



THE UNION SOUND

THE VOICE OF A SOUND UNION



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Rondout Valley Federation of Teachers and School-Related Professionals

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Our Students, Our School, Our Community **NEEDS YOUR SCHOOL BUDGET YES VOTE**

Rondout Valley teachers seen teaching throughout the pandemic, welcoming back our seniors, and volunteering to clean up Rt. 209 as part of the RVF Adopt a Highway Program.



VOTE YES

Tuesday, May 18th

RONDOUT VALLEY FEDERATION
OF TEACHERS & SCHOOL-RELATED PROFESSIONALS

Graphic by Jake Maloney and Robert McDonough



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The Union Sound

Editor-in-Chief:
Robyn McDonough

Assistant Editors:
Jennifer Slauson,
Tara Thibault-Edmonds,
Colleen Vitti

President:
Robert McDonough

Contributors:
Jake Maloney,
Robert McDonough,
Jennifer Slauson,
Christine Wynkoop

President's Message

by Robert McDonough

The Rondout Valley Central School District budget for the 2021-2022 school year is one of the most sound budgets I've seen in many years. But it has to pass or this will not matter.

It is a balanced budget that uses zero fund balance. The expenditures equal the revenue. All of this year's retirements will be replaced with new staff, and several of last year's cut positions will be added back. The proposed budget maintains liaisons, sports programs, night school, and clubs for kids and does not include any program or staff reductions. It truly is one of the most educationally sound and fiscally responsible budgets that I have seen in Rondout in a long time. It is vital to our students and community that this budget passes.

The state budget has also helped us, thanks to all of the NYSUT Mac App actions you have taken to notify our legislators. I also want to thank our RVF Treasurer and Political Action Chair, Kim McEvoy, for the countless hours she puts into lobbying for us. This year at NYSUT's Committee of 100, Kim and I met with legislators and

other union leaders to tell them our personal stories. I believe it's these personal anecdotes about our own districts that affect a lawmaker more than any other type of lobbying. Between the emails, faxes, and tweets you sent and the personal connections we made with our state legislators when we lobbied them, the state legislative budget answered our calls to properly fund public education. In this year's state budget, our state aid for Rondout has increased from previous years, and we also received nearly \$3.6 million in American Rescue Plan stimulus monies from the government. This provides us with the money we desperately need for educational programs, nurses, teachers, paraprofessionals, and secretaries. It provides schools with the ability to focus on our students' social emotional health, and it gives us financial ability to improve our ventilation systems.

A great budget is only as good as the number of "yes" votes it receives. There is no mail-in option this year, so please make a plan to come to the main campus to vote yes for the budget. Please talk to your friends, family, and neighbors about why it is so important to pass this year's budget and why our schools desperately need these resources. Please email me directly if you are able to help post signs around the district. Thank you for all you have done this year. Let's all do the final legwork required to get this budget passed.

SRP News

by Christine Wynkoop

TUITION REIMBURSEMENT FOR PARAPROFESSIONALS

Are you a paraprofessional taking college courses to further your education? Maybe you're a para who is thinking about returning to school? If so, I want to remind you that we have a tuition reimbursement plan in place that had been negotiated and placed in our contract years ago (article 16.2).

The district provides \$5,000 per semester, \$10,000 per year, for reimbursement to those members who successfully complete accredited college-level coursework germane to their district assignment. To be considered for reimbursement, the para must do the following:

- 1) Write a request to the superintendent, making sure to include the specific course you wish to have approved for reimbursement.
- 2) Pay for and complete the course.

- 3) Submit to the district your transcript from the course along with a letter requesting reimbursement.

Reimbursement guidelines allow for one class per person, per semester. A committee appointed by the superintendent and RVF President will meet to establish procedures for the equitable distribution of these funds and will consider a second class for those who have applied, if money remains.

In addition, paraprofessional unit members have the [contractual right](#) to bring workshops and conferences to the attention of the district if they feel it will add to their professional development. Permission to attend such events will be granted upon approval of the superintendent.

Please take advantage of these benefits. Remember, when something is negotiated into the contract, something else was often given up for it.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to your Unit Representatives, Cyndy Murphy and Mary Ann Gates, and/or the VP for para concerns Tara Thibault-Edmonds.

History Corner

by Jennifer Slauson

WANTED: GOOD JOBS

The mail-in ballots have been returned and counted and workers at the mammoth Bessemer, Alabama, Amazon fulfillment center have resoundingly chosen *not* to unionize. Roughly half of the 6,000 workers voted at this facility, which has been open for just over a year.

Amazon is the second largest employer in the country, after Walmart, and last month's vote is being seen as a bellwether for the future of unions within large companies across the country. The \$1.5 trillion tech giant has been fighting against its U.S. employees unionizing for 25 years, and it is clear from this latest vote that they're winning. So how did they do it? We have all heard for years about grueling working conditions at Amazon, so voting two-to-one against joining the union does not compute. There have been many reports in the news media about Amazon's union-busting techniques, like posting anti-union signs in bathrooms, holding mandatory meetings discouraging unionism, texting workers several times a day to urge them to vote no, and creating an anti-union website, DoItWithoutDues.com (which is no longer active). Under the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, it is illegal for employers to intimidate, retaliate against, or ask workers whether they support a union drive. But this is savvy Amazon we are talking about. ("Alexa, how do you stop workers from unionizing without breaking the law?") With seemingly unlimited resources with which to fight the union drive, Amazon was able to implement a successful campaign. In addition, we are talking about a union drive in a right-to-work state, at one of the largest anti-union companies, during a pandemic, after five decades of union membership decline. This is important because 50 years ago, over thirty percent of the workforce was unionized while today it's only ten percent, which meant that union negotiations shaped the broader economy. Essentially, unionism forced nonunion employers to match union wages and benefits. And since everyone either was in a union or knew someone who was, there was a deeper understanding of the difference unions can make and higher expectations of what constituted a "good job."

Aside from Amazon's questionable tactics and long time anti-union stance, I was struck by what Amazon was saying about the strike results as a reflection of their working conditions. "Our employees choose to work at Amazon because we offer some of the *best* jobs available everywhere we hire, and we encourage anyone to compare

our total compensation package, health benefits, and workplace environment to any other company with similar jobs," (*italics mine*) said one spokesperson. Really? I dug a little deeper. Maybe for Alabama this is okay; after all, living in New York is expensive compared to other places in the country. What does it cost to live in Alabama? According to [statista.com](https://www.statista.com), the hourly wage needed to afford a two-bedroom apartment in Alabama in 2020 was \$15.44, compared with \$32.53 for New York—roughly twice as much. It's true that the average pay for a "fulfillment associate" at Amazon, including the Bessemer facility, is \$15/hour according to [glassdoor.com](https://www.glassdoor.com), and they do offer health insurance and some paid time off, which seems livable. However, the same wage is true for associates in New York. So while the worker in Bessemer, Alabama, may see Amazon as a "good job," its pay schedule does not translate in other parts of the country and has forced 4,000 full time employees to use food stamps. And yet, Amazon wasn't completely wrong. The company has had no shortage of applicants for the 427,300 jobs they have added during the Covid-19 pandemic. How can a company known for poor working conditions and driving down pay claim to provide "good jobs"? The answer says less about Amazon than it does about the current state of the labor market: is this really the "best" America has to offer?

For more information about the efforts to unionize at Amazon, check out some of these sources that were used to write this article:

[Warehouse Workers Wage Historic Fight for Union Recognition at Amazon](#)

[Amazon Workers Vote Down Union Drive at Alabama Warehouse](#)

[Alabama Amazon workers say they're fed up and not taking it anymore](#)

[How Amazon Crushes Unions](#)

[Hourly wages needed to afford a two-bedroom apartment in the United States in 2020](#)

[Billionaire Bezos' Amazon warehouse employees depend on food stamps in 9 states](#)

[Pushed by Pandemic, Amazon Goes on a Hiring Spree Without Equal](#)

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Financial Learning Center: We recently contracted with popular financial publisher Kiplinger's Personal Finance for our new Financial Learning Center. This interactive microsite offers numerous articles on a wide variety of financial topics, including selecting the best value in tax planning software and more. No matter your point in life or financial situation, you are sure to find something of interest.



Mid-Island Mortgage: With our UnionDirect Mortgage Discount Program presented by Mid-Island Mortgage, NYSUT members receive special purchase and refinancing mortgage discounts for a variety of home-related needs. Whether you're looking to buy a home, lower your mortgage payment or planning a home improvement project, Mid-Island Mortgage can help you save up to \$2,700 on lender fees and closing costs.



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