



THE EDUCATOR

Newsletter of the Arlington Teachers' Association

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Come Together, Right Now, Over Me

Membership in the ATA is at the highest right now that it has been in at least the last decade. We have strength in numbers, but also the challenge of staying united when we have members with many different job titles in many different buildings over a large geographic area. This year, building reps at some of our schools have put together activities to help ATA members get to know each other and to encourage our younger members to get involved.

At Beekman Elementary, senior building rep Christie Boydston ran an interactive game show

gathering in the fall to help members understand all of their ATA benefits. She reports, "We created a bunch of questions and

In the end, it isn't just up to the ATA leaders in each building to keep our union together, but to all of us to make an effort to get to know one another and to reach out to our newer members to help them feel connected and welcome.

answers based on four categories we thought would be helpful: New Contract Changes, Existing Contract Language, Welfare Trust Benefits, and Affiliate Member

Benefits. We had snacks available and members earned raffle tickets for each question they answered correctly. At the end we pulled raffle tickets for a few prizes: Dunkin' gift cards, bottles of wine, etc. We had a great turn out and members mentioned that they learned a lot of new information!". Anyone who wishes to get more information to possibly run an

event like this at their school can contact Boydston at BES for details. She is happy to share the questions and answers they used. See Together on page 2



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Trivia Challenge

Answer the question below correctly and you could be the proud winner of ATA gear!

How many members does the ATA currently have?

Last month's winner, who submitted the only correct response, was **Alicia Jazayeri** from BES. She knew that **Bill Clinton** gave the longest state of the union address. She will be the proud owner of ATA gear. Answer this month's question and you could win ATA gear too!

Submit your answer to the above trivia question to sfalk@acsdny.org by **March 29**. The winner will be randomly selected from the correct submissions.

Come Together, Right Now, Over Me

Continued from front
A trivia event was also used to bring members at AHS together, but in a different style; building rep Anne Cordella arranged to have professional trivia host Garry Leavy from Let's Go Trivia come in at lunch time on the March 8 conference day to run the event. Faculty members were randomly assigned teams so that they could meet new people, and the teams competed for prizes.

UVMS also had an ATA-sponsored event on March 8. Senior building rep Jim DeBonis and Jean DeBonis organized a breakfast, taking advantage of the fact that Jim's brother owns several Dunkin' Donuts' franchises in Putnam County to receive a discount on items. In addition to the Dunkin' food, they also had fresh fruit, coffee, tea, and quiches made by Jean.

Keeping our members engaged and helping them feel connected to each other doesn't have to involve big events such as these; some schools such as ASM and NOX have run raffles at faculty meetings, and at LMS senior building rep Bill Mueller spruced up the faculty bathrooms with fancy soap. In the end, it isn't just up to the ATA leaders in each building to keep our union together, but to all of us to make an effort to get to know one another and to reach out to our newer members to help them feel connected and welcome.

-Sam Falk,
ATA Communications Chair



Photo by Anne Cordella

The winning team at AHS's ATA-sponsored trivia event on March 8 was (L-R) Joe Poole-DiSalvo, Margaret Fallon, Lauren Collet, and John Filor.



Photo by Jim DeBonis

Jean DeBonis (left) serves quiche at UVMS's ATA-sponsored breakfast on March 8.

Photo by Christie Boydston

Beekman Elementary ATA members partook in a trivia game involving information from these categories and fun facts about their school.

CAC Update: Committee Of 100

The Committee of 100 is a day when union activists converge from across the state to lobby at the capitol building in Albany, New York. On this day, members of NYSUT get to meet lawmakers to discuss issues and challenges we face pertaining to our education system.

This year's topics started with the proposed executive budget. The concern regarding this year's troubling proposal includes the executive budget no longer using the Consumer Price Index. Instead of the current 3.8 percent, it is being proposed to use a 10 year rolling average of 2.4 percent. These changes will result in a decrease of \$419 million in Foundation Aid. The Foundation Aid formula is the driving force of both school aid and the distribution of equitable state aid funding.

Another topic was fixing Tier 6. The inequity of Tier 6 paired with recruiting and retaining highly effective individuals is staggering to say the least. This is not just about teachers, but the whole public service sector. Tier 6 teachers, or anyone working in public service, have to work longer, pay more into retirement, and receive less of a pension than previous tiers. School districts and state or local municipalities will be facing fiscal tragedies when these individuals reach maximum earning potential, as they cannot retire for potentially up to a decade at top-scale wage. If you are a current teacher working within Tier 6, I urge you to become involved in

creating an improved and fair solution.

On March 5, I first met with New York State Senator Rob Rolison from Senate District 39. He acknowledged the large disparity in the state's budget and he agreed the cuts were excessive. Rolison also understood the issues with Tier 6. When asked if it is ever discussed among his colleagues, he replied, "all the time." Unfortunately, Assemblywoman Didi Barrett was not available today. We spoke with her staff assistant regarding the educational issues such as the budget, Tier 6 and the New Deal for higher education. Barrett has a long track record of supporting public education and her assistant had stated she had rejected the budget proposal in its current state.

The day culminated with a rally on the Million Dollar Staircase. Signs

stating "Fix Tier 6" were hung along with chants of "fix Tier 6" echoing throughout the capitol building. Speakers at the rally included NYSUT president Melinda Person, New York state AFL-CIO president Mario Cilento and many other New York state lawmakers.

-Bill Mueller, ATA CAC CO-Chair



Photo by Bill Mueller

ATA CAC Co-Chair Bill Mueller took part in a NYSUT rally to advocate for pension reform at the NYS Capitol on March 5.

Office Beautification Help Needed

If you would like to help out with maintaining the landscaping at the ATA office, please consider joining me on the second Saturday of each month; 4/8, 5/13, and 6/10. Weather permitting, we will meet at 8 a.m. and work for two hours. Tasks may include weeding, mulching, pruning, and planting. Please dress accordingly and bring gloves. Thank you for your consideration.

-Nancy Thomas (OPS)



Scan to sign up →

NYSUT Membership Benefits You

Did you know that, as a NYSUT member, you receive exclusive access to dozens of programs and services endorsed by NYSUT Member Benefits? By building on the group buying power of more than 670,000 members, they are able to endorse competitively priced benefit offerings in areas such as insurance, financial, legal, and shopping. Here is a selection of those benefits that you can take advantage of.

Defensive Driving Training

Through our endorsed Defensive Driving Program, NYSUT members licensed in New York State can take this course online at the members-only price of \$21.95 – a 27% savings over the regular course fee.

If you are the principal operator of a vehicle, you will receive a minimum 10% reduction in the base rate of your auto liability and collision insurance premiums each year for three years. You may also receive a reduction of up to four points on your driving record.

You can take the course as often as you wish, but only once every three years for insurance reduction benefits and once every 18 months for point reduction. This course is sponsored by the National Safety Council.

Make sure to use the Member Benefits discount code: NYSUTDDC.

For more information, call 800-626-8101.

Travel

Worldwide group travel and adventure tours. NYSUT members save at least \$150 per trip; other discounts and savings opportunities are available for specific tours.

*For more information call 800-221-2610
(Grand Circle Travel) or 800-955-1925
(Overseas Adventure Travel).*

Mention group number 25614 when calling to receive special rates and offers.

Pet Insurance

The pet insurance program from Nationwide® can help NYSUT members manage the cost of veterinary care, from annual preventive care to accidents and illnesses. With a Nationwide pet insurance policy, you'll be reimbursed for eligible treatments, surgeries, lab fees, X-rays, and more.

Freedom: You're free to use any veterinarian, anywhere in the world – including specialists and emergency providers – with no pre-approval necessary.

Savings: Receive preferred pricing as a NYSUT member. Enjoy additional discounts when enrolling multiple pets. Save 5% when you enroll two or three pets or 10% when you enroll four or more pets.

Extras: Nationwide policyholders receive 24/7 access to the VetHelpline® for live veterinary advice on pet health questions, along with discounts on handpicked pet products and services, a subscription to Nationwide's award-winning The Companion magazine, and more.

For more information, call 877-738-7874.

**For a complete list of
NYSUT member benefits
visit**

memberbenefits.nysut.org

Mortgage Discount Program

The UnionDirect Mortgage Discount Program presented by Mid-Island Mortgage can help NYSUT members looking to purchase a home, lower their existing mortgage payment, or plan a home improvement project.

Members can save up to \$2,700 in lender fees and closing costs with special purchase and refinancing mortgage discounts, including:

- No Application or Processing Fees
- No Commitment Fees
- No Underwriting Fees
- No Lender or Broker Fees
- Reduced Attorney & Title Fees

For more information, call 800-506-9788.

Home Heating

Our endorsed Heat USA program offers NYSUT members the opportunity to save approximately \$300 to \$500 per year on heating oil.

Participants receive a free or discounted service contract, contract coverage, and cleaning coverage with a minimum consumption of 600 gallons per year.

The program has also been expanded to include \$50 in free heating oil and a \$100 equipment upgrade certificate upon initial sign-up to the program.

Note: A \$35 membership fee is required every two years from all participants.

For more information, call 888-432-8872.

Member Benefits Discounts & Deals (Shopping, Travel & More)

NYSUT members enjoy exclusive access to savings of up to 50% at 850,000 locations with the nation's largest private discount network, including more than 21,200 New York State deals.

- | | | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| • Restaurant Dine-In & Take-Out | • Services | • Oil Changes & Vehicle Maintenance | • Theme Parks |
| • Groceries & Food Delivery | • Flowers & Gift Baskets | • Sporting Events | • Movie Tickets |
| • Meal Subscription | • Bose Products | • Hotels & Flights | • Ski Rentals |
| | • Clothing & Shoes | • Car Rentals | • Much More |

Important: You will need your seven-digit NYSUT ID number to create an account with a preferred email address and password on the MB Discounts & Deals website at mbdeals.enjoymydeals.com.

These deals can then be accessed either online or through Access Development's MB Deals mobile app. Each discount offering includes "How to Redeem" instructions, whether it be online, printable coupons or the mobile app.

You can even request that your favorite local business (restaurant, coffee shop, workout facility, etc.) join the network to provide NYSUT members with a special discount.

Start today by visiting mbdeals.enjoymydeals.com or calling 800-406-6020.

2023 — 2024 ATA Officers

President

Bob Maier

Elementary Vice President

Nicolle McMorris

Secondary Vice President

Greg Nieman

Vice President For Membership

Steve Hertzog

Treasurer

Dave Cordella

Chief Negotiator

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Kristine Jackson

Community Action Chairs

Brendan Lawlor

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ASM — A'Rehema Leach

BES — Christie Boydston

NOX— Lynette Battle

VFES— Gwen Moschetto

OPS — Nancy Thomas

TRP— Diana Judge

JDWR—Barbara Mackey

TIS — Heather Blatz

LMS — Bill Mueller

UVMS — Jim DeBonis

AHS — John Filor

AHS — Theresa Daleo-Stock

What's Going On?

"What's Going on" is a monthly feature of The Educator. It highlights noteworthy accomplishments by ATA members. Do you know of a colleague who deserves recognition? Let The Educator know by emailing sfalk@acsdny.org. We can't know what's going on at all of your schools without your help!

Congratulations to the following ATA members for their contributions to the Arlington community and beyond.

Arlington High

Science teacher Megan Murphy ran the St. Jude's half marathon in Washington D.C. on March 16 as a member of team St. Jude's. She had the goal of raising \$1000 for St. Jude's Research Hospital.

Social Studies teachers Kathy Bellino, Dina Warnken, and Julia Bucklin attended the annual New York State Council For the Social Studies (NYSCSS) conference on March 7 through 9 in Albany. Bucklin presented a talk titled "Drowning in Information, Starved for Knowledge".

Arthur S. May School

First grade teacher Kristy O'Connell received the 2023 CF Star award from the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation for her arrangement of holiday donations to needy families with one or more children battling cystic



Photo courtesy of Beth Maier

Sparrow's Nest

A number of Arlington faculty and staff were part of Team Sparrow in Disney World this past November. Some ran a 10k, some ran a half marathon, and some ran both, to raise money for Sparrow's Nest charity, which feeds families across the Hudson Valley who have a member battling a cancer diagnosis. ATA members who participated include Michelle Hartman and Beth Maier (AHS, pictured), Carrie Eirish (OPS/TRP), and retirees Liz Sawicki and Eileen Snook.

fibrosis. The award ceremony took place on March 5 at the Greater NY Chapter annual meeting and awards night in New York City.

Overlook Primary

Kindergarten teacher Karen Mahar is the president-elect of the New York State Reading Association, as well as the president of its local chapter, the Mid-Hudson Reading Council (MHRC). According to their website, "The Mid-Hudson Reading Council was formed for the charitable purpose of empowering educators, inspiring students, and encouraging leaders by providing them with the

knowledge, and resources they need to make literacy accessible for all. The Mid-Hudson Reading Council works together with professors from colleges in the area to create five or six programs a year that promote research based literacy presentations. The Mid-Hudson Reading Council also brings literacy programs to the children at Grace Smith House and Brookhaven."

Reading specialist Sarah Armstrong presented a talk titled "Weaving It All Together: Reading Is More Than a Stand-Alone Skill" on March 14 at Locust Grove in Poughkeepsie.

Member Spotlight: Damian Kortan

While to many, thinking of a first grade classroom might bring to mind a bustling hive of activity, to OPS first grade teacher Damian Kortan, his room for the past 22 years is also a place of early-morning serenity. Along with being an elementary school teacher, Kortan has a side gig being the front man in the Damian Ecco band. While his main instruments are his guitar and voice, he is also working on getting better at the piano: "I feel so lucky to have a classroom with a wall of windows that faces the woods to the east," he says, "There's nothing more peaceful than playing piano as I look out on the sunrise coming through the trees in the early morning hours."

Kortan formed his band in 2009 along with former BES teacher Callie Hershey to play music at their five year olds' birthday parties. Originally playing family-friendly rock songs, when the kids got older, the band morphed into what it is today, a self-described "4-piece Americana, alt-folk/rock band". They play benefit concerts for local organizations, appear at festivals, and will even be at an event on Bannerman's Island in June.

The band is also recording their second album. According to Kortan, "I engineer and produce all of my music in my home studio and a high-end iMac computer that I bought during the COVID lockdown. I also use the computer to produce all of our videos and in creating our website. Learning how to create in all of these different mediums has been quite challenging, but also extremely rewarding."

He goes on to say, "My advice for ATA members who are musically-inclined is to play with other people as much as possible—especially people who are better than you! It's much more motivating and fun than playing by yourself—and playing with others forces you to keep time and be a better listener. I've recently started a weekly jam at Overlook on Thursday mornings before school where staff are invited make music together—no matter what their skill level. It has been really nice to get to know my colleagues on this creative level!"

To learn more about Kortan's band and their upcoming shows, or to purchase their first album, visit damianeccoband.com.



Photo courtesy of Damian Kortan

OPS first grade teacher Damian Kortan is the front man in the Damian Ecco band.

Volunteer Opportunities Abound

April showers bring May flowers as well as so many opportunities for our members to continue to come together and give back to the community. The ATA is proud to offer two events in the coming months.

First, the ATA will once again sponsor a build in partnership with ReBuilding Together Dutchess County. The National Day of Rebuilding is always the last Saturday of April, and it is a call to service for community members. We will partner with other local groups and organizations to help a family (often right in our district) make essential repairs on their home to keep it habitable. No skill set is required, but if you do have any handy skills, it is very much appreciated. If you are interested in participating on April 27,

2024, please contact Eleni Anemelos at eanemelos@acsdny.org. An email will also be forthcoming with more details.

Secondly, check your email for updates on a date for our bi-annual highway cleanup. We will clean up the stretch of Route 55 in front of the high school. It is always a great day where you can chat with a buddy while beautifying our surrounding area. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Debbie Pollack at dpollack@acsdny.org. We will meet on the south side of the high school in the parking lot by the auditorium and Rt. 55 at 9 am. The highway department provides us with hi-visibility vests, helmets, bags, and gloves--just be sure to wear some comfortable shoes!

This year, the ATA has supported

the Grace Smith House with a district dress-down day, the Arlington Education Foundation with our annual Morning Movie event, the DCSPCA with our Jackie Higgins Memorial drive, and sponsored other events like the AHSMB invitational. Some upcoming events we have contributed to include the Gift of HOPE basketball game where we donate the jerseys worn by participants, and the 5K hosted by the AEF this spring.

The PR committee is so thankful for your generosity of time, resources, and spirit. Should you have any general questions about volunteer opportunities, please contact Kristine Jackson at kjackson@acsdny.org.

-Kristine Jackson, ATA PR Chair

Dates to Remember



MARCH

- 19th—ATA Executive Council Meeting: 4 p.m., AHS Room 1432
Board of Education Meeting, 7 p.m., BES
- 22nd—Gift of HOPE Basketball Game: AHS
- 25th-31st—Spring Break

APRIL

- 1st—Spring Break
- 9th—Board of Education Meeting, 7 p.m., OPS
- 16th—ATA Executive Council Meeting: 4 p.m., AHS Room 1432
- 20th—District Art Fair, 11 a.m.—4 p.m., LMS
- 23rd—Board of Education Meeting: 7 p.m., ASM



MAY

- 10th—PD Half Day (Elementary and Middle Schools only)
- 14th—Board of Education Meeting: 7 p.m., UVMS



Announcements

WHAT'S GOING ON?

Do you know something great that an ATA member has done recently? Perhaps they have done charity work, received an award, attended a conference, or even published a book. Let us know by scanning the QR code or going to this link:

<https://forms.gle/aGLYf3LWHqkP5gaS7>



Stay informed! Follow us on Facebook and Twitter or check out www.arlingtonteachers.com for forms, photos, calendars, and more.

Do you know what retirement tier you are in?

Tier 1: Membership prior to 7/1/73	Tier 4: Membership 9/1/83 — 12/31/09
Tier 2: Membership 7/1/73 — 7/26/76	Tier 5: Membership 1/1/10 — 3/31/12
Tier 3: Membership 7/27/76 — 8/31/83*	Tier 6: Membership on or after 4/1/12

*Tier 3 members are eligible for benefits under Tier 3 or 4, whichever provides the better benefit.

For more information, go to nystrs.org