



# 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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## A Space to be Seen and Heard



by Jayden Brodhead-Milton

This past December, Gerald Cheers and I attended the Members of Color Affinity and Action (MOCAA) Conference. The NYSUT MOCAA Conference is about providing educators and school-related professionals of color a space to share stories, explore ideas, and build community. The conference highlighted the emotional realities of working in spaces where educators of color can feel isolated or unheard. Within our district, about 5% of our staff are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and are widely dispersed across schools, which makes it difficult to support one another.

The MOCAA Conference was a powerful and affirming experience for me as a Black male educator working in a predominantly white school. Often, I find myself navigating spaces where I am one of the few educators who share my background or lived experiences. This opportunity marked the first time I was in a room filled with hundreds of educators of color with stories just like mine. The conference felt like one big family reunion and instantly created an environment where we all understood we were there to support each other. Its focus on building community and solidarity among members of color made the experience especially meaningful.

Continued on Page 2



### IN THIS ISSUE:

A Space to be Seen and Heard by Jayden Brodhead-Milton	1-2
My First NYSUT Leadership Conference by Andrea MacScott	2-3
Financial Update by David Bonington	4
Books and Bevs Graphic by Robyn McDonough	5
RVF Merch Drop Graphic by Robyn McDonough	6

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## A Space to be Seen and Heard, cont.

One of the most impactful aspects of the conference was its emphasis on empowerment through advocacy and organizing. The conference offered a variety of workshops, including *Know Your Rights as a Member of Color*, *Immigrant Activism*, *Navigating White Spaces*, and *Power Dynamics*. Each session equipped educators with strategies to advocate for themselves, their colleagues, their students, and their communities. Reflecting on the speeches and discussions, several ideas stayed with me. Many speakers described “carrying the weight of systems that were never designed with us in mind.” Over the years, educators of color have been dismissed as “DEI hires,” regardless of degrees, accomplishments, and accolades. At the conference, educators spoke openly about how these hateful assumptions attempt to invalidate their expertise and lived experience.

At the same time, one speaker shared about the importance of reclaiming our joy and leading with boldness. One message resonated deeply with me: no one can ever take away my Blackness or make me feel ashamed to be Black. I am proud to be a Black educator. It is essential for students to see BIPOC educators thriving in a wide range of roles—beyond their favorite movies. The conference reminded me that sustaining joy in this work is not only an act of resistance, but essential for resilience and longevity.

Ultimately, I loved the MOCAA Conference because it

renewed my spirit and commitment to building equity within our schools. The broader mission of the conference is to provide educators with the tools, resources, and confidence needed to continue advocating for meaningful change in our district. I left feeling affirmed, motivated, and grateful for the connections I made with my new friends. At the same time, I was excited to come back to my supportive department, colleagues, and union to begin the work that needs to get done.

While this conference created a space dedicated to BIPOC educators and voices, there are meaningful ways non-BIPOC professionals can support minority groups within our schools, such as participating in the NYU diversity training. For educators of color, I implore you to attend the conference in the future. The presence of Gerald, myself, and other members of color are not just symbolic—we are catalysts for change. So, keep advocating for an inclusive curriculum, ensuring qualified authors of color are represented, speaking out against discrimination, and building strong networks of allies. Discrimination has no place in our society and certainly not within our school. Thank you to the RVF Union Leadership for the opportunity to attend the conference and to everyone who contributes to making our district a safe, inclusive, and affirming place for the BIPOC community.

Happy Black History Month!

## My First NYSUT Leadership Conference

by Andrea MacScott

Last November, when I was invited to attend the NYSUT Leadership Conference in Albany for the first time, I honestly didn’t know what to expect. As a brand-new union member, and really, new to unions in general, I felt a mix of excitement and curiosity. I was eager to meet people, to connect, and to experience what it truly meant to be part of something bigger than just our district.

The second I walked in, I felt it: energy everywhere. People were smiling, greeting each other, hugging, and yes, almost everyone was proudly wearing blue, the color of the union. The venue itself was great, and registration was effortless. At registration, I was handed a NYSUT swag bag and wandered through the exhibitor tables gathering pens, magnets, chocolate, even pizza cutters, all while

learning about the many benefits available to us as union members.

It was the first moment I thought: *Wow, I’m really part of this.*

At the new member reception, I found myself chatting with RVF Treasurer Kim McEvoy and RVF Secretary Melissa Frumentti. At one point, Kim kindly introduced me to Ron Gross, NYSUT’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President. He smiled warmly and asked, “So, are you an officer in your district?” And instead of saying *no*, what spilled out of my mouth was, “Not yet.” We burst into laughter, and Ron nodded with approval, agreeing that was exactly the kind of mindset that builds strong membership. Honestly, it made me realize there’s a whole world of possibilities in the union that I’m just starting to discover.



RVF SRPs Andrea MacScott, Melissa Frumentti and Kim McEvoy alongside NYSUT 2<sup>nd</sup> VP Ron Gross and NYSUT Board Member Matt Haynes.

One of the things that struck me most was how much the conference focused on professional development. The long list included CPR certification, advocating, training on 504s and more. I chose three workshops: using Google Suite, the truth in the age of AI, and a personal finance workshop. I was impressed by the thought and substance behind each session.

Between workshops, NYSUT representatives spoke about collective strength and the importance of showing up for one another. They introduced the “One Job Should Be Enough” resolution, written by Kim and first presented at last spring’s Representative Assembly in Rochester. Knowing that our own RVF Treasurer and SRP At-large director for the NYSUT Board was the mind behind it filled me with pride. And personally, it hit home. As someone who is currently navigating the realities of affordable housing and working hard not to live paycheck to paycheck, I felt like the resolution was speaking directly to my situation. It was powerful, validating, and, if I’m honest, emotional.

Of course, the conference wasn’t all serious; NYSUT knows how to have fun! We were encouraged to dress in ‘80s or ‘90s style, enjoyed a buffet dinner, and then danced to a live band playing all the iconic hits. There was also a big giveaway for raising funds for breast cancer. Together we raised over \$3,000 for the American Cancer Society’s Making Strides Against Breast Cancer fundraiser.

I dressed up with the other two RVF representatives, and the night was pure fun—singing, laughing, dancing, and soaking in the nostalgia. It felt special to celebrate together after a day filled with learning and advocacy.

Thinking back, a moment that made me feel most proud

came when NYSUT leaders emphasized how much stronger we are when chapters support each other. Hearing them talk about fixing Tier 6, ensuring fair pay, and the power of unity, among many other important issues, made me realize just how deeply NYSUT advocates for its members. What moved me even more was the spotlight placed on members who have dedicated their lives to strengthening the union: individuals whose decades of service, advocacy, and courage have made them true role models. Seeing them recognized reminded me that this work is carried forward by people who show up again and again because they believe in justice, dignity, and a better future for all of us.

The highlight, though, was the discussion of the “One Job Should Be Enough” resolution. Knowing the heart and intention behind it, and knowing how relevant it is to my own life, made me feel seen and heard. (Article: [SRPs proclaim that One Job Should Be Enough](#).)

As the conference wrapped up and I headed home, I carried a swirl of emotions. Part of me felt sad from the awareness of how true the message of the resolution is in my own life. But even stronger than that was a sense of comfort, hope, and connection.

I left with the belief that this union—our union—truly cares about its members, our well-being, our growth, and our ability to serve our communities. I also loved meeting fellow SRPs from chapters all across the state. I felt connected: like building a new network, a new support system, a collective heartbeat.

This was my first NYSUT SRP Leadership Conference... and I know it won’t be my last.



NYSUT President Melinda Person presents the Abel Blattman VOTE-COPE Award to RVF SRPs for being one of several locals who have contributed the equivalent of at least \$10 per member.

## Financial Update

by David Bonington, CFP®

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### IF I CAN DO THIS, YOU CAN, TOO!

I hope the new year finds everyone well!

2026 finds me in semi-retirement, working with educators and public servants for part of a week and filling two days with other activities. So far, I've devoted time to healthy things, like more exercise, and I'm also pursuing fresh challenges.

One of them is playing Bridge, a game my mother taught me to play in my early teens. I played in college, and then—not surprisingly, as life, career, and family took over—not again for several decades. If you don't know, the game is a great exercise for the logic and reasoning half of the brain, as one tries to apply experience, probability, and educated guesswork to bring order to a nearly limitless universe of possible puzzles. (The number of possible “puzzles,” or hands, which can materialize with 52 cards randomly distributed to four players is larger than the number 8 *followed by 67 zeros!* Fortunately, paying attention to bidding by two opponents and your partner can help you “see” some of the 39 cards you don't have in your hand.)

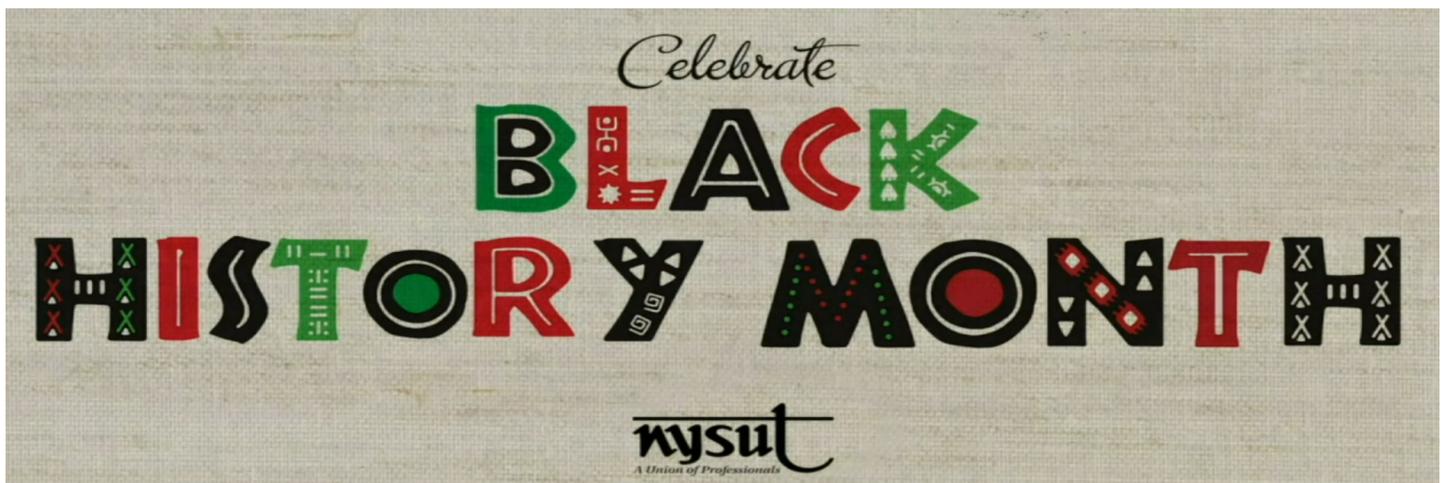
But the game changed while I was away! It's not the objectives or the rules which are now different—it's the *bidding conventions* and *playing tactics*. I've joined a club where members (who have been playing regularly for a long time) bring their partnership strategies and dig in for a daily three to four hours, we-mean-business effort to earn a share of the available Life Masterpoints. All this is extremely intimidating to a latecomer who can only play once a week.

I'm out of my comfort zone—but I'm not too proud to ask for help. I take a weekly, two-hour group lesson, and (even better) have found an experienced, knowledgeable, and caring partner who—without pressure or judgment—helps me up my game every Monday afternoon.

Why share this? It occurs to me that the nervousness and apprehension I overcome to walk into the club could be exactly the same feelings which are preventing you from meeting with a Stacey Braun Associates counselor—who like me are all Certified Financial Planners®. Financial topics are complex, confusing, and intimidating. Without background knowledge, many are hard to grasp, let alone master. But almost all of them are important—some critically so—and they matter far, far more than a card game. Why not let your no-cost-to-you financial counseling program provide you with some helpful information, explanations, ideas, and suggestions?

My recommendation for the new year? If it's been nervousness, uncertainty, or anxiety which has kept you from doing so, summon the courage to make an appointment. If I can walk into that club each week, I bet you will not only survive but—with high likelihood—benefit from and even enjoy a meeting with an experienced, knowledgeable, and caring Stacey Braun planner who—like my partner, without pressure or judgment—can help you up your financial game!

**Free, confidential Telephone or Zoom sessions with a Stacey Braun planner can be arranged by calling 1-888-949-1925. No financial products are sold and there is no sales pressure.**





# Books & Beverages

**New Date: March 18th**  
**4:00-5:30 pm**



Join us for a relaxed “bring your own book” gathering with no preparation required! Share highlights from your current read, or simply come for a snack, good conversation, and fresh book recommendations. Whether you’re at the beginning or end of a book, all are welcome. In the future, we can decide together if we’d like to read the same book, but for now, we’re keeping it flexible and fun. Come connect, unwind, and discover your next great read.

**[CLICK HERE OR SCAN Q.R TO RSVP](#)**

**Location:**

**RVF Office**

**4301 US Route 209**

**Stone Ridge, NY 12484**



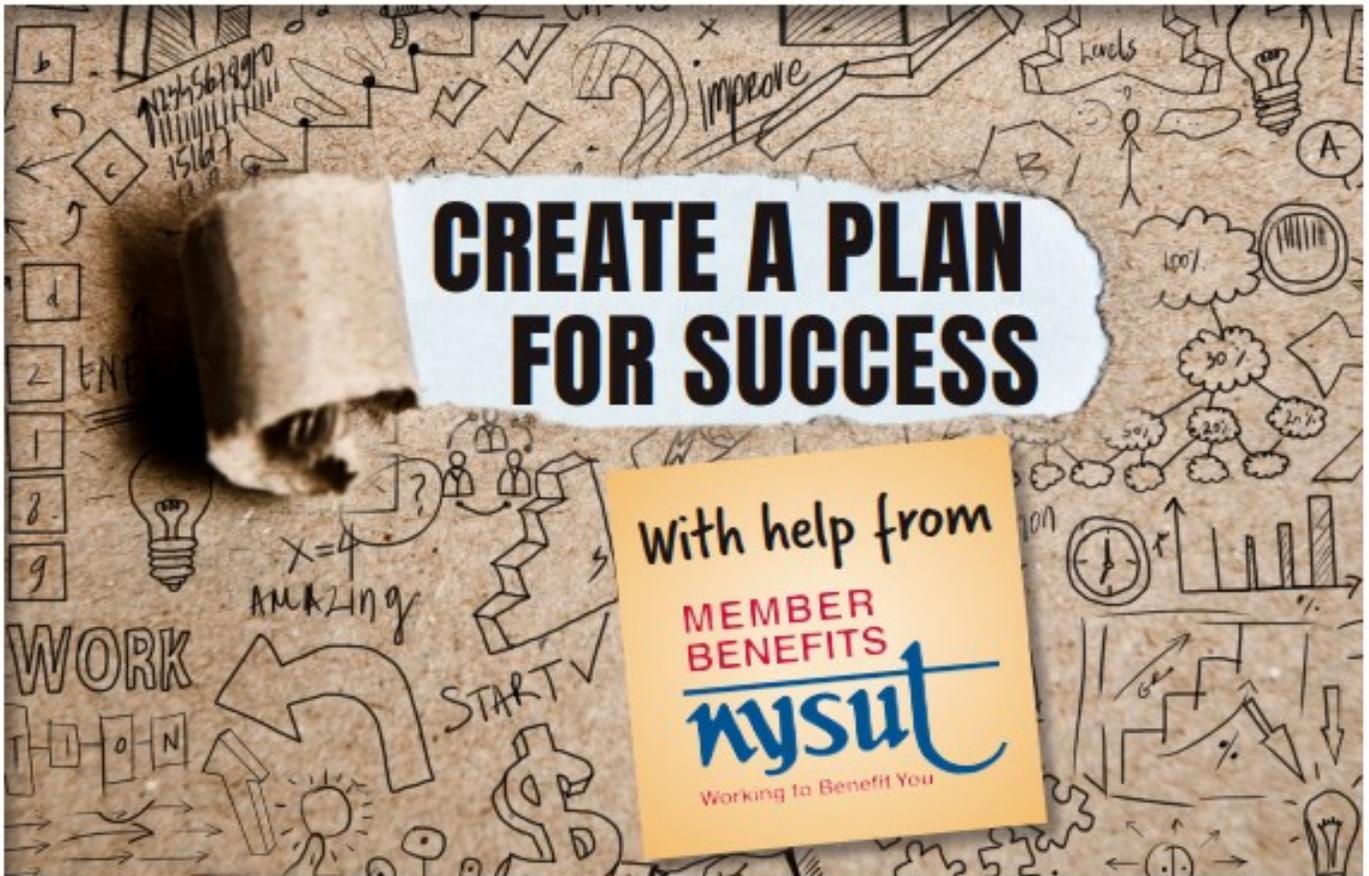
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**Have you addressed any legal or financial concerns?**

With our Legal Service Plan, you gain access to a national network of attorneys at a reduced cost; two, free hour-long consultations; and a legal security package containing a simple will, health care proxy, living will, and power of attorney. Meanwhile, our Financial Counseling Program provides access to certified financial planners that can offer unbiased financial counseling services.

Improving your financial acumen is a key part of building a successful retirement plan. Powered by Kiplinger's Personal Finance, our Financial Learning Center is a free online resource that offers monthly articles about dealing with debt, insurance, retirement, finances, and more.

**Do you have an emergency fund?**

Synchrony Bank offers several options to help grow your savings over time, including high-yield savings accounts,

money market accounts, and certificates of deposit. NYSUT members receive special rates above those available to the general public.

**Is a new home or refinancing of your current home on your list?**

NYSUT members can save up to \$2,700 on lender fees and closing costs with the UnionDirect Mortgage Discount Program from Mid-Island Mortgage. For more than 60 years, Mid-Island Mortgage has been helping union members with realizing the joy of homeownership.

**Are you looking for assistance with credit and/or debt management?**

Our partnership with Cambridge Credit Counseling can assist members with understanding debt consolidation and student loan repayment options. Members can receive a free, no-obligation consultation with a Cambridge certified counselor.