



## GNTA DELEGATE REPORTS

### from the NYSUT Representative Assembly - April 2023

**JIM DASZENSKI**  
*GNTA President*

This year marked the 51st anniversary of NYSUT's Representative Assembly. For more than half a century, delegates from across New York State have gathered annually to debate the hot educational and political issues of the day and to help craft NYSUT's legislative agenda for the coming year. It's a tremendous honor for our 7-member delegation to represent the Great Neck Teachers Association at the state level. As part of our work, the delegates elected NYSUT

Officers and members of the NYSUT Board. Former NYSUT Executive Director and Political Director Melinda Person was elected president, and Jaime L. Ciffone, an educator of 21 years, was elected executive vice president. NYSUT Second Vice President Ron Gross and Secretary-Treasurer J. Philippe Abraham were both re-elected for three-year terms.

In convention action on Friday and Saturday, RA delegates considered 33 resolutions; six were approved on the floor and the remainder were referred to the NYSUT Board for consideration. Delegates passed a special order of business calling for an end to over-testing; a constitutional amendment was also brought forth raising dues—NYSUT's first such increase in seven years.



Delegates heard from a host of labor and legislative heavyweights including AFT President Randi Weingarten, NEA President Becky Pringle, AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler, and State Comptroller Tom DiNapoli.

Thank you for your continued support as a member of GNTA and the New York State **United** Teachers.



**JENNIFER SNYDER**  
***GNTA VP, Professional Rights & Responsibilities***

Thank you for the privilege of representing you at the NYSUT Representative Assembly. The RA was held in Albany again this year and was attended by a record number of delegates, alternates, and visitors.

At the RA, delegates participate in committees where proposed legislation is debated and then brought to the floor for all of the delegates to discuss and ultimately vote upon. It has been my pleasure to be a member of NYSUT's Pension and Retirement committee for the past sixteen years. The current focus of this committee is fixing NYSTRS Tier 6. You will hear more about NYSUT's efforts to "Fix Tier 6" as the campaign is rolled out in the near future. The other issue facing this committee was increasing the COLA base rate above the current \$18,000. Due to a lack of time, all resolutions were referred to the NYSUT Board of Directors, but we are sure to hear more about both.

The second role of the delegates at NYSUT's Delegate Assembly is to elect the NYSUT leadership team. This year, President Andy Pallotta retired. He has been a fighter for NYSUT for many many years. Jolene DiBrango, Executive Vice President, decided to step aside this year as well. I have worked closely with Jolene for 15 years, first in the Pension Retirement Committee and then through a variety of committees at NYSUT. Jolene's commitment to educators in New York is remarkable. She put everything she had into every challenge she faced. She fought to "Correct the Tests" and never wavered. Jolene took NYSUT's Women's Committee from infancy to a full blown statewide committee. This work intersects with that of GNTA's Social Justice Committee, and Jolene rarely said no to any of our requests and could always "find a way"! She is a proud unionist and a friend. I wish her luck as she begins her next chapter.



**JOAN GREENBERG**  
***SHS BRC Co-Chair & MEG Coordinator***

Always inspirational and relevant, the Civil and Human Rights Committee represents the spirit of our union and our collective will to make schools a welcoming and safe space for all members of the educational community. In a climate where 49 states (except Delaware) have initiated anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation particularly targeting trans folks, it is imperative that school districts adopt policies that protect and respect the gender identities of students and staff. At the RA, NYSUT members passionately shared their lived experience as trans individuals and parents of trans children. More than 1 in 5 LGBTQIA+ students don't see positive representation in their curriculum, nearly 9 in 10 experience verbal harassment, and nearly 1 in 3 miss school because they feel unsafe or uncomfortable. In addition, the Trevor Project reports LGBTQIA+ youth are more than 4 times likely to attempt suicide than their peers. NYSUT's Constitutional Amendments address that LGBTQIA+ youth are not inherently prone to suicide risk because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, but rather placed at higher risk because of how they are mistreated and stigmatized in our society. We stand for all, or we stand for none.



**PATTI CRISAFULLI**  
***GNTA Middle School Director***

I was proud to represent the Great Neck Teachers Association at the 51st NYSUT Representative Assembly in Albany from April 28-30. In a time when public education is under attack, it was uplifting to stand in solidarity with 1,529 other delegates who came from pre-K through university classrooms and educational settings across the state. After welcoming remarks by several NYSUT officials, NYS AFL-CIO president Mario Cilento addressed the Assembly. In explaining the power of unionized labor he emphasized that about 24% of the NYS workforce is unionized which means about 1/7 of union workers in the United States are New York union members. He went on to say that high and increasing numbers of union members mean nothing if we are not working together and supporting each other as we move toward common goals, such as improved wages, working conditions, and benefits in retirement. It was empowering to understand our connection to hundreds, thousands and millions of union members across the state and nation.

Later in the evening Friday, the NYSUT committees met and I sat with the Legislative II Committee to hear three proposed resolutions. As a former lobbyist and lifelong social studies person and unionist, I am always interested in the legislative committees' work. This year, the three resolutions presented in committee could be directly connected to Nassau County issues. Two resolutions were proposed from the Pearl River area, which includes the East Ramapo school district, whose budget is frequently voted down. The budget has been voted down often since the community began limiting their support for public schools and increasing their support for private schools in the area. When the budget fails, the funding for bussing and other supports for private schools must be continued, while public school programs can be cut. Both resolutions called for increased state assistance for public schools in these situations and they were passed by the committee. Outgoing NYSUT president Andy Pallotta, incoming President Melinda Person, and the Lawrence Teachers Association president were also present during this committee meeting and the third resolution dealt with increased support within the Taylor law for teachers' units in extreme circumstances. Many unions, including GNTA, had members marching with Lawrence teachers last week as they work through their twelfth year without a contract. The LTA president shared the frustration and duress of her membership as they try all legal pathways to collectively bargain. There was much discussion of this situation and the limits of the Taylor Law (and Triborough amendment) in committee. The committee voted for all three resolutions to be presented to the entire representative assembly.

I appreciate the opportunity to represent Great Neck at the state level, and to meet other union leaders from our area, New York City, and across the state. Through informal conversations, listening to debates and observing presentations, it is evident what NYSUT members are doing across the state to promote and protect public education while carrying out the daily responsibilities of all school related jobs. It was a privilege to attend as one of your representatives and I look forward to continuing to serve you in this capacity.



**JEFF BERNSTEIN**  
***Retired Educators Chapter***

I was honored to represent GNTA/REC at the 2023 NYSUT Representative Assembly in Albany, joining my in-service GNTA delegate colleagues. This year was a bit different than past RAs, in that two of the officers were retiring, and much time was spent honoring them. In addition to the usual speeches from NYSUT leaders, AFT President Randi Weingarten, and state and local politicians, there were a number of somewhat unanticipated speeches by some of the most important labor leaders in the country, including AFL-CIO President Liz Schuler and NEA

President Becky Pringle. All of the speeches served to remind us of the importance of our profession, our union, and each of our individual efforts in helping to make a better future for our students and the nation.

Before the RA began, on Thursday, April 27 the Local & Retiree Council Presidents Conference was held. The main theme was NYSUT's new campaign, "Fix Tier 6". You will be hearing a lot about this campaign in the future. There is currently a great disparity in costs and benefits between those in Tier 6 and those in Tier 4. As in past battles to fix disparities in the pension system, it will take action on the part of both in-service and retired members to fight for pension equity.

There were a number of resolutions concerning retirees in both the Organization and the Pension & Retirement Committees. The Organization Committee recommended concurrence on three resolutions regarding greater recognition of retirees. The Pension & Retirement Committee recommended concurrence on a resolution to work along with other unions to Fix Tier 6, a resolution on increasing the Union for Life program, including educating in-service "retirees in training" members on the function of the union after retirement and a resolution requiring NYSUT to lobby for COLA reform for teacher pensions. Due to the extensive and unanticipated speeches due to the retirement of two NYSUT officers, by the time it came to vote in these resolutions, it was late on Saturday and there was no longer a quorum in the convention center. As a result, these resolutions will be voted on by the NYSUT Board of Directors at their next meeting.

It was a great three days of camaraderie and inspiration, and it was a privilege to spend the time with my union colleagues.



## **LUCI LEGOTTI**

### ***Elementary Director, 3-5***

Time was spent at the RA this year looking back at the challenges and successes of outgoing President Andy Pallotta and forward to the transition of leadership to our new NYSUT President, Melinda Person. Melinda is not new to NYSUT and has worked side-by-side with Andy Pallotta in her role as NYSUT's Executive Director for Political Action for 4 years. Following the election, Melinda addressed the Delegates and outlined her goals for the membership.

- Create a teaching/learning environment where teachers and students can thrive: ensure professional autonomy, enhance access to resources, reduce emphasis on high stakes tests, improve school safety and address school violence.
- Make Teaching an enticing and sustainable profession: advocate for greater state funding, address staffing shortages, eliminate APPR, fix Tier 6, support negotiations and collective bargaining rights, improve contracts to include higher salaries and benefits like paid parental leave, and stop underfunding of higher education.
- Grow NYSUT's power: grow in strength and size, expand organizing and outreach for inservice and retired members, expand member engagement, foster civic engagement through the "Public Schools Unite Us" campaign, and support NYSUT members in public office elections.

Under the leadership of Melinda Person, NYSUT's Executive Directors presented a unified message, public service deserves respect and economic security and NYSUT will continue to fight to enhance our members' professional and personal lives. Ron Gross, Second Vice President, stated, "We are a union built by labor whose foundation will not crack....We come



together today to debate the future of our profession—not only defending each other, but the future of public education.” Melinda concluded, “Policy making is about improving people’s lives. While we are living in a divided country our differences are not unbridgeable. People can disagree and see each other’s humanity. Instead of moving left or right. We should be moving forward.....Education is not just a job, it is a calling and our union protects that calling.”

I am inspired by NYSUT’s leadership team and look forward to working together to advance NYSUT’s core values.



**ROB JIMÉNEZ**  
*Paraprofessionals Co-President*

I enjoy participating in the RA, not only as a leader, but as a School Related Professional in general, because it provides us with a glimpse of what legislative proposals and related topics are floating around in the state capital. This year several proposals stood out as being directly important to SRPs.

One proposal aims to address staff shortages in Special Education settings by calling for increased enforcement of and monitoring of staffing mandates and ratios in Special-Ed settings and special reporting of affected staff shortages. Another proposal calls for NYSUT & AFT to lobby to either eliminate retirement Tier 6, moving all of its members to Tier 5, or to address and fix some of the inequalities between Tier 6, and previous Tiers. Expanded Access to FMLA is a proposal that especially affects SRPs. Most SRPs are hourly, 10-month employees and do not meet the threshold for FMLA. This proposal seeks to reduce the hourly requirements for 10-month employees and to increase partial benefits for SRPs.

All of these proposals—along with most of the proposals presented at the RA—were recommended for concurrence, but due to time constraints were not voted on and were instead passed on to NYSUT’s board of directors. NYSUT will undoubtedly continue to move these items forward and lobby for them on our behalf.

