



### 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.