

## Holiday Greetings

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The holiday season can be a hectic time in the best of years. I am willing to bet that none of us have experienced a holiday season quite like this one before. Many of us will experience a hiatus from our normal holiday traditions. Perhaps this pause can serve as a time to reflect on the meaning of those traditions and the importance of the values behind them. Let us be mindful as we struggle to navigate this season that our students are struggling as well. Thank you for the care and commitment that you offer to them. In many cases the students we serve have been underserved elsewhere. We do important work and we do it well.

versal symbol. It takes the form of the Hanukkah Menorah, the lights of the Christmas tree, the lantern festival in China, the Kinara of Kwanzaa, the Hindu festival of Diwali and the yule log of the winter solstice to name just a few.

This new year holds many promises. A vaccine, falling numbers of positive cases, and a return to life with a semblance of normalcy are among the things we are hopeful for. The night is always darkest right before dawn and we must prepare for some dark nights this winter before the promise of Spring. Let us be inspired by these traditions as we wait for brighter days ahead.

What this means in our professional lives is a continuation of safety precautions, social distancing and at least a degree of remote instruction. It means en-

tering a contract negotiation where we seek to be recognized for the good work that we do under the cloud of a worsening financial reality brought on by the impact of the C-19 crisis. It means pushing through the uncertainty and weariness that so many of us feel with the faith that we will persevere and end up where we need to be.

However you celebrate this year may you find comfort in the knowledge that the work that you do matters. Despite the craziness of this past year you have still managed to do it well. I wish you a restful break and a New Year where promises are fulfilled.

In Solidarity,

Joal Bova

President, RCG BOCES Teachers' Association

### Union Updates

- *For NYSUT Coronavirus Updates*  
Visit: <https://www.nysut.org/resources/special-resources/sites/coronavirus-toolkit>

Many holiday celebrations around the world use light as a symbol of hope in darkness. It seems to be a deeply held uni-

## Educators say 'new normal' is not sustainable

Author: Sylvia Saunders

NYSUT members from around the state shared poignant stories of how difficult it is to keep up with ever-changing state protocols for COVID-19 — and the varying implementation by local school districts. Many voiced concerns about the wide range of quarantine policies, testing protocols and a lack of notification when someone in the school community tests positive for COVID-19.

The uncertainty is taking its toll, leaders said. As COVID cases spiked throughout November and December, a growing number of schools shifted back and forth between in-person/hybrid schedules to fully remote. Others extended remote instruction into January and beyond. With so many chaotic scheduling changes and hybrid versions, many members are struggling with childcare issues, said Schenectady Federation of Teachers President Juliet Benaquisto. "It would be a little easier if schedules were more aligned," she said.

Union leaders also urged NYSUT to advocate for the state to cancel this year's Regents Exams and grades 3–8 assessments. "We're halfway through the year and there are big differences in how kids are learning," said North Syracuse Education Association's Joanne Thornton.

"Teachers and students need to know; what will finals look like?" Leaders also noted the lack of uniformity among districts and schools is clearly hurting morale. While some schools allow educators to teach remotely from their homes, others require that staff report to school to stream lessons. "It's insulting," said one elementary teacher, who must report to her empty classroom.

With so many educators in and out of quarantine and a severe shortage of substitutes, some districts have shifted to fully remote because they simply don't have enough staff.

See the full article here: <https://www.nysut.org/news/nysut-united/issues/2021/january/new-normal#.X-JxelV43nE.link>

## Know Your Contract

### Article 10: Employee Rights

#### 10.12 Preparation of IEP's

- A. Questar III shall provide two half days for special education teachers and related service providers prior to February 1 each year for the purpose of preparing and writing IEPs for the Annual Review.
- B. Special education teachers and related service providers

shall be provided with release time from their classroom or assignments as necessary to participate in CSE meetings in person or by phone conference.

- C. Only one related service provider shall attend the CSE meeting consistent with the request of the CSE chair. The determination of who shall

attend shall be made by the classroom team, the supervisor or the CSE chair. If the CSE Chair determines another service provider should attend, the service provider will be given release time, subject to approval from the Director of Special Education.

- D. Questar III will not close classes for two, one-half days to accommodate CSE meetings.

“Education is the most **POWERFUL WEAPON** which you can use to **change** the **WORLD**.”  
-Nelson Mandela

### Holiday Events Foster Community at AREC

Students and staff at the Academy at Rensselaer Educational Center celebrated the holidays and anticipated the break with a series of winter-themed activities during the last week and a half of the year. The activities helped foster a sense of community among staff and students, and remote students were invited to participate in the activities from their homes.

Classrooms spent the week of December 14-18 decorating “virtual” doors, since an actual door-decorating contest was precluded by fire codes. Each homeroom teacher had a virtual door outlined with painter’s tape in the hallway. Jennifer Rogowski’s class chose the Disney movie Frozen as its theme. Emily Hasso’s class decorated their door with a tree composed of

myriad circles and holiday lights that actually worked. Jennifer Pruden’s class chose to look out through the doorway into a winter wonderland of woodland animals. Katryna Lawyer’s class decorated its door with a Harry Potter theme that included a hand-drawn Dobby. Melissa Bodenstab hung a quote from Home Alone decorated with stockings.

Mrs. Hasso’s homeroom won bragging rights with their door. Judges included REC Principal Anthony DeFazio, Nurse Pam Ryan, and Lisa Gilbert, guidance counselor at the Rensselaer Educational Center. Holiday Spirit Week began with the appropriately named Winter Wonderland Whiteout! on Thursday, December 17. Rather than celebrate by wearing white, silver,

and/or blue and scarves (as had been the plan), everyone celebrated a snow day that dropped more than two feet in some areas. On Friday, everyone returned wearing boots and flannels. The week before break began with red and green outfits on Monday, moved into Tinsel Tuesday with tacky holiday sweaters, socks, scarves, and other garments. On Wednesday, everyone celebrated ‘Twas the Day Before Break with holiday-themed comfy clothes. Students and staff got a kick out of the outfits, that variously included unicorn horns and antlers. On Tuesday, everyone knew where Mrs. Rogowski was by the jingle of the bells around the hood of her elf sweater. The events were organized by Psychologist Mary Richwine, who splits her time between AREC and George Washington School.

### Shared Success

“Nothing is impossible, the word itself says I’m possible.” -Audrey Hepburn

### Grief among students: Tools for educators facing a wave of loss

“Even before COVID-19, grief in the classroom was not uncommon, with an estimated 1 in 14 children in the U.S. experiencing the death of a parent or sibling by age 18. Eighty seven percent of educators have had at least one student a year experience a death; 25 percent have had five or more students in that category. Those numbers are likely to increase: More than 1 in 4 educators report that a member of their school community has died from COVID-19.

Educators are struggling to keep up: The survey shows that only 15 percent feel very comfortable addressing students’ emotional needs—including anxiety, grief and/or trauma—and 84 percent say the coronavirus has made them more aware of the impact of “non-death-related losses,” like disrupted routines, interrupted employment for caregivers and displacement from housing. Other challenges can in-

clude changes in the neighborhood, new partners for parents and the addition of step-siblings to a household.

The impact of profound loss shows up in many ways—including withdrawing, acting out and an inability to focus—and can prevent children from learning and growing academically.” -Virginia Myers

See the full article here: <https://www.aft.org/news/grief-among-students-tools-educators-facing-wave-loss>



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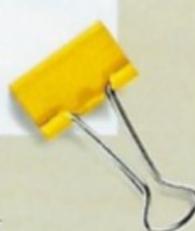
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**In solidarity,**  
**J. Philippe Abraham**  
Chairperson, NYSUT Member Benefits Trust



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Additional life insurance and accidental death & dismemberment insurance from \$1,000–\$150,000 (depending on circumstances). Details at: [memberbenefits.nysut.org](http://memberbenefits.nysut.org)

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



To learn more about our endorsed programs and services, please visit:

[memberbenefits.nysut.org](http://memberbenefits.nysut.org)

NYSUT Member Benefits

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