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**Public Schools Unite Us**

This past year NYSUT launched a campaign highlighting the ways that public schools unite us. In a promotional video they state “our schools are the heart of our community”. I would go so far as to say that public education is the heart of our democracy. It has played a crucial role in equalizing the playing field, providing opportunity to all, and creating generations of informed citizens who continue to lead our nation into the future.

The demographics in a public school mirror the community in which it exists. Whatever societal ills exist in the larger community also exist in our public schools. We are often the front line in

the battles against inequality, poverty, addiction and violence. We are charged with meeting the academic, social/emotional and physical needs of our students. These efforts are often underappreciated and underfunded. A difficult proposition indeed...but vital to the health and well being of our students, our communities and our nation.

Our BOCES, and by extension, each one of you, provides unique opportunities to students who might otherwise be left behind. We meet students where they are at, from preK to graduation, working to meet any need a student may have so they can be ready to learn. We equalize the playing field when we offer programs to our special education students that prepare them to achieve their college or career goals. We provide opportunities through programs like our STEM HS that allows students to learn on the HVCC campus and earn credits at no cost to them. We create the next generation of informed citizenry through programs such as SKILLS USA and New Visions. None of these would be possible without us.

It is easy to get bogged down in the day to day and lose that larger perspective. I am impressed every day by the scope of the programs we provide and the talent and dedication of the

people who provide them. The work that we do matters. The larger community may not always appreciate that, but we can never forget that.

It is true, public education is the heart of our community. And you are the heart of public education. Thank you for all that you do to support our students, our programs, and our Association.

In Solidarity,  
Joal Bova, President, RCG BOCES Teachers' Association

**We want to make sure that you are getting all that you can out of your membership. Make sure you are receiving communications from us through a personal email. Check out our website at <http://rcgboces.ny.aft.org/>. Follow us on Twitter, @BocesReg. If you have not already created an online account do so at [www.NYSUT.org](http://www.NYSUT.org). Our Local is RCG BOCES Teachers' Association and we are Local 10175. Once you log in you will have access to a variety of membership benefits.**



**Delegates Elect Melinda Person as NYSUT President**

ALBANY, N.Y. April 29, 2023 – Delegates to the New York State United Teachers' Representative Assembly on Saturday elected Melinda Person to a three-year term as President of the nearly 700,000-member union.

“There is no greater honor than to represent hard-working professionals in education and health care from across this state. I firmly believe they are the backbone of our classrooms, communities, and society. They deserve a strong voice in Albany and Washington advocating for better pay, working conditions and respect,” Melinda Person said. “I’m proud to be that voice.”

Melinda has served as NYSUT’s executive director and political director since 2019, overseeing the union’s staff and coordinating its far-reaching political action and organizing operations. She is credited with initiating and developing numerous successful

statewide programs aimed at amplifying members’ voices on critical policy issues while growing the union’s internal strength through member-to-member organizing.

Melinda’s vision for the future of NYSUT is rooted in the priorities of NYSUT members and leaders, along with her personal experiences and two decades of work to strengthen our public education systems. Melinda is committed to creating learning environments where students and educators can thrive, ensuring members’ professions are enticing, sustainable career choices and growing NYSUT’s power.

Prior to joining NYSUT in 2006, Melinda worked in the governor’s Budget Office and the state Assembly, and student-taught in a sixth-grade classroom in the Boston public schools. Her NYS teaching certification is in Childhood Education (Grades 1-6).

Melinda is a dual-graduate of Cornell University. She and her wife, Kelly, have four children.

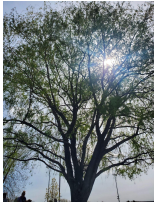
In addition to electing a new president, delegates also elected Jaime Ciffone of New York City’s United Federation of Teachers as executive vice president; re-elected Ron Gross as second vice president and J. Philippe Abraham as secretary-treasurer; and voted in members of the NYSUT’s Board of Directors.

*New York State United Teachers is a statewide union with nearly 700,000 members in education, human services and health care. NYSUT is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association and the AFL-CIO.*

See the full article here:  
<https://www.nysut.org/news/2023/april/media-release-person>

“Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better.” -Albert Einstein

**City Nature Challenge**



Students in the Columbia High School NYSAA classes participated in the **City Nature Challenge** on Friday, April 28th. The students learned about the City Nature Challenge through the Unique Learning curriculum in a News2You article. The City Nature

Challenge takes place in cities around the world from April 28th-May 7th. Participants take pictures of nature in their city or community and download the pictures onto an app called iNaturalist. The app then identifies the items and gives information about different types of nature. Students in the Columbia classes spent much of the morning outside, looking at nature. They had certain items they had to find (i.e. pinecones, twigs, flowers) on a ‘Nature Hunt’. Once all of their designated items were collected, they were able to look around for

unique nature items such as bugs, plants, and animals. The students all brought individualized perspectives to the challenge and collected a variety of nature pictures using their school iPads, as well as real nature items. They created a collage of nature that was collected, answered questions about the nature hunt, and inputted their results into the app using google classroom. The students showed great enthusiasm for this activity and enjoyed being outside.

Written by: Emily Bluhm-Allen

**MEMBER WELLNESS**

“The Groundwork for all happiness is health.” -Leigh Hunt

**Wellness: Little Things Mean A Lot**

Spring is here! Even though this winter wasn't the coldest or snowiest on record, most of us (well, maybe not the skiers or snowboarders!) are happy that warmer weather, blue skies, daffodils and blossoming trees are back.

Shedding our winter coats and mittens, we're looking forward to heading outside for some fresh air and sunshine. And going outdoors is proven to be good for both your physical and emotional health. Japanese people even have a term for it: shinrin-yoku or “forest bathing,” the idea of taking a slow walk in a natural environment (with devices turned OFF!) and reconnecting with nature is good for your health. “Forest bathing” was designed to counteract the stresses of modern urban life that can cause burnout and health issues, and there are hundreds of studies demonstrating its benefits, according to Melissa Lem, MD.

Those benefits can include a much-needed increase in Vitamin D intake (from the best natural source...the sun!) exercise that will release endorphins, plus ease your stress and anxiety (why it's especially important to leave behind texts, emails and social media when you go out).

Maybe you're already making some ambitious plans for the spring and summer months such as:

“I'm going to plant a huge garden and grow some, no, all of my own vegetables... and start canning enough quarts of tomatoes to feed my family for a year!” **OR**

I'm going to start walking 5, no 10 miles a day! Even better, I'll take up hiking, and conquer all the Adirondack peaks! **OR**

No barbeque for me, I'm only eating salads all summer!

For some people, these might be achievable goals, but for most of us, the reality is that like our New Year's Resolutions, we get caught up in making unattainable over-the-top plans, and soon become discouraged.

So, you may want to start with some smaller steps toward a summer that's both happy and healthy.

Instead of a huge garden, start with several large pots filled with cherry tomato plants and herbs. They are easy to maintain and water, but soon you'll

be enjoying fresh produce from your yard. Even pinching off a leaf from an herb plant and giving it a good sniff can be good for you. The scent of lavender can have a calming effect, or mint is a natural energizer.

Instead of trying to walk 10 miles, or train for a marathon on day one, start with 10 minute walks (1-3 times per day). If you're used to walking or running regularly, great! If not, starting with 20 minutes a day, whether on the rail trail or walking around your backyard, can be beneficial.

Instead of restricting yourself to only boring lettuce, heat up the grill with some good stuff. All kinds of vegetables are fantastic when grilled... zucchini, eggplant, even slices of sweet potato. Fruits like peaches and pineapple are really delicious too! Try salmon or chicken as alternatives to fatty meats. And that boring salad? Add in some new items to pep up the flavors, like watermelon, radishes, fresh fruit such as pears, plums and strawberries and nuts like almonds and walnuts.

Little things mean a lot, and small changes can make a big difference in leaving winter and school year stresses behind you, and enjoying a summer that also helps you feel better, in so many ways!

Happy Spring! Have a relaxing, restorative and FUN summer!

-Mari Warfel, Member Wellness Coordinator

**Courtney Hill, NYSUT has peer support available. Those in the educational field have carried a heavy load with mental health needs continuing to be on the rise. The unique aspect of this offering is that it is 1) support offered by people who have worked in the field. 2) No referral or insurance necessary.**

**It is another opportunity for support, from those who have experience in the educational settings- which is a bit different than EAP – (another useful resource)**

**Check out the links below:**

**\*<https://united.nysut.org/issue/november-december-2022/benefit-s-services-available-to-nysut-members/>**

**\*[www.nysut.org/peersupport](http://www.nysut.org/peersupport)**

CHECK OUT ALL YOUR UNION MEMBERSHIP HAS TO OFFER!

## When you're planning for the future, what's at the top of your list?

- A comfortable nest egg for retirement
- Providing for your family
- Purchasing a new home
- Home improvement
- Purchasing a new vehicle
- Travel and entertainment

NYSUT Member Benefits offers dozens of endorsed programs to help turn those dreams into reality.



When it comes to saving you money, protecting your family and helping you plan for the future, NYSUT Member Benefits has a variety of programs and services to help with your goals. Whether you are just starting out on your journey, well into your career or enjoying a well-deserved retirement, there is a Member Benefits-endorsed plan that may be of assistance featuring value-added extras unavailable to the public.

Get started by first bookmarking the Member Benefits website at [memberbenefits.nysut.org](http://memberbenefits.nysut.org). There, you will find numerous tools and resources available to you as a NYSUT member – including a **Financial Learning Center** with articles designed to help educate you on financial decisions and topics. Member Benefits also endorses important **legal and financial services** along with an **online savings program** featuring some of today's most competitive interest rates.

Next up would be looking in the "Shopping, Travel & Personal" section of our site for **MB Discounts & Deals**. This program utilizes the nation's largest private discount network to provide NYSUT members with exclusive access to savings of up to 50% on restaurant dine-in or take out, groceries and food delivery, clothing and shoes, hotels and flights, car rentals, theme parks, vehicle maintenance, and much more.



Learn more by scanning the QR code to the left, visiting [memberbenefits.nysut.org](http://memberbenefits.nysut.org) or calling 800-626-8101.



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

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