This newsletter addresses PTA information in general and specifically that from New York State PTA and Genesee Valley Region PTA.

From the Region Director
Lisa Christoffel, GVPTA Region Director
director@gvpta.org

As I’m sure you’re all aware from the NYS mailings and communications, March is Advocacy month. What does advocacy mean? Does it mean you have to lobby for a cause or speak in front of dozens of people to have your voice heard? It can. But it can also be the little things: responding to a NYS Cap Wiz alert and adding your voice, via email, to thousands of others, to deliver the message of change. Or it can be local: talking to your principal about a situation at school that isn’t in the children’s best interest; talking to your child’s teacher about a way to help your child learn more effectively; speaking up at a board meeting about budget cuts and keeping them out of the classroom; participating in training and educating yourself about current issues on which PTA has taken a stand, so that when you speak to others outside the PTA, you can share our message and help improve public education for our children.

Speaking of educating yourselves, I hope everyone saw the Save the Date notice that went out for our Spring Conference and the survey (https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/77V2RHN) asking you for input on what topics you want to hear about. Please post the date on your calendar and try to send at least 2-3 people from your unit to the Conference, so that they can bring the message and material back to your unit. Also don’t forget to get those last few memberships in, and then get that check in the mail to NYS PTA in Albany by March 25. They need to RECEIVE it by March 31. Hope your year is going well, and please don’t hesitate to ask questions or seek support from your Region Assistant or Associate director or myself (director@gvpta.org).

The Treasurer’s Corner
Jill Ehrlinger, treasurer@gvpta.org

The weather outside makes even the most optimistic person start to think that perhaps winter will never end. I am NOT a winter-loving person. But even though the groundhog said winter will stick around for a while, in my own head, I’m thinking spring!

As a PTA Treasurer, you should also be thinking about spring too! This is the time of year for you to be thinking about two things:

First, start thinking about forming a Budget Committee. You will want to be developing the budget for 2014-2015 starting now. You will want to meet with the Budget Committee during March, April and even May to discuss the needs for your PTA for next year. The budget should be finalized and ready for a membership vote at your June meeting.

Second, your PTA will also need an Audit Committee. The audit of the Books should take place before July 1. Your Audit Committee should have three members and they should not be check signers. Remember, the annual audit protects not only your PTA, but it also protects you. See your Bylaws for more information.

Other items that should be on your radar in the coming months are making sure you pay your insurance bill in May, work with your Membership Chair to get any remaining membership payments sent to NYS PTA by March 31, and performing a review of your Unit Procedures.

The PTA is...
• A powerful voice for all children,
• A relevant resource for families and communities, and
• A strong advocate for the education and well-being of every child

nyspta.org/AboutPTA/AboutPTA_Purposes.cfm
If you are leaving the Treasurer position at the end of this year, please start the process of finding a replacement and getting them up to speed. If you are staying on as Treasurer, hopefully you are feeling very comfortable about the job by now. Either way, give yourself a huge pat on the back for being a very important part of a wonderful team!

It is hard to believe, but spring will be here before we know it! With a little planning, you’ll be ready!

Think Spring!

From the Membership Chair

by Kathy Giles, membership@gvpta.org

We are down to the wire for this year’s membership dues - final dues payments must be in the State office by March 31, so mail early! Unit presidents should have received a end-of-the-year mailing with instructions for returning unused membership cards, and making final payments. Please make sure that information gets passed to your unit membership chairman. Remember that unused membership cards must be returned to RegionMembership Chair, Kathy Giles, 5120 Canandaigua Farmington Townline Rd, Farmington, NY 14425. Payments for memberships sold should be mailed directly to the State PTA office in Albany.

We've had some units do an incredible job with membership drives this year. Tami Sulfita from Greece Arcadia Middle School PTSA (unit 07-274) shares a tip they use to keep their PTSA in the minds of teachers: “Every month we have a staff appreciation day with treats of some kind. In December we had 3 poinsettias set out for decoration on our treat table. There was a drawing for 'members only' to take plants home. I think this helps teachers remember to become members.”

West Ridge Elementary PTA (unit 07-252) also shares an idea they use for teacher and staff appreciation: their unit sponsors a "Soup Day" where PTA parent volunteers provide crockpots of soup to transform the staff lounge into an appetizing lunch buffet. The PTA supplies bowls, spoons, napkins, tablecloths and baskets of extras such as cheese, crackers, tortilla chips and any other toppings that are recommended for the soups provided. Staff participation is always 100%, especially because the teachers recommend their favorite soups to their colleagues and everybody is keen to try them. The teachers make a point to stop in and express their gratitude to the cleanup volunteers at the end of the day. Recipes are requested for days afterward too. What a great idea to provide a little extra warmth during the long western New York winter!

Speaking of West Ridge Elementary, President Colleen Taylor wins our Region “Sweetheart Award” for the February. Her unit sent in these accolades to prove why she is a sweetheart of a volunteer: “Colleen has been involved in PTA since her first child entered Kindergarten. She comes from a family that was raised on the belief and actions of volunteering and giving back. She has had many roles in the West Ridge PTA from small committee assistant to President. She helped the community through a very difficult transition from one building to another. She listens and responds in the best way she can. Every time. She knows many of the students by name and most of the faculty/staff on a personal basis. This is her last year with West Ridge and she will be greatly missed. We hope the clubs and fun events she helped create and maintain at our school will keep going when she is gone. She is currently also involved in the Regional PTA and at her children’s Middle School so I know that she will continue to be a source of advice and keep watch over us in the years to come.” Brava, Colleen, and thanks to Janine Horn for submitting such a great tribute. Colleen receives a gift certificate to the PTA store for being one sweetheart of a volunteer.

We have one more Region membership incentive for the year - the March "Drive to the Finish Award" will be given to the unit that has the greatest percentage of membership growth this year. To be eligible, units MUST MAKE a March dues payment (no resting on your laurels from earlier in the year!). Winners will receive two free tickets to our GVPTA Spring Conference. The winning unit will be determined from State membership reports after the March 31, 2014 final dues deadline. Our goal is a 2% increase in membership across the region this year and this is the time to shine, so get those membership payments in!

NYSPTA Lobby Day

By Bridget Monroe, BridgetMonroe@gvpta.org

Earlier this month, I had the pleasure of attending the NYS PTA Legislation/Education Conference in Albany. I was highly impressed by the quality of the general session discussions as well as the seminars. There was extensive discussion of Common Core Standards versus Albany’s Common Core Curriculum, both of which have been firmly linked to APPR, further increasing the high stakes nature of standardized testing.

We were brought up to date on the Governor’s and legislature’s proposed education budgets and what fiscal challenges lay ahead due to new accountability standards, the State’s property tax cap, and continuation of the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) which took a portion of funding from all pots of money to help plug the state’s budget gap. We had an excellent panel with one of the Regents, Dr. Kathleen Cashin and Sen. John Flanagan, who chairs the Senate’s Education Committee. On day two, the general session was about PTA’s urban initiative, which in many ways brings PTA back to its roots of working to directly impact our neediest students.

The last day of the conference was the optional lobby day. I stayed and joined a group of 20 impressive PTA folks including two articulate students from
local South Colony High School who provided timely illustrations of the current losses they've experienced due to budget cuts at their school. We had appointments with Sen. Flanagan and Assemblyman Edward Silver; Assemblywoman Cathy Nolan, Chair of the Education Committee; Senate Majority Leader and Governor. Our group had quite a few people from Nassau and Suffolk counties, including parents and teachers as well as parents with children with special needs; three people from Erie County, including a principal, teacher, and school board member of a rural district; and myself, representing a Big 5 as a Rochester City School District parent.

Between us, we really had the breadth of issues facing this state covered. I enjoyed how we worked off of each other's stories, demonstrating how inadequate funding has had a deleterious effect across the state with a large range of impacts from, for example, South Colonys' losing electives, to the Rochester City School District still failing to provide such basics as full-time art and music in every school.

Although our lobby focus was on the elimination of the GEA over two years and not enacting a property tax cap, the impact of the Common Core Curriculum provided by the state worked its way into our discussions. We expressed a general consensus that the curriculum and high-stakes testing fails to nurture the whole child, and dulls students' educational experience.

Having attended this year's Legislation/ Education Conference, I feel I fully understand how PTA advocates for all children. The camaraderie, intelligence and background knowledge of both our state leadership and conference attendees made for a high quality conference full of thoughtful questions and debate. Thanks to this experience, I can now provide other units, parents and teachers with accurate information about how much work our representatives from the state PTA do and what we, as teachers as well as parents with children with special needs, experience, I can now provide other units, parents and teachers with accurate information about how much work our representatives from the state PTA do and what we, as a body of advocates, bring to the table. I will recommend that my unit include conference funding in our budget for next year so that other members can partake of this excellent event. Truly, PTA is just as relevant now as it was over one hundred years ago.

**Legislative Education Conference Update**

by Lisa Christoffel, director@nypta.org

I just got back from Albany, from the NYS Legislative Education conference, which is a short, but powerful conference held on March 1 and 2. I couldn’t stay for Lobby Day on March 3 this year, but have participated in the past, and it’s equally as powerful. The focus of the main speakers at Leg Ed this year was on the governor’s budget and its impact on our public schools, and furthering people’s understanding of why PTA supports Common Core learning standards, but doesn’t necessarily support the implementation of some of the other pieces around them (curriculum, assessments, accountability). All three are necessary aspects of having a successful implementation to be sure, but the way they were rolled out, in a hurried and forced way, was not beneficial to our students or our educators. I wish the entire conference could have been taped, so I could more effectively share the experience, but I will do my best here to help you understand the message from NYS PTA.

The conference began with a panel interview on Funding Reform. Maria Neira from NYSUT and Charles Szuberla from NYSED participated in the panel. Jessica Bakeman, of Capital New York facilitated. The central focus was the governor’s budget and how different constituencies reacted to different parts of the budget. Bottom line, though, is that no one believes it was sufficient or adequate to maintain our public schools. NYS PTA’s position on the budget is that we’d like to see $1.5 billion in new money added to the budget just to avoid districts having to make drastic cuts, plus we’d like money to be added to support more professional development (to aid in the rollout of the Common Core, for starters) and for early childhood development efforts. Example: in Greece, where I’m a resident, with the estimated revenues and costs, plus the lower tax cap this year, we are looking at a minimum of a $3M gap, just to do the things we’re legally required to do. If we actually want to keep or expand programs and educate our kids the way we want, our gap is much bigger. That gap exists even with the “extra” money the governor has provided, because it doesn’t cover higher salaries and benefits costs, transportation, utilities, etc. If you are not attending your board meetings to hear what’s going on with the budgets and where schools are going to have to cut, you should try to get that information and understand it. (It’s pretty clear most will have to cut because the extra money is nowhere near enough and doesn’t cover what schools are actually owed.) Share it with your membership, and get them out to board meetings to talk about it. You’re your children’s best advocate with your boards of education to help them make sensible choices about where they’ll need to take money out of their budgets next year.

Why are our costs rising, and why are NYS costs/pupil so high relative to other states, even though we say we’re not sufficiently funded? Costs across New England are higher for almost everything, our special education costs are continuing to increase, we have a fully funded pension system, and funding has not kept up with the needs of the students. Per the panel, New York State is one of the most inequitable states in terms of how education is funded, and the tax cap seems to have exacerbated that issue. Over time, we need to try to share the burden statewide in order to improve urban and rural districts. Interestingly, New York State spends less on testing than most other states.

There were also discussions about why the budget required Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK), when kindergarten is not required, and disagreements about what UPK would actually cost (it’s thought the governor...
significant underestimate that cost). They talked about student assessments, education evaluations, and data security (how safe is our kids’ data, really?). One very interesting point that was raised which surprised me, given the complaints I’ve heard about the curriculum modules on engageny.org, which many districts are requiring their teachers to use for Common Core: it was shared that many states are using our engageny.org curriculum material because of the relative high quality.

We had some wonderful breakout sessions, whose presentations should be on the NYS website for you to take a look at. I attended Dr. Bob Aloise’s Common Core in the Classroom, which looked at the history of education, how we evolved to Common Core, why it’s necessary, and touched on APPR and student assessments.

The next speaker was Dr. Bill Daggett, discussing Management of Change. Dr. Daggett is from the International Center for Leadership in Education, Inc. He helps schools and districts through organizational change to deliver world-class curriculum, instruction and assessment systems. He spent most of his speech sharing some alarming statistics that showed the need for increased rigor in our schools, which supports the move to Common Core Learning Standards. He shared that 70% of youth are not eligible for the military, due to a variety of issues like high school diploma, obesity, drugs, and incarceration, but 28% of them fail the admissions test (reading, writing, math, science), and that test gets harder each year, because they need to be able to do more and harder things in the military each year. The number not eligible for the military is increasing by 1% per year due to that increasingly higher standard on the test. But the test isn’t hard just to fail kids out: it’s hard because it’s testing that they have the necessary skills to perform their job tasks. Those tasks are getting more and more difficult. Our schools ARE improving; they are turning out more and higher educated kids yearly. However, the changing world (technology, globalization, demographics, etc.) is changing faster, and we’re not keeping up. Students graduating from high school are not college and career ready. 89% of high school teachers say their kids are ready; 26% of college freshman professor believe those same kids are ready. Our average graduation rate for students entering 4 year colleges is 36%. 53.6% of students holding bachelor’s degrees are unemployed or underemployed. But there are 3.8 million unfilled jobs in the US each year. The problem is skillset match. Kids are getting degrees in majors without job availability. What they choose as their major in college matters a whole lot to whether or not they’ll have a job after college. The number two major in the US is General Studies. That is alarming, and Dr. Daggett shared other statistics that he feels prove the case that we need to make major changes in rigor and set higher expectations for our kids if we want them to succeed in today’s global, technology-driven marketplace. Here is a link to his slides containing the rest of the supporting documentation he shared about the case for change: http://www.lederered.net/PP/Albany,%20NYS%20PTA%203.1.2014%20send.pdf

A panel discussion with Regent Cashin and Senator Flanagan focused on helping us understand who drives policy, money, etc., in the public education world. It was a fascinating discussion and interesting perspectives from the two different groups in Albany overseeing our children’s education.

The final speaker on Sunday was Michael Conte, from Syntax, in marketing communications and public relations. He discussed the need for PTAs to market themselves, and how critical it is to know your audience and communicate with them on their terms.

Overall, I learned a lot at this conference, as I always do, and the only thing that bothered me was the lack of attendance. There were fewer than 100 people at this conference from across NYS. This type of information is critical to our ability to advocate for our kids and to help make our public school system deliver to them the necessary skills and experiences for them to succeed, but very few people were able to get that message and take it back. I hope I have been able to at least give you a flavor of what was shared. But I do invite and encourage you to send a representative to Leg Ed each year if you’re able: it is well worth the money and time spent.

**Reflections & Bookfair**

Jessica Ophardt, reflections@gvpta.org

On Feb 8th the GVPTA had an extraordinary event at Barnes and Noble in Pittsford. All day we held a Book Fair fundraiser in which a portion of sales, made by willing customers, went to help fund our Spring Conference this year! The event included a performance by singer/songwriter Maddi Smillie, a senior at Sutherland who did a phenomenal job! For our first fundraiser we did extremely well and were offered to come back next year! Thank you to everyone who volunteered their time and talents!

During the Book Fair we also celebrated the accomplishments of all our Local and Regional Reflections Program winners! We had an artists reception in which all artwork and literature were showcased in the Community Room. The reception was attended by more than 100 friends and family of the artists! Each artist who made it to the Regional level received a certificate of participation and the Regional winners received an additional one for moving on. The region received over 70 entries this year and awarded 28 pieces onto the NYS Level. We recently learned that of those 28 pieces, we had 6 place at the state level!

The Reflections program was a huge success this year due to the wonderful support of the local PTA Reflections Chairs and the great participation of the artists and support of their families. Please congratulate them! Another thank you to all who helped out with the reception and to Penny Robinson, Community Relations Coordinator at B&N.
**PTA Recognition Awards**

**Honor a Special Volunteer this spring!**

Does your PTA unit have a special volunteer who has gone above and beyond working for your PTA unit? There are several ways you can honor them. First, think about awarding them with the **NYS PTA Honorary Life Membership Award**! Does that special volunteer already have the Honorary Life Award? Then present them with a **NYS PTA Distinguished Service Award**! The financial contribution to NYS PTA for both these awards supports the Twin Projects (the Jenkins Memorial Scholarship for Teacher Education and the Teacher Fellowship For Graduate Study In Memory of Richard Gazzola). A certificate and special pin will be awarded each recipient.

A PTA unit, council or region may award either award to an individual in recognition of distinguished service to children and youth by having served faithfully and having devoted exemplary service to the maintenance and growth of the PTA.

A request for either award should be mailed to the New York State PTA Office. Applications and more information are available on the NYS PTA website [www.nyspta.org](http://www.nyspta.org).

**NYS PTA Leadership Award In Honor of Jane Skrzypek**

The purpose of this award is to recognize an outstanding leader in your PTA who, by his or her actions, inspires others to volunteer and assume leadership positions. The award is given in recognition of outstanding PTA volunteerism and leadership. Applications should be submitted to Region Director Lisa Christoffel, at geneseevalleyrd@nyspta.org or mail to her at 277 Cameron Hill Drive, Rochester, NY 14612, postmarked by June 15. Each region may submit one nominee to NYS PTA. From the nominees submitted, one recipient in New York State will be chosen the State winner, will be honored at the NYS PTA Convention in November and will receive an engraved mantle clock. The chosen recipients from each Region will also be recognized by a smaller clock from NYS PTA at an event within their region. The application process and more information are available on the NYS PTA website [www.nyspta.org](http://www.nyspta.org).

**Unit/Council Leadership Recognition In Honor of Jane Skrzypek**

Although only one NYS PTA winner of the NYS PTA Jane Skrzypek Volunteer of the Year Award is chosen, your PTA/PTSA may wish to honor a volunteer who goes above and beyond the scope of his or her position—a person you can always rely on to be there when an extra hand is needed. You may honor a volunteer within your unit by presenting a Jane Skrzypek Volunteer Pin (purchased through the NYS PTA Store for $5.00 or contact the State office).

**Parents As Reading Partners Award**

Does your PTA unit have a Parents As Reading Partners Program (PARP) or other reading program? Many of the units in our region have a parent-partnership literacy-based program to demonstrate the importance of reading. Have your program recognized! Apply for the Genesee Valley Region PTA and the NYS PTA awards! The application can be found on the NYS PTA website [www.nyspta.org](http://www.nyspta.org). They should be submitted to Region Director Lisa Christoffel, at geneseevalleyrd@nyspta.org or mail to her at 277 Cameron Hill Drive, Rochester, NY 14612, postmarked by June 15.

For information about PTA awards, contact Mary Twardokus, Region Awards Chairman at awards@gvpta.org or call 585-657-7722.

**MCEC**

MCEC has decided to focus on Gap Elimination Adjustments since that affects almost all the districts in Monroe County reducing state aid for these districts and giving money to needier districts. Some districts like Brighton are considering a budget that will exceed their 1.8% budget cap because the state took away most of the state aid that should have come to them. Greece Central School District has lost more than $40M in four years. More information is forthcoming at: [http://www.monroe.edu/webpages/mcec/bulletins.cfm](http://www.monroe.edu/webpages/mcec/bulletins.cfm)

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**NYS PTA Information**

**NYS PTA Publications** *(Fast Facts, Our Children)*

[http://nyspta.neric.org/YourPTA/YourPTA_Publications.cfm](http://nyspta.neric.org/YourPTA/YourPTA_Publications.cfm)

**Advocacy**

[http://nyspta.neric.org/Advocacy/advocacy_home.cfm](http://nyspta.neric.org/Advocacy/advocacy_home.cfm)


**Advocacy Newsbriefs**

[http://nyspta.neric.org/Advocacy/advocacy_newsbriefs.cfm](http://nyspta.neric.org/Advocacy/advocacy_newsbriefs.cfm)

**Legislative Program**

[http://nyspta.neric.org/Advocacy/advocacy_legislativeprog.cfm](http://nyspta.neric.org/Advocacy/advocacy_legislativeprog.cfm)

**Where We Stand** - includes current

Resolutions and Position Papers

NYSPTA Common Core Learning Standards video by Dr. Bob Aloise [http://vimeo.com/88579145](http://vimeo.com/88579145)

For NYS PTA issues sign up for Capwiz and then Take Action with CAPWIZ

[Sign up for Capwiz](#)

[Take Action with CAPWIZ](#)
Echo Newsletter
March 2014

GVPTA Executive Committee

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Additional GVPTA Contacts are listed on the web site

If you have any questions or need help with anything PTA, please contact an Associate Director or the Region Director.

GVPTA SPRING CONFERENCE 2014!!!

After listening to attendees responses and surveys from past Spring Conferences, we are changing things around!! We have listened to you!!! This year we will be having our Genesee Valley Region PTA Spring Conference on Saturday, May 17th from 9:00 am – 2:00 pm at the Bloomfield High School, 1 Oakmount Avenue Bloomfield, NY 14469

Based on member feedback, we are modifying our historical dinner meeting model to a Saturday workshop. This will include breakfast and participants choosing two training workshops, followed by a working lunch with a relevant speaker and the annual meeting.

Stay tuned for additional details. And don’t forget to take the survey so that we can make sure our workshops and speaker address topics of interest to you.

The link to the survey is here: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/77V2RHN

GVPTA Spring Conference on Saturday, May 17th 9 am—2 pm

Upcoming Events, Deadlines, and Reminders

March is Advocacy Month

Mar. 31 second membership payment is due to NYS PTA
NYS PTA prefers monthly submission of new dues.

May 17 GVPTA Spring Conference
Includes workshops, discussions, and Annual Meeting at the Bloomfield High School.

May 20 Budget and Board Elections
District school budgets with the exception of RCSD.

Year End Unit Help
As we hopefully move into spring, every unit and council must have elections for their new officers to take over on July 1, 2014. Do you need help in the nomination and election process and in recruiting people to fill positions? Your bylaws define the process and time table, but many units struggle to fill their new officer positions for the coming year. GVPTA is willing to come and share ideas at your location on making this important transition successful. If you would like us to do this, please call Gene Kinney 585-586-0556 or GeneKinney@gvpta.org

Ontario Wayne PTA* Livingston one voice.*
Genesee Valley Region Yates everychild. Monroe