March 2021

Advocating since 1979

From the President’s Desk

March rolled in with some rather harsh temperatures and even a bit of snow, so in like a Lion, out like a Lamb - do I hear Spring knocking at our door? I sincerely hope so. As we begin to look forward to Spring, there seems to be more optimism than we had just one year ago. We will be forever grateful to our health care workers, first responders, front-line workers, restaurateurs, researchers, and so many countless others who continued to work during these most difficult and stressful times for the health and safety of all of us. There have been and continue to be, many heartwarming stories of adults, caregivers, students, children, communities, and countless others who saw a need and acted to fill that need with food drives, parades, collections, mask-making, etc. - it truly shows the human spirit and concern we have for our neighbors. We are saddened and personally mourn the tragic loss of family, friends, neighbors, and the thousands of other Americans who lost their lives during this past year. A year that has changed all of us. Together let us hope we can all begin to move forward and look to more positive times ahead.

My thanks to those new members who joined during our Great PTA Sign-Up Day. We increased our membership by more than 10 new PTA members and are getting closer to our goal of 175 members for 2021! Remember it is not too late to gift a membership as a thank you to a retiring teacher or administrator, or to a member of your PTA, who may be leaving your PTA unit, as a way to help them continue to help us to advocate for our children.

The month of March is PTA Advocacy month, and more than 200 members were engaged in our NYS PTA Legislative Summit, including meetings with NYS Legislators; some were also able to participate in the National PTA LegCon2021 where they had the opportunity to dialogue with members of our Senate and House of Representatives. Important issues remain for our school children, as we approach the end of the year, another year of uncertainty and multiple paths of learning for our young people. It will be some time before we can truly know the effects that this pandemic has had on our students. We applaud the administrators, teachers, aides, bus drivers and other school personnel who continue to go above and beyond to deliver the best curriculum they can in the safest environment during these unprecedented times. I urge you to continue to watch for the advocacy alerts that are sent by our NYS PTA Advocacy team and speak up with your voice for the needs of our children.

Our “Shining a light on our members” profiles for this month feature two members who have been friends of NYS PTA for many years. Each has been a welcomed participant and presenter at many of our past NYS PTA conferences and conventions, as well as Region workshop events, sharing their expertise in the areas of public-school education. We are grateful to have them continue to be a vital voice for our children through their continued membership in the Empire State PTSA.

On behalf of the executive committee, may I extend our best to all of you as we celebrate the Spring holidays; try to stay positive and be especially vigilant in the coming months; This year has changed all of us, no question about it. We have learned so much, we have lost so much, but as an organization emerged stronger in our commitment to the health, safety and welfare of our children and youth; they are our future; they need our support, at this time, more than ever. We must continue to “Shine a Light on Every Child with one Voice.”

Warm Regards,
Jacqueline Wilson
President, ESPTSA
On February 27, 2021, NYS PTA held its annual, but first virtual, Legislative Summit. Nearly 200 PTA leaders from across our vast and diverse state spent the morning preparing and honing their advocacy skills.

President Dana Platin began our virtual event welcoming everyone and encouraging us to serve as a beacon of hope, shining a light on our advocacy work. State leaders and experts addressed the four NYS PTA key issues affecting public education:

- Oppose $607 million in proposed cuts to education funding and the consolidation of expense based service aid (transportation reimbursement, BOCES aid, etc.).
- Support adequate funding for school-based mental health services for students in non-competitive grants.
- Support legislation that ensures all students have access to high quality broadband and can meet the technology demands of 21st century learning.
- Continue to oppose the legalization of recreational marijuana.

For two weeks following the Summit, PTA members met with their state legislators and staff to make a difference in the lives of children by asking for their support in our four NYS PTA key issues.

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the NYS PTA Legislative Summit Committee knew they had to think outside the box and use this event as a way to expand our reach to our members. We had to offer support and advocacy training to our PTA leaders. Offering the Summit training as a virtual event and extending the Lobby Day meetings to a two week period afforded so many more people the opportunity to participate. As a matter of fact, this year we reached four times as many people!

Congratulations to this committee on a job well done!

Sarah Henris
NYS PTA Legislation Coordinator

NYSED NEWS

* August 2021 Regents Exams Cancelled
* If USDE Waiver is Denied, Only Four June 2021 Regents Exams will be Administered
* If USDE Waiver is Denied, Only Session One of the Grades 3-8 ELA & Math Assessments and Only the Written Test Component of the Grades 4 & 8 Science Tests will be Held

The Board of Regents today acted on a series of emergency regulations to allow for exemptions to diploma requirements associated with the June 2021 and August 2021 Regents Examination administrations. With the COVID-19 crisis still affecting the State of New York and students having varied levels of in-person instruction, the Board and the Department are taking necessary steps to provide essential flexibility for the State’s students, families, and educators.

These include actions to cancel the August 2021 Regents Exams and, should the U.S. Department of Education deny the Department’s waiver request, only four of the June 2021 Regents Exams will be administered; only Session 1 of the Grades 3-8 English Language Arts (ELA) and Math Tests will be required; and only the one-session Written Test component of the Grades 4 and 8 Science Tests will be administered.

To read in full go [here](#)
Closing The Digital Divide

The New York State Educational Conference Board (ECE)—made up of seven leading educational organizations representing parents, classroom teachers, school-related professionals, building administrators, superintendents, business officials and school boards—is urging federal and New York State policymakers to provide essential short- and long-term solutions to combat the digital divide our K-12 students continue to face. All students deserve a quality, equitable education, whether it is delivered in person or online.

The full statement can be read here

POSITION STATEMENT

Position Statement on Assessments

National PTA and its Board of Directors recently amended the 2016 Position Statement on Assessments addressing the impact Covid-19 has had on student learning whether in school or remotely, and the resulting effect it will have on the ability to administer federally mandated tests equitably to all students.

To read the National PTA’s Position Statement please go here

NYS Educational Conference Board 2021-22 Executive Budget Reaction

Read here!
David Rothfuss

David Rothfuss is a career educator who currently works in Research & Educational Services for New York State United Teachers (NYSUT).

A graduate of SUNY Oswego and Bank Street College of Education, Dave is certified in elementary education and special education and has worked as a teacher in Colorado, New York City and Upstate NY.

At NYSUT, he works on a wide range of federal and state educational policy issues including special education, teacher certification, educational technology, and teacher evaluation in addition to regularly monitoring the activities of the NYS Board of Regents and Education Department.

Prior to NYSUT, Dave was a fourteen year member of the NYS Education Department staff with extensive experience addressing statewide special education concerns and program compliance.

While the pandemic is currently keeping Dave close to home in the Capital Region, he enjoys spending time with family and friends, travel, the arts and year-round outdoor activities.

everychild.onevoice.

Elizabeth Sheffer-Winig

Hello to my NYS PTA family. I have missed you all and the wonderful work that we did for the students, teachers, and parents of NYS. Being the liaison to the PTA was the best part of my 20 years at NYSUT. The bonds of friendship created have been a source of joy as we connect via social media.

Since my retirement from NYSUT in 2017 I have kept busy. Tony and I have traveled south to visit friends and cousins. With my children, we have vacationed in Rhode Island, went camping in the Adirondacks, and spend a week on Cape Cod each summer. My grandchildren number six as one of my daughters had a little girl in 2018. This past October, my eldest granddaughter married her best friend and the small, family reception was held in our backyard. Three of the grandchildren are in elementary school, one is in preschool, and two are out in the world of work. Tony and I are surely blessed with these beautiful young women.

In 2019 Tony and I were involved in a serious automobile accident. We both sustained severe injuries, which I am happy to report, have been successfully repaired and we are living our best lives ever. Currently I serve as the town historian for the Town of New Lebanon. Should you ever want to visit my historic town, give me a call, and I’ll give you a tour. I also serve as Senior Warden for my church, Church of Our Savior, whose building is one of the town’s historic sacred places.

From mid-March 2020 to mid-August 2020, I cared for my four-year-old granddaughter as her preschool closed and her parents are essential workers. We did fun things, some school work, and had precious time together. To see the world through the eyes of a beloved child is a beautiful thing.

I continue to support the work of the NYS PTA as I navigate the world of education through a grandparent’s eyes. I am always ready to fight the good fight and help in any way I can.
ESPTSA MEMBERSHIP

EMPIRE STATE PTSA  
“Reaching New Heights!”

WELL, LOOK AT US REACHING NEW HEIGHTS!

The membership team is excited to announce that your PTA successfully achieved the Founders Day Award badge from NYS PTA. This award was achieved because you had at least 10 new members join your PTA in honor of Founders Day in February. You have shared your Love of PTA and your community has embraced and supported you which shows just how special your PTA is.

Thank you for your support!

Plans are underway for the 125th NYS PTA Annual Conference and Convention
November 19-21, 2021 at the newly renovated and beautiful Marriott Syracuse Downtown, check it out here!
SHINING A LIGHT ON SPECIAL EDUCATION

On March 13, 2020, education as we knew it ground to a halt. For some of our most vulnerable learners and their families, this change was especially challenging. As parents, caregivers, and educators have worked to navigate the new normal, access to accurate, timely information has been essential. NYS PTA didn’t waste any time in doing all we could to provide those resources.

With social distancing protocol in place, the most effective way to reach our members is online. We are continually updating our Parent/Family Resources - Special Education page, so that caregivers can easily find resources to help advocate for their children, understand their rights, and explore different ways to manage distance learning. If you aren’t already - be sure to follow NYS PTA on Social Media. We often share articles and guidance relating to special education on Facebook.

Sometimes though, face-time has the most value. As the parent of children with special needs, I know this all too well. This past year has been a challenge, and at times, very isolating. At the 2020 NYS PTA Conference, NYS PTA Education Coordinator, Amy Hysick, and I presented a workshop: A Parent’s Guide to Navigating COVID-19 Education – Presentation. Along with the program, we created a Parent’s Guide to COVID Education. This guide has support for the whole child, with apps, articles, and resources for all different kinds of learners, as well as a section on mental health support for all family members.

Our job is ongoing, and we are always searching for new ways to support all of our children. If you have any suggestions for Special Education topics to address, please let me know. I would love to hear from you!

Lissa Zukoff
NYS PTA Special Education Specialist

SHINING A LIGHT ON REFLECTIONS

NYS PTA is excited to announce this year's Reflections winners! The theme, I Matter Because, inspired students across the state to submit their artwork. Congratulations to all students! The winners can be found here.

Did you know there are several awards available throughout the year for hardworking volunteers? Honor someone today!

**Advocate in Action Award** – This award acknowledges the involvement of PTA members in their child’s education as well as in their PTA.

**Community Service Award** – This award recognizes groups of individuals for their dedication and achievement to the children and youth of New York State.

**Distinguished Service Award (DSA)** – This award recognizes outstanding contributions to the welfare of children and youth, or to a PTA association.

**Golden Oak and Diamond Awards for Special Recognition** – These awards are a special way to honor your most dedicated volunteers.

**Honorary Life Membership (HLM)** – This award recognizes individuals for their contributions to the welfare of children and youth.

Kelly Howe
NYS PTA Programs Coordinator
Do you know a current ESPTSA member who has exhibited long standing PTA service? Nominate them (or yourself) for the **Muriel Berk Service Award**!

The kind of PTA commitment and leadership that led to the formation of the Empire State PTSA (ESPTSA) in 1979 through the work of a superb leader, Muriel Berk, then NYS PTA Membership Chair, serves as a model for us all. Her vision of how to strengthen PTA, coupled with her pursuit of this goal with consistent and constant passion, patience and persistence, continues to serve as an excellent framework for action.

Therefore, on the occasion of the 35th Anniversary of ESPTSA in November 2014, the **Muriel Berk Service Award** was established and dedicated to the memory of this visionary leader so that her service will support the service of others into the future.

**AWARD:**

The recipient of this award will receive a $250.00 stipend to be used for NYS PTA Convention attendance expenses. The award may be utilized by the recipient for the convention immediately following the award announcement or the next succeeding convention.

**CRITERIA:**

The recipient must:

- Be a current member of ESPTSA
- Have exhibited long standing PTA service
- Have been nominated by any ESPTSA member or may self-nominate

**SELECTION OF THE RECIPIENT:**

*Application shall be made through the submission of a one-page statement which states, at minimum, the following criteria:*

- How many previous conventions has the applicant attended?
- What positions (i.e., offices, chairmanships) has the applicant held at the unit, council and/or region level?
- Why does their service to the PTA stand as a model to others?

**HOW TO APPLY:**

1. The one-page statement must be submitted to the President of the Empire State PTSA, via email to [esptsa.president@nyspta.org](mailto:esptsa.president@nyspta.org) and in the subject line place “Muriel Berk Award”, no later than **May 1** of the award calendar year either by the nominee or another member.

2. Applications shall then be reviewed by the Muriel Berk Award Committee who will determine the final selection no later than **June 1** of the same calendar year.

3. Notification of the award will be made by the Empire State PTSA President no later than **July 1**.

4. Please note that, according to the availability of ESPTSA funding, this award may not be given in every year. However, notice of the availability of the award will be made to the membership annually.