



Oneida Teachers' ASSOCIATION

Partners for a Better Community

March/April 2024
Newsletter

www.oneidateacher.com

OTA - Facebook Page

Volume 52—Issue #4

A Message from our President — David Wright

Please take some time and read the retirees “goodbye message”. Many thanks go out to each of them as they have dedicated many years and countless hours to the youth of Oneida and the betterment of the District. We wish them the very best in retirement!

Last month while attending a local NYSUT conference I had the opportunity to talk with Ronald Gross, the second vice president for NYSUT. It was an opportunity to pick his brain and share the concerns that we are facing here in Oneida. The small group session brought together the local union presidents from Syracuse and Utica and many districts in between. Many discussions took place and ideas were shared about issues related to many local unions. How do we get people to join the profession? How do we create balance with an ever increasing workload? What is the best way to deal with pressure from various items such as the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) system? These were a few of the main topics that were being discussed.

One item that Ron shared was the pressure on our state elected officials to fix Tier 6. “This campaign is working” were his words. NYSUT’s legislative team has testified before the NYS Senate about the need to Fix Tier 6 to boost retention and recruitment. While the title of the moment is to fix Tier 6, this fix will also help out the Tier 5 members as well. Ron recalled a time around the start of the new millennium, when NYSUT and its members advocated for the betterment of Tier 4. The pressure placed on the NYS legislature resulted in the end of Tier 4 contributions after 10 years and reduced Tier 4 early retirement penalties. Now it is time to help our Tier 5 and Tier 6 colleagues. Locally we are starting an advocacy group to help make this change happen. If you are interested, please contact an OTA officer. We are looking to arm this team with knowledge of why we need to fix tier 6 and get information out as to why it is an important moment for our profession.

The other major topic that Ron discussed was changes to the APPR. It was communicated to us that a proposal was hand-delivered by NYSUT President Melinda Person and NYSED Commissioner Betty Rosa to the offices of the Legislature’s leaders. It is the hope that this proposal would restore local control, eliminating some of the damaging parts of the current system. The OTA will continue to monitor these developments with APPR and it is our hope that these changes are supported by our elected officials.



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UPCOMING MEETINGS:

OTA Representative Meeting (Second Tuesday of the Month) ALL ARE WELCOME!

Next Meeting: **April 16th** **3:45 PM Oneida High School**
 May 14th **3:45 PM TBA**
 June 11th **3:45 PM TBA**

Board of Education Meeting (Second Tuesday of the Month)

April 16th **6:00 PM Costello**
 May 14th **6:00 PM Costello (Budget Meeting)**
 May 21st **6:00 PM DO (Reg Meet, Budget Vote, Election vote)**
 June 11th **6:00 PM Costello**

Board of Education Meetings

The Oneida City School District Board of Education meets on the second Tuesday of every month.

The meetings are generally held at one of the buildings in the district and begin at 6 PM.



We all need to remember that it is our job, our livelihood, that is constantly scrutinized. Make every effort to attend a meeting to show solidarity in the OTA. Remember: it is in your best interest to know what is going on in your district.

Donations and Contributions

Thank you Everyone!

We have contributed to
Eight (10) different
Organizations/community mem-
bers

At just over \$3900!



Happenings in and around the OTA

NYS Teachers' Retirement System: A Seasonable Approach to Retiring

In Spring of your Final School Year:

- ◆ The filing period for a July 1 retirement begins April 2. You can file your application for retirement up to 90 days prior to your effective date of retirement or as late as the date of retirement. File online through MyNYSTRS (age 55+) or submit a paper application (RET-54).
- ◆ Continue tracking pending legislation by visiting the Legislation Page of NYSTRS.org.
- ◆ We encourage filing for retirement with NYSTRS 30 days before your date of retirement so we can avoid delays in putting you on our retirement payroll. You will need to indicate your choice of the Maximum benefit or an option. **Thoroughly review the difference between each before selecting.** If you need clarification, call (800) 348-7298, Ext. 6250 and speak with an information representative.



Speaking of NYS Teachers' Retirement System, the OTA has a new NYSTRS Delegate! Lisa Zamperetti will be stepping into the role. She will become our contact person and our liaison with NYSTRS.

OTA Scholarship Nominations

This year the OTA will be awarding five \$500 scholarships to deserving members of the graduating class. Nominees are posted on the OTA website (oneidateacer.com) and were distributed through school emails, with teachers choosing the five (5) students they want to nominate. The Selection Committee will finalize the nominees. **Voting will be open from April 1st through April 19th.**

Criteria for the Scholarship include:

- 1- Be accepted at an institution of higher education.
- 2- Have a need for financial assistance.
- 3- Have achieved the Standard of Excellence established by the Oneida City School District. According to these standards, the nominee may be described as.....

"an effective communicator"
"an applier of technology"
"a life long learner"
"a responsible citizen"
"a critical thinker"
"an independent learner"
"a global citizen"

OTA Annual Spring Fling

It's back and bigger than ever! Well, almost.

Becca Piccola has taken the lead on the Spring Fling. If there are any members interested in assisting with this annual event, Contact Becca at rpiccola@oneidacsd.org.

As the plans continue to get finalized, be sure to keep your eye on your email. Great time for Food, Fun, Friends, and maybe an adult beverage or two!

Meet our Retirees

Laura Reff

Business Teacher
Oneida High School



Wow, where did the time go? For all of the younger faculty, savor every moment in the classroom. Time goes by too quickly. My 33-year teaching career began in 1990 when I took a full-time job teaching post-secondary business education at Bryant & Stratton College making \$18,000 per year! Since public teaching jobs were scarce, I am sure that I believed I hit the jackpot.

A few years later, a position opened up at Port Byron High School, which launched my public teaching career. During that time, I taught a variety of business classes, advised the junior class, and started an FBLA chapter. I traveled with students to regional, state, and national competitions in Orlando. I also served on the NYS Board of Trustees for FBLA. Some years later, my family moved closer to Oneida where I have spent the last 25 years teaching business classes and advised several clubs. I have been fortunate to share my love of teaching with many talented and caring colleagues, and our time spent together will always be cherished.

I am grateful to the OTA for the endless hours spent advocating for faculty and staff, protecting our fringe benefits, and maintaining the language in our contract. Thank you. It is imperative to stay united for everyone's benefit.

In retirement, I plan to spend more time doing the things that I never have time to do now. It will be wonderful to not live each day by 40-minute bells. I plan to spend more time being active, enjoying more time on the St. Lawrence River, traveling with my husband, visiting family and friends, and volunteering with my husband's company helping cancer patients in some capacity.

Thank you, Oneida, for the great memories together.

Keep Oneida Strong!

Laura Reff

Christine Hawthorne

Math AIS Teacher
North Broad Elementary



When I graduated from Oneida High School in 1987, elementary education was not on my radar. After finding other career paths unfulfilling, memories of teachers and subjects that positively impacted my youth sent me down the elementary education path and to a career in which I discovered my passion.

In 1993, six years after leaving Oneida High School, I returned to the area and began teaching at the Sylvan-Verona Beach Elementary School in its final year as a common school district before merging with Oneida City School District in 1994. After 5 years with Sylvan-Verona Beach school I transferred to North Broad Street School where I would remain for the next and final 26 years of my 31 year career in Oneida.

During that time, I taught 4 years of First Grade, followed by 23 years of Kindergarten and finally 4 years of Math AIS. While I enjoyed all of my time, I must say that Kindergarten will always have my heart. Nothing in education can parallel the energy, excitement and enthusiasm of a Kindergarten student!

I was fortunate to work alongside a dedicated and passionate group of Kindergarten teachers district-wide during that time. I also had the pleasure of working with some of the best teacher aides that I wouldn't have survived without!

There were so many special people that I will never forget. Mentors that guided me at the beginning of my career and administrators and teaching partners that continued to support me each and every day. Of course these last few years wouldn't have been nearly as much fun without the **Mathzillas!**

I have enjoyed watching all of the students learn, grow and mature through the years. Oh, the memories to cherish and stories to tell!

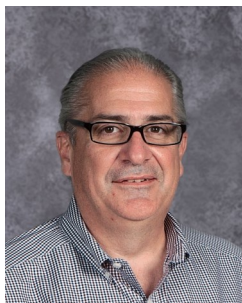
Thank you to the Oneida Teacher's Association who works tirelessly in support of our teachers. I would never have been able to follow the path that led me here without your support.

I am looking forward to spending my retirement traveling with my husband (and dog), making memories with family and friends and enjoying the central NY winters as far away from central NY winters as possible!

Meet our Retirees

David Hawthorne

Oneida High School
Band Director



While I started teaching in this district in 1991, with the exception of 4 years in college, I have been a part of the Oneida City Schools since Kindergarten. My first day on the job I walked into the band and every student yelled “Hey Dave, welcome back.” Most of the kids knew me as Dave. My brother graduated from Oneida 1 year prior to me landing the job. So my first lesson or instruction to my students was you have to call me Mr. Hawthorne from now on.

Being the band director has always been a dream job for me. I’ve loved every day of it, even during the challenging times. Since the 7th grade it is all I ever wanted to be. Many thanks to Tim Watson, Daryll Wonderly, Norma Luce, Roselle Lynch, Tom Williams and Tom Mirante. All of these former music teachers worked, guided, scolded, mentored and advised me from day one. They ALL played such a large role in my music education and eventually in my career here in Oneida. They were and are that important to me. Thanks to Dr. Tamburro for that handshake and him saying “welcome to Oneida.” One of the best days in my life!

Many things in OHS have changed. We didn’t have computers or email. I used and was proficient at mimeograph and can still smell that fluid today. The struggle was real. Now we get upset when a copier is down! The building has gone through many positive changes. The new auditorium is state of the art and should be awesome for students and the community for many years to come.

In retirement we will be doing a lot of traveling. My best friend owns a house in Italy and we will be going there regularly. We want to live in Miami. We love the culture, the music, the food, sun and beaches and all that city and South Florida has to offer. I’m done with snow. My daughter Jessica, is a professional trombone player in Las Vegas and I need to see her play more. My youngest, Morgan, is a French pastry chef in Pasadena. I plan on taking flying lessons in hopes to achieve my private pilot's certificate.

In closing, I wish all faculty and staff well. I will miss this place. It has been such a large chunk of my life. “Hail to thee Oneida High. May thy spirit NEVER DIE!”

Michelle Crowley

Willard Prior Elementary
Elementary Teacher



In 1994 I started my career coaching for Oneida, and teaching in Clinton. Having grown up in Oneida I always knew that I wanted to teach here. So, when the opportunity arose the following year, I grabbed it. During my career I have worked in a few elementary buildings, as well as having the pleasure of coaching Girls Modified and JV Field Hockey and Boys Varsity Volleyball. My first classroom was Pre-1st at Willard Prior. I taught there for one year. I then transferred to Sylvan Verona Beach and taught 4th grade for two years. There was an opening at North Broad so I transferred there and taught 4th grade for twenty-two years. For the last 4 years I jumped out of the classroom and taught AIS Math at Seneca St and then at Willard Prior.

Being an elementary teacher has been an incredibly hard, yet rewarding job. I value the lifelong relationships that I’ve built with my students and athletes and I’ve realized that perhaps they have taught me as much as I have taught them. They have made me a more patient and compassionate person and I will miss them so much! I’ve also been absolutely blessed to work side by side with the most amazing staff, whom I call family. We’ve laughed and cried together. We’ve picked each other up when necessary as well as celebrated our successes. I know we’ve made a huge impact on each other. I wouldn’t change a thing about my time here in Oneida because good or bad, every situation has made me the person I am today.

I’m completely happy with my decision to become a teacher (Thanks Dad!) because I’ve been fortunate to have had the chance to do what I love, and get paid! Oneida has been, and will always be, a huge part of my heart. I will genuinely miss my students and co-workers, but am very excited to finally get the chance to travel, spend time with my friends and family and fill my days how I chose. Keep in touch and I’ll see you at Happy Hour!!!

Meet our Retirees

John Zamperetti

Social Studies Teacher
Oneida High School
2001-2024



As I head into a new phase of my life, I'd like to take the opportunity to thank and acknowledge some people on my way out the door.

To the many students that I've had either in class, on a golf team or as members of a musical production, I'd like to make it clear that I've learned as much from you as you from me. My evolution as a teacher reflects many lessons that you have imparted over the years. By my count, I've had around 3300 students from Camden High School in 1995 through OHS in 2024.

To my department mates, you've made coming to work a pleasure rather than a chore. The time has flown by, in part, because of the common interests and conversations that have occurred about teaching, the NY Giants, NY Yankees or the numerous Oneida Athletic teams we have coached, watched and cheered for. We have certainly solved a lot of problems haven't we?

Finally to my family, which would not have existed if not for teaching, I met Lisa when we were both teachers at the aforementioned Camden High School. You have been a sounding board, supporter and listener of bad jokes. My coworkers only have to deal with me in small doses, you can't escape, thanks for being my best friend. Anna and Alex, you are a product of two educators and have probably heard more than your fair share of "too much information", thanks for listening and tolerating my nonsense as well.

Good luck to all in the future and should you need to find me, look no further than McConnellsville Country Club where I plan on spending a lot of time for the next few years.

Jim Perkins

Oneida High School
Science Teacher



I've been employed at Oneida High School for 30 years and have enjoyed them all (ok maybe not 2020). I started my professional life in the Army and eventually worked as an engineer at Rome Labs. I enjoyed both but couldn't see myself doing either for 30-40 years. I was introduced to teaching while substituting between contracts and felt that education might be something I could do long term.

I've taught about every science course we offer at OHS but Living Environment is the one course I've taught every year and is probably what I most enjoy teaching. Supervising gamers club, selling football tickets, night school, and all the other activities I've participated in have kept me busy in the best ways possible. In hindsight, my initial thought that teaching was what I was meant to do was correct. Considering all the things I enjoy about teaching, interacting with the kids is definitely my favorite. I really mean it when I say they've taught me as much as I've taught them.

As I retire and look back at my time at OHS, I just can't visualize spending 30 years of my career in any other way. I realize we are going through some difficult times right now but I know the faculty and staff of this district are up to the challenge. I will miss the students and staff here at Oneida and wish all of you the best in the future.



Meet our Retirees

Patty Murphy

Otto Shortell Middle School
6th Grade Teacher



After 20+ years of teaching and learning in our Oneida school community, I am retiring. It has been an incredible journey filled with unforgettable memories, invaluable experiences, and cherished relationships.

I never intended to become a teacher. I thought I'd enter the business world and make as much money as was humanly possible. I finished my BS in Business Administration and went to work. I spent the next 15 years in the nonprofit world (so not a lot of money was made.) I met a lot of people. I did a lot of traveling too. But something was missing. I was never home. I was stressed out. My kids were growing up with me being absent. When September 11th happened, I realized I was done. My husband Justin asked me what I'd do if I could do anything at all. Without hesitation, I answered, "I'd go back to school and become a teacher." It was absolutely without a doubt, the best move I could have made. I really wanted to be a secondary math teacher, but learned that I would have had to get a second bachelor's degree and then my masters. So, I decided instead to go back for an MST in Childhood education. As it turns out, I spent 13 years teaching middle school math, so I got what I wanted in the end!

Reflecting on my time at OSCD, I remember the early years, teaching third grade and then sixth. When recently clearing out cabinets in my classroom, I found momentos I had saved from long ago. I found the weekly planning documents for WP News where students ran our version of morning program. Students acted as newscasters to bring the news to the students and teachers. I found the invitations from our Sixth Grade Luncheons. Each year, our sixth graders studied etiquette and had a luncheon with the meal served on china. I remember one student telling me she'd never eaten on a "glass" plate and another admonishing Dr. Tamburro for putting his elbows on the table. Such memories!

I found Murphy Money in a box in my cabinet. Students earned "money" for completing homework, performing acts of kindness, etc. and had to "pay" for infractions. At the end of the week, we auctioned off goodies like pencils, cap erasers and dollar store finds. I remember hearing students selling pieces of gum to friends for \$300 in Murphy money. Then, I found the students' meeting minutes from the Ambassador's Committee at OSMS. This student-led group learned and practiced leadership through speaking, planning and team-building exercises.

One of the most humbling experiences I have had as a teacher was being invited to the wedding of one of my first students. I had that student in third grade and again in sixth. When I received that invitation in the mail many years later, I felt such gratitude for the opportunity I have had to work with students in Oneida. I went to that wedding and watched that former student, all grown up, marry the love of her life.

I can't imagine a better way to spend a career than teaching in Oneida. I am fortunate to have worked alongside such dedicated and passionate individuals who share a common goal of nurturing and empowering our students. Your friendship, collaboration, and camaraderie have been a source of strength and inspiration to me, and I will always cherish the memories we have created together. Thank you, Oneida City Schools, for an unforgettable 22 years. Their support and encouragement have meant the world to me, and I will forever hold a special place in my heart for this remarkable school community.

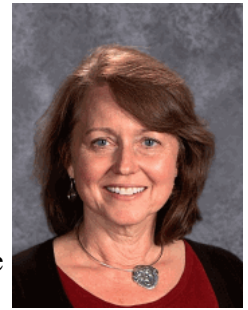
With heartfelt appreciation,

Patti Murphy

Meet our Retirees

Catherine Jeannin

Oneida High School
French Teacher



I was born and raised in Dallas, Texas by French parents who immigrated to the U.S. in 1962. I had a wonderful childhood of being brought up in a bilingual household and spending summers with my family in France. My husband and I met in a German class in 1982 and have been together ever since. We moved to Syracuse in 1992 so my husband could pursue an art degree at Syracuse University. We were only going to be here for two years... For many this will be hard to believe, but we fell in love with Central New York. The snowy winters were an adventure and fall foliage was beautiful! After two years of subbing, office work, Stickley sales, I met Superintendent Dr. Volp at the Huntington Learning Center. The District's goal was to bring back the French program which had dwindled to 30 students. I was so excited for this opportunity. The French program grew to include AP classes and MVCC credit. But the best part? Traveling with students on multiple occasions to Quebec, France, and once to Martinique! I am proud to say that over the years, many of my students went on to study French in college and use those skills in their careers.

Nevertheless, all good things come to an end. I am saddened to be the one to usher the end of the French program. Times have changed greatly and this is the new reality. It's been a great ride and I have no regrets! My 30 years in the Oneida School District have been wonderful. I would like to thank my Spanish colleagues, specifically Renee Gleason, for their support and a shout out to my one French colleague, Ken Infarinato. We had a great time sharing the Francophone Culture with our students. Finally, I am grateful for everyone in this district who has supported my other passion – welcoming exchange students. This part is not going away as I will continue to bring the world to this community. My retirement will be busy working for Greenheart Exchange and taking care of my husband. I will miss the students and my colleagues, but I am ready for next chapter of my life.



Merci beaucoup, Madame Jeannin

What Has the OTA Done For You?

If you are looking to retire, whether in a year or a couple of years, the OTA has negotiated many benefits to help you move into retirement. Here are several negotiated incentives for you to consider;

- ◆ **Retirement Incentive Benefit** — meet the criteria and get a retirement bonus
- ◆ **Accumulated Sick Leave Benefit** — if you have sick days remaining when you retire, the District will buy them back from you
- ◆ **Service Salary Adjustment** - after 10 years of service, the District will offer you a service incentive

All of the incentives have criteria. Please read your contract or contact an Executive or Building Rep for more information

FIX tier six

Compared to Tier 4, Tier 6 members will pay more and earn a significantly reduced pension.

TIER 6

At the start of their careers, both NYSUT members pay 3 percent of their salaries toward their pensions.

TIER 4

His payments increase as he earns more.

At \$46,000, he pays 3.5 percent.

At \$56,000, he pays 4.5 percent.

At \$76,000, he pays 5.75 percent.

At \$101,000, he pays 6 percent.



Tier 6 members can't retire and collect their pensions, penalty-free, until age 63.

10 years

Her payments end after 10 years and are capped at 3 percent.



30 years

Tier 4 members can retire and collect their pensions, penalty-free, with 30 years of service at age 55.

Learn More and Join the Fix Tier 6 Team: FixTier6.org

Check out all your union membership has to offer!

NYSUT Member Benefits offers dozens of endorsed programs and services that can save you money, assist you in protecting your family, and help you plan for the future.



Legal Service Plan

Plan benefits include:

- Crucial estate planning documents (Simple Will, Health Care Proxy, Living Will & Durable Power of Attorney)
- Free telephone consultations
- Guaranteed maximum fees for specific legal matters

Financial Counseling Program

Plan benefits include:

- Unbiased objective advice
- Free telephone & virtual consultations
- Assistance with retirement planning, 403(b) savings, college savings, tax planning and more

For an annual fee, the Legal Service Plan -- provided by the law firm of Feldman, Kramer & Monaco, P.C. -- offers legal expertise on a variety of personal legal matters such as dealing with a speeding ticket or handling estate planning. Plan participants receive unlimited access to toll-free advice weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (EST) as well as a toll-free hotline for urgent legal assistance outside of these hours.

Meanwhile, the Financial Counseling Program -- provided by Stacey Braun Associates, Inc. -- offers unbiased, objective advice customized to your specific financial situation. The full-service program provides up to six hours of objective toll-free telephone or virtual consultations with a Stacey Braun Certified Financial Planner. *



Learn more by scanning the QR code to the left, visiting memberbenefits.nysut.org, or calling 800-626-8101.

For information about contractual endorsement arrangements with providers of endorsed programs, please contact NYSUT Member Benefits.



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