd. There is also talk of teachers in Kentucky striking as well. What can you share about West Virginia's strike with other teachers around the country?

Greg: First and foremost, the conditions were right. Educators were unhappy enough to take a risk and do something, to participate in collective action.

Two, there was a great deal of solidarity. The state's three competing education unions - the AFT-WV, the WVEA, and the West Virginia State Service Personnel Association (WVSSPA) – worked together, held hands in public, and spoke from the same podium.

Three, county union presidents opened dialogues with county superintendents early.

Four, we had the good will of the community. At my school, the local hardware store sent drinks and snacks down for teachers working informational pickets at the closed school almost every day.

Five, member participation was high. We might not have succeeded if we hadn't been able to get five or six thousand school employees chanting and lobbying inside the Capitol, day after day, and getting ten thousand plus to turn out for the rallies on February 17th and 26th.

Six, superintendents cancelled school all 9 days of the strike in all 55 counties. If this had not happened, we would have had to stage actual picket lines and watched to see who the “scabs” in our school were. I am a career-changer who began teaching in 2004, 14 years after the 1990 strike. And despite that length of time, my mentor during my first year made sure I knew who it was in my building that had crossed the picket line in 1990. The support of superintendents meant that the strike never got nasty. It also rearranged the traditional labor vs. management model and engendered a lot of good will.

I am a career-changer who began teaching in 2004, 14 years after the 1990 strike. And despite that length of time, my mentor during my first year made sure I knew who it was in my building that had crossed the picket line in 1990.

Seven, I don’t know how, but we managed to avoid legal action being filed against us. The idea of someone filing an injunction began to spread in rumors early. No one ever did. I’m sure that behind the scenes activity by union leaders played some role in that.

Eight, social media played a role that is difficult to define, but a secret Facebook group for state employees was started, and it now has 24,000+ members.

Nine, national union leaders showed up and helped focus press attention on us. Randi Weingarten (President of AFT) was there on three occasions, I think, over the 9 days. She stood a picket line at a school outside the Capitol and was in the governor’s office the day we broke the Senate. Lily Eskelsen Garcia (President of NEA) was also there at the Capitol at least twice.

Ten, the role of experienced, competent state union presidents and staff cannot be quantified. But it was indispensable. Without Christine Campbell (president of the AFT-WV) AND her staff, without WVEA President Dale Lee, without WVSSPA Executive Director Joe White, this strike would have been a failure for reasons that we will probably never be aware of.

... the role of experienced, competent state union presidents and staff cannot be quantified. But it was indispensable.

STA: Greg, congratulations to you and all of the educators in West Virginia. Your experiences serve as a warning and an inspiration to teachers across the country, depending on what conditions are like in each particular state. Here in New York, we have to stay vigilant because we can learn so much from what teachers in other states are fighting against. We cannot thank you enough for the time you spent sharing this information with us. We will be closely following what happens in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Kentucky, and everywhere else public education is under attack.

Here in New York, we can learn so much from what teachers in other states are fighting against. A special shout-out to Gretchen Breon, the STA’s Social Media Coordinator, who is in touch with so many educators across the country, allowing our association to remain vigilant and informed. She put us in contact with Greg literally five minutes after the request was made.



In the last issue, a request was made for teachers to consider writing about what being in the union means to them. One of our members forwarded this request to Pete Randazzo, who was President of the STA in the 1980s. Pete emailed this fantastic article! Thank you very much, Pete! Currently, Pete is a NYSUT Retiree Services Consultant.

ARE UNIONS NECESSARY?

By Peter Randazzo, Spencerport Retiree and Past STA President

It was the start of the 1982-83 school year, and I had been president of the STA for about a year. I had, however, been Vice President, Grievance Chair and Negotiations Chair for the previous five years. So, I had some idea of the politics of the district.

School started for teachers on the Tuesday after Labor Day, as usual, and we sat in the auditorium to listen to various announcements and to hear the “sermon of the year” from the Superintendent of Schools. That superintendent, by the way, did not have the courtesy to inform me of what was coming, even though he and I met several times that summer. So then the big announcement was made: the district was implementing a new policy of reporting teacher absences. We no longer had the convenience of calling the Substitute Calling Service, and we now had to call our building principal to report an absence. That principal would then relay the message to the calling service.

The reason for this new policy, we were told, was that it was felt that teachers were taking too many sick days, often for silly, invalid reasons. This new policy was to somehow intimidate the teacher who might not take off that day if he/she had to tell the boss. We were told that more details would be coming in the various building meetings later that morning.

At our respective building meetings, the bigger bomb was dropped. It seems that the principals didn’t like the new policy any more that we did, and they concocted their own twist on the issue. Each building was allotted only a five minute window in which to call your principal. The High School had from 5:55 to 6 AM to call – not before and not after. In other words, if you got sick after 6 AM, too bad, your window was over, and you had to report.

The question was asked about our children who might be sick that day. The response was to wake him up before 5:55 and see if he’s OK. If he’s sick, you can call during your window and ask for a Family Illness day. If he’s OK, he can go back to sleep until it’s time to get up.

Each building was allotted only a five-minute window from 5:55 to 6 AM to call— not before and not after. In other words, if you got sick after 6 AM, too bad, your window was over, and you had to report.

It seems, as we found out later, that the principals decided to make the policy so outrageous, it would force the STA to take legal action against the district.

So we did. The STA, after exhausting all civil attempts to resolve the issue, filed an Improper Practice charge claiming that the matter constituted a change in working conditions and should have been negotiated.

It took until December of that year, four months of living with a ridiculous policy, for the hearing officer to rule in our favor. The charge was upheld, and the district had to revert back to the former practice of reporting teacher absences.

One side story on this issue involved a new teacher, fresh out of college, 22 years old and starting his first job. He received his class lists on that day, Tuesday, and taught Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Then on Saturday, he received a call that his father had died, and he was needed immediately at home in Pennsylvania. He was now the man of the house and had to be with his mother and see to funeral arrangements. He was in a near panic and called his building principal that Saturday afternoon to explain what happened and to say that he wouldn't be in on Monday. The principal, intransigent that he was, put a disciplinary letter in the teacher's file saying that he didn't follow the proper procedures in reporting absences. That principal expected the teacher to wait until 5:55 on Monday to call and report the death. The Superintendent was appalled at the principal's action and immediately pulled the letter.

Even though this occurred 36 years ago, it happened once and could happen again. Ask yourself: DO I NEED A UNION?



Ann Limbeck retired as an Art teacher from Cosgrove in 2010. She received an email forwarded to retirees asking for pieces on what being in the union means. Thank you, Ann, for sharing this with us!

What Does the Union Mean to You?

By Ann Limbeck, STA Retiree

A quality, free, public education is a guaranteed right for all children residing in the USA and territories. This is the only fair and free ticket to the American Dream and all of the possibilities that come from that public education diploma. It is the one fair, leveling opportunity for all races and social classes that reside in our borders.

Our teachers need to be respected and treasured, for they are the ones that continue to deal with all of our changing social problems as they continually strive to reach the needs of all learners. By being provided a well-constructed curriculum, teachers carry the future of our country on their backs and are in the daily forefront of our nation. Our colleagues, the general public, and our elected government members need constant reminder of this responsibility and provide all training and support needed. Similar to our police forces and firefighters, teachers provide an infrastructure that protects, supports and educates local communities. A strong union provides a voice in our

society. It provides the cohesiveness and sharing of information. It provides the time and ability to write and create relevant curriculums for the community it serves. A strong union provides support for colleagues when none exists in hurting or impoverished districts. It is now even more important for young men and women to see the support of our teachers and to continue to learn how to respect each other as well as themselves in this climate of political division.

Our public schools are a very much-needed institution where equality, human compassion, and global awareness is formed in the growing minds of our children. While many other choices for education exist for the rich, a free, quality, public, local education masses, from which come adults make up the face of our crowded rural schools in our suburban schools, we need well-trained and well-educated support and respect. In America of their race, social background pay. As American citizens, we differences and stop comparing do not follow this belief. Our blaming teachers for the failures address the needs of the teachers directly involved. A strong union is this voice, for teachers who are the base, in an America we all love, cherish and wish to see it's continued strength and success.

While many other choices for education exist for the rich, a free, quality, public, local education is the only one that exists for the masses, from which come adults who walk all paths of life and make up the face of our nation.

of our children. While many for the rich, a free, is the only one that exists for the who walk all paths of life and nation. For those in the cities, as well as the large trained and well-educated support and respect. In America of their race, social background pay. As American citizens, we differences and stop comparing do not follow this belief. Our blaming teachers for the failures address the needs of the teachers directly involved. A strong

Teachers on Strike

The teachers of West Virginia are not the only educators fed up with their working conditions. Teachers in Oklahoma have set a strike date of April 2nd, and talks of striking have begun in Kentucky and Arizona. Depending on which metrics are used, Oklahoma ranks between 47th and 50th in teacher pay across the nation. In response to the severe shortage of educators, 91 of 512 districts have adopted a four-day school week. These districts are better able to attract teachers because so many educators work a second job that having a third day to the weekend makes working two jobs more feasible. Oklahoma teachers have not had a pay raise in ten years, due to statewide legislation that was passed in 1992 requiring 75% approval in the House and Senate before taxes could be raised for the sake of increasing revenue. Oklahoma has a one-day walk-out scheduled for April 2nd.

Vote-Cope

At this time where the STA is asking members to recommit to the union, it is important that every member understand that it is illegal for NYSUT to use any money collected as dues for any political agenda. All political action by the STA and NYSUT is funded by our Vote-Cope contributions. When NYSUT donates money to a politician, these funds come from Vote-Cope—money voluntarily donated by members to support NYSUT’s political agenda and back any political issue we are affiliated with or supporting. This could range from supporting a candidate to paying for lawn signs, billboards, or even television commercials.

Last year, voluntary NYSUT Vote-Cope contributions were up 6.44%, totaling \$10,751,000! Vote-Cope is extremely important in this hostile political environment! Vote-Cope money was the number #1 reason we were able to prevent New York State holding a Constitutional Convention in 2018! If you already donate to Vote-Cope through payroll deduction, consider increasing the amount, which you can do by reaching out to Ryan Ewanow. If have not donated in the past, a building rep will be stopping by with Vote-Cope information after April break. If you’re comfortable with what you are donating now through pay deduct but would like to make an additional one-time donation, you can do that here: <https://www.nysut.org/resources/special-resources-sites/legislation/vote-cope>

Every Member Matters!

Here are a few ways you can support the union in our schools.

- Look up your state lawmakers’ email addresses and add them to your contacts. When you read an article on an education topic, forward the article to your lawmaker with a message. For example, send an article about the ridiculous charter school regulations that now allow certain charter schools to certify their own teachers in five weeks, and include a note about why you feel this is unacceptable and bad for kids. When our lawmakers regularly hear from us, they will be less likely to support anti-public education policies.
- Attend a school board meeting. Our presence helps convey to the Board of Education that we are invested in the decisions they make that affect our students and our profession. The BOE meets approximately twenty times per year, and with over 400 teachers, if everyone attended one meeting per year, we would have 20 teachers in attendance at each meeting!
- Attend a board meeting in the district where you live. After the meeting, consider emailing the board members to thank them for their service. Let them know your priorities (i.e., a mandatory recess policy).
- Wear red on Wednesdays and your STA shirt on Fridays. Solidarity improves climate and morale!
- Reach out to new teachers in your building. Check in to see how they are doing. Teachers hired in the last several years have many hurdles—both time-consuming and expensive—to jump through at the state and local levels, and they do not earn tenure for four years! Additionally, they are part of the Tier 6 retirement system, where they must work until age 62! For someone hired right out of college, that’s 40 years in the classroom. With one-third of NYS teachers eligible to retire in the next five years, we need younger teachers to know we care about them. Tier 4 replaced Tier 3, and it’s certainly not outside the realm of possibilities for NYSUT help push legislation to replace Tier 6 with a stronger Tier 7.

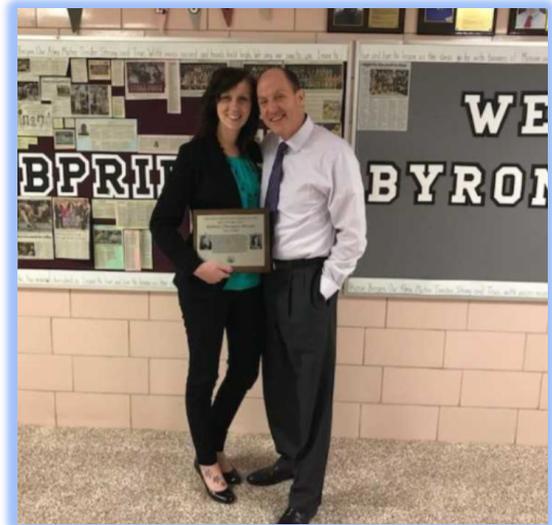


Celebrations



High School

Kim McLean was recently inducted into the Byron-Bergen Central School District Fame. A graduate of the class of 2000, Kim was her class's Salutatorian, an athlete in track and volleyball, and a member of the National Honor Society, Spanish Club, and—appropriately—Future Teachers of America! She was honored at an induction ceremony on March 28th, 2018.



John Viavattine has just been awarded an artist endorsement from the Conn-Selmer Company. John has been playing Selmer Saxophones for over 50 years and has loved every minute of playing them. John shares, “Even though I have been approached by other saxophone manufacturers, I have stayed true to my musical convictions. Selmer is and always will be the "Cadillac" of saxophones in my opinion. I was very blessed to have parents that listened to my first saxophone teacher Joe Romano. My parents gave Joe \$600.00 back in 1966, and Joe went to NYC and hand-selected the tenor I am still playing today from Manny's Music. Gerry Niewood was another teacher I had who also was a Selmer player. My sound *is* the Selmer sound, and I have been blessed to play worldwide and share that sound with the likes of the Glenn Miller Orchestra, Al Chez and the Brothers of Funk, Chuck & Gap Mangione and of course Rochester's own fabulous Mambo Kings!”

Canal View

Deb Rogala's daughter, Melanie Rogala, was recently accepted into the University of Rochester, Warner School of Business, Professional MBA Program. Her son & daughter-in-law, Kevin & Vanessa Rogala, are expecting their second baby the end of September 2018.



Julie Gabriel's son, Jared, has been chosen to receive the RIT Founders Scholarship, a merit-based award. He will be attending RIT this fall in the Computer Exploration Program.

Bernabi

Jennifer and Mark Magliocco are expecting a baby girl in July!

Taylor

John Szulgit's son, Benjamin, received his Eagle Scout rank on Saturday, March 2nd, 2018.

Kristen Pettis' children, Alex and Logan Pettis, were selected by their coaches to receive the Faith Through Sports Award from the Bishop of Rochester.



Cosgrove

Emmy and Don Thevanesan are expecting a new baby in August!
Big brother Lukas and big sister Lija are excited to meet their new sibling this summer.

Jessica and Slava Fesyuk are expecting their first baby in September 2018!



Anna and Ryan DiSabatino are expecting their second child in September 2018!



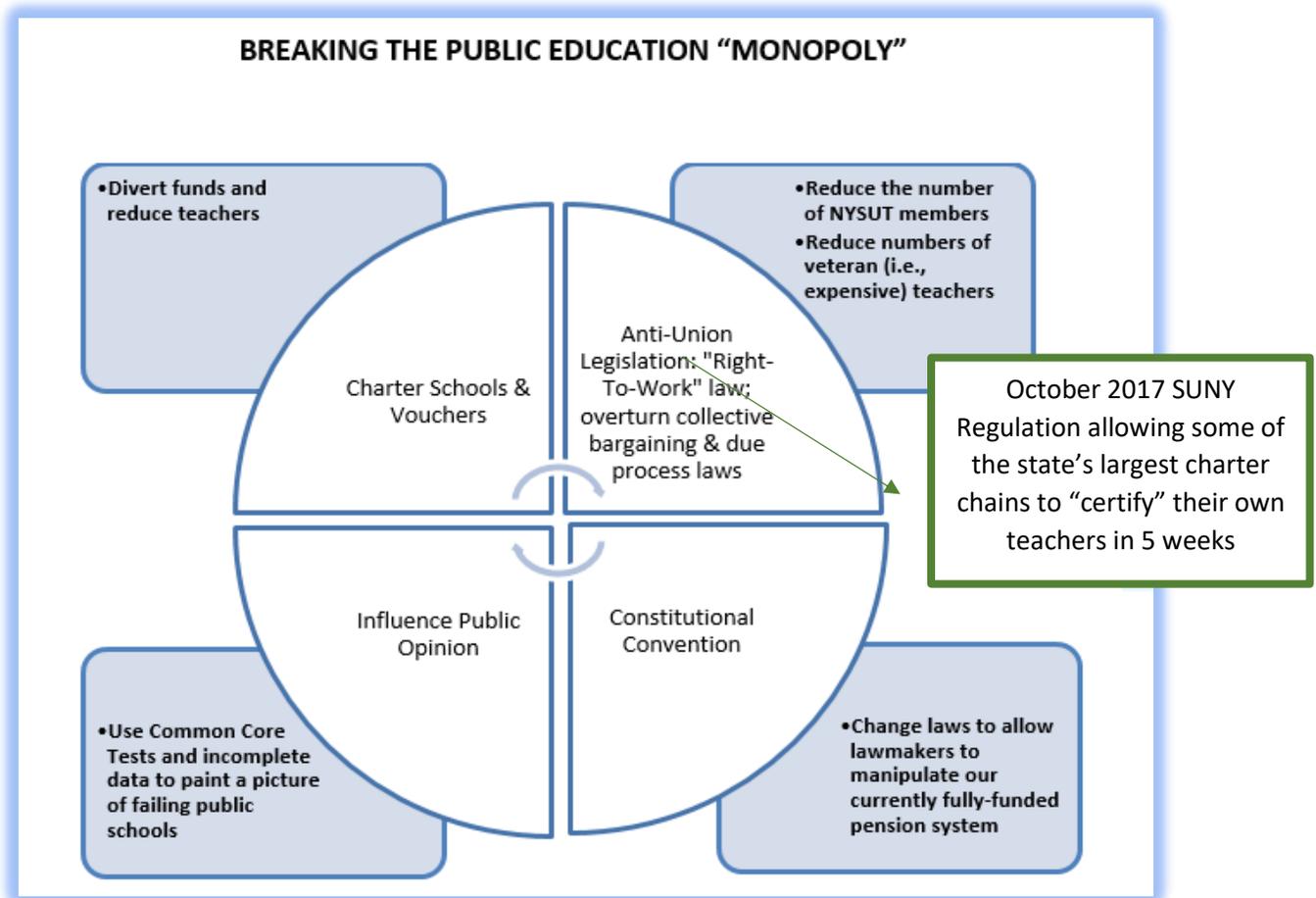
Lindsay Giacalone married Patrick Asselin on March 24th, 2018.
The ceremony was at Westminster Chapel in Mendon, and the reception was at Oak Hill Country Club.
The entire day was a dream come true for the new Mr. and Mrs. Asselin!



Please send your celebratory news to the following members of the STA:
High School- Courtney Hoerner; Cosgrove- Frank Cafarella; Munn- Stacy Lowardo;
Canal View- Sue Chatterton; Taylor- Danielle Blossom; Bernabi- Tracey D'Alonzo.



Our newsletter includes this infographic each issue to remind members about the organized attack to deprofessionalize public education across the country and how we can take action.



An excellent resource to stay informed and to get involved is NYSUT's Member Action Center. <https://mac.nysut.org/>. You can sign up to get action alerts sent to your cell phone each Tuesday. **When calling lawmakers or members of the Board of Regents to advocate for our profession, consider using these talking points:**

- ✓ Oppose vouchers, and ask for your lawmaker's position
- ✓ Oppose charter expansion/lifting the charter cap/increasing funding for charter schools, and ask for your lawmaker's opinion
- ✓ State your support of strong unions for a healthy middle class, and ask for your lawmaker's opinion on right-to-work legislation
- ✓ Call to inform your lawmaker that you are a constituent who supports public education; that you believe charter schools and vouchers are an unsustainable drain on resources meant for real public schools
- ✓ Tell your lawmakers to address the root cause of achievement gaps between districts: poverty
- ✓ Contact members of the Board of Regents and share issues/topics that you believe should be their focus and priority
- ✓ **Oppose the October 2017 SUNY Charter Regulations allowing certain charter schools—some of the state's largest chains—from certifying their own "teachers" in five weeks of training**

For Love of Lisa

In honor of Lisa Cutten, Lori Faas has organized a Spencerport team, For Love of Lisa, for the Rochester Heart Walk. The walk takes place on Saturday morning, April 14th, at Frontier Field. Liz Roth designed a beautiful shirt that was available for purchase until March 26th. Even if you weren't able to purchase a shirt, wear red (or anything!) and join us anyway! When you click the link below, you will be directed to a registration page. You can add a fundraising goal, or you can choose to bring your registration login when you come to the walk. Feel free to register yourself and bring your family along! Register by going to this link:

<http://www2.heart.org/goto/ForLoveofLisa>

STA Scholarship Drive

Each year, the Spencerport Teachers' Association conducts a scholarship drive to raise money for deserving seniors who have chosen to continue with their studies.

Scholarship recipients are chosen by a committee of teachers from each building, an administrator, a member from the Board of Education, and a representative from the community. Applications are ranked on scholastic achievement, financial need, citizenship, and course study. Last year, over 70 seniors applied. Our annual scholarship drive allows us teachers to donate money to the very students we have nurtured and taught through their school years, many since kindergarten.

You can donate to the Scholarship Fund through payroll deduction or during the annual drive. After April break, we will hold our annual fundraiser, and you will receive information on how to donate from your building reps.

STA Calendar of Events

March 29th– Mobile Food Pantry at Cosgrove Middle School & FirstBook Give-Away

April 12th– **Executive Council Meeting**, 4:00 PM in Cosgrove Room 626

April 14th– For Love of Lisa, Rochester Heart Walk, 9:00 AM (check-in begins at 7:00 AM)

May 17th – **Executive Council Meeting**, 4:00 PM in Cosgrove Room 626

June 7th– Spencerport Fireman's Carnival/First Book Give-Away

June- TBD- New Teacher Celebration

STA Leadership

Officers

John Kozlowski, President*
Joe DiTucci, 1st Vice President*
Jennifer Ott, 2nd Vice President*
Joe DiTucci, PAC Chair*
Jacquelyn Lanpher, Secretary*
Cheri Hall, Treasurer*

Nurses' Representative

Beth Hoben*

Bernabi Building Reps

Ryan Ewanow*

Laurie Scutella*

Canal View Building Reps

Sue Chatterton*

Laura Gannon*

Teaching Assistant President

Laurie Wood*

Munn Building Reps

Matt Fink*

Scott Schwind*

Cosgrove Building Reps

Rob Allen*

Janeen Henry (alternate)

Doug Lennon*

Emmy Thevanesan*

Teresa Trujillo*

Wilson Building Reps

Kristin Cocchiara*

Becky DiNatale*

Steve Kelley*

Amanda Van Huben*

Jody Wyant*

Taylor Building Reps

Danielle Blossom*

Medea Bonny*

NYSUT At-Large Delegate

Gretchen Breon*

Social Media Coordinator

Gretchen Breon

Political Action Coordinators

Ryan Ewanow

Emmy Thevanesan

Webmaster

Bryan Swanson

PAC Representatives

Ryan Ewanow, Bernabi

Sue Chatterton, Canal View

Stacy Lonardo, Munn

Danielle Blossom, Taylor

Doug Lennon, Cosgrove

Jacquelyn Lanpher, Wilson

Newsletter Editor

Emmy Thevanesan

BPT Representatives

Ryan Ewanow, Bernabi

Sue Chatterton, Canal View

Stacy Lonardo, Munn

Danielle Blossom, Taylor

Doug Lennon, Cosgrove

Kristin Cocchiara, Wilson

*Denotes Executive Council vote

Your monthly bills won't stop if you become unable to work

Insurance is the type of product that you hope you never have to utilize. In the event that you need to use it, though, it's important to have the insurance product that best meets your individual needs.

The NYSUT Member Benefits Trust-endorsed voluntary Disability Insurance Plan -- provided by Metropolitan Life Insurance Company -- provides valuable income replacement benefits to help meet your living expenses if you become partially or totally disabled and are unable to work.



Disability insurance can be customized to fit within your budget and still provide peace of mind until you are able to get back on your feet and return to work. Applications for the new NYSUT Member Benefits-endorsed Disability Insurance Plan are now available, with coverage effective dates on or after Jan. 1, 2018 from the Plan Administrator, Mercer Consumer.

For more information and/or to get an application, visit memberbenefits.nysut.org or call 800-626-8101 for specific information about this program.

Call to Action: Proposals requested for NYSUT *Educator's Voice*



New York State's classrooms are among the most diverse in the nation. In recognition of this, NYSUT is currently seeking article proposals on "**Culturally-Responsive Teaching**" for consideration in its annual edition of *Educator's Voice*, a *Journal of Best Practices in Education*. **The deadline for proposals is June 15, 2018.**

Do you have a project or practice that works well in your classroom, something you are passionate about and would like to share with other educators across the state? This is a great opportunity to write about it and become published in NYSUT's member journal, a publication created by NYSUT members for NYSUT members. No previous experience is needed nor do you need to be a professional writer to be published in *Educator's Voice*.

Once accepted, authors receive a great deal of editorial support and writing guidance throughout the year-long publication cycle. The result is a professional, research-based publication that can be shared with your colleagues and used for professional development. Authors or author teams can collaborate across schools or with partners in higher education; at least one author must be a NYSUT or affiliate member.

For more information and/or to download the author submission form, visit <http://www.nysut.org/educatorsvoice>.

Previous editions of this publication are available at [https://www.nysut.org/resources/special-resources-sites/educators-voice](https://www.nysut.org/resources/special-resources/sites/educators-voice).



For information about contractual endorsement arrangements with providers of endorsed programs, please contact NYSUT Member Benefits. Agency fee payers to NYSUT are eligible to participate in NYSUT Member Benefits-endorsed programs.

Mar/Apr '18