



News & Updates September 26, 2017

FUSE Welfare Fund:

- **Financial Information Forum**

A seminar to inform members about the benefits of a 457(b) account is scheduled for October 11 at 4:00 in the NRHS library. A reminder will be distributed to all buildings the week of September 25.

Sick Bank Open Enrollment Period

- *Employees who are not members of the Sick Bank have the opportunity to enroll for this benefit now -- **the deadline to enroll is October 6.** Once enrolled, new members will contribute two sick days from their accrued sick days allotment to the bank. **Any member who has previously joined the Sick Bank, does not need to re-enroll.***

More information about the Sick Bank may be found in our contract, Section 1.08:07 on page 21.

Contract Negotiations Preparations: The Negotiations Committee

Our collective bargaining agreement with the School District expires on June 30, 2018. Negotiating a contract is probably one of the most important responsibilities that the union has towards its members.

As was mentioned in last week's newsletter, vacancies exist on the Negotiations Committee that need to be filled by qualified and motivated candidates. Those vacancies are:

- **1 or 2 Committee-Members** who will participate in compiling FUSE's list of proposals, participate in pre and post negotiation strategy sessions as well as attend, and participate in, actual face-to-face negotiation sessions as part of FUSE's negotiating team.
- **1 or 2 Committee-Advisors** who will participate in compiling FUSE's list of proposals, participate in pre and post negotiation strategy sessions, but will only observe actual negotiation sessions.

Compiling FUSE's list of proposals requires that the Committee meets 2 – 4 times each month, beginning in October. Meetings usually begin at 1:00pm, which means that interested candidates must be willing to have their classes "covered" on a regular basis. These meetings usually conclude by 3:00pm. Face-to-face negotiations with the school district's team begin in February, convening 2 – 4 times a month, until a successor agreement is completed. These meetings pose similar conflicts as those mentioned above.

Interested and qualified candidates should possess several years of experience participating in FUSE-related activities. These activities **may** include, but are not limited to, serving on a building committee, regularly attending Board of Representative meetings, or other relevant experience. In

addition, candidates must be willing to comply with the statutory and regulatory parameters of the Taylor Law, which governs public employee collective bargaining in New York State, and be willing and able to work collectively and collaboratively with the other members of the Negotiations Committee.

While Committee-Advisors will not actively participate in face-to-face negotiations sessions with the school district, (they will attend these sessions as observers), their advice in compiling FUSE's list of proposals, as well as their participation at post and/or pre negotiation strategy sessions, will be invaluable assets to the entire negotiations process.

If you are interested in serving on the FUSE negotiations Committee, please submit a letter of interest to Mike Chwick (mchwick@nrfuse.com) which details your interest, qualifications and other relevant experience, via e-mail or through the inter-office "Pony."

VOTE No on the Constitutional Convention: What's at Stake?

It is imperative that the Constitutional Convention referendum be defeated. As educators we, and our students, have a great deal to lose should New York's constitution be opened and rewritten.

First are our pension protections. Article 5, Section 7 of the New York Constitution states that public employee pensions are guaranteed and cannot be reduced. This section requires that the pension system be fully funded. *This is a rare and vitally important protection.* To understand why, look no further than New Jersey, where for several years budget shortfalls were made up by the the state reducing pension fund contributions. Now, New Jersey has a 40 billion dollar deficit in its pension system. It will only be a matter of time before the state reduces previously promised pensions to make up the shortfall. Under New York's current constitution, that simply cannot happen. Your pension is guaranteed under the state constitution not to be reduced.



Second, the New York Constitution guarantees students the right to a "sound basic education." This is the language that was used to sue the state in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit, and has subsequently forced the state to calculate how much each district is being underfunded. We know that the Governor and charter school industry would love to see that protection eliminated from our state constitution.

Third, the Constitution establishes the Board of Regents. While under the leadership of Chancellor Tisch, this was hardly any protection at all. However, the current Board of Regents under Chancellor Rosa has been very involved in turning back some of the worst abuses of the last decade. Had it not been for the activism of the current Board of Regents the APPR under the Education Transformation Act of 2015 would have already destroyed the profession we love.

Finally, it is estimated that a Constitutional Convention would cost taxpayers 300 million dollars, and proponents like to claim that it will lead to a new era in New York politics that will end the corruption of recent years. The reality is this convention will be dominated by the same financial and real estate interests that have historically corrupted our politics and will remove the final protections that have prevented the collapse of our pension and school systems.

There is cause for concern. **In the most recent polling released this month, 80% of New York voters knew nothing about this election day referendum.** Of those that did know, supporters of the constitutional convention outnumbered opponents 45% to 33%. So, we can turn the tide against this.

NYSUT is campaigning heavily to educate our membership. Working with other labor unions and like minded associations and organizations, NYSUT is committed to get the word out across the state that the proposed Constitutional Convention is an expensive boondoggle that could have long term negative consequences for our schools, our profession and our state.

We have until election day to make sure that everyone in our various social circles knows to vote **NO IN NOVEMBER.**

This goes much deeper than simply protecting pensions; this gets to the heart of defending our public education system itself.

(Vote No” materials -- buttons, car magnets will be available through our FUSE building reps sometime during the first week of October)

Some thoughts on State Assessments from NYSUT’s “Stronger Together” Caucus

(The Stronger Together Caucus is one of the two “political parties” in NYSUT. Most of the FUSE delegates to the NYSUT Convention are members of this caucus.)

Statewide results on the grades 3-8 math and ELA tests were released a couple of weeks ago in a fairly subdued manner.

This was the upbeat headline from SED designed to show progress from New York’s students: “Statewide, the percentage of students proficient in ELA in grades three through eight increased 1.9 percent from 37.9 percent in 2016 to 39.8 percent this year, whereas the same figures for mathematics increased 1.1 percent from 39.1 percent to 40.2 percent this year.” But



really, does anybody care about what SED says about our students? Does anyone really believe that only 40% of New York’s students are proficient?

For the last three years, 20% of NYS parents had their children refuse the tests. In many districts the percentage hovers at 50% or higher. Last year, only 8% of the districts in New York met the 95% testing requirement. In short, there is no longer any credibility in the State Education Department on testing issues.

The testing fetish has reached its point of diminishing returns. Statewide there is not enough art, recess, or creative time left to take away in our students’ day to have the proficiency numbers inch any higher. The only thing left for SED to do is manipulate the data and adjust cut points to show growth; this is what they have done and this is why they still have not released the technical reports on the tests from the last two years.

How many educators would love to be liberated from this numbers game to focus on what matters: teaching the whole child? This is why it is important that NYSUT continue to advocate that members NOT participate in test writing for the 3-8 State tests. This was demanded and supported unanimously at the Representative Assembly and needs to be enacted upon! We also encourage you to share information about Opting students out of the current regimen of the 3-8 State tests. Visit [New York State Allies for Public Education \(NYSAPE\)](#) for more information.