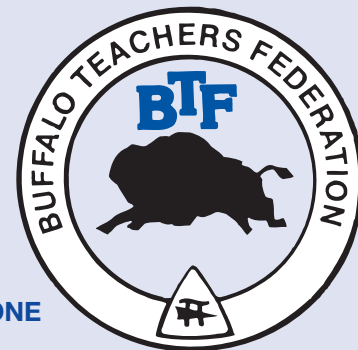


PROVOCATOR

June 2024

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE BUFFALO TEACHERS FEDERATION VOLUME 54/NUMBER 4

DEDICATION
SOLIDARITY
PROFESSIONALISM
PRIDE
SECOND TO NONE



BTF President and Teachers Address Negative Comments Made by BOE President Sharon Belton-Cottman

The president of the Board of Education came under fire during the Board's regular meeting June 12th following comments she made during a previous meeting.

Sharon Belton-Cottman, president of the Board, responded with defensive comments and an attempt to silence other Board members. She made remarks that upcoming Board elections may have been the reason that two At-Large Board members lent support to the teachers.

Her response followed comments from the BTF, teachers, parents, and Board members defending teachers' rights to refrain from physically intervening in student fights.

Belton-Cottman said during the May 15 Board meeting that teachers have a responsibility to break up fights and implied that teachers "owe" the district this measure in exchange for salary and benefits in the contract.

As a result of those comments, BTF President Rich Nigro informed teachers they are required to intervene in altercations, but should not physically break up fights. (See story on page 6)

He said teachers are responsible for all students and could be hurt or knocked unconscious breaking up a fight, leaving the remaining students unattended. Some teachers are physically unable to break up a fight because of pregnancy or illness.

Despite the danger, many teachers will still try to stop student fights, he said. Many have been seriously hurt or permanently disabled.

Nigro explained to the Board, and specifically to Cottman, the union's position, then reprimanded her for her "reprehensible" comments and "pitting" people against the teachers.

"Much is expected of this Board and President Sharon Cottman. You represent the teachers and administration, everybody in this district. I find it reprehensible that you would use false claims that I can only perceive are to pit people against each other and I

don't understand why", Nigro told the Board.

He said teachers, on a daily basis, "have given much of themselves" in personal sacrifice, personal safety, time, and money and deserve the pay hike approved in the contract last year.

"The salary they are now earning came from negotiations between this Board of Education and the Federation and the superintendent. Both District and Federation gave some things up and both District and Federation got some things in return. And that's how negotiations work. Nobody was strong-armed. Nobody would have signed anything if they didn't agree to it.

The salary the teachers are finally earning right now would amount to the same dollar amount had we received timely contracts over the last 20 years. According to the Standard Consumer Price Index, this is about 2%. We'd be right where we are right now", Nigro explained.

He reminded the Board that the teachers and district are part of the same team and working toward the same goals.

"We're all different parts of the same body and it benefits us to work together", he said. "Anti-union rhetoric" causes division and "is why unions exist".

Nigro said he and teachers in the audience were there not in protest, but because the meeting is a "public forum".

"Thank you for not bringing your torches and pitchforks", Cottman replied, "because that would have caused a major problem".

She said "if you were offended over anything I've said. It was not to offend you. However, it was to make you aware that my eyes and the community eyes are watching us all. And, when I get reports from doctors who say that incidents (are up) and children are being hurt more, I have to wonder if there is an environment that exists that allows it", Cottman said.

"One reason I've said I don't want to be the Board president on my final year on the Board is because I want to be able to say whatever I have to say because I've earned that right", Cottman said.

After her comments, Cottman told Board members if they wanted to respond to the speakers, they would have to do so at the end of the meeting because it was getting late.

However, At-Large Member Terrance Heard insisted on addressing the body. After he and At-Large Member Larry Scott voiced their support of teachers, Cottman said their comments were made to get votes in the November election. Both are seeing re-election.

Superintendent Tonja Williams offered to meet with Cottman and Nigro to resolve any issues that might remain.



Above: Because the meeting room at Grabiarsz School #79 did not provide for sufficient seating, BTF President Rich Nigro helped bring at least 40 chairs into the room to accommodate the teachers who attended in support.



Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

June 30, 2024 marks the completion of Vice President MacPherson-Sullivan's and my first year as the elected leaders of the Buffalo Teachers Federation. And as we prepare to welcome the summer months ahead, it is important to remember our gains and stay focused on our goals.

This time one year ago, teachers were breathing a little easier after finally having ratified our contract. While sacrifices indeed were made to achieve that contract, teachers gained a number of benefits that will impact them throughout their careers. Teachers are finally earning a salary that is commensurate with the level of education they must attain. It is a wage that more appropriately acknowledges the many facets of their job and all the work they do. The reduction of salary steps was another win that will benefit teachers by increasing their lifetime earnings as they spend a longer portion of their

careers at the top pay step.

But to see progressive growth, we needed to address the many issues that have plagued us and other unions for far too many years. Besides the initial months of COVID, where teachers' innovation and creativity were lauded as they strove to meet the learning and social-emotional needs of their students, unions and teachers have historically and wrongfully been targeted as scapegoats for countless problems. Locally, we were swimming in a sea of ancient grievances and arbitrations that never seemed to reach a conclusion. Problems with the District were typically addressed via a stagnated grievance process, email, telephone, or the media. And teachers seemed to be constantly rebutting negative news narratives. All these things helped paint an unfavorable image of Buffalo Public School teachers in the eyes of our community. Something had to change. We needed to clean up our own house and begin to take responsibility for sharing the reality of our story and rethinking the way we address issues. How would we begin to do this?

Today, Buffalo teachers and your union have revamped communication strategies with the District. Regular Labor/Management meetings held over the last 12 months have established more productive and less confrontational sessions between the Federation and the District. And at the building level, the Federation has collaborated with and joined many delegates at monthly Building Committee meetings. The Federation and its members have pivoted from delivering complaints about the District primarily through the media and instead opened a path of direct dialogue with the District, a strategy that is beginning to pay dividends. One only need look at the teachers who spoke at the June 12th BOE meeting. They voiced their concerns, provided verifiable facts to support their positions, and maintained professional decorum while responding to divisive comments made by the BOE President. Follow-up comments from the Superintendent and some of the Board members demonstrated empathy and a desire to work with teachers. And an even more telling indication that the media and public are beginning to see teachers in a different light is through observations made by some of the media outlets. After years of being fed a narrative of conflict and division, they are beginning to see the collaborative efforts between teachers and the District as we work to realize health and safety improvements and academic advances for our students through the lens of (and not at the expense of) the teachers' contract.

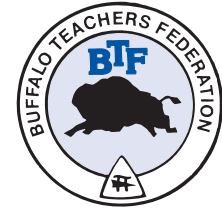
In addition to regular Labor/Management meetings (which have resulted in fewer grievances being filed, leading to a much quicker turnaround and settling of grievances), this year has seen many other improvements and successes for members, such as:

- *Medicare Part D MOU* (settling a grievance that had been languishing since January 2018)
- *ICT Overage MOU* (ensuring the overage numbers outlined in the contract are followed)
- *Teacher Center Presenter Pay MOU* (raising pay so it is in line with current contract numbers)
- *Temporary Teacher Personal Day MOU* (guaranteeing equitable disbursement days)
- Implementation of the *Additional Class Assignment HR Policy*
- Increases to Supplemental Benefits (dental, optical, and co-pay reimbursements)
- Creation of the members only [BTF Union app](#)
- Ongoing delegate and alternate trainings
- Several Social Committee and member engagement events

So, what's next? Moving into the 2024-25 school year, the BTF will continue to maintain the momentum we have built around improving communication, settling outstanding grievances and arbitrations, and bolstering member engagement. I will be working with the Supplemental Benefits Fund Trustees to assess our finances in anticipation of another increase in benefits for our members. But we will begin to shift from the old model where union headquarters functions simply as a call center to reactively respond to issues, to a model of empowering and working alongside members to address issues right at the building level (whenever possible and appropriate).

To be clear, the need to call headquarters will always exist. But if I have learned one thing these last 12 months, it is that many of the same issues and questions continue to flow through this office from different members and from different schools. That is a problem. We cannot rely on a reactionary method of dealing with issues. Rather, we must work to prevent them from occurring in the first place. So, we will work to change this paradigm as your BTF officers and Labor Relations Specialists will regularly visit delegates and members in the buildings as we continue to better provide onsite support and training.

Change is a process measured not in weeks or months, but in years. Knowing that, I am proud of all we have achieved together this past year. Together... Because nothing happens as the result of one person alone. Together is how we will continue to improve things for our members. Together is how we will control the narrative of who teachers are and what we do. We are stronger when we stand in unity. And because of our unity, I am confident I will be sharing more positive news and advancements for our members in next June's *Provocator*.



BTF at a Glance

BTF President

Rich Nigro

BTF Vice President

Melinda MacPherson-Sullivan

BTF Treasurer

Joseph Montante

BTF Secretary

Mark Mecca

BTF Executive Committee Members

Pre-K-6

Rachel Binda-Lis, April Hall,
Kim Parzymieso, Tara Rosa,
Janine Schuster, Chris Stephens

7-12

Tom Anthony, Dennis Brancato, Sam
Fritz, Mike Jeffers, Rich Pyszczyk, Eve
Shippens, M. Sue Raichilson

K-12

Desiree Breckenridge-Barnes,
Melinda CuvIELLO, Amy Flynn, Mel Holden,
Karen Kane, Ellen Malone, Gregory Sawicki

At Large

Mike Mecca, Brian Meyer, David
Stephens

BTF Headquarters Staff

Rich Nigro, *President*

Melinda MacPherson-Sullivan, *Presidential
Assistant*

Joseph Montante, *Presidential Assistant*

Jenna Burke, *NYSUT Counsel*

Devon Gawley, *NYSUT Labor Relations*

Specialist

Robert Mueller, *NYSUT*

Labor Relations Specialist

Jennifer Rhee, *NYSUT*

Labor Relations Specialist

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PROVOCATOR

BTF Provocator Staff

Joseph Montante, *managing editor, photo editor*
Chris Salamone, *editor*

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June 2024
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Letters to the Editor

The Teacher's Desk Provides Supplies to Low-Income Schools and Students through Donations

Thank you for supporting The Teacher's Desk and for your generous donation of \$1,000. With so many worthwhile organizations to choose from, it is an honor to be selected to receive your support.

The Teacher's Desk will use your funding to maximize the academic potential of economically disadvantaged students. Specifically, we will provide school supplies, books and educational materials to low-income schools. In the last academic year, we distributed \$7,500,000 in free school supplies and books to 6,000 teachers and 150,000 students in need at 250 schools throughout the Western New York region.

The pandemic and ensuing problems faced by local families have caused many youths to fall through the cracks. The Teacher's Desk has learned how to adapt and to meet the greatest needs our kids have.

We have responded to the many challenges that low-income children face by partnering with schools throughout the region to distribute beautiful, brand new books because too many low income youth have no books at all (61% of low income

homes have no books in them; can you imagine?) We also continue to create and disseminate Panchopacks- backpacks filled with \$100 of school supplies-along with a Healthy Student Supply Kit which includes personal hygiene items.

Personal health/hygiene items are often expensive. Many families in our region are struggling to meet their needs and have difficulties purchasing the everyday products most of us take for granted. Increasingly, teens and young people are going hungry to save themselves the humiliation of going to school with greasy hair and smelling of body odor. We had to do something.

Ultimately, we have distributed over 50,000 Panchopacks and over 250,000 brand new books to economically disadvantaged students and over 20,000 Healthy Student Supply Kits over the past 2-3 years. And we keep going...thanks to steadfast supporters like you!!!

Once again, thank you for your kindness. We are so very fortunate to have you on our team.

With Gratitude, Hope and Love,
John Mika, Executive Director

BTF Supports Buffalo Toronto Public Media

Thank you for making a gift of \$500 on February 21 to Buffalo Toronto Public Media, where every day you hear and see something new, interesting and important to your life. Thank you for your generosity.

Every supporter of Buffalo Toronto Public Media is appreciated for their commitment to public media. Thank you for partnering in our efforts to remain your most trusted source for the programs you love and that make a difference in your life and in the lives of your family, friends and neighbors.

Our team is so grateful for you – the extra step that you took to support great programming for the Western New York and Southern Ontario area is a vital one. Thank you for helping us make our community a more engaging place to call home.

Sincerely,
Lisa LaTrovato, Director
Leadership & Legacy Giving
Programs

Madonna of the Streets Thanks BTF for Donation

We would like to thank you for your contribution to Madonna of the Streets, Inc., St. Luke's Mission of Mercy and Our Lady of Hope Child Services. Your generosity has helped us to serve the needy in Western New York.

This year, with your gift, we were able to provide almost 624,000 grab & go meals (100,000 more than last year), along with many other needed services. This would not be possible without you!

Your total contribution of \$500 was received during 2023. If you did not receive a thank you from us for a donation you made during the last calendar year, we would like to apologize.

May God Bless You,
Amy Betros
President & Co-founder

BTF Donates \$100 to Kevin Guest House

Thank you for paying it forward for guests who are dealing with a medical crisis away from home with your donation of \$100 for a Family Stay made on letter dated 12/21/2023. As you know, Kevin Guest House represents a "home away from home" to over 2,000 people every year and your support directly helps care for these families as we remain open despite many challenges.

The Garvey family established Kevin Guest House to allow families to stay close to their loved ones. Your generous gift will help ensure that the Garvey Family's legacy lives on for the many guests who walk through our doors.

It is through the generosity of our community and support from donors and friends like you, who help ease the financial and emotional stress that often accompanies serious illness. Kevin Guest House is proud to be America's first healthcare hospitality house, providing a home away from home since 1972 for more than 60,000 patients and families traveling to Buffalo for critical medical care.

Sincerely,
Lynsey Zimdahl Weaver Executive
Director

BTF Donates \$2,500 to Roswell Park Prostate Cancer Research Fund

Thank you for supporting Roswell Park's lifesaving work. Your partnership is so valuable as we work to create a world in which someone doesn't have to fear a cancer diagnosis.

Every year, thousands of cancer patients and their families will turn to Roswell Park in search of hope. Our team is committed to providing them with exceptional medical care and compassionate programs to enhance their quality of life. As we aspire to free our world from the fear, pain and loss due to cancer, our world-renowned scientists are diligently working to develop new treatments and save more lives.

Please know, we could not continue our important work without you. On behalf of all those who walk through our doors, thank you!

Most sincerely,
Candace S. Johnson, PhD
President & CEO
M&T Presidential Chair in Leadership

Thirty-one Teachers, with Nearly 800 Total Years of Service, Honored During BTF Annual Retirement Dinner

Thirty-one teachers, with nearly 800 cumulative years teaching in the Buffalo Public School District, attended the annual BTF Retirement Dinner following the brief Council of Delegates meeting May 21 at Salvatore's Italian Gardens in Depew.

In addition, certificates were presented for the first time to delegates who provided outstanding representation in their schools during the 2023-24 school year.

The retiring teachers, ranging in service from ten to 38 years, taught a total of 797.4 years in Buffalo schools. Prior service in other school districts was not part of the calculations.

The annual dinner was started by the BTF to honor retiring teachers who wish to attend. Each participant receives a complimentary dinner and a framed certificate for their service. The dinner follows a brief meeting of the Council of Delegates.

BTF President Rich Nigro and Vice President Melinda MacPherson-Sullivan presented the certificates. MacPherson-Sullivan also emceed the event.

In opening remarks, President Nigro told the retirees they will always be part of the BTF and can call with their questions and concerns.

The retirees and the number of years they served are:

Piret Duma	38	Debra Veronica	26
Charlene Lewis	34	Diana Cooke	25
Patricia Moynihan	34	Joan Tedesco-Blair	25
Lucia Costello-Sanders	33	Cherie Burau	23
Theresa Foscolo	31.3	Nancy Dumke	23
Michele Bluntt	31	Amy Lickfeld	23
Jane L. Burgio	31	Emmett Peterson	23
Kerrie Herrscher	31	Catherine Bellanti	21
Constance Kudrna	30.3	Daniela Hager-Carbonara	20
Ana Velez	30	Debra Jacob	20
Kimberly Wechter	30	Jane Brooks	18
Debra Hinckley Sugg	28	Deborah Hardwick	18
Nancy Zilker	28	Deborah Schulmeister	16
Kathleen Sciolino	27.8	Kathleen Herdlein	15
Tammy Lickfeld	27	Richelle Morgan	10
David Samson	27		



BTF President Rich Nigro and Vice President Melinda MacPherson-Sullivan address the retirees and their guests, and the Council of Delegates.



Outstanding Delegates: For the first time ever, six delegates were given certificates for outstanding service during the Council of Delegates meeting preceding the retirement ceremony. Pictured with President Rich Nigro, they are, L to R, Naomi Carey, Cody Mapes, Cheryl Greene, Gaetano Falcone, and Mitch Baehre. Also honored was Chris Ricci, who was unable to attend.



Left: Several delegates attended the dinner to congratulate the retirees.



Welcome to NYSUT Retiree Council #44

Congratulations to our new retirees! As you conclude your time as an active teacher and BTF member, be assured that you are still a union member in NYSUT and AFT.

NYSUT Retiree Councils, established in 1991, are a powerful voice for retirees, who continue to support the values and work of our union.

BTF members, upon retirement, become members of NYSUT Retiree Council #44 and join more than 260,000 NYSUT retirees. As a retiree, you can stay involved and take advantage of the many benefits that NYSUT offers its members.

Retired members serve as delegates to the NYSUT, NEA and AFT conventions, where they represent the interests of their retired colleagues as well as support the issues important to active teachers.

RC #44 partners with retirees from Western New York (Retiree Councils #1, #2, and #3) to plan activities for its members.

Traditionally there is fall luncheon to welcome new retirees as well as a holiday luncheon and a retiree conference in the spring. These events provide members the opportunity to network with retirees as well as to keep up to date on member benefits, legislation, and any other issues pertinent to retirees.

There are a variety of activities that retirees can engage in. RC #44

members volunteer at The Teacher's Desk on a weekly basis from September through May. We participate in the Making Strides Walk, Western New York Women's Committee, and make phone calls to support NYSUT-endorsed candidates, to name a few. We are a 2024 recipient of the NYSUT Local Community Service Award and the Ken Kurzweil Social Justice Award. Our retiree council is active and involved!

Members can also participate in workshops and trips. You can keep informed of all of our events through our RC #44 newsletter that you will receive during the year and by following us on our Facebook page (NYSUT Retiree Council #44) and our website <http://rcwest.ny.aft.org>.

Retirees do not pay dues to belong to NYSUT. RC #44 has a voluntary participation fee that is collected each year. We encourage our members to continue to contribute to NYSUT's political action fund VOTE-COPE.

Upon retirement you are no longer an NEA member unless you join as a lifetime member. This will enable you to continue to enjoy all the benefits of NEA membership.

We look forward to welcoming you into our organization and encourage you to become an active member!

If you have any questions, please contact Sara Rodland, president of RC #44 at 689-9561 or by email sarasarasara2008@live.com.



Retirees Can Remain Active

You don't have to say goodbye to your friends and colleagues when you retire. The Buffalo Retired Teachers Association (BRTA) will keep you busy and in touch.

The BRTA is open to all Buffalo teachers and administrators who are retiring. The BRTA hosts four luncheons during the school year, including the Fall Luncheon on the first day of school in September, Holiday Luncheon in December, Winter Luncheon in February, and the Spring Luncheon, in May. During June, BRTA men and women participate in the Annual Golf Tournament.

Travel excursions are sponsored by the BRTA throughout the year, including international vacations, day trips to various locations within a 100-mile radius, overnight trips outside New York State, and theater trips to Shea's Buffalo Theatre. The BRTA newsletter keeps members informed of all important issues.

And, although retired, members of the BRTA don't forget the students. Each year, three \$1,500 scholarships are awarded to graduating seniors of the Buffalo Public Schools.

Life membership in the BRTA is \$150 and must be paid in full. Annual membership is \$12 per year. For more information contact Linda Parada, membership secretary, at 875-3392 or online at www.BRTA.biz.

Despite Criticism by BOE President, BTF Stands by Advice Regarding Student Fights

There are dozens of incidents of teachers being injured while breaking up fights among students. Some were hurt so badly, they were left incapacitated and forced to retire.

As a result, teachers were advised by the Buffalo Teachers Federation not to physically intervene during altercations between students.

However, not everyone agrees with this approach and recent comments from a Buffalo Board of Education member have resulted in a strong message from the BTF.

Rich Nigro, president of the BTF, issued the following letter May 16 to Buffalo teachers reminding them their safety is of the utmost importance when it comes to breaking up student confrontations.

Dear Colleagues,

After hearing BOE President Sharon Belton-Cottman's comments at last night's Board meeting regarding the Federation's position on physical intervention during altercations between students, I am compelled to reiterate our position. I, Buffalo Teachers Federation President Rich Nigro, advise members **NOT** to physically intervene during altercations between students.

Teachers **DO** have an obligation to protect the safety of the students in their building. That is part of your job as an educator. It's why you pull students aside to talk with them when you see a change in their behavior. It's why you change the seating arrangement in your class when you notice unresolved personality conflicts. It's why you conduct restorative circles. And it's why you reach out to Student Support Staff and parents to ensure a safe and healthful environment for your students. Teachers **MUST** intervene in some way when physical altercations occur. Interventions take many forms. Teachers have shouted verbal commands for students who are fighting to stop. Teachers have put themselves in harm's way managing crowd control to prevent other students (who may be attempting to get a better view, cheer on the fight, or record a video to upload to such sites as Buffalo Fights on Instagram). It may be appropriate to call the Main Office, School Security, or a neighboring teacher for help. There are many ways to intervene outside of physical intervention.

Teachers **ARE** mandated reporters and so must report such instances

to building administration. You have a responsibility to inform the building principal (or his/her designee in his/her absence) of **ANY** physical altercation or assault. You should also record such occurrences as an Office Discipline Referral (ODR) in Infinite Campus (IC). Such data recorded in IC are reported to the State's Information and Reporting Services and reflected on the School Safety and the Educational Climate (SECC). These data, if accurately reported, can be used to target supports where they are most needed. But only if such instances are accurately reported.

Teachers are **NOT** mandated to physically intervene when fights erupt between students. There are court decisions that support the reasons for such advice. If a teacher, while attempting to break up a fight, is injured, left incapacitated, or knocked unconscious, that leaves his/her other students vulnerable to imminent danger. A teacher may be hurt while attempting to separate fighting students resulting in long-term or permanent injuries. A teacher may suffer injuries requiring a paid leave of absence from work as the Workers' Compensation process takes place. A student or parent may claim they were injured by the actions of a teacher who physically broke up a fight they were involved in. Thus, for the safety of our members whose interests we must protect, the Federation advises our members **NOT** to physically intervene when two or more students are fighting.

I have personally broken up fights as have many of you reading this letter. At times, I have been injured doing so, though I have been fortunate those injuries did not result in loss of work time. Ultimately, the decision is the teacher's as to how he/she intercedes based upon the unique situation at hand. Know that your union is here to support you. The union's primary job is to uphold the rights guaranteed to you in the contract and Taylor Law. BOE President Belton-Cottman has said, "Much has been given, and much will be expected in return." I believe a more accurate statement is, "Much has been given, because you have earned it!"

In Solidarity,
Rich Nigro

BTF Endorses 3 for Board of Education

Three candidates for the Buffalo Board of Education were endorsed by the BTF June 11 during the Council of Delegates meeting.

Larry Scott, and Terrance Heard, both incumbents seeking re-election, and newcomer Adrianna Zullich, were endorsed for at-large positions.

They are the first political endorsements for the November elections made by the BTF.

The endorsements were recommended by the BTF Political Action Committee after interviewing all candidates requesting BTF endorsement.

The committee, chaired by BTF Vice President Melinda MacPherson-Sullivan, includes Treasurer Joseph Montante, Dennis Brancato, Amy Flynn, Nicole Herkey, Melissa Kenney, Eve Shippens, Mike Mecca, and Ruyvette Townsend.

Endorsement interviews for the November elections will resume in September

Larry Scott Supports Teachers on Facebook

A statement supporting teachers' decisions to remain safe during student altercations was issued June 11 by Buffalo Board of Education At-Large Member Larry Scott on his Facebook page.

In his remarks, Scott says teacher safety is just as important as student safety. He also says teachers "have earned and deserve every penny" they receive, despite a comment from Board President Sharon Belton-Cottman indicating teachers owe the District for benefits they have received.

Scott issued the following message:

BUFFALO TEACHERS:

As a Board member and parent of two BPS students, your safety, just like the safety of our students, is important to me.

We all have a responsibility to uphold our District Code of Conduct, Code of Ethics, the Dignity for All Students Act, AND the collective bargaining agreements that we have negotiated and approved.

You also have earned and deserve every penny that you receive, as well as respect for the invaluable work that you do each and every day for our students and their families.

Though I know many share my sentiments, these thoughts as written are mine and mine alone.

Larry Scott

Union Activists Honored at NYSUT's 34th WNY Annual Awards Dinner

Two BTF activists were honored May 16 by the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) during the Western New York 34th Annual Awards Dinner at the Buffalo/Niagara Convention Center.

BTF President Rich Nigro and Sophia Howard-Johnson received WNY Regional Leadership Awards, Election District 44, for their service to the BTF and to the teachers of the Buffalo Public School District. The "local" award was presented to Sophia and the ED 44 award was presented to President Nigro.

Sophia Howard-Johnson is an Elementary Education teacher who started working in the District in 1993. She served as a building delegate and later on the BTF Executive Committee until 2023. She also was an invaluable member of the negotiating team for the contracts settled in 2016 and 2023. Her input helped improve the language that eventually went into the final agreements.

Sophia is a trustee of the Sick Leave Bank and diligently reviews teachers' applications biweekly along with the other trustees, all while maintaining strict confidentiality. She is a member and former chair of the Ethnic Minority Involvement Committee and has assisted with numerous special projects through the years.

Sophia was nominated for the award at the suggestion of the Executive Officers of the BTF and was unanimously approved by the Executive Committee.

Rich Nigro started teaching with BPS in 1998 as an ELA teacher and later became an Instructional Technology coach. He served as a union delegate for several years before winning election to the Executive Committee in 2021 and, of course, as president of the BTF in 2023.

In less than one year in office, Rich has helped settle a backlog of arbitrations, signed several M.O.U.s with the District after securing approval from the Council of Delegates, recommended significant increases to Supplemental Benefits, and initiated monthly Labor/Management meetings. These meetings have been very productive and have led to much-needed dialogue between the BTF and the

District.

Rich has been a strong advocate for our teachers and has not been shy about taking on District officials or Board members who have attempted to portray Buffalo teachers in an unfavorable way.

Rich Nigro was nominated by the NYSUT Election District Directors from the Western New York area. They were in unanimous agreement on conferring the award based on how much has been accomplished in less than one year into Rich's presidency.

In addition to our active members, retiree Sara Rodland received NYSUT's "Legends Award" from the Coalition of Retirees based on her many decades of service to unionism. Another BTF retiree, Claudia Kania, was presented the local award from Retiree Council 44 for her service.

The BTF is fortunate to have had so many great leaders, both past and present. We have what we have today thanks to the unionists who have given so much through the years.



ABOVE: BTF President Rich Nigro and Sophia Howard-Johnson display their awards.

BTF Gets Award at NYSUT RA

Every year, the BTF goes above and beyond what is expected when giving back to the community and fighting for what's right.

For these extraordinary contributions, the BTF received an award during the annual NYSUT Representative Assembly, held May 3-4 in New York City.

The BTF received the Community Service Award because it "consistently evidences a belief in community service."

BTF Welcomes New Members

The following 3 teachers have joined the Buffalo Teachers Federation since the last issue of the Provocator.

Jessica Folckemer
Heather Staggers
Celina Wozniak

Welcome to the union!

NY's Good Food Bill Passes in Legislature

The Good Food NY Bill has passed both Houses of the New York State Legislature and is now being reviewed by Gov. Kathy Hochul.

More than 70 farmer associations and community groups across the state helped write and pass the bill to change NY's food system and make public funding work for frontline food workers, farmers and communities. BTF retiree Liz Spiro-Carmen lent much support to the passage of this bill.

With the approval of the Good Food Bill, public institutions across the state will now no longer be restricted by "lower bidder" mandates and will be able to build supply chains that reflect community values.

City Honors School Ranked Top High School in Buffalo Area

City Honors School has been named the best high school in the WNY area by U.S. News and World Report.

The news outlet recently released its 2024 list of the best high schools in the United States based on college readiness, state assessment proficiency and performance, underserved student performance, and college curriculum breadth.

According to their findings, City Honors School had an overall rating of 98.94/100; a graduation rate of 97%, and a college readiness rate of 81.8%. Enrollment at the school was listed at 593.

Rounding out their list of top 10 high schools in the Buffalo area and based on their ranking, behind City Honors are:

2. Williamsville East High School
3. East Aurora High School
4. Clarence Senior High School
5. Williamsville North High School
6. Amherst Central High School
7. Orchard Park High School
8. Lancaster High School
9. Williamsville South High School
10. Grand Island Senior High School

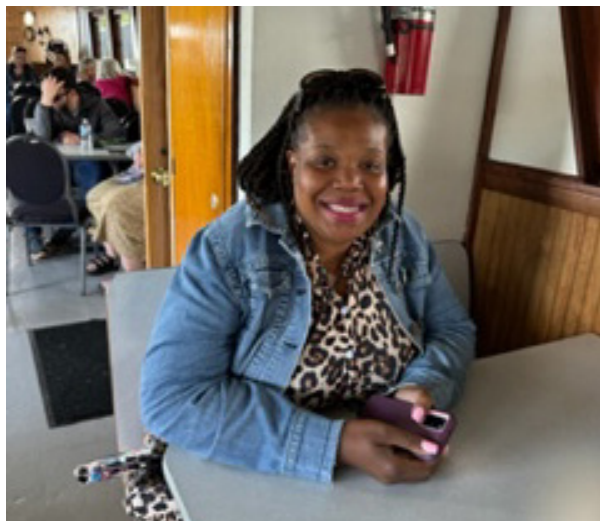
Congratulations to the teachers at City Honors for a great year!

Solidarity Cruise aboard the Miss Buffalo provides fun time for all

Approximately 100 BTF members, their friends and families embarked June 9 on a Solidarity Cruise aboard the Miss Buffalo.

Despite a few sprinkles and a breeze which kept most participants safely inside the vessel, a fun time was had by all.

Arranged by Nicole Herkey, chairperson of the Social Committee, the two-hour cruise along the Buffalo Harbor included an array of hot and cold appetizers and a cash bar. Participants paid \$10 each for the event.





2022-2023

See accompanying notes. 3

See accompanying notes. 4

See accompanying notes. 5

3. Investments:

	2023	2022
U.S. Government securities	\$ 277,894	\$ 257,809
Common stock	1,460,076	1,261,817
Mutual funds	1,699,799	1,613,575
Corporate bonds	292,448	327,765
Certificates of deposit	424,059	128,423
Money market	808,362	869,456
	<u>\$ 4,962,638</u>	<u>\$ 4,458,845</u>

Investment income (loss) is as follows:

	2023	2022
Interest and dividends	\$ 253,352	\$ 115,185
Net gains (losses)	331,781	(498,611)
	<u>\$ 585,133</u>	<u>\$ (383,426)</u>

4. Property and Equipment:

	2023	2022
Land	\$ 25,000	\$ 25,000
Buildings and improvements	490,640	493,305
Office furniture and equipment	172,072	157,857
Computer equipment	83,816	155,847
	<u>771,528</u>	<u>832,009</u>
Less accumulated depreciation	638,424	739,651
	<u>\$ 133,104</u>	<u>\$ 92,358</u>

5. Short-Term Borrowings:

The Federation has available a \$100,000 bank demand line of credit with interest payable at prime plus 3.5%, secured by substantially all assets of the Federation. The line is subject to the usual terms and conditions applied by the bank for working capital financing, and is subject to review annually. There were no amounts outstanding under the line at August 31, 2023 and 2022.

6. Transactions with Affiliate:

The Federation receives rent (for the use of a portion of its building) from Buffalo Teachers Federation, Inc. Supplemental Benefit Fund (SBF), a tax-exempt, health and welfare organization. This rent totaled \$17,000 for each of the years ended August 31, 2023 and 2022.

The Federation also remits payment of certain SBF personnel and other expenses for which it is reimbursed. Amounts owed to the Federation from SBF at August 31, 2023 and 2022 included in receivables were \$156,738 and \$151,631.

7. Post-Retirement Health Care Benefits:

The Federation provides postretirement health care benefits to all retirees who attain age 55 with fifteen years of service. Employees who retire after September 1, 2016 contribute annual amounts ranging from \$360 to \$900 depending on insurance coverage. It is the Federation's practice to fund these benefits as incurred. The measurement date used to determine the benefit obligation is August 31st of each year.

The status of the postretirement health benefit plan at and for the years ended August 31, 2023 and 2022 is as follows:

	2023	2022
Accumulated postretirement benefit obligation (APBO)	\$ 1,193,082	\$ 1,472,283
Accrued postretirement benefit obligation (benefit liability)	1,193,082	1,472,283
Accumulated adjustment change in net assets available for benefits	1,429,809	1,133,914
Benefit cost	26,478	163,383
Benefits paid	9,784	10,272

At August 31, 2023 and 2022, the following items included as adjustments to net assets available for benefits had not yet been recognized as components to benefit cost:

	2023	2022
Net gain	\$ 1,429,809	\$ 1,133,914

	2023	2022
Weighted-average assumptions used to determine benefit liability:		
Yearly health care premium increases	6.00%	6.00%
Discount rate	5.00%	4.50%
Yearly retiree contribution increase	3.00%	3.00%
Weighted-average assumptions used to determine net periodic benefit cost:		
Discount rate	5.00%	4.50%

Expected future annual benefit payments:

2024	\$ 39,700
2025	40,800
2026	42,000
2027	43,000
2028	43,900
2029 – 2033	229,200
	<u>\$ 438,600</u>

8. Financial Assets Available for Operations:

The Federation's primary source of financial assets are member dues, rental income, and investment income, which are acquired throughout the year to help meet the Federation's cash needs for general expenditures. If necessary, the Federation also has access to a \$100,000 bank demand line of credit (Note 5).

The Federation's financial assets available within one year of the balance sheet date to meet cash needs for general expenditures consist of the following at August 31, 2023 and 2022:

	2023	2022
Cash	\$ 634,915	\$ 708,918
Receivables	214,914	224,047
Investments	4,962,638	4,458,845
	<u>\$ 5,812,467</u>	<u>\$ 5,391,810</u>

9. Expenses by Nature and Function:

	2023	Program	Management and General	Total
Per capita dues	\$ 2,216,064	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 2,216,064
Personnel	623,191	321,041		944,232
Occupancy	61,921	26,537		88,458
Office supplies and expenses	58,005	33,371		91,376
Contributions	39,995	-		39,995
Public relations and contract enforcement	70,648	-		70,648
Professional fees	-	65,176		65,176
Other	107,733	12,379		120,112
	<u>\$ 3,177,557</u>	<u>\$ 458,504</u>	<u>\$ -</u>	<u>\$ 3,636,061</u>

	2022	Program	Management and General	Total
Per capita dues	\$ 2,285,469	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 2,285,469
Personnel	635,673	327,466		963,139
Occupancy	58,586	25,108		83,694
Office supplies and expenses	59,495	36,341		95,836
Contributions	60,000	-		60,000
Public relations and contract enforcement	69,394	-		69,394
Professional fees	-	68,152		68,152
Other	112,101	14,257		126,358
	<u>\$ 3,280,718</u>	<u>\$ 471,324</u>	<u>\$ -</u>	<u>\$ 3,752,042</u>

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Extended Pay Plan Questions & Answers For the 2024-2025 School Year

Periodically, the BTF receives inquiries about the Extended Pay Plan.

Essentially, the Extended Pay Plan is a form of a savings plan for teachers who want to be assured they have budgeted monies for the summer following the school year. Interest monies are used to help defray the BTF's operational expenses and thereby keep dues costs down.

The program is optional for any Buffalo teacher who wishes to participate. Any teacher who wishes to participate in the Extended Pay Plan for the summer of 2025 should be aware of all the information that follows.

Q. How much money do I receive during the summer?

A. You decide how much you want to receive during the summer of 2025. Assuming there are no difficulties, payroll deductions occur from 20 paychecks during the 2024-25 school year. The amount you receive will depend on how much you have deducted from each check.

Q. How do I receive my summer payments?

A. You must receive your summer payments as direct deposits. (Please see the Direct Deposit Section.)

Q. How much money will come out of each check?

A. The exact amount of deduction is determined by you and will be withheld from 20 of your 22 paychecks. The minimum deduction per paycheck allowable is \$40. You may increase this amount in \$5 units (i.e. \$45, \$50, \$55, \$60, etc.).

Option 1: One direct deposit issued during the summer recess. Formula: to determine the exact amount of the summer direct deposit under Option 1, multiply the amount deducted each paycheck times 20. **Example:** \$100 withheld per paycheck times 20 equals \$2,000. If you saved \$100 per paycheck and selected **Option 1**, your one summer direct deposit would total exactly \$2,000.

Option 2: Two direct deposits issued during the summer recess. Formula: to determine the amount per deposit under Option 2, multiply the amount deducted each paycheck times 20 and divide by 2. **Example:** \$100 withheld each paycheck times 20 equals \$2,000 divided by 2 equals \$1,000. If you saved \$100 per paycheck and selected Option 2, your two summer direct deposits would each total exactly \$1,000.

Option 3: Four direct deposits are issued at two-week intervals

during the summer recess. **Formula:** To determine the amount per direct deposit under Option 3 multiply the amount deducted each paycheck times 20 and divide by 4. **Example:** \$100 deducted per paycheck times 20 is \$2,000 divided by 4 equals \$500. If you saved \$100 per paycheck and selected Option 3, your four summer direct deposits would each total exactly \$500.

Q. Are there other teachers participating in the BTF Extended Pay Plan?

A. Currently more than 2,000 teachers are participating.

Q. How do I sign up?

A. You must complete an Extended Pay Plan card. The Extended Pay Plan card is divided into 3 cards. Be sure to complete the top two cards as instructed. Be sure the amount that you would like to have deducted from each paycheck is listed. The third card is for direct deposit (please see the direct deposit section below). Cards are not available online. Contact your building delegate for an application form or call Joseph Montante or his assistant, Jackie Newton, at the BTF Office (881-5400). **ALL CARDS MUST BE RETURNED TO THE BTF OFFICE.**

Q. When should I sign up for the Extended Pay Plan?

A. Submit your form during the months of May, June, and July for the following September. New teachers may enroll when they receive their New Membership Packet.

Q. What is an advance withdrawal?

A. An advance withdrawal is available to you should you need funds before the summer. One withdrawal per school year is allowed. Call the BTF and ask to speak with either Joseph Montante or Jackie Newton and they will take the necessary information over the telephone. Please be advised that it may take three to five days to process a check.

Q. Am I allowed a second withdrawal? **A.** Yes, however, if a second withdrawal is taken, you will be asked to discontinue your paycheck deduction for the remainder of the school year.

Q. Will I be able to have my summer disbursement before the scheduled payments?

A. No. To keep our records accurate, up to date and provide sufficient time for our accountants to review the accounts, there will

Extended Pay Plan Dates Set

Extended Pay Plan disbursement dates for the summer are:

- July 19
- August 2
- August 16
- August 30

The number of disbursements you will receive has been pre-selected by you. If you have questions, please call the BTF.

be no withdrawals after June 1st of each school year unless there is an extraordinary circumstance, which we will ask be accompanied by appropriate documentation.

DIRECT DEPOSIT

The BTF/Extended Pay Plan Program reached an agreement with Northwest Savings Bank for **DIRECT DEPOSIT** of your Extended Pay Plan checks. Listed below are ways that Direct Deposit can make your summer checks efficient and safe:

- 100% of the funds are available when the funds are deposited to your account.

- Funds are in your account when you are sick or on vacation.

- No worries if the mail is late or lost. You will need to complete the third card of the Extended Pay Plan card. The best way to ensure the accuracy of your banking information is to include a voided check for the account that you would like to have the funds deposited into.

- Northwest Bank will have your Extended Pay Plan funds electronically deposited during summer into the bank of your choice. You DO NOT need to have an account at Northwest Bank.

- Please remember that if you make any changes to the account that your Extended Pay Plan funds are deposited in, **YOU MUST** notify the BTF before June 1st to be sure that your summer payments are deposited into the correct account.

Paper checks are no longer an option for the summer, and you will need to complete the third card of the Extended Pay Plan card. If you need an advance during the year, that will still be via paper check.