



ST Caucus Platform

There is one thing that is certain: the current NYSUT officers have failed NYSUT. After the election of 2014 exposed a fractured NYSUT, the Stronger Together Caucus has seen no attempt on the part of the current NYSUT leadership to try to heal that divide. In fact, they have done nothing but widen the fissure by virtually ignoring voices of educators across the state. We have lost the past three years, and we cannot afford to lose any more time.

ST Caucus offers a vision for a different NYSUT, specifically a NYSUT that is consistent in its positions across all grade levels and educational issues. From Pre-K through graduate school, we are all under attack. Our schools have been deprofessionalized and the value of our labor has been downgraded; the voices of all P-12 educators, school-related professionals, healthcare professionals, adjuncts and professors need to be heard. Stronger Together Caucus pledges that the needs of our many constituency groups will be addressed ***in order to best serve our members and our students:***

- **When we oppose the Common Core** (in any iteration) for its developmentally inappropriate standards, it will be based on the reasoned concerns our members have consistently expressed. Our organizational strategy to oppose the Common Core will be clear and member-driven. We will not ask members to take action that is contradictory to our stated principles. For example, we will only encourage teachers to participate in writing test questions when we are satisfied that the standards are developmentally appropriate.
- **When we oppose the 3-8 State Tests**, because that is what our membership wants, we will clearly articulate a comprehensive plan to do so. We will also tell the Regents and NYSED our members will only write test questions when the tests align with developmentally appropriate benchmarks.
- **When we fight for fair funding**, we will ensure that the policy makers understand the correlation between school funding and student success. Scapegoating teachers serves only to distract from examining the pervasive economic inequities in NYS school funding. This issue affects every educator from Pre-K through graduate school.
- **When Governor Cuomo says teachers are failing their students**, we will correct him and the policy makers so all will know he lies about the state of education.
- **When President Trump and Governor Cuomo use flawed statistics to claim** that our schools are failing, teachers and parents will respond and rally in unity on every corner, on every street, and in every Board of Education meeting to expose the deformers and remove the pretentious language and the flawed statistics they hide behind.



In Andy Pallotta's eight-year tenure with NYSUT, educators have experienced hit after hit to our profession. We have suffered through budget cuts, layoffs, Race to the Top, APPR, Tier V and VI, Receivership, a property tax cap, loss of teacher privacy, and the botched rollout of the Common Core. Additionally, NYSUT has chosen not to lobby our legislators to repeal the APPR Matrix, but rather is currently working to incorporate invalid student performance measures to evaluate teachers. This highlights that NOW IS THE TIME for a dramatic change in leadership, electing leaders who will not just claim to "demand a return to local control," but rather will publicly advocate through words and actions to return observation and evaluation to a mandatory subject of negotiation, 100% controlled at the local level.

We seek to TRANSFORM our union. We plan to make NYSUT a union of ideas based on merit and not the size of the local in which they originated. Andy Pallotta's policy of capitulation is simply not working for anyone. We need an agenda based on honesty and integrity. While our members need to drive our statewide mission, we need leaders who are willing to fight the hard fights. **This is why ST Caucus offers the leadership team of Mike Lillis, Bianca Tanis, Megan DeLaRosa, and Nate Hathaway.**

NYSUT can no longer afford to give up its power in exchange for a seat at the proverbial table. With new leadership and an educated, empowered membership, the Union can and will prevail against the impending onslaught of political, financial, and ideological attacks against education and labor. With the support of the entire membership, we will work to create a vibrant and vital union that will always put the needs of members, educators, students and teachers first. Join with us, for when we act as ONE BIG UNION, we truly are stronger together!

In Solidarity,

The Stronger Together Caucus Executive Committee



ST Caucus' Position on the Issues

3012d - The current state officers ran on a platform opposing Iannuzzi's APPR and the way it was created, citing "minimal input from delegates, local presidents, or even the Board of Directors." Furthermore, they vowed to fix the onerous burdens of APPR, demanded a return to local control, and an end to using standardized testing as an overriding factor in teaching and learning." In reality, the new matrix-based APPR that NYSUT supports offers less local control, more emphasis on standardized testing, less valid measures for teacher evaluation, and less input from educators. Even more concerning is the mandated inclusion of scores based on a VAM model, a formula that has been proven invalid and volatile. NYSUT members' demands for the return of local control to collectively bargain the teacher evaluation have been overridden by the Unity Caucus's demands for the current matrix and the expansion of invalid and unreliable student performance measures to evaluate teachers. One of the defining issues of this election will be whether you support a teacher evaluation based on student performance or (like us) you support the right to negotiate teacher evaluation at the local level. For the next two years, while the APPR moratorium is still in place, we will organize and work to ensure the repeal of the damaging aspects of the Education Transformation Act. Will you stand with us in opposing student performance in teacher evaluation?

Common Core – The current officers demanded that SED get the Common Core "right," vowing not to support Common Core until it includes "restoration of local control, a curriculum that is developmentally appropriate and an end to high stakes testing." And yet, NYSUT has been recruiting and encouraging teachers to write test questions for the developmentally-inappropriate 3-8 tests that are used to evaluate teachers. ST Caucus, on the other hand, does not support teachers writing test questions for assessments that we know are inappropriately benchmarked and subsequently hurt students, teachers, and the integrity of our classrooms. Rather, we gave members identifiable reasons for what is wrong with the Common Core and offered members avenues to engage in true solutions, not band-aids. In June 2016, the ST Caucus urged Commissioner Elia, Chancellor Rosa, and the members of the Board of Regents to ensure an assessment boundary is attached to each of the standards. This would not be considered a testing mandate, but rather a goalpost that can be used to design rich curriculum. We continue to strongly urge the Regents to adopt a system of attaching assessment boundaries to each standard so that stakeholders have the best opportunity of understanding the standards in a grade-appropriate manner. In October 2016, when teachers, educators, and parents were asked to respond to the draft standards with comments addressing the need for these assessment boundaries, we also asked members, in partnership with NYSAPE, to consider the strong position taken on the draft revisions.



OPT-OUT – Like our opponents, ST Caucus supports a parent’s right to refuse to allow his or her child to take abusive state tests. However, unlike our opponents, we intend to implement the *I Refuse* resolution that was unanimously adopted by the NYSUT delegates at the 2015 RA; this resolution asked all members of NYSUT to opt their own children out of these damaging tests. The ST Caucus recognizes that very little has changed for students still being compelled to sit for flawed assessments that are too long and yield little to no usable information. The Stronger Together Caucus has directly expressed frustration to our NYSUT officers that the message from headquarters to locals was not strong enough. ST Caucus will strengthen the meaningful partnerships with grassroots parent organizations like NYSAPE and Long Island OPT-OUT. Finally, all parents in New York State will know that NYSUT does not support these abusive state tests and will fight alongside them for their children.

Students – Our working conditions are our students’ learning conditions. Under ST Caucus leadership, NYSUT’s advocacy will be centered on alleviating classrooms of the burden of poorly thought-out curriculum and assessments designed to demoralize and mislabel students as not ready for college and career. Under our leadership, whether it is abusive testing, lack of funding, flawed learning standards, harmful education policy, corporate reform, or existential federal threats, under our leadership, NYSUT will always advocate for what is in the best interest of our students. NYSUT will push for a tangible shift from the state’s focus on ranking and sorting students based on test scores to a focus on research-based best practices that will enable all of our students to learn and to meet what their future demands.

VOTE-COPE – Andy Pallotta is fond of pointing out that 91% of our endorsed candidates won their seats. What has this gotten us? NYSUT has endured failure after failure: the additions of Tiers 5 and 6, 3012c, 3012d, the property tax cap, and the Educational Transformation Act, to name only a few. At last year’s RA, Stronger Together brought forward a resolution for more transparency and accountability with regard to where our VOTE-COPE dollars are spent. Instead of focusing on the intent of the resolution, the opposition discussed toilet paper and paper clips. NYSUT needs a new vision for political action beyond asking members for larger donations to VOTE-COPE. The power of our union resides not in our ability to rub elbows with politicians who will always yield to the highest bidder, but rather in our ability to mobilize the collective power of 600,000 rank-and-file teachers. Hedge fund reformers and billionaires like the Koch brothers and the Walton family are currently pouring millions of dollars into NY PACs devoted to the privatization of New York’s public schools. We are never going to win the money game, but we do have the ability to rally 600,000 members alongside the parents of our students. Only when we make our classrooms the focus of our activism will we be successful. We need to reclaim our profession!



Democracy – NYSUT’s leadership and decision-making bodies are hampered by an undemocratic power structure that rewards a local’s size rather than ideas. The current Unity Caucus domination of NYSUT’s agenda prevents an inclusive vision in which all locals matter. The 2014 NYSUT election and the current endorsement process in the UNITY Caucus have illustrated that the sensitive balance that allowed NYSUT to function so successfully for so long has become corrupted and imbalanced. In fact, with all their talk of bringing change to NYSUT, infusing more democratic practices within our union’s governance is one principle the current officers never mentioned. As a union, we support measures to democratize balloting within New York State, yet within our own union, we face resistance when seeking to create processes and procedures that will allow and encourage all locals, regardless of size or financial ability, the opportunity to participate in NYSUT governance. They stated their belief that “members need to drive how we operate as a union and have major input on statewide decisions,” but their actions do not support this statement. ST Caucus, with the support of hundreds of NYSUT members, has repeatedly brought forth NYSUT Constitutional Amendments that would address these undemocratic processes, including but not limited to At-Large members of the Board of Directors being elected by the entire state delegation, rather than the constituencies to which they are assigned. Our current system of voting for officers and At-Large Directors gives large locals an oversized representation in our democracy. Only 30% of all locals participate in the election process, in large part due to the expense of traveling to and lodging in New York City in order to vote. This requires, at minimum, a \$500 “poll tax” per delegate. We will make it a priority to engage locals that have traditionally (or more recently) been disengaged from NYSUT because they feel their voices have gone unheard and their concerns unheeded. We will continue to support change that empowers ALL of our members to be the voice of NYSUT.

Finances – In 2014, Martin Messner demanded transparency in NYSUT’s finances. At last year’s RA, delegates were informed of how successful Martin Messner has been at correcting NYSUT’s financial challenges. He even bragged about a surplus, only to find out two months later, NYSUT was reporting a fiscal crisis so severe it threatened to derail negotiations with PSA, the union that represents much of the NYSUT staff. In addition, the Board of Directors is considering a “five-year plan” focused on restructuring and reducing the field services a majority of our locals depend upon. This clearly articulates the vision of our current NYSUT leadership. They believe the burden of the fiscal crisis faced by NYSUT should be one borne on the backs of the organization’s most important asset—its employees. In contrast, we believe NYSUT officers should lead by example when it comes to NYSUT’s finances. We are proposing a constitutional amendment that would reduce the number of NYSUT officers from five to four, which presents at minimum a 20% reduction in officer expenses. Additionally, once elected, we will be reducing officer salaries by 15%. While we are under no delusion that these measures will be the solution to all of NYSUT’s financial hurdles, we believe it is important that we do all that we can to preserve the most critical services offered to NYSUT locals.



Tax Cap – This law is inherently undemocratic, and handcuffs almost all school districts throughout the state. It must be eliminated. Tom DiNapoli has identified 82 school districts who are fiscally distressed. The communities these schools serve have tried to pierce the tax cap, turning out 59% of votes, only to fall short. Because of the lack of democracy in the law, 41% of voters can overrule the other 59%. This means school districts are forced to cut services and staff despite overwhelming support from their community.

Fighting for ALL Constituency Groups – The current officers promised to support all constituency groups, but have failed to recognize the systemic nature of the threat to education. The tax cap at the local level is not a separate issue from the treatment of adjuncts in higher ed. Policy makers are trying to pay for education on the cheap. EdTPA is as harmful to the profession of education as is the current benchmarking of the grades 3-8 State Tests. The Tax Levy Cap impedes the salary advancement of our SRPs in the same way that it prevents the funding of needed programs in our most struggling districts. New York State fails to meet its legal requirements to fund Pre K-12 education, and neglects to support its Community Colleges as well as State Colleges and Universities. We have seen a 40% drop in teacher training programs because NYSUT has simply failed to protect our profession. By accepting every legislative loss and making it our “new normal,” we numb our members to the hope for change. Only when we fight for the values that will allow us to reclaim the promise of public education will we then be able to fight for every constituency group in NYSUT.



ST Caucus' Endorsed Candidates

Mike Lillis, NYSUT President - Mike Lillis has been teaching physics in the Lakeland Central School District for 23 years. He has been President of the Lakeland Federation of Teachers for 16 years.

Mike has witnessed, first hand, how the jobs of teachers and teacher unionists have become more difficult. He has seen such education “reforms” as the APPR, tax cap, tests with abusive benchmarks, and a Common Core curriculum untethered to the developing brains of our students, diminish and marginalize teachers.

For the last several years, Mike has made pushing back against corporate reform central to his activism. He has travelled the state speaking at NYSAPE forums and educating teachers and parents on the metrics behind New York’s abusive 3-8 Math and ELA assessments. He has also served as a member of the Commissioner’s Teacher Advisory Council since its inception.

Mike knows it is no mystery why enrollment in teacher training programs is down 40% - we have failed to defend the profession. At a recent workshop with fellow presidents, Mike said, “Educators face an existential threat like no other; NYSUT’s only course of action is to educate and empower members by mobilizing around issues that matter to teachers.” He believes that what has been missing from NYSUT’s activism is clear, high-quality information. Arming our members with the information they need about abusive tests and invalid teacher evaluations will help turn the tide and reclaim our profession. Mike believes one need look no further than NYSUT United or NYSUT’s website to understand the roots of the problem. As an education activist, he points out, NYSUT’s publications are the last place educators look for informative content to educate legislators, the Regents, or parents.

Mike refuses to accept NYSUT’s ineffective action on issues which are critical to our profession. To help organize teachers and make NYSUT more responsive to their needs, he was a founding member of the Stronger Together Caucus, and is the current Chair. Under Mike’s leadership, the caucus has taken a strong position on amending NYSUT’s Constitution to expand the ability of all NYSUT delegates to vote. He has also worked with the Caucus to promote and endorse Chancellor Betty Rosa, oppose SED’s flawed [College and Career Readiness Benchmarks](#), support the [Opt-Out Movement](#), and fight to improve graduation rates.

Mike recognizes NYSUT’s great potential to improve the lives of teachers and students. To do so, however, NYSUT must effectively engage and inform the membership. Mike co-founded the ST Caucus to provide a platform for issues related to testing and teaching on the state level, and will only increase this activism as NYSUT’s next president.



Bianca Tanis, NYSUT Executive Vice President - Bianca Tanis is an elementary special education teacher with expertise in multisensory reading therapy and crisis intervention. She has worked in the Ramapo Central School District for the past seven years and has taught students in grades K-5. Tanis currently teaches a K-1 therapeutic support class.

As a founding member of New York State Allies for Public Education (NYSAPE), a grassroots advocacy group allied with over 50 parent and education organizations, Tanis has been at the forefront of the opt-out movement. She has advocated for the repeal of test and punish policies that harm teachers and students and is a firm believer that the State's misguided education policies and laws have served to increase inequity in educational opportunities for students while silencing teacher voice and diminishing the education profession.

Bianca Tanis has a proven track record of organizing parents, educators, and communities around critical issues facing public education. She has made frequent media appearances to discuss these issues including [Capital Pressroom](#), [Capital Tonight](#), [CNN](#), and [Connect:NY](#) (alongside Commissioner Elia) and has presented at numerous education conferences and forums across the state and nationally.

As a leader of NYSAPE, Tanis helped lead the charge in bringing greater transparency to the appointment of members to the NYS Board of Regents, an accomplishment that has led to an increased number of Regents with actual classroom experience. In 2014, Tanis was selected to be a judge for the American Federation of Teachers Innovation Fund Grant and she recently served on NYSED's ESSA Think Tank. Tanis has also served on the New Paltz Board of Education's Legislative Action Committee for the past two years.

Tanis frequently [blogs](#) on educational topics and in addition to being featured in the [Washington Post](#), her writing is often reblogged by [Diane Ravitch](#) and other national blogs. She has been published in [American Educator](#) and was a contributor to [Resisting Reform: Reclaiming Education Through Grassroots Activism](#).

Tanis holds a BA in Anthropology from SUNY New Paltz and an MS in Childhood and Special Education from Mount Saint Mary College. Prior to teaching, Tanis served as senior case manager in a 60 unit housing facility for adults transitioning out of homelessness.



Megan DeLaRosa, NYSUT 1st Vice President - Megan DeLaRosa has been an elementary teacher for the Shenendehowa Central School District for the past seventeen years. She has served as the President of the Shenendehowa Teachers Association for the past five years.

As an elementary teacher, Megan has taught a variety of grade levels and subject areas. While an elementary classroom teacher, she taught every subject area, and as a sixth grade middle school teacher, she was exposed to the issues facing her secondary colleagues. Returning to the elementary level, Megan has served as an Academic Intervention Services (AIS) teacher for the past six years, experiencing directly the role New York State's faulty assessments play in dictating students' daily learning opportunities.

Megan is a true believer that we can have a stronger, more democratic NYSUT if we hold true to the democratic principles of accountability and transparency. In her own local, Megan maintains transparency and accountability by encouraging two-way communication, opening herself and other elected leaders in her local to scrutiny from the membership at-large. She believes her members have a right to know the strategic plans for the local and what their elected leaders are/are not doing in working toward the local's goals. Without transparency and open dialogue, Megan feels it is impossible to know the will of the rank-and-file, and therefore, elections are meaningless, simply rubber stamps that lead to an arbitrary and self-serving governance structure. In her role as a NYSUT delegate, Megan has voiced her concerns with the current NYSUT governance structure that she believes suppresses the voices of rank-and-file NYSUT members. Speaking publicly at the 2015 and 2016 RAs in favor of proposed Constitutional Amendments that increase transparency and member engagement in NYSUT elections, Megan has articulated that hypocrisy exists when we, as a union, support the democratization of balloting in New York State elections and yet do not seek solutions to overcome the voting barriers within our own union elections processes.

In her positions as both a local president and a current teacher, Megan has negotiated and been evaluated by APPR plans under both 3012-c and 3012-d. She knows the inherent flaws in the laws and the subsequent NYSED regulations and has engaged NYSUT staff in developing and securing the fairest evaluation system possible for her members and their students, given these flaws. Working with other members of the ST Caucus, her Superintendent and Board of Education members, parents and PTAs, and her own members, she has advocated for the repeal of 3012-d and an end to this costly, arbitrary evaluation system. In her efforts to negotiate a new APPR plan under 3012-d, she, along with other local leaders felt the frustration as they tried to seek meaningful answers to questions for which NYSUT leadership had no answers. An important issue that impacts the daily lives of our members must be met with significant and continuous guidance and support. To provide so little, leaving local presidents in precarious negotiating positions and members' livelihoods in the hands of the same NYSED that created a deeply flawed system, strengthens Megan's belief that the current NYSUT

(DeLaRosa cont'd) leadership is completely disconnected from the everyday lives of the local presidents and the rank-and-file members they represent. An opportunity for change can and should be brought to our union.

In her tenure year at Shenendehowa, Megan was elected to serve as a building representative and a NYSUT delegate for her local. Since then, she has also served as her local's VOTE-COPE Coordinator, newsletter editor, Secretary, Employer-Employee Relations (Grievance) Chair, and AFT, TRS, and AFL-CIO delegates. In 2015 and again in 2016, she was elected by the ST Caucus membership to serve as the ST Caucus Vice-Chair for the Capital District. In addition, Megan is a graduate of the NYSUT and AFL-CIO Leadership Institutes and recently helped lead her local through NYSUT's three-year LAP Program



Nate Hathaway, NYSUT Secretary/Treasurer - Nate Hathaway is a high school social studies teacher, department coordinator, and Model UN advisor at Franklin Academy High School in the Malone Central School District. For eight of his eleven years in the district, he has been a union activist. Starting as a union representative on a building improvement committee, Nate quickly rose to become Vice-President and LAP coordinator of his local and two years later became President of the Malone Federation of Teachers. He has also been a delegate to the NYSUT Representative Assembly, a member of NYSUT's Special Area Committee for Social Studies, and a 2014-15 graduate of the NYSUT Leadership Institute.

As a parent, teacher, and union activist, Nate has spent the last several years fighting against the education "reform" agenda that has demonized the teaching profession and victimized students across the state. He spoke out against the Common Core standards/curriculum and benchmarking at the Common Core forum in Lake Placid. He helped organize locals in his region to take part in rallies against Cuomo's 2015 education budget. He's lead an Opt-Out movement in his community that has not only led to a dramatic increase in Opt-Out numbers within his home district, but within many surrounding districts as well.

As a founding member of the Stronger Together Caucus, and regional vice-chair for the North Country, Nate has helped lead a movement within NYSUT, intent on democratizing the organization and empowering members from all locals. It is his belief that the power structure of NYSUT has left too many locals behind and disenfranchised. As a local president and regional vice-chair, Nate has also advocated for NYSUT leadership to be responsive to the whole membership by addressing a wide range of concerns surrounding APPR and the Common Core testing and standards.

As a candidate for Secretary-Treasurer of NYSUT, Nate hopes to present a vision for a fiscally responsible NYSUT that demonstrates a respect for the diverse needs of all locals and the many employees of the organization. Nate and the members of the Stronger Together Caucus governing board understand that in order for NYSUT to provide the services locals need and want, any belt-tightening needs to start at the top of the organization.