

# OCTA Advocate

A newsletter for members and friends of the Oswego Classroom Teachers Association



## February 2026

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**Meet your 2025-2026 OCTA Officers!**



Carrie Patane:  
OCTA President



Kim LeRoy:  
OCTA VP Grievance



Jess Burrige: OCTA  
VP Negotiations



Jenn Cahill:  
OCTA VP PA



Mike Patane:  
OCTA VP  
Treasurer



Michelle McManus:  
OCTA VP Secretary



Dan Rose: OCTA VP  
PR

## Greetings OCTA Members,



As we move through February, I'm continually reminded of the strength, resilience, and heart of our union. Across every building and role, OCTA members show up each day with professionalism, compassion, and an unwavering commitment to students. Whether you are teaching in a classroom, supporting students behind the scenes, mentoring colleagues, or staying connected as a retiree, your work matters. The collective impact of what we do—often quietly and without fanfare—shapes lives and strengthens our entire school community.

One of OCTA's core goals is not only to ensure that educators can *thrive* in their work environments, but that we can also have a little fun along the way. Building community, fostering connection, and creating space for laughter and solidarity are essential parts of a strong union. We believe that when members feel connected to one another, supported, and energized, it makes us stronger—professionally and personally.

That spirit has been on full display as we kick off the new year with community-building events that bring us together while giving back. Our upcoming bowling fundraiser is a perfect example—an opportunity to relax, connect with colleagues from across the district, and support both a team-selected charity and **Blessings In A Backpack**. With all 24 lanes available, inclusive scoring rules that welcome bowlers of all skill levels, and plenty of food, conversation, and friendly competition, the focus is simple: have fun, build relationships, and support a great cause.

At the same time, we are seeing the power of solidarity on a larger scale. The overwhelming response to the [Fix Tier 6 rally](#)—now completely sold out—speaks volumes about what happens when educators stand together. Nearly 15,000 members and allies stepped up, reinforcing the idea that when we come together with shared purpose, our collective voice is strong. For those attending, more details will be coming soon, and for those on the waitlist, your engagement and interest are just as valued.

As we head into the second half of the school year, I encourage everyone to take part in these moments of connection whenever possible. Whether it's joining an event, cheering from the sidelines, or simply striking up a conversation with a colleague you don't often see, these moments matter. OCTA will continue to look for ways to bring members together—to support one another, celebrate our work, and remind ourselves that we are part of something bigger. Thank you for all that you do for our students, our schools, and each other.

**IMPORTANT!** PLEASE take a moment to respond to the [Legal Plan survey](#) today (responses are due by March 6).  
[CLICK THIS LINK TO ACCESS THE SURVEY](#)



In Solidarity - Carrie

## ★ OCTA Spotlight

### Kelly Jackson – Oswego High School

**Kelly Jackson**, art teacher at Oswego High School, fosters artistic excellence while nurturing empathy, resilience, and global awareness. In the classroom, she creates meaningful opportunities for students to explore creative expression and connect their work to the world around them. Her drawing and painting students recently participated in the Memory Project, creating portraits for children facing hardship around the globe—an experience that strengthened both artistic skills and cultural understanding.



As Art Club advisor, Kelly provides a welcoming space for students to experiment, collaborate, and grow beyond the school day. She also serves as an adjunct professor at SUNY Oswego, teaching Book Arts and Illustration and helping bridge secondary and higher education. A dedicated lifelong learner, she recently presented at the New York State Art Teachers Association conference, sharing strategies that connect watercolor techniques with emotional expression and healing. Through her leadership, Kelly empowers students to use creativity as a tool for both personal growth and positive global impact.

### Katie Fierro – Minetto Elementary



**Katie Fierro** is a third-grade teacher at Minetto Elementary and is in her first year of teaching. Drawn to education by her love of working with children and building relationships, she quickly found her place within the strong and supportive Minetto community. She values the collaboration and positivity of her colleagues and the daily opportunity to make a difference in her students' lives.

Katie is passionate about helping young learners grow academically and socially, and she looks forward to continuing to develop her craft in the years ahead. When asked about the future, she envisions herself still doing what she loves—teaching and impacting students in meaningful ways. Minetto is fortunate to have her enthusiasm and dedication as part of its team.

## Ashley Jenkins – Kingsford Park School

**Ashley Jenkins** has been a special education teacher for over twelve years, including the past six at Kingsford Park School. She is deeply committed to ensuring her students have the structure, tools, and support they need to succeed both now and in the future. Her students are her greatest inspiration, motivating her to give her very best each day.

Ashley's dedication extends beyond academics—she strives to build confidence and independence in every learner she serves. Outside of school, she enjoys reading, fishing, and spending time with her family, especially outdoors. Whether grilling on weeknights or exploring local parks and family camp on weekends, she values quality time and community. Kingsford Park and the Oswego City School District are grateful for her steady commitment and care.



## Mary Wills – Riley Elementary



**Mary Wills** joins Riley Elementary as a reading teacher this year, bringing a passion for literacy and student growth to the classroom. A native of Oswego, she earned her degrees from SUNY Oswego and SUNY Cortland. In her first year with the Oswego City School District, Mary is already focused on supporting students as they navigate challenges, celebrate “a-ha” moments, and build confidence in their learning.

Mary values continuous learning and enjoys collaborating with colleagues, finding inspiration in both her students and her professional community. Outside of school, she enjoys spending time with her family, including her two sons who are also part of the OCSD community. She especially enjoys traveling during the summer and making maple syrup with her family in the late winter months. Mary looks forward to deepening connections with students and coworkers alike and continuing to grow as an educator in the years ahead.

## Jane Crossman & Kristie Tonkin – Oswego Middle School

**Jane Crossman** has taught Family and Consumer Science at Oswego Middle School since 2010. A graduate of Monroe Community College and SUNY Oswego, she is passionate about equipping students with practical life skills that foster independence and confidence. She believes middle school is the perfect place to help students discover these essential abilities. Beyond the classroom, she enjoys gardening, baking, reading, and creating products for her small business. She also hopes to expand student involvement in maple syrup production and gardening initiatives at the middle school, further connecting learning with real-world skills.



**Kristie Tonkin** began her career in fashion before transitioning to education, earning degrees from Cazenovia College and SUNY Oneonta. After teaching in Rome, Mexico, and on Long Island, she joined Oswego Middle School in 2002 and quickly found her calling in middle-level education. She treasures the meaningful moments when students recognize their own growth and potential. Outside of school, she enjoys time on the water, adventures with family and friends, and embracing each day with gratitude. Her commitment to impacting even one student in a lasting way continues to guide her work.



[Click HERE](#) to learn more about the sold out rally happening March 9th!

## Retirement Seminar (New York State Teachers Retirement System)



The Oswego Classroom Teachers Association (OCTA) is excited to host a **New York State Teachers' Retirement System (NYSTRS) Benefits Presentation on Tuesday, March 24 from 5:00–6:15 PM at the OCTA Office!**

This is a valuable opportunity to hear directly from a **real NYSTRS representative**, who will cover key topics that every teacher (new or veteran!) should know, including:

- An overview of pension calculation rules by tier.
- How to ensure you receive all eligible service credit.
- Important service milestones and how they affect your pension.
- Pension payment options available to you.
- Death benefits and their continuation into retirement.
- The steps needed to file for retirement.

The session will last a little over an hour and will include time for **general questions** in this group setting. (For more specific or personal questions, members are encouraged to schedule an individual benefits consultation or call NYSTRS directly at **(800) 348-7298**.)

**Food and drink will be provided courtesy of OCTA**—come for the valuable information and stay for the refreshments.

 **Sign up now!** Please let **Dan Rose** ([drose@oswego.org](mailto:drose@oswego.org)) know if you plan to attend this in-person seminar.

## OCSD Social Media Policy

*Submitted by OCTA President, Carrie Patane*

Social media and social networking sites (SNS) have great potential to connect people around the globe and enhance communication; however, they are also more informal, less structured and constantly changing. [These guidelines](#) are designed to establish some basic parameters on the creation and use of SNS and other social media for the District and its personnel. Please take some time to [follow this link](#) and read the social media district policy for all employees.

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**NYSTRS** New York State  
Teachers’ Retirement System

## NYSTRS News

### Navigating the Retirement Process

Retirement is a big life event. From planning services to pension payments, we have the resources members need to make informed decisions.

The [Retirement Checklist](#) outlines the steps to take as members consider retirement. Members in your district can also visit our [Ready to Retire page](#) or email us at [communit@nystrs.org](mailto:communit@nystrs.org) for help at any point in the retirement process.

### Special Delegate Election Opens in March

This spring, we’ll be holding a special election to fill open delegate and alternate seats, so every district is represented and every NYSTRS member is supported. The special election opens March 1, 2026. During a special election, both the delegate and alternate positions must be filled as a ticket.

Check the [2025-2027 Delegates list](#) online to find out who represents your school and to see if your district has open delegate-alternate slots. Learn more about the special election process (including how employers must report election results to NYSTRS) on the [Delegates/Delegate & Election FAQs](#) page of our website.

## OCTA February Update

*Submitted by OCTA Secretary Michelle McManus*

We do not have too much to report this month, so I will not be writing the full OCTA Newsblast. However, we do have a few updates to share.

The OCTA Board of Directors, Representative Assembly, and Safety Stewards attended a presentation on the Workplace Violence Act on Tuesday. This session was very informative. Please be sure you are reporting any sort of threat or injury to your building Safety Steward and that you complete a Worker's Compensation form. There will be another presentation, in which all are welcome, June 9th. Carrie has been working with Dr. Kilmer to create a Workplace Violence reporting form so that issues not resulting in injury can also be documented. Despite multiple requests, this has not yet been finalized. Therefore, at this time, we need to keep track of all interactions — even threats — using the Worker's Compensation form. In addition, you should have a conversation with your Building Safety Steward so the incident can be recorded on our internal record-keeping form.

If you have any questions, please speak with your building representatives.

All members should have been contacted by the person responsible for conducting their unannounced observation. If you have not heard from anyone yet, please notify your Building Officers.

Please be sure to confirm your attendance for the Fix Tier 6 Rally with NYSUT. You should have received an email requesting confirmation. A bus will transport members from Oswego High School. We do not yet know the exact departure time, but you will be home by dinner.

### **Social Media Policy**

The District has adopted a new [Social Media Policy](#). Once we receive a copy, we will share it with members. In the meantime, always be cautious about what you post. Even if your account is set to private, interactions can become public through sharing or screenshots. Employees do not have unlimited free speech protections when it comes to their employer.

### **Bowling Event**

We are up to 19 bowling teams. It is highly likely that all teams will begin at 4:00 PM on Friday, February 27th. I am currently waiting for confirmation from the bowling alley that a 4:00 start time, for all teams, is approved. We understand it may take elementary staff a little longer to arrive. Each team is asked to bring a basket to donate. If you are not bowling, you are still welcome to attend. Please note: no children are permitted.

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## **Pension & Retirement Education Program**

Many retirees wish they began focusing on financial and retirement planning much earlier in their lives. No matter how far along you are in your career, careful financial and retirement planning are critical. That's why our Pension & Retirement Education Program (PREP) seminar is so valuable.

The PREP seminar helps members understand your NYSTRS benefits and offers tips for retirement planning. This information will help you develop a plan to achieve your retirement goals and dreams.

[CLICK HERE TO SEE THE 2026 PREP SEMINAR SCHEDULE](#)

## Dental Benefits Reminder & Member Perks



Submitted by you Dental Administrator, Lindsay Voigt  
[octadentalplan@gmail.com](mailto:octadentalplan@gmail.com)

### Dental Plan Update – Effective January 1, 2026

Beginning January 1, 2026, members will be eligible for **two dental cleanings per calendar year**, with **no six-month waiting period required**. Cleanings may be scheduled **at any time between January 1 and December 31**.

### Important Address Reminder

Please be sure to **update your address with the district and Delta Dental** if you have moved. We have seen an increase in reimbursement checks being returned because Delta Dental has **outdated addresses on file**, resulting in delays or missed payments. A quick update can prevent unnecessary issues.

As a member of the Delta Dental family, you now have access to exclusive savings and discounts! Please [click here](#) or on the image below to check out your deals! (Note: savings available after registration).



### Member perks for your smile and beyond

Delta Dental members have access to perks like educational articles and exclusive product discounts.

### Save on everyday lifestyle brands

Save on products and services that help you live a healthy, balanced lifestyle. As a Delta Dental member, you can sign up for LifePerks and get unlimited access to discounts on fitness, groceries and meal delivery, as well as travel, entertainment, pet insurance, childcare and more. Register today and start saving!

[Register for LifePerks](#)

**LifePerks** | Member Discount Program  
 powered by LifeMart.

# One Job Should Be Enough

Molly Belmont

[molly.belmont@nysut.org](mailto:molly.belmont@nysut.org)

**A**cross New York, School-Related Professionals, direct service providers and healthcare professionals are facing a fundamental problem: their paychecks don't cover the cost of living.

As the gap between what workers earn and what basic necessities cost continues to widen, more families find themselves pitched into the chasm between. In 2023, 48 percent of households, or 3.7 million families, couldn't afford basics; that's up from 44 percent in 2010.

Mashantuck Bell, treasurer of the Paraprofessional Chapter of the United Federation of Teachers, estimates that half her membership holds a second job.

"Some of them depend on SNAP benefits," said Bell. "They're going to other resources, like food pantries, to get enough food. They're going to family members for help. Some even, they might not say it, but they may have to leave their apartment and go stay with someone else because rent is so high."

## [READ THE FULL ARTICLE](#)

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### NYSUT UNITED



January/February 2026

## Have you visited the OCTA website yet? What are you waiting for!!!??

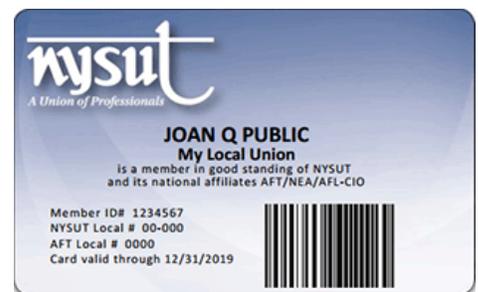
Click on the screenshot of the image below to explore the site! Find quick links to important union documents like the new OCTA Contract, the OCTA building officer list, and the new OCTA resources guide! Click on the image below to link to the [website](#)! **Many of your questions can also be found in the [2025-2026 Resource Guide](#). The link to this is ALSO posted on our OCTA Webpage!**



## Need A Quick NYSUT Membership Card?

[Login here and download a PDF of your membership card.](#)

To request a replacement for this card, call NYSUT at 1-800-342-9810  
ext. 6224



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