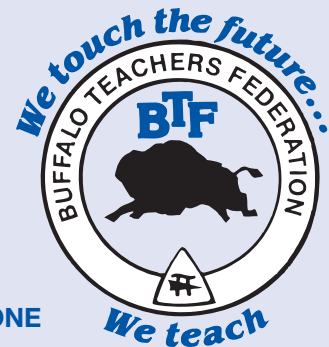


PROVOCATOR

February 2021

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE BUFFALO TEACHERS FEDERATION VOLUME 51/NUMBER 3

DEDICATION
SOLIDARITY
PROFESSIONALISM
PRIDE
SECOND TO NONE



Going Back to School Has Not Been Without Issues at Most Sites

It seemed like the logical thing to do; keep the schools closed to prevent students, teachers, and other personnel from contracting Covid-19. Not forever, just until the District was prepared to re-open with an adequate safety plan in place.

The superintendent seemed to agree and promised he would not send school employees "into the mouth of the volcano." His chief medical advisor agreed that Covid numbers would have to dip below 5% before schools could safely be opened.

But shortly after the winter break when a couple of vocal parent groups started talking to the press, opinions started to change. The superintendent and Board of Education, meeting remotely, decided schools were safe. The superintendent visited a handful of schools and said the District was ready to open schools. The District doctor decided it was safe even though the Covid infection rate was still above 5%.

Lost in the rush to reopen the schools were the promises for new ventilation systems, daily sanitation procedures and temperature monitoring of all students and staff.

Court Decision Rendered

The decision on the BTF's request for an injunction to halt in-person instruction was received just as the Provocator went to press.

State Supreme Court Justice Emilio Colaiacovo initially reserved judgment after a day-long hearing on February 5. During the hearing, the BTF and District presented their arguments and enlisted witnesses to testify.

Unfortunately, the judge denied our request for an injunction in aid of arbitration to prevent the return to in-person learning. "While we obviously disagree with the decision and as our attorneys examine it, we will continue to move forward and leave no stone unturned, no battle unfought, to ensure that our schools are and remain safe for our students, parents, staff and of course, ourselves", said President Phil Rumore.

Teachers returned to the classroom and found food and other debris still in the same place it was when schools closed back in March. Instead of hiring more cleaners, the District decided the teachers could do the day to day cleaning of their rooms.

Many teachers, from various schools throughout the district, reported the thermal machines to monitor temperatures were malfunctioning and were not monitored by a nurse. In fact, some individuals simply ignored the warning that indicated they should not enter.

Dirty bathrooms, classrooms and equipment prevail. One teacher found rat droppings and a dead rat in her room. Others reported that repeated requests for sanitation servicing were ignored or not completed until the next day.

Meanwhile, very few high school students are reporting to school. And, some of those who are reporting are not social distancing or wearing their masks properly.

More teachers than students are reporting to school. At one school, there were 15 teachers milling around a high school cafeteria, doing their duty to supervise about the same number of students.

There are also many reports of teachers cramming together in the employee entrance corridor, waiting for their turn to have their temperature taken.

And then there is the issue of keeping the windows open. Even a small crack is causing rooms to be so cold that some teachers have resorted to wearing heated blankets. At one school, a teacher assistant took off three days after telling her administrator the cold exacerbated her arthritis.

As if there aren't enough problems already, the majority of teachers who want to get vaccinated, can't get appointments. The shortage of the vaccine is not expected to end anytime soon.

To add insult to injury, the District has warned its employees that if they travel outside the state and need to quarantine

as per NYS regulations, they will not be able to use sick time and may lose pay for those days. We are checking on the legality of this.

So, like it or not, we're back to school. Gone is the fun of interacting with the students and socializing with our co-workers. Gone are the field trips and group activities. Gone is the expectation that we are safe in the workplace.

Scholarships Available

Scholarships, some earmarked specifically for the children of Buffalo teachers, are being offered by The Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo.

The Foundation will be awarding scholarships for the 2021-22 academic year in the spring.

Students who currently are high school seniors or are already enrolled in an accredited program are encouraged to apply.

Applications are accepted from students all over Western New York and some money is allocated specifically for the children of Buffalo Teachers. Awards range from \$1000-\$6000.

The application process opened on January 1st and closes May 1st.

To apply, visit www.cfgb.org and click on the icon to apply. You also may call the CFGB at 852-2857.

Save The Date

March
2

Read Across America

11

Nominations for BTF Executive Committee, Council of Delegates Meeting.

30

BTF Retirement Workshop



WHO TEACHERS ARE AND WHAT THEY, THEIR STUDENTS, PARENTS AND STAFF DESERVE

What follows are excerpts from a New York Times article for which we have received permission to reprint.

I wanted to share parts of it with you, most importantly, because Erick Ortiz embodies the essence and soul of each of you. When he said “Have they assigned a sub for my classes?”, it was a reflection of a teacher like yourself.

The article also reflects the real challenges we face, that we must and will continue to overcome ... not just for ourselves but for our students, parents, staff and our community.

From The New York Times –

A Dying Teacher, Worrying Over Students to His Last Breaths
Dan Levin Wed, January 27, 2021, 3:04 PM

A family photo of Erick Ortiz, a chemistry teacher whose death due to COVID-19 stoked outrage among educators throughout Houston, Jan, 2021. (Brandon Thibodeaux/The New York Times)



Erick Ortiz lay in a hospital bed just before Thanksgiving, struggling to breathe. Unable to see his family, he texted his wife, concerned about his high school chemistry students: “Have they assigned a sub for my classes?”

Four days later, he was put on a ventilator. He would never recover.

Ortiz, a 52-year-old father of three who had diabetes, was wary about returning to the classroom, his wife said. A lover of science, he studied biology in college and worked in a lab before becoming a high school teacher in 1997, a career shift inspired by his wife.

“I kind of talked him into it because I loved it, and he ended up loving it, too,” Maria Ortiz said.

Her husband wore a plastic face shield and a mask in his chemistry classes after schools opened in October. Ortiz said she believed he became infected with the virus later that month while proctoring the SAT for five hours, in a classroom with about 20 students. She recalled him mentioning that some of the students were coughing during the test.

About a week later, he came home feeling under the weather, she said, and tested positive for the virus. For the next week, he stayed behind the closed door of their bedroom, ill with a fever that hit 104 degrees and an increasingly severe cough. Early on Nov. 16, Maria Ortiz went to check on him, she said, and found he could not speak. She called an ambulance.

“They didn’t even tell me what his oxygen was; they just said it’s really low, we need to take him to the hospital,” she recalled. “He never came out.”

For Ortiz and her children, the loss has been devastating. “Dad was everything to them,” she said. She also received messages from some of her husband’s former students, including letters that were delivered to the funeral home. “He was one of the most caring and hardworking people I’ve met,” one student wrote.

Her grief is mixed with anger, because she believes the welfare of her husband and his colleagues was not prioritized. “Teachers are also on the front lines educating children, trying to get them ahead, during this pandemic,” Ortiz said. “And they’re not being treated with respect.”

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In these difficult times, please take a deep breath often, to reflect on how, in maybe a way you didn’t realize, you made a positive difference in a student’s life. You have impacted on students’ lives, their children’s lives and on and on.

Why? You are a teacher and you care.

We fight for safe and healthful conditions in our schools because we care ... we are teachers.

BTF at a Glance

BTF President

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BTF Vice President

Rebecca Pordum

BTF Treasurer

Joseph Montante

BTF Secretary

Melinda MacPherson-Sullivan



BTF Executive Committee Members

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Rachel Binda-Lis, April Hall,
Sophia Howard-Johnson,
Trisha Rosokoff, Janine Schuster,
Ruyvette Townsend

7-12

Dennis Brancato, Patrick Foster,
Lynn Garcia, Melissa Kenney,
M. Sue Raichilson, Chris Salamone,
Eve Shippens

K-12

Susan Baker, Nicole Herkey,
Ellen Malone, Mark Mecca,
Gregory Sawicki, Elizabeth Spiro-Carman

At Large

Tom Anthony, Marc Bruno,
Mike Mecca

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Tim Connick, *NYSUT Counsel*

Jenna Burke, *NYSUT Labor Relations
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Matthew Kibler, *NYSUT Labor Relations
Specialist*

Robert Mueller, *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 six times during the 2020-2021 school year as a service to BTF members and interested parties in the community. Subscription price is included in BTF dues.

Postmaster, send address changes to:
BTF Provocator, 271 Porter Avenue,
Buffalo, New York 14201.

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

February 2021
Volume 51, No. 3
Circulation 4400

Letters to the Editor

BTF Supports Virtual Theatre Presentation

We were so happy to receive your gift of \$500 on 12/22/2020. Thank you for including Ujima in your year-end giving and making our world bright!

Your generous donation moves us closer to our goal. The unpredictable times make it difficult for children to get all the educational and developmental opportunities they should be receiving. That is why Ujima believes that we must expand The Dunbar Project and make it available to as many young artists as we can. Even if it means doing so virtually. We appreciate your gift. You are making a lasting difference in young people's lives through the transformative power of art.

Don't forget to check out Ujima's Virtual Season and our presentation of Athol Fugard's play "PLAYLAND" on January 29, 30 and 31, directed by Ujima alum Phil Knoerzer. You can also keep up with our virtual events on Facebook and Instagram.

As The Dunbar Project classes get started, we will share with you what the young artists are working on and what they are learning. We also appreciate that you believe in Ujima's future and we welcome your support and faith in us. You're the best!

Ujima sends you gratitude and good wishes for your health and happiness in the New Year!

Kindly,
Margaret M. Smith
Managing Director
Brian Brown, Company Member

BTF Donates to Kids Escaping Drugs

On behalf of the Alex Pichette Memorial Foundation, I would like to thank you for your donation.

This foundation relies on the generosity of donors such as yourself and is grateful for your support.

We donated \$5,850 to Kids Escaping Drugs this year. This brings our four-year total to over \$40,000. I couldn't have done it without you!

Thank you once again!
Best Regards,
Mary Pichette (School #6)
Alex Pichette Mem. Foundation

Toys Distributed To 1,200 Families

Happy New Year from the Toy Story Toy Drive Committee!

As we closed the books on 2020, a year like none we've ever seen, I want to pause to simply say Thank You. Thank you for your commitment in supporting our Toy Story toy drive. Your generosity in supporting Buffalo's inner-city communities is greatly appreciated.

Your creativity in ensuring the safety of others as required by CDC guidelines during this pandemic was epic. We are sincerely grateful for every tireless effort in donating, wrapping and/or distributing toys to over 1,200 families.

The Toy Story Committee is quite proud of the service afforded to families in need during these trying times. It is in coming together for the greater good that met the needs of others. Thank you!

We pray peace, purpose, and prosperity from the Toy Story Committee.

Ruyvette Townsend
Desiree Breckenridge-Barnes
Patrick Gary-Jean
Esthlia Hunt

BTF Supports Virtual Theatre Presentation

On behalf of all of us at Teachers College, thank you for your vital support. The college received your gift of \$1,000 through Buffalo Teachers Federation in support of the Center for Educational Equity (CEE) on November 11, 2020. Through your generosity, we will continue to nurture changemakers and pacesetters whose own lives are changed at TC, and who in turn make a positive impact on the lives of others.

Thanks to committed donors like you, CEE can pursue its mission to champion children's opportunities to graduate from high school prepared for college, careers, and civic participation. Your gifts fuel efforts to define and secure the full range of resources, supports, and services necessary to guarantee this right to all children.

Your support extends our legacy by ensuring that TC remains a place where talented people break new ground, and where their ideas grow, spread, and change the world. Thank you for investing in all that we accomplish.

With much gratitude,
Linda Colquhoun, Senior Director
Stewardship & Donor Relations

Mayor Thanks BTF for Supporting Reading

Thank you for supporting my 18th Annual Reading Rules! Kid's Summer Reading Challenge and Awards Ceremony through your generous sponsorship contribution, in-kind donation, or volunteerism.

I am pleased to announce that over 2,000 youth worked on improving their literacy proficiency skills between June-August to achieve the goal of becoming Champion Readers!

I would also like to thank parents, caregivers, and teachers for joining me in my mission to help prevent summer learning loss by encouraging this summer's participants to read seven books and complete seven book summaries.

Nearly 17,000 students in grades K-12 from the City of Buffalo have completed this educational program since 2006 when I began my first term as mayor and introduced Reading Rules!

Again, I would like to extend a special thank you to all of the sponsors, donors and volunteers for helping me hold a memorable Awards Ceremony for the 18th Annual Reading Rules! Kid's Summer Reading Challenge on Aug. 24 at the Buffalo Niagara Convention Center. Your generosity and ongoing support allowed every Champion Reader to receive free children's books, book bags and envelopes filled with complimentary passes to our city's most beloved cultural institutions along with laptops, kindles, and educational scholarships. Families were also able to enjoy free breakfast, entertainment and engage in fun activities during this festive celebration that honored this summer's Champion Readers.

Thank you again for supporting this powerful program that inspires students to practice their reading and writing skills, and partnering with us to make a difference in the lives of our city and region's youth.

Sincerely,
Mayor Byron W. Brown

BTF Community Action Committee Leads the Fight for Lead Abatement in Buffalo

An anonymous knock on the door at the home of a BTF activist has led to a partnership of sorts, to combat housing issues in the city.

Liz Spiro-Carman, a BTF Executive Committee member and Co-Chair of the BTF Community Involvement Committee, and Mitchell Nowakowski, the Democratic Councilman from the Fillmore District met by pure chance when he was running for office in 2019. Little did they know, they had some things to discuss.

Nowakowski wanted to know what issues the people in his district were concerned with and Spiro-Carman, an Art teacher at School #6, had a lot to say.

“He came door-to-door asking what is important to us and, then, for the next hour on my porch, we discussed the issue,” Spiro-Carman explained.

That issue, so important to Spiro-Carman, was lead poisoning and its effects on children and adults in the city

“When this candidate (Nowakowski) came by again, we continued this discussion,” Spiro-Carman said. “After that, at every political rally etc., Mitch would update me on the progress. I know he’s not wasting any time because he got on that immediately.

“Finally, a couple of months ago, Mitch reached out to me and asked me to participate with a committee looking to move the new lead abatement law through the Common Council,” she continued. “It seems he was crediting my dogged focus on this issue as inspiration to him to move with this legislation. He was partnered with David Rivera, West District Councilman, in developing these new laws.”

Her involvement on the committee led to an impassioned address to the Common Council to urge passage of legislation.

“I had done some research so I could convey that it wasn’t just children being affected by lead in any house built prior to 1976,” Spiro-Carman explained. “The CDC outlines very clearly that adults can suffer mood swings, physical ailments and cognitive decline as a result of being exposed to lead dust and particles.

“Although the Common Council kept focusing on the kids, I emphasized at every opportunity that the parents are part of the kids’ education and the parents’ exposure is as significant to the child’s education as the child’s

exposure. And then I quoted the Buffalo Public Schools motto, that we are putting children and families first.”

“And”, she continued, “I am happy to say that after I addressed the Legislation Committee, more Council members added their names in sponsorship (of the bill).”

Spiro-Carman’s passion for lead abatement isn’t new. As a member of the BTF Political Action Committee, she often focused on the issue when interviewing candidates seeking endorsement.

“I focused attention on a question ascertaining that rental properties,

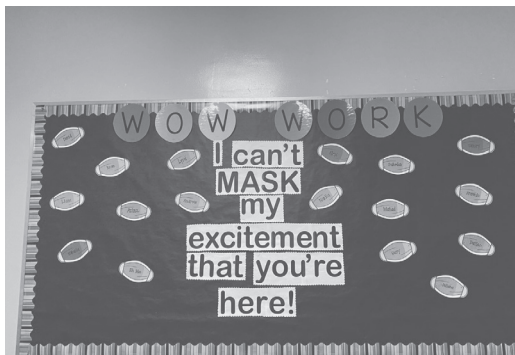
wherein most of our students reside, are lead-free and, if not, landlords be given enticements to make them so”, she said.

Spiro-Carman plans to continue her fight, along with the BTF Community Involvement Committee until every home in Buffalo is free of lead paint.

“The results (of lead poisoning) could impact our students and their families for generations to come”, she said.

And if Liz Spiro-Carman has anything to say about it, it’s not going to happen on her watch.

Teachers Create Back-to-School Excitement



Many teachers were so excited to go back to school and see their students and went the extra mile to prepare. One such teacher was Kaitlin McCluskey, right, a first grade teacher at Native American Magnet School #19. “I’m looking forward to finally meeting my students in person”, said McCluskey, who is in her fifth year of teaching. “I am supposed to receive the vaccine this week and feel that with the precautions I have put into place, I can make this a safe and fun rest of the school year for my students!”



McCluskey greeted her students with colorful signs, baskets and personal spaces marked off for safety.



To share your pictures and classroom stories, send the information to salamone426@aol.com

Transfer Letters Due March 23

If you are planning to move to another school next year, or just want to find out what openings are available, the deadline for transfer letters is March 23.

Transfer letters must be sent to Ms. Jamie Warren, Associate Superintendent for Human Resources; Buffalo Board of Education; 65 Niagara Square; City Hall Room 719; Buffalo, New York 14202.

As per Article XIV of the Contract (pages 30-31), a teacher can apply for a voluntary transfer for the next school year by writing a letter to the Human Resources Department by March 23.

In your letter, you should identify what and where you currently teach and that you want to be advised of all available openings in your tenure area. There is a sample letter on the BTF website under BTF Forms.

If you do not want your principal to know about the request, you can ask that your letter be kept confidential.

Once your letter has been received, your supervisor will contact you sometime during the summer and inform you of the available positions. You will then have four days to decide whether you want to accept a new position or remain at your current school.

Welcome New Members

The following 16 teachers have joined the Buffalo Teachers Federation since the last Provocator issue.

Welcome to the union!

Jennifer Beeson
Kevin Borchers
Kathleen Cody
Benjamin Eberle
Alexandra Gomez-Brock
Lindsay Green
Bryanna Hill
Miah Hoerter
Rachel Kent
Mary Lopez
Morgan Moran
Jennifer Paterson
Anthony Vaccaro
Jacob Wasylenko
Alyssa Wojciechowski
Stacia Young

IT Coach Preps Girls to Win Competition

Teaching virtually this year has proved to be quite successful for one Buffalo teacher whose pilot program for the district propelled her students to win an international competition.

Instructional Technology Coach Rebecca Fast started the Girls Who Game (GWG) program as a pilot for the district at the request of Sarah Edwards, director of Instructional Technology.

“It’s very exciting”, Fast said. “I felt the (winning) project was strong, but we were so new, I had no idea how it would compare to other projects.”

Girls Who Game is an outreach program from Dell computers and Minecraft for Education to increase interest in technology and STEM careers for girls. Minecraft for Education is a game-based learning platform that promotes creativity, collaboration, and problem solving in an immersive digital environment.

For the competition, teams were provided a specific challenge to research, then they plan and build their project in Minecraft Education.

Fast said the competition included teams from across the United States and Canada. She and her students learned of their success during a virtual celebration. The winning team will receive a 30-minute session with the Global Minecraft Team.

“It took some time to get it going as I did not know the girls, but I had been working with the staff at School 196 and had worked with the staff at School 76 last school year, so I reached out to find girls interested in participating,” Fast explained. “We had a full team by the end of October.”

For this competition, Fast’s team was challenged to build an eatery of the future. Students researched, then planned and built their design in Minecraft.

For the final project, the students made a video tour of their world explaining each part.

“It was very challenging to do this project 100% virtually”, Fast explained.

“Because I hadn’t known the girls before, we had to establish trust within the group and build our team across two different schools”, she said.

One way she did this was by visiting each of the girls to deliver gift bags



provided by Dell. The gift bags included custom-made laptop backpacks, water bottles, and team T-shirts.




“There were some issues recording the video through Teams or by using a screen-recording software, but they persevered, and I believe they produced a quality project”, she said.

Prior to becoming an IT coach three years ago, Fast taught science at Schools 53, 79 and 59. During those years, she also worked as part of the Buffalo Science Teachers Network (BSTN), a partnership with Buffalo State College.

In 2003, she left BPS for a year while working towards becoming an Educator Astronaut with NASA. When she returned, she continued to be part of the Network of Educator Astronaut Teachers and taught briefly at School 91 before becoming a Science Support teacher and then Science/Project Based Learning Coach at Bilingual Center School 33, a job she held for five years.

To see the winning project, scan the QR code below:





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Letters to the Editor *continued from page 3*

Police Athletic League Appreciates Support

The Police Athletic League of Buffalo, Inc. would like to thank you for appointing Buffalo Teachers Federation as a \$1500 Bookworm Sponsor of Reading Rules! Mayor Bryon W. Brown's 2020 Kid's Summer Reading Challenge & Virtual Awards Ceremony for Champion Readers.

We appreciate the benevolent donation made to this significant literacy program for PAL youth in grades K-12 who practiced improving their reading and writing skills between June-August. We are pleased to report that 1,000 youth achieved the goal of completing Challenge I & Challenge II of Reading Rules! So they could qualify to win academic prizes, bicycles, laptops, and Kindles along with receiving a Reading Rules! Diploma and invitation to attend Mayor Brown's Virtual Awards Ceremony on Aug. 24.

We are grateful for strong community partners like you who help make a positive difference in the lives of at-risk youth who are living at or below poverty level in the City of Buffalo, and benefit from participating in Reading Rules during the summer.

Thank you again for our ongoing support and commitment to helping today's readers become tomorrow's leaders! We hope you have a wonderful holiday season, and a healthy and happy New Year!

Sincerely,
Judy Sperry
Development Director

EPIC Thanks BTF for Its Generosity

Thank you. Yesterday was truly a day of EPIC (Every Person Influences Children) impact. Thanks to your generosity and the many ways you donated, we were able to exceed our goal and raise \$4,170. This directly serves and supports families across New York State and beyond.

In case you missed it, we have recapped all things "Giving Tuesday" on our website. The day may be over, but your impact is just beginning. Our 40th anniversary year isn't over yet, so be sure you are following along on social media for more ways to support and celebrate.

With deepest thanks and appreciation.

Tara N. Burgess,
EPIC Executive Director

BTF Supports Labor Studies with Ad

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the American Labor Studies Center, I want to thank you for sponsoring an ad in the commemorative journal for our recent Awards Ceremony. While Covid-19 placed severe restrictions on the nature of the event, we were able to present the Mullany medals to our award winners, Public Employees Federation President Wayne Spence and Mullany genealogist LuAnn Cherry, in person.

Your generous support will be instrumental to our twin goals of promoting the teaching and learning about the American labor movement and its history in K-12 schools nationwide and the historic restoration of the home of Kate Mullany in Troy, New York, which will provide a physical space to tell the story of the young Irish immigrant who founded and led America's first bona fide all-female union – the Troy Collar Laundry Union, in 1864.

Funds from the journal ads will be particularly helpful to continue our sponsorship of a gold medal and \$1,000 prize to the winner of the best entry on American labor in the very popular National History Day contest and our sponsorship of workshops for teacher on strategies to integrate labor studies into their classrooms.

Given the increasing assault on workers and unions in our nation, our mission grows more important every day.

Thank you for your important support.

Fraternally,
Paul F. Cole, Executive Director

State Senator Thanks BTF for Endorsement

Thank you for your donation to my campaign for State Senate. I am so thankful for the support we've received in such an uncertain time and through this roller coaster of an election year. And now, after all the votes are counted, I couldn't be more honored to be chosen to represent Central New York in Albany.

This year we faced unimaginable challenges – an uncontrolled pandemic, the economic uncertainty that followed, and a federal government that has failed to respond. While I have been so inspired by our community's resilience in this crisis, the failures of some elected leaders have left us struggling.

I ran for office to be an advocate for my community and the values we share. I have spent the last year talking to local leaders about the challenges they are facing from job losses to childcare to basic needs like food and affordable health care.

As I head to Albany next session, I hope that my work there will help restore our faith in our elected leaders and government.

I am so grateful for the overwhelming support our campaign, my family, and I have received over the last year. As you know, Jen and I are teachers with two kids in college – we could never have imagined funding this campaign out of our own pocket. It means so much to us that people like you donated financially as well as their time to support our vision for Central New York.

We couldn't do this without you.
Sincerely,
John Mannion

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 attached form and mail it to the BTF, c/o Jackie Newton, 271 Porter Ave., Buffalo, NY 14201. This form may be faxed to 716-881-6678

✂	
Name _____	home/cell phone: _____
Home address: _____	

Personal E-mail: _____	
School _____	Number of years teaching in BPS _____

Reimbursement for Rx Co-Pays Available

Did you know that you can receive a reimbursement for prescriptions you and your dependents had filled in 2020?

The Supplemental Benefit Fund will pay \$2 for every prescription filled for you and each eligible family member, up to \$100 per person.

You must obtain a computer-generated prescription roster from your pharmacist and submit it along with a completed Rx Co-Pay Claim Form to: SBF, c/o BTF, 271 Porter Avenue, Buffalo, NY 14201.

The Rx Co-Pay Claim Form is available from your building delegate, the SBF Office, or our website, www.btfny.org, under the forms tab.

The deadline for submitting the forms is 5 PM Friday, March 5. Forms may be placed in envelopes and dropped through our mail slot.

Did You Know...

That no derogatory letters or reports shall be placed in a teacher's file without the teacher's knowledge and an opportunity to make a written statement of defense to be attached to the derogatory statement?

This provision is part of our collective bargaining agreement and can be found in Article XVI, F of the contract on page 34.

NYSUT/AFT/NEA/BTF Dues for 2020

It's that time of year when everyone is gathering information to prepare their tax returns. Remember, if you file an itemized tax return, Union dues withheld from your paycheck may be tax deductible. Please check with your tax professional as new Federal tax laws are in effect.

The total dues for full time employees are \$971.96.

This includes \$618.52 for the period January-June (\$44.18 x 14 checks) and \$353.44 for September-December (\$44.18 x 8 checks).

For part time employees, the total dues are \$485.98.

This includes \$309.26 for January-June (\$22.09 x 14 checks) and \$176.72 for September-December (\$22.09 x 8 checks).

Adult Learning Center dues totaled \$382.14. This includes \$243.18 for January-June (\$17.37 x 14 checks) and \$138.96 for September-December (\$17.37 x 8 checks).



School Zone Cameras

School zone cameras were reactivated February 1 to coincide with the reopening of schools. The cameras are designed to catch motorists who travel over the 15 mph speed limit in school zones. After a one-month grace period, citations will begin on March 1.

The cameras are located near the following schools:

- Discovery School #43
- Porter School # 3
- George Blackman School #54
- Grabiarz School #79
- Arthur Eve School #61
- Houghton Academy #69
- Herman Badillo #74
- Stanley Makowski #99
- Bennett Park Montessori #32
- Academy Middle School #131
- Harvey Austin #97
- Olmsted #156
- Louis J. Bennett High School
- Performing Arts High School
- Hutch Tech High School
- McKinley High School
- DaVinci High School

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Optician

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We Control Our Future

Happy New Year! Welcome to 2021! May it be a much better year than the last one. This school year is flying by and before we know it, the 2021-2022 school year will be here.

Next year will be a significant one for the Buffalo Public Schools as the 2021-2022 school year will see a hotly contested election cycle. Six district seats on the Buffalo Board of Education will up for election as shown below:

Name	District	Term Ends
Hope Jay	North	2022
Kathy Evans-Brown	East	2022
Paulette Woods	Central	2022
Jennifer Mecozzi	West	2022
Louis Petrucci	Park	2022
Sharon Belton-Cottman	Ferry	2022

Board members play a critical role in decision making that has a direct effect on the learning environment for students and on the teaching environment for teachers.

It is critically important that we work hard to get school board members elected who support public education, share our educational priorities, and who believe that creating a good relationship with teachers is key to establishing positive morale, which translates into a better learning environment for students and a better teaching and working environment for teachers.

In the last election, we saw tens of thousands of dollars in funding come into the candidates' campaigns to help their election chances. The message to us is clear. If we want to get candidates elected who share our values, we need to be able to play in the big leagues by helping to fund candidates at close to the same level as other special interest groups.

By law, our union dues cannot be used for this purpose. So, how can we do this? Pass the hat when social events are again permitted? Have a baked goods sale? Fortunately, there

is a system already set up for this, and in case you haven't heard of it yet, it is VOTE-COPE.

VOTE-COPE is the political fund-raising arm of NYSUT. It is described by NYSUT as the non-partisan action fund that coordinates the voluntary contributions of members to support NYSUT-endorsed candidates and campaign committees that are pro-education and pro-labor. NYSUT mostly gets involved in state-level races such as elections for governor, state assembly, and the state senate, but also allows unions like the BTF to actively fund local races by refunding up to 40% of all VOTE COPE contributions back to the local union. These funds will be critical for our next election.

Indeed, the 2020 election cycle saw many of our endorsed candidates win close races.

Assemblywoman Monica Wallace was successful in a very close contest in the 143rd Assembly District only after all of the absentee ballots were counted. Judge Amy Martoche also came out on the winning end of her State Supreme

Court race after the final tally of absentee ballots.

Other local races where we were successful included William Conrad, a NYSUT member who captured the 140th Assembly District seat. In addition, Karen McMahan was re-elected to the State Assembly to represent the 146th District as was Patrick Burke in the 142nd. Sean Ryan, a long-time ally of public education, captured the State Senate race for the 60th District and Jon Rivera won the right to represent the 149th State Assembly District.

All of the above candidates received assistance from the BTF and NYSUT through VOTE-COPE contributions. Assisting candidates whose ideals and values match ours is certainly in our best interest.

If every member in the BTF contributed to VOTE-COPE at a \$2 per paycheck level, the BTF would have approximately \$60,000 to spend on political action issues such as the 2022 school board race and upcoming mid-term elections.

That level of funding would put us in a good position to get candidates elected who share our educational values and who want to work hard to improve teaching and learning conditions in the Buffalo Public Schools.

The 2021-2022 school year is a critical one for us because of the coming school board election. We need to play in the "big leagues" of political fundraising in order to get candidates who share our values elected to the school board and other offices.

We can do this by getting involved in VOTE-COPE. Our goal is to get everyone involved as contributing members!

If you are not yet signed up, please call the BTF at 881-5400 or reach out to one of your building delegates to get a contribution form.