

PROVOCATOR

March 2026

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE BUFFALO TEACHERS FEDERATION VOLUME 56/NUMBER 3

DEDICATION
SOLIDARITY
PROFESSIONALISM
PRIDE
SECOND TO NONE



1. In the conference room of Senator April Baskin, members of the WNY delegation meet with leaders from the BTF.
2. A staunch proponent of public education, Assemblyman Bill Conrad meets with BTF VP Melinda MacPherson Sullivan.
3. At a crowded meeting of the full Committee of 100, BTF President Rich Nigro and the team review the talking points before meeting with legislators.

Committee of 100 Lobbies State Representatives

More than 700 NYSUT members, including seven from the BTF, went to Albany March 8-10 to lobby legislators for money for education as part of the annual Committee of 100 Advocacy Days.

The BTF representatives met with Western New York lawmakers to urge more funding for Buffalo Schools, encourage the legislators to approve Tier 6 reforms, and push for the state to continue to fully fund Foundation Aid.

The Committee of 100 is the largest of NYSUT's grassroots lobbying efforts. Each member local is expected to send at least one representative to the event.

Participants from the BTF included President Rich Nigro, Vice President Melinda MacPherson-Sullivan, Treasurer Joseph Montante, and teachers Tammy Curry and Eve Shippens. In addition, Teacher Center Director Molly Eldridge and BTRC Policy Board Chair Kim Gable attended to advocate for funding.



BTF Hires New Member Relations Officer

Tricia Andrzejewski, a member of the BTF Executive Committee, was appointed March 9 to the newly-created position of Member Relations Officer (MRO) at the BTF. Andrzejewski was selected for the position from among 13 applicants.

Andrzejewski, a long-time member of the Council of Delegates, was elected to an At-Large seat on the Executive Committee in 2025. She has been a BPS employee since 2008 and taught Secondary Math at Discovery School No. 67.

The job of the MRO is to provide various services to our members. That could entail answering questions about leaves of absence, seniority, contractual rights and benefits, or even representing teachers if they are called into a meeting with the principal. Eventually, she will be representing teachers at Level II and Level III grievance hearings.

In September 2026, Andrzejewski will begin attending NYSUT trainings in the Albany area that are designed for Labor Relations Specialists.

The trainings take about 18 months to complete but will provide Andrzejewski with the same training that NYSUT's Labor Relations Specialists receive.

The BTF was fortunate to have many good applicants for the position. We look forward to having Trish on our staff and there is a good chance you might be talking to her the next time you call!



Tricia Andrzejewski



Earlier this month, the Federation met with the Western New York Delegation in Albany for the annual Lobby Day to share the many challenges teachers face today while doing their jobs, and to request financial support for District programs that will help to mitigate some of these challenges. Particularly, our conversations focused on the lack of resources and support for teachers of Special Education and Alternative Education and their students. We shared the strides the Federation has made this year in the wake of a series of BTF speakers at several Board of Education meetings since the fall which have led to the formation of two joint BTF/BPS/Parent committees: **Autistic Special Education Committee and Alternative Education Committee.**

- The AU Special Education Committee focused on several areas needing improved processes. One such area is student placement so parents of students with special needs are provided with information on schools that not only have availability but also have the resources to appropriately service their children. The committee is in the final stages of modifying an Intensive Needs MOU that will focus on an agency-like program for our AU classrooms. Pending funding, this will be piloted next school year in two to four primary grade classrooms with intentions to expand to higher grade levels with each passing year.
- A Board of Education member; the BTF and BCSA union presidents; and teacher, district and building administrators, parent, and community representatives comprised the Alternative Education Committee. Together, they drafted a proposal to redesign the alternative education program, a program that has slowly been decimated over the last 20 years. The proposal hopes to infuse more robust instructional support and options to be better equipped to address both the academic and behavioral needs of students.

Our meeting with the WNY Delegation yielded significant interest from the legislators present. Senator April Baskin and members of the Senatorial Education Committee invited the BTF to schedule subsequent meetings with them as we map out earmarked funding requests so that these programs receive the funding they will need. None of this would have occurred without the expertise, ideas, and involvement of several special education teachers, our BTF Special Education Committee members, and our alternative education teachers who together have invested countless hours and evenings strategizing speaking and presentation campaigns. And thank you to ALL our teachers who, despite sometimes unimaginable challenges, continue to fight for their colleagues, their students, and our profession!

In solidarity,



BTF at a Glance

BTF President

Rich Nigro

BTF Vice President

Melinda MacPherson-Sullivan

BTF Treasurer

Joseph Montante

BTF Secretary

Nicole Herkey

BTF Executive Committee Members Pre-K-6

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

7-12

Tom Anthony, Dennis Brancato, Sam Fritz, Mike Jeffers, Eve Shippens, M. Sue Raichilson, Jonathan Zasowski

K-12

Amy Flynn, Mary Kiblin, Ellen Malone, Andrea Manna, Becky Moola, Gregory Sawicki

At Large

Tricia Andrzejewski, Danielle Harris, Brian Meyer

BTF Headquarters Staff

Rich Nigro, *President*

Melinda MacPherson-Sullivan, *Presidential Assistant*

Joseph Montante, *Presidential Assistant*

Tricia Andrzejewski, *Member Relations Officer*

Nicole Herkey, *Member Relations Officer*

Nick Whitman, *NYSUT*

Labor Relations Specialist

Visit Our Updated Website
www.btfny.org

PROVOCATOR

BTF Provocator Staff

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

The **Provocator** is the official publication of the Buffalo Teachers Federation. It will be published four times during the 2025-2026 school year as a service to BTF members and interested parties in the community. Subscription price is included in BTF dues.

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The **BTF** is an affiliate of **NYSUT, AFT** and **NEA**.

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Letters to the Editor

Habitat for Humanity Thanks BTF for Support

Your support is critical to helping families build decent, affordable homes and brighter futures. Thank you for helping to build a world where everyone has a decent place to live.

With gratitude,
Tolli Love, Director Monthly Giving
Habitat for Humanity

Teacher Thanks BTF for Support of Foundation

The Alex Pichette Memorial Foundation appreciates your continued support!

Thank you for your generous contribution. The proceeds from all events will be donated to the Kids Escaping Drugs organization and the Casey House Youth Shelter.

We couldn't do this work without you!

Best,
Mary Kobee

BTF Donation Helps Roswell Research

One act of kindness, one gesture of generosity means so much for people like me who are facing cancer.

Thank you! This gift you've made to support Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center creates opportunities for patients like me. That brings me so much hope.

Your generosity is appreciated more than you know. The donation helps with on-going research.

Teri Sonaz

BTF Supports Breast Cancers Awareness

Thank you for your support. Because of supporters like you, we are raising awareness about breast cancer and taking action to end this disease as we know it, for everyone.

We are so grateful for your support. Your contributions help by:

- Funding critical research into new treatments and cures
- Providing vital information and support for those diagnosed and their families
- Giving people in every community information about ways to reduce their breast cancer risk, or find it early when it's most treatable

Together, we have come so far. Your gift makes all the difference. With your help, we are making breakthroughs against breast cancer. Your support helps us fund vital research, which is our best shot at ending this terrible disease. Your part in Making Strides Against Breast Cancer is so important and appreciated!

Thank you again for helping us improve the lives of people facing cancer. We sincerely appreciate your generosity. Thank you for supporting the American Cancer Society's vision to end cancer as we know it, for everyone.

Warm regards,
William L. Dahut, MD
Chief Scientific Officer
American Cancer Society

Legislator Thanks BTF for Endorsement

I want to extend my heartfelt thanks for your endorsement and steadfast support throughout this campaign. Your confidence in my leadership means a great deal, and I am truly honored to stand with an organization that consistently fights for the rights, dignity and well-being of working families.

I am deeply grateful that the residents of District 2 voted to retain me as their legislator. Their trust and yours reminds me why this work matters and strengthens my commitment to showing up every day with integrity, transparency, and a focus on delivering real results for our community.

Looking ahead, I want to ensure that our partnership continues to grow. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with you and your leadership team to discuss your priorities for the year. Please let me know the time that works for you. I want to understand the challenges your members are facing and explore where I can advocate, support, and help move your goals forward at the county level.

Thank you again for your trust, your advocacy, and your continued partnership. I look forward to the important work we will accomplish together.

Sincerely,
Taisha St. Jean Tard

Special BTF Pins Available

If you have 20, 25, 30, or 35 years of teaching experience in the Buffalo Public Schools and would like a pin to commemorate your service, please complete the form below and mail it to the BTF, c/o Joseph Montante, 271 Porter Avenue, Buffalo, NY 14201. This form may be emailed to jmontante@btfny.org.

Did You Know...?

That no derogatory letters or reports may be placed in a teacher's file without the teacher's knowledge and an opportunity to make a written statement of defense that will be attached to the derogatory report? This includes counseling memos! This provision can be found in Article XVI.F of our collective bargaining agreement.

Name: _____

Home/cell phone: _____

Home address: _____

Personal E-mail: _____

School: _____ No. of years teaching in BPS: _____



BTF Attends Bandits Game for Second Time

Once again this year, the BTF Social Committee organized an evening with the reigning National Lacrosse League (NLL) champions, the Buffalo Bandits. The game, played on February 7, was held at KeyBank Center.

Taking advantage of group sales pricing, and with a supplement from the BTF, teachers and their families were able to secure seats for just \$20 each. More than 350 tickets were sold and guests watched as the home team took a 3-0 lead early in the game.

Unfortunately, the Bandits ultimately fell to the Philadelphia Wings 13-11. The Bandits, NLL champions for the past three years, have had a slow start to their season but there is still plenty of time left. For some, this was their first time experiencing a Bandits game. The atmosphere was loud and exciting as the lead changed hands several times during the game. Despite the loss and frigid temperatures outside, a great time was had by all!



1. Immediately following the game, Raini Goñez, Nicole Herkey, Brian Meyer, and Colleen Hutton pose for a photo before heading home.
2. Accompanied by her family, Megan Cudzilo from School 67 enjoys the Bandits game.
3. Attending with her sister Mo Wilhelm (middle), Colleen Hutton and Raini Goñez had a great time at the game despite a loss by the home team.
4. Along with Axel Hayes, Amber Nigro revels in the excitement of the game.
5. Attending the game with her husband, Cheryl Brinson cheers on the Bandits.

Fix Tier 6 Rally Draws Thousands to Arena in Albany

More than 15,000 people packed the MVP Arena in Albany on March 8 for the largest ever rally to address reforms to Tier 6 in all of New York State's eight retirement systems.

The event was organized by New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), and included about 40 BTF members.

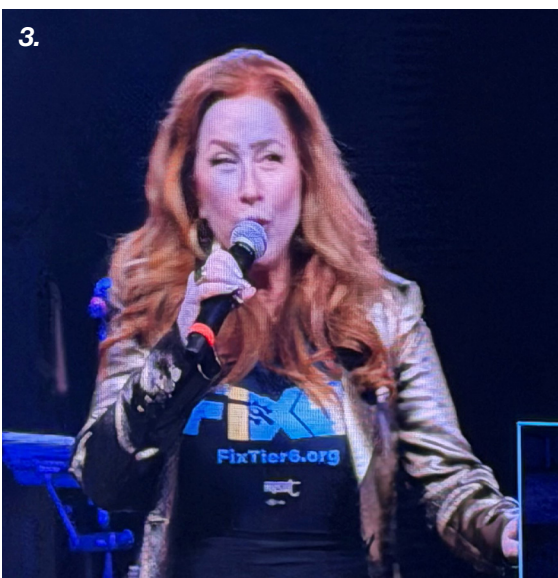
The atmosphere was loud and electric and featured prominent speakers including NYSUT President Melinda Person, AFT President Randi Weingarten, NYS Comptroller Tom DiNapoli, Attorney General Letitia James, NYS Assembly Leader Carl Heastie, and NYS Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins. Also speaking was Governor Kathy Hochul. Having the governor on board with the agenda will be a huge help as we seek to improve Tiers 5 and 6.

Each speaker addressed why Tier 6 is unfair, how harmful it is to our newer members, and the reason it has been difficult to recruit teachers and other public sector employees.

As a reminder, Tier 6 was forced on public sector employees by former Governor Andrew Cuomo, who strong-armed the Legislature into passing it in 2012.

A highlight of the program was a hilarious presentation by actress Lisa Ann Walter, star of the show Abbott Elementary. And while Walter has not been a teacher, she is the vice president of SAG-AFTRA, which went on strike for nearly four months in 2023.

Besides thousands of teachers and paraprofessionals, the attendees included firefighters, nurses, law enforcement personnel, and civil service employees. We are hoping for a major improvement in the next budget. BTF thanks all those who made the 5-hour journey (each way) to attend this rally and support our Tier 6 brothers and sisters.



1. Having just travelled 5 hours on a bus, Tammy Curry maintains a smile and gets ready for the program.

2. With every seat filled, the MVP Arena was loud and full of excitement.

3. Keeping the crowd in stitches, Lisa Ann Walter seemed to have a good idea of the job teachers do every day.

4. Along with leaders of other local unions, Rich Nigro took the stage to sing "Solidarity Forever" to close the program.

5. Finding a spot with a little more leg room, Colleen Hutton and Brian Meyer donned their BTF shirts for the rally.

BTF Marches in St. Paddy's Day Parade

For the first time ever, a contingent of Buffalo teachers represented the union in the annual St. Patrick's Day Parade on Delaware Avenue on Sunday, March 15.

Along with thousands of other people in downtown Buffalo, teachers and their families came out to celebrate Irish heritage by marching in one of the largest parades in Buffalo. The weather was mild and pleasant and parade goers were treated to an early taste of spring.

Featuring bagpipes, shamrocks, floats, and an abundance of green, this parade has been a long-standing tradition in Buffalo due to the large number of Irish Americans in Western New York. It is hosted by the United Irish American Association. If you couldn't make it this year, there are more parades to come in the spring including the Pride Parade and Juneteenth. Please join us!



Counseling Memos

A counseling memo is not discipline; nevertheless, no one likes to be told he/she is doing something incorrectly. Therefore, here are some things to keep in mind when dealing with the receipt of a counseling memo.

A counseling memo may be used by an administrator or supervisor for the limited purpose of making a teacher aware of a rule, policy, procedure, practice or expectation. The purpose of a counseling memo is to warn and instruct the teacher as well as discuss future conduct, expectations and areas for improvement. A counseling memo may not include any discipline or the threat of discipline, although whether a memo or letter to the file is a counseling memo or discipline in the nature of a letter of reprimand will depend on all of the facts and circumstances.

Even though a counseling memo is not discipline, a Buffalo Public School teacher should not receive a counseling memo without a union representative present. If the administration insists on issuing the counseling memo without a union representative present, against the wishes of the teacher, the teacher should state, *"I believe I am entitled to representation so let's continue this meeting when representation is available"* in response to administration's questions. After the meeting, the teacher should notify his/her union representative immediately about the meeting and denial of representation.

At the end of the meeting, the administration will ask the teacher to sign the counseling memo. It is each teacher's

choice whether or not to sign the counseling memo. If the teacher decides to sign, make sure to add the following language to the memo, *"My signature acknowledges I have received this memo not that I agree with its contents."*

In response to a counseling memo, a teacher has a right to provide a rebuttal. In the Buffalo City School District, there is no time limit as to when a Buffalo Public School teacher has to respond to a counseling memo. The most prudent course of action is for the teacher to request a copy of his/her counseling memo. The teacher should then prepare a rebuttal to the counseling memo. Prior to submitting the rebuttal, the teacher should provide the BTF with a copy of the counseling memo and draft rebuttal for review.

Once the BTF has reviewed and suggested possible changes, the teacher should provide the rebuttal to his/her administrator by email or in person with a request for a date stamped copy and request that the rebuttal be attached to the original memo and be placed in the teacher's personnel file. The teacher should keep a copy of the email or date stamped copy for his/her own records. See *Provocator*, "Keeping Records is a Must" (February 2023) for more information about which records to store.

This article is for informational purposes only. It does not constitute legal advice, nor does it establish an attorney-client relationship.

BTF to Host March 24 Retirement Workshop

A workshop for teachers considering retirement in the near future will be conducted Tuesday, March 24 by the Buffalo Teachers Federation.

The event will begin at 7 PM at Salvatore's Italian Gardens, located at 6461 Transit Road in Depew.

After a few opening remarks by BTF President Rich Nigro, a representative from the New York State Teachers' Retirement System (NYSTRS) will explain the various options for receiving benefits. The presentation will include sample calculations of benefits, the Post Retirement Death Benefit, and penalties for retiring early.

When that portion of the program is finished, the Supplemental Benefit Fund director will discuss options for picking up COBRA coverage after you retire.

The last part of the program will be a presentation about the negotiated benefits available to Buffalo teachers. This includes healthcare, the Early Retirement Incentive, payout for unused sick days, and a bonus payment for early notification of retirement.

If interested in attending, please refer to the email sent to all members with instructions for registering. You may call the BTF at (716) 881-5400 if you have questions.

Scholarships Available For Teachers' Children

Scholarships, funded by a BTF settlement and earmarked for the children of Buffalo teachers first, are being administered by The Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo.

Scholarships for the 2026-27 academic year will be awarded in the spring. Students who are currently high school seniors or are already enrolled in an accredited program, are encouraged to apply.

Awards range from \$1000-\$6000 and the funds are allocated to the children of Buffalo Teachers before other applicants.

The application process opened on January 1 and closes May 1. To apply, visit www.cfgb.org and click on the 'Scholarships' tab under Community Change. You also may call the CFGB at 852-2857.

Save the Date

March 24

BTF Retirement Workshop, 7 PM
Salvatore's Italian Gardens

March 26

Council of Delegates Meeting
Knights of Columbus

March 27-28

BTF Training/Workshop
Embassy Suites, Buffalo

April 3 - April 10

Spring Recess

April 23

Council of Delegates Meeting
Knights of Columbus

May 20

BTF Retirement Dinner, 5:30 PM
The Foundry Lounge

NYSUT/AFT/NEA/ BTF Dues for 2025

It's that time of year when everyone is gathering information to prepare their tax returns. Union dues withheld from your paycheck may be tax deductible. Please check with your tax professional regarding whether or not you are eligible to deduct union dues from your NYS return.

The total dues for full time employees are **\$1,028.24**

This includes \$650.72 for the period January-June (\$46.34 x 14 checks) and \$377.52 for September-December (\$47.19 x 8 checks).

For part time employees, the total dues are **\$514.16**.

This includes \$325.36 for January-June (\$23.24 x 14 checks) and \$188.80 for September-December (\$23.60 x 8 checks).

Adult Learning Center dues totaled **\$463.98**. This includes \$293.58 for January-June (\$20.97 x 14 checks) and \$170.40 for September-December (\$21.30 x 8 checks).

Welcome New Members

The following 34 teachers have joined the Buffalo Teachers Federation since the last issue of the *Provocator*. Welcome to the union!

Jessica Arana
Dennis Blakely
Grace Borrelli
Nora Buchman
Izeal Bullock
Catherine Clark
Amanda Dean
Theresa Dixon
Kimbrell Eliason
Ana Espinosa
Alexa Fiden
Tabitha Hamilton
Danae Hardy
Zoe Jones
Melanie Joslin
Makenna Kallin
Alana Kilminster
Kelsey Kirchner

Nathan Klein
Rebecca Laczkowski
Olivia Maldonado
Marissa McMurtree
Kathryn Meyers
Chantal Michaux
Kala Miller
Jessica Murphy
Leanne Pacer
Robin Pedone
James Riley
Nilda Snow
Jeffrey Thomas
Stephanie Tilton
Ronette Wood
Cassius Young-Mandiak

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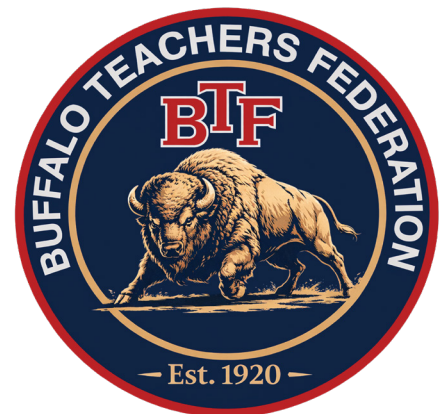
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