

OCTA Advocate

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



November 2025

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Meet your 2025-2026 OCTA Officers!



Carrie Patane:
OCTA President



Kim LeRoy:
OCTA VP Grievance



Jess Burridge: OCTA
VP Negotiations



Jenn Cahill:
OCTA VP PA



Mike Patane:
OCTA VP
Treasurer



Michelle McManus:
OCTA VP Secretary



Dan Rose: OCTA VP
PR

Message from your OCTA President - Carrie Patane



Happy November, everyone — and Happy Thanksgiving!

This season always reminds me how thankful I am for our union, our strong membership, and the collective power that allows us to protect our benefits, advocate for our students, and secure improvements like the new early-retirement sick-day incentive added to our contract this year.

You should be receiving your NYSTRS Benefit Profile soon. If you are within five years of retirement, please create or update your [MyNYSTRS.org](https://mynystrs.org) account so you can review your service credit, projections, and eligibility.

If you are even considering retiring effective June 30, I strongly encourage you to schedule an appointment with NYSTRS now. Speaking with a representative early will help you understand your options and avoid rushed decisions later ([Read NYSUTs publication *Your Blueprint for a Successful Retirement* here. You will need your NYSUT member number for access.](#))

A few key reminders about the new incentive:

- To access the early-retirement sick-day benefit, you must submit an irrevocable letter of resignation for retirement purposes dated June 30.
- The District must receive this letter by February 1 of the school year you plan to retire. Please start preparing now so you don't miss the deadline.

Under this incentive, members who retire in their first year of retirement eligibility (or within the window before any legislatively reduced pension applies) will receive \$150 per unused sick day, up to the contractual maximum. (Note that your first 100 days are used to cover your healthcare costs in retirement.) This incentive will be paid as an Employer Non-elective Contribution, which means it goes directly into your retirement savings — not as cash.

Because of this, if you do not already have a 403(b) account, please open one. The district's contribution for this incentive must be deposited into a 403(b) plan. You can use your financial advisor to do this or do it yourself through the [OMNI portal](#).

This Thanksgiving, know how grateful I am for each of you and for the solidarity that makes our union strong. Please reach out with questions, and take care of yourselves as we head into the busy weeks ahead. [In the meantime, our newly updated OCTA Resource guide is available at all times to help answer any questions you might have!](#)

In solidarity,
Carrie Patane, OCTA President

[Congratulations to our most recent OCTA Spotlight Recipients!](#)

Maureen Bennett is a dedicated Special Education teacher at **OHS**. Although she joined OCSD in



December 2024, she brings over 25 years of teaching experience to our district. Throughout her career, Maureen has taught in Hawaii and Sandy Creek, spending the majority of her time at CiTi BOCES. Her passion for teaching began early, inspired by her experiences babysitting nonverbal children. The joy she found in connecting with them led her to pursue a career in special education—a calling she has embraced ever since. Maureen is a valued member of our school community. Her compassion, patience, and commitment to her students are evident in her daily work, especially with those who face significant challenges. She takes great pride in building

meaningful relationships with her students and treasures the moments when they feel comfortable enough to share their lives with her. Outside of school, Maureen enjoys traveling, spending time with her family, and relaxing with her St. Bernard, Rex, at their family camp.

KPS' November Spotlight: Katherine Robinson

Katherine Robinson grew up in Oswego and is a proud Kingsford Park alum, having attended KPS from grades 1–6 before graduating from Oswego High School. After a few college and major changes, she returned home to earn her Elementary Education degree from SUNY Oswego. She has been with OCSD for eight years and is now in her seventh year teaching 3rd grade.

Katherine loves teaching “the oldest of the youngest” and says the best part of her work is truly getting to know her students as individuals. “The better I know



them, the better I can support them. I love showing my students that learning can be fun and that they can do hard things.”

Outside of school, Katherine enjoys adventures with her son, Lincoln—whether they’re exploring bookstores and coffee shops, visiting beaches, or camping with friends and family in the summer.

This year, she looks forward to learning alongside her colleagues and doing what’s best for students. Twenty years from now, she hopes to still be sharing the magic of a good book and finding joy in the classroom every day.

Thank you, Katherine, for everything you bring to KPS. We’re lucky to have you!

Amy Ditota – Riley Elementary School



This month, we’re proud to spotlight **Amy Ditota**, who joined the Oswego City School District just two months ago and is already making a positive impact at Riley Elementary. Originally from Baldwinsville, Amy graduated from Baldwinsville High School before continuing her studies at SUNY Canton and SUNY Geneseo, later earning her master’s degree from SUNY Oswego. She currently teaches Special Education and is passionate about helping students grow—especially as they learn to read.

Outside of school, Amy enjoys spending time with her husband, Joe, and their three children: a son and daughter in high school and another daughter in middle school. Their busy schedules keep the family on the go, but they always make time for board games, movies, cheering on the Bills, and traveling together whenever they can. This year, Amy looks forward to learning more about the

district, building strong relationships with students, staff, and families, and discovering a new travel destination to explore with her family.

Will Days with Your Union Lawyer



Dear Members,

We would like to introduce and welcome you to one of our Legal Service Benefits – a Will Day. You will be able to meet with an attorney (either in person or virtually) and discuss your estate planning needs. You are entitled to have three sets of documents drawn up in the next two years. Each set includes a Last Will and Testament, Power of Attorney, Health Care Proxy and Living Will. That means you as the member plus a spouse/domestic partner plus an additional family member (whether it is a dependent child aged 18-26, parent, parent-in-law, grandparent, or grandparent-in-law) can have these documents drawn up for NO COST to you or your family. Any additional sets above the three sets is only \$100 per set.

We have reserved the date of **Wednesday, December 17, 2025**, for our meetings with the attorney. The appointments are approximately 20 minutes in length. There is a questionnaire (see below, ask me, or check out their website!) that needs to be reviewed and completed to the best of your ability prior to meeting with the attorney. At the meeting you can ask any questions that come up as you review the questionnaire. If you require additional time, you can schedule a follow-up call with an attorney at the firm.

Once the firm drafts your documents they will be mailed directly to you. Review the documents carefully and if there are any changes that you would like to be made, you must contact the office. If there are no changes, those documents are the originals that will be signed in front of an attorney.

If you are attending the Will Day to sign the documents that you received in the mail, please bring these documents with you, as the attorneys will NOT have any documents with them!

In this meeting you can also request information about putting your assets in a trust (especially if you are over the age of 60 years old or own property in multiple states!) and other estate planning concerns that you and your family may have. However, because of the brevity of the meeting we encourage you to call the office for these questions at +1 (800) 832-5182 (For NY) or +1 (800) 292-8063 (For Outside NY).

Very truly yours,

Your NYSTRS Benefit Profile Is Now Available!

Benefit Profiles Available

Members in your district can access their *Benefit Profile* online in their secure [MyNYSTRS](#) accounts. Members who opted for a paper copy will receive one in the mail.

Each *Profile* provides a summary of a member's service credit and earnings – key factors of their retirement benefit formula – and may also include projections of a member's service retirement benefit, disability and death benefits, contributions summary, loan details (if applicable) and beneficiary designations.



Encourage members to ensure their information is current and accurate. Any issues will be easier to resolve now than when a member nears retirement. Members can update beneficiaries in MyNYSTRS and should contact their employer(s) if they need any corrections to their service or salary data.

Watch The Road to Retirement

Did you see our recent video? We invite you to travel on [The Road to Retirement](#). No matter where you are in your career, this two-minute video will tell you what you need to do to prepare for retirement. Don't forget to share it with members in your district so they can do the same



FREE NYSUT LEGAL PLAN

What is it?

Your union membership entitles you to a free health care proxy, living will, power of attorney, and Last Will and Testament. A member is entitled to 3 sets of documents during the two-year contract period. You can do the documents for any covered person.

The covered people are:

- Member
- Spouse/domestic partner
- Dependent children ages 18-26
- Parents/parent-in-laws
- Grandparents/grandparents in-laws

Any additional set above the 3 sets in the two-year period is \$100 per set. There is an additional \$50 fee per Will for a Minors Trust (to hold the children's inheritance longer than 18). The minors trust is optional.



Questions:

John Calimano, Esq.

JCalimano@fkmlaw.com

Will Questionnaire Meetings - December 17th

Attached to the left is FKM's will questionnaire that each member seeking to create a Last Will and Testament, Health Care Proxy, Living Will, and/or Power of Attorney needs to fill out. If the member and their spouse agree that their documents will mirror each other exactly, then only one questionnaire is needed. If they are naming completely different individuals for any of the forms, then the spouse must fill out a second questionnaire. **The virtual days are for wills or trusts.** For other matters, such as divorce or personal injury, members should call the office (631-231-1450) to speak with an attorney who handles your specific needs.

Fill out this questionnaire prior to meeting with a lawyer to the best of your ability and reserve any pages with questions for the meeting with the attorney via Zoom. During this meeting you can ask any questions you may have and they will let you know the next steps of where to send papers. **Sign up for a time in the link below.**

December 17th Will Questionnaire Meeting - Sign Up Link

Save the Date: In person Will Signing

When: February 13th & 14th

Where: OCTA OFFICE

Attached to the right, you will find a letter regarding important information about the upcoming Will Day.

Return the Will Questionnaires to the office by:

Email- Wills@FKMLaw.com

Mail- 330 Motor Parkway, Suite 400, Hauppauge, NY 11788.

Will Days with Your Union Lawyer

Dear Members,

We would like to introduce and welcome you to one of our Legal Service benefits - a Will Day! You will be able to meet with an attorney (either in person or virtually) and discuss your estate planning needs. You are entitled to have three sets of documents drawn up in the next two years. Each set includes a Last Will and Testament, Power of Attorney, Health Care Proxy and Living Will. That means you as the member plus a spouse/domestic partner plus an additional family member (whether it is a dependent child aged 18-26, parent, grandchild, or grandparent) and can have these documents drawn up for \$60 USD to you in one hour. Any additional sets above these sets is only \$100 per set.

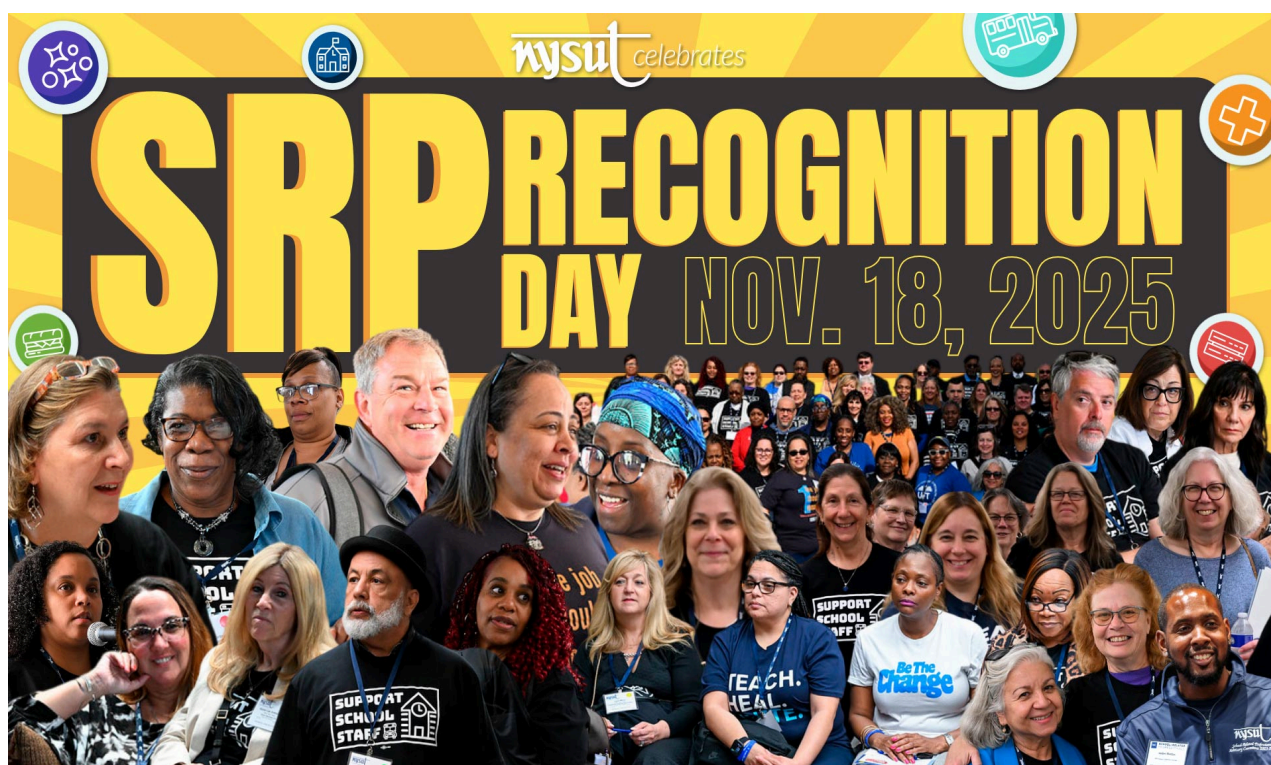
We have reserved the date of **Wednesday, December 17, 2025**, for our meetings with the attorney. The appointments are approximately 30 minutes in length. There is a questionnaire (see below, ask me, or check out the website) that needs to be reviewed and completed to the best of your ability prior to meeting with the attorney. At the meeting you can ask any questions that come up or you submit the questionnaire. If you require additional time, you can schedule a follow-up call with an attorney at the time.

Since the first draft of your documents they will be mailed directly to you. Review the documents carefully and if there are any changes that you would like to be made, you must contact the office. If there are no changes, these documents are the originals that will be signed in front of an attorney.

If you are attending the Will Day to sign the documents that you received in the mail, please bring these documents with you, as the attorney will need to have any documents with them.

In this meeting you can discuss information about drafting your estate in a trust (especially if you are over the age of 60 years old or own property in multiple states) and other estate planning matters that you and your family may have. However, because of the breadth of the meeting, an attorney can't call the office for these questions at 1 (800) 432-5302 (the 140) or 4 (800) 231-1450 (the 1450).

Very truly yours,



Thank you, OCTA members, for making SRP Day extra special this year! We celebrate our SRPs every day, but 2025 SRP Recognition Day was truly special.

On Tuesday, November 18, 2025, NYSUT members across New York honored the incredible School-Related Professionals who make our schools run every single day. From early morning bus routes to after-school cleanup, from bandaging scraped knees to serving nutritious meals, from maintaining safe buildings to supporting our classrooms — our SRPs once again showed how they Rise to the Challenge.

The response from locals and members across the state was overwhelming! We received hundreds of submissions showing how you celebrated your SRPs and highlighted the difference they make in your schools and communities. Your stories and photos are a powerful reminder of why these dedicated professionals deserve recognition not just on their special day, but throughout the year.



DENTAL INFO!

Dental Administrator Lindsay Voigt octadentalplan@gmail.com

Have you had a recent address change? Please use the email below to alert Lindsay!

Please feel free to reach out to OCTA Dental at: octadentalplan@gmail.com should you have any questions about this or anything else dental related!

Did you know as a Delta Dental Member you gain access to exclusive perks such as: Virtual Dentistry, BrushSmart, Hearing aids and LASIK discounts, LifePerks, Wellness resources?

Members can easily get all the info on these perks - [just click HERE!](#)

If you need to establish a new dental provider find a specialist in your area you can search for dental providers by [visiting this link!](#)

Click on [this hyperlink](#) to read the most recent issue of Delta Dental's monthly magazine called [GRIN!](#)

[Click HERE to create an account with Delta Dental or log in to your existing Delta Dental account!](#)



of



New York State
Teachers' Retirement
System

Fall 2025 PREP Seminar Schedule

Pension & Retirement Education Program (PREP)

Location	Address	Dates
Albany/Capital District	Capital Region BOCES 900 Watervliet Shaker Road, Albany, NY 12205	Thursday, Nov. 6, 2025 Tuesday, Dec. 16, 2025
Binghamton	DoubleTree by Hilton Binghamton 225 Water St., Binghamton, NY 13901	Thursday, Dec. 11, 2025
Buffalo	Buffalo Airport Hotel 4600 Genesee St., Cheektowaga, NY 14225	Wednesday, Nov. 12, 2025 Wednesday, Dec. 3, 2025
Fishkill	Hyatt House Fishkill/Poughkeepsie 100 Westage Business Center Drive, Fishkill, NY 12524	Friday, Dec. 12, 2025
Mount Kisco	Hotel MTK 1 Pat Reilly Way, Mount Kisco, NY 10549	Thursday, Nov. 20, 2025 Thursday, Dec. 4, 2025
Plainview	Holiday Inn Plainview – Long Island 215 Sunnyside Blvd., Plainview, NY 11803	Wednesday, Nov. 19, 2025 Wednesday, Dec. 3, 2025
Rochester	RIT Inn & Conference Center 5257 West Henrietta Road, Rochester, NY 14467	Thursday, Nov. 13, 2025 Thursday, Dec. 4, 2025
Stony Brook	Hilton Garden Inn Stony Brook 1 Circle Road, Stony Brook, NY 11794	Tuesday, Nov. 18, 2025 Tuesday, Dec. 2, 2025
Syracuse	Hilton Garden Inn Syracuse 6004 Fair Lakes Road, East Syracuse, NY 13057	Friday, Dec. 5, 2025

The PREP seminar helps members understand their NYSTRS benefits and offers tips for retirement planning. Always check nysters.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 nysters.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 register.

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 nysters.org.



It's Long-Term Care Awareness Month!

November is a great opportunity to reflect on what you think long-term care will look like for you. Whether it's at-home care, assisted living or nursing facilities, putting a plan in place with a long-term care insurance policy now ensures you're prepared for whatever life brings.

Call toll-free [888-884-0077](tel:888-884-0077) for your FREE long-term care guide.

VISIT US

Click on the image below to read the latest in Union News!



nysut.org | November/December 2025

NYSUT
UNITED
A UNION OF PROFESSIONALS

OUR FIGHT FOR FAIRNESS

In the wealthiest state in the richest nation, students were going hungry. NYSUT members fixed that for 2.7 million kids — and we're just getting started.

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

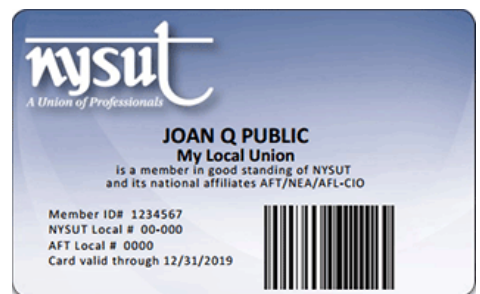
Click on the screenshot of the image below to explore the site! Find quick links to important union documents like the new OCTA Contract, the OCTA building officer list, and the new OCTA resources guide! Click on the image below to link to the [website](#)! **Many of your questions can also be found 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 1st 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.

