

# OCTA Advocate

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



## January 2026

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



Carrie Patane:  
OCTA President



Kim LeRoy:  
OCTA VP Grievance



Jess Burrigde: 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 forward in the new year, I'm reminded—more than ever—that what we do matters. In our classrooms, our buildings, and our union halls, educators across New York are standing up for students, for each other, and for the future of public education. January is a time to reset, refocus, and recommit to the power we hold when we act together.

Across the state, our colleagues are facing enormous challenges: shrinking enrollments, limited resources, and difficult conversations about district reorganizations and mergers. [From Morrisville-Eaton to Canajoharie, Fort Plain, and Wynantskill, educators are navigating uncertainty while keeping students at the center of every decision.](#) What stands out in these stories is not fear—but solidarity. When educators are informed, united, and supported by their unions, they are able to protect jobs, expand opportunities for students, and advocate for sustainable solutions that strengthen—not weaken—public education.

At the same time, NYSUT is pressing forward in the long fight to **Fix Tier 6**. Tier 6 was imposed on educators without our consent, forcing many to work longer, pay more, and receive less in retirement. **Thirty years is a career—and every educator deserves the ability to retire with dignity after that service.** Thanks to collective advocacy, we've already seen progress: Tier 6 vesting has been reduced to five years, immediately benefiting more than 85,000 members. This is proof of what sustained union action can achieve—and why we must keep going. [On Sunday, March 8, 2026, educators from across the state will gather in Albany for a statewide rally to Fix Tier 6.](#) I hope OCTA members will be part of this historic moment. **REGISTER NOW before they close the registration window.**

Nationally, unions continue to play a vital role in defending democracy itself. [As AFT President Randi Weingarten reminds us, educators are targeted not because of what we do wrong—but because of what we do right:](#) teaching critical thinking, fostering inclusive communities, and organizing collectively for justice. Our work helps students learn how to think, how to question, and how to participate in a democratic society. That work is powerful—and it's worth protecting.

This year, let's stay informed, stay involved, and stay united. Attend meetings. Read the updates. Talk with colleagues. Show up when we are called to act. OCTA is strongest when every member sees themselves as part of something bigger—because we are. Together, we will continue to advocate for our students, our profession, and a future where educators are respected, supported, and able to thrive.

In solidarity and with optimism for the year ahead, **Carrie Patane**, President, OCTA

## ★ OCTA Spotlight



**Renee Warren (OHS)** has consistently been willing to go above and beyond to help her students be successful, whether at the Honors or the Regents level. She spends a great deal of time finding resources to differentiate instruction so that she can reach, engage, and challenge all students. She never hesitates to spend extra time with students who may need further assistance understanding content or getting feedback on their writing. Her quick wit and animated persona keep students laughing, and students can often be found stopping by her classroom to say hello in the year after passing her class. Renee is very knowledgeable and a great asset to the English department at OHS!

**Emily Cao** is a music teacher at **Charles Riley Elementary School** who joined the Oswego City School District in September 2025. Originally from Hong Kong, Emily moved to the United States in 2019 to study Music Education at the Eastman School of Music, where she earned both her undergraduate and master's degrees. New to the district and the profession, Emily says her students have been her greatest teachers—helping her learn that meaningful relationships, understanding, and motivation are the foundation of real learning. While her first year has come with challenges, she finds the work deeply rewarding, especially as she builds her teaching “toolbox.” Outside the classroom, Emily enjoys knitting and is eagerly looking forward to the March musical, where her students’ excitement and dedication continue to inspire her every day.



**KPS'** January OCTA Spotlight shines on **Morgan Lawrence**, an Oswego High School alumna from the Class of 2010. Morgan earned her bachelor's degree in Cross Disciplinary Studies with a minor in Psychology from Roberts Wesleyan College in 2014. After working in daycare settings for more than six years, she returned to Oswego ready for a new challenge and joined KPS as a Teaching Assistant. For the past five years, she has primarily worked in the kindergarten

inclusion classroom, where her passion for early childhood education truly thrives.

Morgan shares that her daily inspiration comes from her kindergartners and their growth—especially the quiet, nervous students who blossom into confident learners. She beautifully reminds us that kindergarten growth isn't just academic; it's emotional, social, and deeply human. Outside of school, Morgan enjoys arts and crafts, reading, movies, and spending time with family and friends—including her cat, Raven. She also loves watching TV series



with her twin sister and works as a caregiver on Sundays. Thank you, Morgan, for the care, joy, and dedication you bring to KPS—we truly appreciate you!

**FPS** is proud to recognize **Heather Wood** this month! Heather is a kindergarten teacher who brings positivity and joy to her classroom every day. She has spent the past 10 years teaching kindergarten in OCSD, after previously teaching UPK and reading. Originally from Ogdensburg, she earned her BS in Elementary Education and English from Keuka College and SUNY Oswego, along with her MS in Literacy Education.

Heather loves watching her kindergarten students grow—both as learners and as little humans—and treasures their “light bulb” moments as confidence and excitement for learning take off. She also values the relationships she builds, especially staying connected with former students as they grow older, and feels grateful to work alongside such dedicated colleagues throughout OCSD. Outside of school, Heather enjoys spending time with her family, reading, movies, and true crime shows, and is excited to celebrate her children’s senior and junior year milestones at OHS. Thank you, Heather, for all you do for OCSD!



### SPECIAL NOTE FROM THE EDITORIAL STAFF:



We would like to offer our sincere apologies for an unintentional omission in last week’s OCTA Spotlight. **Christina Losurdo**, 8th grade math educator on the OMS East Team, was our **December OMS OCTA Spotlight**, and her name was unfortunately left out of the bio. We regret the oversight and want to be sure Christina receives

the recognition she deserves for her dedication, positivity, and commitment to her students and the Oswego City School District. Thank you, Christina, for all that you do!



## NYSTRS News

### Inside the Numbers

Have you ever wondered why NYSTRS is one of the best-funded public pension plans in the nation? Our ["Inside the Numbers" video](#) highlights NYSTRS' financial strength and shows the demographics of our membership.

### 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 Bowling Tournament & Fundraiser!

## Benefiting the Winning Team's Charity of Choice & Blessings in a Backpack

We're rolling into the new year with a **community-building bowling event** that's all about fun, connection, and giving back! The more teams we have, the more money we raise for charity—so start building your squad now!



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### EVENT DETAILS

-  **Friday, February 27**
-  **24 lanes for 4 hours**
-  **Teams of 4**
-  **\$60 per team** (includes shoe rental, pizza & soda)

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### ARRIVAL & BOWLING TIMES

#### Secondary Members

- Arrive after **2:45 pm**
- Bowling starts at **3:00 pm**
- Winners announced around **5:00 pm**

#### Elementary Members

- Arrive around **4:15 pm**
- Bowling starts around **4:30ish**
- Winners announced around **6:00 pm**

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### TOURNAMENT FORMAT (Stress-Free & Fun!)

Each team bowls **2 games**.

- The **highest** and **lowest** score from each game are dropped
- The **two middle scores** are averaged for the team score

 Translation: **ANYONE** can play!

No pressure, no “ringers,” no worries—just come bowl and have fun!

## 📅 RAFFLES & SPECTATORS

- Each team is asked to **donate a basket** for the raffle
- Spectators & cheerleaders: **\$5 minimum donation** at the door
- Spouses may attend and purchase raffle tickets (but cannot bowl)

## 💰 HOW TO SIGN UP

- ✓ Choose a **team captain**
- ✓ Captain collects the money & [fills out the Bowling Sign-Up Form](#)
- ✓ Venmo team payment to **Michelle McManus**: [Michelle-McManus-35](#)
- ✓ OR send payment to Michelle at **OMS**

🛑 **Entry Deadline: Friday, February 13 at 4:00 pm**

💰 **All teams must be paid by Wednesday, February 25**

👉 [Bowling Sign-Up – Click Here](#)

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## 📌 IMPORTANT RULES

- ✓ Anyone from **OCSD** may play **if they are a union member**
- ✓ You may bowl with anyone—you don't have to be from the same school
- ✗ No children under 21
- ✓ **RULE #1: HAVE FUN!**



🎯 Let's fill **all 24 lanes**, raise money for great causes, and **STRIKE up some good conversation**.

After all—we can all **SPARE** a little time to connect and build stronger relationships!

[See you on the lanes!](#) 🎉 🏹 🎳



## TIER 6 - WHERE ARE YOU?

This is your fight. JOIN US on MARCH 8th. We only have 11 members signed up for the rally! Tell us - are you going? Fill out [OCTA Google Form here!](#)

Tell NYSUT to [REGISTER for a spot](#) on the bus here! [Fix Tier 6](#)

Fix Tier 6 is about fairness, dignity, and protecting the future of our profession. Together, NYSUT members have already made meaningful progress—final average salary calculations have been improved, and the number of years required to vest has been reduced. As we look ahead to the new year, it's time to finish the job.

### How You Can Help:

- Register for the March 8 rally using the QR code on the flyer or at: [fixtier6.org/events/statewide-rally-to-fix-tier-6](https://fixtier6.org/events/statewide-rally-to-fix-tier-6)
- Complete a brief poll so I can report interest to NYSUT and reserve at least one bus from Oswego
- Invite family and friends—bus riders do *not* need to be OCTA members

The flyer and QR code were shared in Michelle's January meeting minutes, and paper copies were also distributed. **Showing up matters. Our voices matter.** As we all start the new year, this is our chance to stand together and be heard—and to be part of history.

## Legal Service Plan with Your Union Lawyer



Powered by



**FK&M** FELDMAN, KRAMER & MONACO, P.C.  
ATTORNEYS & COUNSELLORS

The Legal Services Plan provides Plan participants with access to attorneys in connection to various areas of law.

The initial point of contact for every active participant is the toll-free number of the Legal Plan Office of Feldman, Kramer & Monaco, P.C., (800) 832-5182. If necessary, the Legal Plan Office will then make referrals to local participating attorneys.

Below, please find a summary of the benefits included in the Legal Services Plan:

## Legal Services Plan Benefits

- Free Telephone Advice and Consultation
- Free Office Consultations
- Toll-Free 24 Hour Hotline for Emergencies
- Free Letter Writing
- Free Document Review
- Will and/Trusts
- Estate Planning Seminars or "Will Days"
- Lease Review Benefit
- Uncontested Annulment Benefit
- Uncontested Adoption Benefit
- Small Claims Protection Benefit
- Identity Theft
- Foreclosure
- Veterans Benefits
- Elder Law
- Bankruptcy
- Referral Attorneys
- Reduced Fee Benefit
- Stockbroker Arbitration
- Personal Injury Benefit
- Debt Consolidation
- Estate Administration Benefit
- Commercial and Business Law Benefit
- Guaranteed Maximum Fees

For more information on your Plan benefits, scan the QR Code:

Feldman, Kramer & Monaco, P.C.  
+1 (800) 832-5182 (For NY)  
+1 (800) 292-8063 (For Outside NY)  
Answers@FKMLaw.com



**[LEGAL PLAN FLYER](#) - USE THIS VALUABLE TOOL! (put on website too please)**

Here is the [link](#) to the flyer...  
Please add to Jan advocate.



Another new year is upon us and with it comes the opportunity to take stock of where we are in our lives. NYSUT Member Benefits endorses numerous programs that can help with creating a plan to prepare for whatever the future brings.

**CREATE YOUR PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE UPCOMING YEAR TODAY.**

Learn more by scanning the QR code, visiting [mb-nysut.org/investinyourfuture](http://mb-nysut.org/investinyourfuture), or calling 800-626-8101.

SCAN ME



### **Have you addressed any legal or financial concerns?**

With our Legal Service Plan, you gain access to a national network of attorneys at a reduced cost; two, free hour-long consultations; and a legal security package containing a simple will, health care proxy, living will, and power of attorney. Meanwhile, our Financial Counseling Program provides access to certified financial planners that can offer unbiased financial counseling services.

Improving your financial acumen is a key part of building a successful retirement plan. Powered by Kiplinger's Personal Finance, our Financial Learning Center is a free online resource that offers monthly articles about dealing with debt, insurance, retirement, finances, and more.

### **Do you have an emergency fund?**

Synchrony Bank offers several options to help grow your savings over time, including high-yield savings accounts,

money market accounts, and certificates of deposit. NYSUT members receive special rates above those available to the general public.

### **Is a new home or refinancing of your current home on your list?**

NYSUT members can save up to \$2,700 on lender fees and closing costs with the UnionDirect Mortgage Discount Program from Mid-Island Mortgage. For more than 60 years, Mid-Island Mortgage has been helping union members with realizing the joy of homeownership.

### **Are you looking for assistance with credit and/or debt management?**

Our partnership with Cambridge Credit Counseling can assist members with understanding debt consolidation and student loan repayment options. Members can receive a free, no-obligation consultation with a Cambridge certified counselor.



New York State  
Teachers' Retirement  
System

## Winter/Spring 2026 PREP Seminar Schedule Pension & Retirement Education Program (PREP)

Location	Address	Dates
Albany/Capital District	Capital Region BOCES 900 Watervliet Shaker Road, Albany, NY 12205	Tuesday, March 10, 2026 Tuesday, April 7, 2026
Binghamton	DoubleTree by Hilton Binghamton 225 Water St., Binghamton, NY 13901	Wednesday, March 11, 2026
Buffalo	Buffalo Airport Hotel 4600 Genesee St., Cheektowaga, NY 14225	Tuesday, Feb. 3, 2026 Tuesday, March 3, 2026 Wednesday, April 8, 2026
Fishkill	Hyatt House Fishkill/Poughkeepsie 100 Westage Business Center Drive, Fishkill, NY 12524	Thursday, March 12, 2026
Hauppauge	Radisson Hotel 110 Vanderbilt Motor Pkwy., Hauppauge, NY 11788	Wednesday, Feb. 18, 2026
Mount Kisco	Hotel MTK 1 Pat Reilly Way, Mount Kisco, NY 10549	Friday, Feb. 20, 2026 Thursday, March 19, 2026 Thursday, April 9, 2026
Plainview	Holiday Inn Plainview – Long Island 215 Sunnyside Blvd., Plainview, NY 11803	Thursday, Feb. 19, 2026 Wednesday, March 18, 2026 Wednesday, April 8, 2026
Rochester	RIT Inn & Conference Center 5257 West Henrietta Road, Henrietta, NY 14467	Wednesday, Feb. 4, 2026 Wednesday, March 4, 2026
Stony Brook	Hilton Garden Inn Stony Brook 1 Circle Road, Stony Brook, NY 11794	Tuesday, March 17, 2026 Tuesday, April 7, 2026
Syracuse	Hilton Garden Inn Syracuse 6004 Fair Lakes Road, East Syracuse, NY 13057	Thursday, Feb. 5, 2026 Thursday, March 5, 2026 Thursday, April 9, 2026

The PREP seminar helps members understand their NYSTRS benefits and offers tips for retirement planning. Always check [nystrs.org/prep](https://nystrs.org/prep) for the latest seminar schedule. Topics in each free half-day session include:

- **NYSTRS Benefits:** Pension, disability coverage, loans, vesting and death benefits.
- **Financial Planning:** Saving early, catching up, withdrawals and financial advisors.
- **Social Security:** Benefits, eligibility rules, when to collect and earning limits.
- **Estate Planning:** Wills, trusts, powers of attorney, health care proxies and living wills.
- **The Retirement Process:** Retirement options, "resigning" vs. "retiring," choosing a retirement date, retirement checklist, monthly payments, taxes and earnings limitations on NYS public employment.

### Reservation and Attendance Information

- **Make a reservation** online in MyNYSTRS at [nystrs.org](https://nystrs.org) or call 800-348-7298, ext. 6180 during our business hours.
- **Sessions run from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.** Registration begins at 8 a.m.
- **Slots fill quickly**, so we recommend making a reservation early.
- **Bring your latest Benefit Profile** with you (you can print it from MyNYSTRS).
- **Not going to attend?** Cancel through MyNYSTRS or by phone so others may reserve a spot.

The PREP seminar is not intended for individual benefits counseling. To schedule a one-on-one consultation, members should visit the Retirement Planning/Benefits Consultations page of [nystrs.org](https://nystrs.org).



## 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.

### Delta Dental Member Perks – More Than Just Your Smile

Your Delta Dental membership includes access to valuable extras that support your overall wellness, including:

- **Virtual dentistry services** for low- or no-cost remote consultations
- **Free wellness resources** such as articles, videos, recipes, and newsletters
- **LASIK discounts** (save up to 35%) through QualSight – call 855-248-2020
- **Hearing aid discounts** (average savings of 66%) through Amplifon – call 888-779-1429
- **LifePerks discounts** on oral health products, travel, childcare, entertainment, and more

To explore these benefits, visit:

[www1.deltadentalins.com/memberperks](http://www1.deltadentalins.com/memberperks)



## Retirement Planning Checklist

**Dental Update-** Beginning 1/1/26 members are eligible for **2 cleanings per calendar year**. (No 6 month waiting period required.) [Delta dental perks](#)

- **Virtual dentistry services** for low- or no-cost remote consultations
- **Free wellness resources** such as articles, videos, recipes, and newsletters
- **LASIK discounts** (save up to 35%) through QualSight – call 855-248-2020
- **Hearing aid discounts** (average savings of 66%) through Amplifon – call 888-779-1429
- **LifePerks discounts** on oral health products, travel, childcare, entertainment, and more

**NYSUT 2026 Priorities-** It is a BIG YEAR! Take a [QUICK survey](#) on what matters to you to help NYSUT prioritize their efforts.

### **Safety- Share safety concerns with your union Safety Representatives:**

OHS- Gina Iorio  
 MIN- Don Fronk  
 OMS- Dan Rogers  
 CER- T. Lagoe  
 KPS- Carolyn Slobodian  
 FLS- Kate Bowman  
 FPS- Cari Joyce

#### EMAIL THEM THE FOLLOWING:

- Location of incident
- Describe concern (threat or building issue)
- Was anyone injured?
- Describe injury
- Did the employee fill out the Employee's [Accident Report for Workers' Compensation](#) and return it to the nurse?

**Insurance-** If you are having difficulties with MVP be sure to reach out to Assured Partners (was ENV) at (315) 641-5848. They can help you with Benefit questions, claims issues, finding providers, etc. You should also inform Amanda Hamilton at the EDC and Carrie Patane of claim issues so they can pass the information on to the members of the Healthcare Committee. IF you have reached out to Assured Partners and you still have concerns, please let us know that too. **Make sure you are using Teladoc, ask for GENERIC RX, and use Express Scripts when possible to help reduce plan costs and to lower our premiums.**



**FIX TIER 6 - [How bad is it?](#) [Get involved!!](#) [Watch a Video](#)**

**[Visit Fixtier6.org](#)**- Visit this website to learn more about supporting fixing tier 6. Make sure you write out the Oswego Classroom Teachers Association.

**Employee Assistance Program (EAP): To contact them call (315-470-7447).**

The district provides members with services to help with stress management, family stress, anxiety and panic, workplace issues, communication barriers and more. The service is provided by Help People. It is a free and confidential service! Offices are located in Fulton, Liverpool and Syracuse.

**Member Benefits Teacher Discounts-** Click on this [link](#) to view teacher discounts.

**OCTA RESOURCE GUIDE- [2025-2026 OCTA Resource Guide](#)**

### **Jeans Weeks-**

OCTA Scholarship- Feb. 9-13  
 Stuff A Bus- May 18-22  
 Blessings- March 23-27  
 Prom- April 6-10

New members, and anyone who hasn't completed it yet or needs to update their email or name, please take a moment to fill out the [OCTA Contact Form](#).

**Know Your Paycheck Deductions-** [Document from Meghan Wilson](#)

Check your stub to make sure you are receiving the appropriate deductions for each paycheck:

**FICA** is social security

**MEDI** is Medicare

**FEDERAL** is federal tax

**STATE** is state tax

**D/I OCTA** is disability insurance

**HI10F15%** is 10 month family/single health

**INSREIMB** = Insurance Reimbursement (in Dec) for those off step

**TRS**= money you pay into NYS Teachers Retirement

**MED/DENT** is your flex spending account

**DFBOCTIN** is your OCTA Dental Insurance

**VISFIND** = Vision individual

**OCTA28+** is your union dues

**OPL** is city library contribution

**NYSUT** = member benefits (Life ins, legal, etc.)

[READ the latest UNION NEWS! CLICK HERE TO read the latest NYSUT UNITED!](#)

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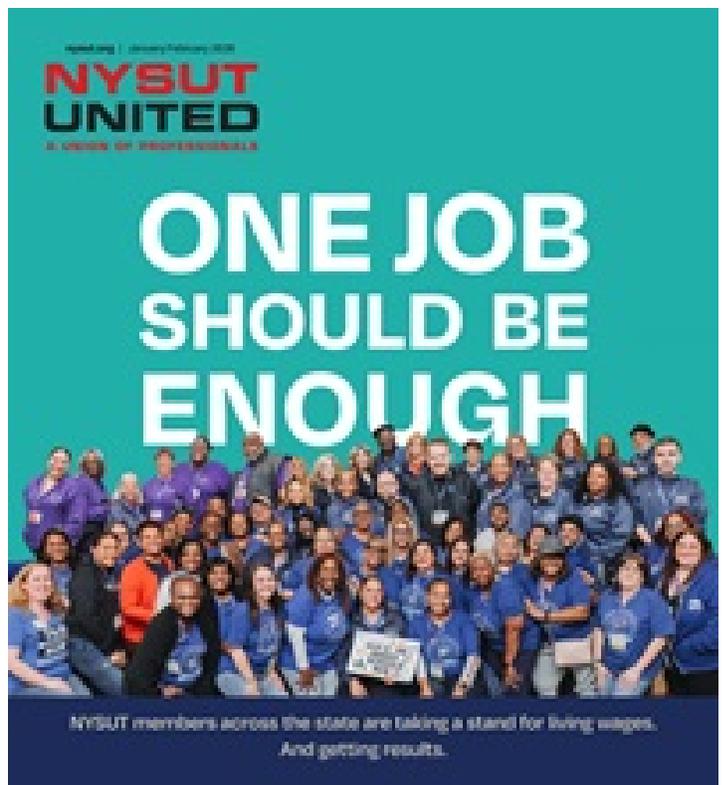
**9:** Labor feeds NY: NYSUT members help neighbors in need

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

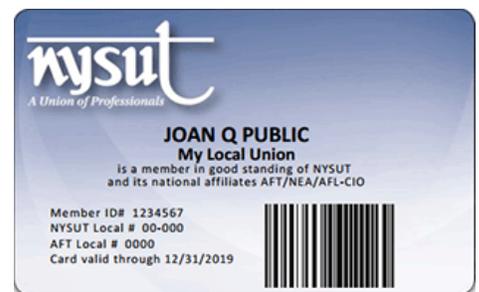
Click on the screenshot of the image below to explore the site! Find quick links to important union documents like the new OCTA Contract, the OCTA building officer list, and the new OCTA resources guide! Click on the image below to link to the [website](#)! **Many of your questions can also be found 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



*OCTA Advocate* is published by the Oswego Classroom Teachers Association, West 1<sup>st</sup> Street, Oswego, NY. **President:** Carrie Patane, **VP Grievance:** Kim LeRoy **VP Negotiations:** Jessica Burrige **VP Political Action:** Jenn Cahill, **VP Newsletter:** Dan Rose, **Secretary:** Michelle McManus, **Treasurer:** Mike Patane. Affiliated with the New York State United Teachers and the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO.

