

OATA Newsletter **Sept./Oct. 2019**

Your Team:

Wendy Bergman
President/NYSUT RA Delegate

Andrea Karas
Vice President

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Secretary

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Treasurer

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Jeff Schlagenhaut
MHS Building Rep

Ashley Rebmann
Elementary Building Rep

Corinne Coffta
Elementary Building Rep

Denise Glidden & Joe Jankowski
Retirement Reps

Corinne Coffta
Teachers' Center Rep

Updates and Reminders:

- Check out our **OATA website** regularly for updates and upcoming events at <http://oakfieldalabamata.weebly.com/>
- For APPR Info, check out the OATA website!
- **Email** us at: oakfieldalabamata@gmail.com
- Please contact members of the Negotiating Team if you have concerns/suggestions: Yale Leupold - Lead Negotiator, Robin Bonnano, Dave Carpino, Lisa Mullen, Ashley Rebmann, Adam Reeb

WELCOME NEW TEACHERS!

Welcome to our newest OATA members! We are glad to welcome all our new hires this year: Sean McNutt II – MHS Technology, Laurie Rudolph – MHS Teacher Assistant, Lori MacRae – 3rd grade (maternity for Michelle Smith) then 2nd grade (for Claudia Gelder), Monica Lang – Speech Pathologist, Jen Pritchett – 2nd grade, Kelly Courtney – MHS Physical Education, and Hayley Lown – MHS Library Media Specialist. Please take the time to welcome them and help them out in any way.

Our first and second year teachers were also invited to a new teacher dinner this year. It was a great evening filled with great conversations and laughter, time to reflect on the beginning of school, valuable tips and information provided by our NYSUT Reps, Lou DalPorto and Rose Hennessy, and a great dinner. Thank you to all who were able to attend.

★ Remember to RSVP (by Nov. 1st) for the OATA Night at the Races on November 8th!

Halloween Party

Thank you to all our members who volunteered their time to make the Oakfield Betterment Committee Halloween party a success. We had great weather this year and the kids in our community loved seeing all of you outside of school.



Labor Daze

Thank you to everyone who volunteered during their last weekend of summer break at Labor Daze. We had a tremendous number of OATA members support Alex's Lemonade Stand, helping to raise money for childhood cancer. Members also got soaked getting dunked by the community in the dunk tank. Thanks for always making our students' lives brighter!





Majestic Lights in Triangle Park

A Christmas tree was purchased again this year for Triangle Park representing the Oakfield Alabama Teachers Association. The tree will be decorated by our union in “honor of OACS learners and leaders”. We have LED lights, some gold garland and some blue and gold ornaments. We are asking **each grade level and/or department to make ornaments to represent their team to add to the tree.** The only requirement is that they are designed to **survive the outdoor weather** conditions. Let’s have fun with this and show off our creative/whimsical side. The ornaments would need to be turned in to me (Robin) in the elementary building and Wendy in the MS/HS building by **no later than Tuesday, November 26th.**

Then, the tree needs to actually be decorated on **Tuesday, December 3rd at 3:45 after the elementary school day ends.** Many hands make light work and it is fun to get into the holiday spirit. **PLEASE** consider joining your fellow union members on Tuesday to decorate our tree.

The **festivities and tree lighting take place on Friday, December 6th from 7:00 - 8:00pm in the Village Triangle Park.** It would be nice to have members present at this celebration as well. All the trees will remain decorated and lit until **January 1st.** The **tree then needs to be undecorated by Sunday, January 5th.**

If you haven’t seen the trees, it is worth a visit this year. Come join in on the festivities. Don’t hesitate to ask if you have any questions. **Looking forward to some great team ornaments!**

Social Media

The widespread popularity of social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram has created a new generation of problems and potential liabilities for educators. Further, the ease of posting information, including videos and other media, on the Internet by anyone with Internet access can create problems for professionals in education when false or inappropriate personal information is posted about them.

Are Educators at Risk?

Online indecency would fall under general district guidelines banning inappropriate behavior both in and outside school. Courts have also ruled that schools can regulate off-campus speech if such speech can be demonstrated to have an adverse impact on the district. Teachers in Florida, Colorado, Tennessee, and Massachusetts have been dismissed and/or suspended because of the content of their social networking sites. Educators may also be held responsible for content posted about them, either by individuals or by organizations. Even liking a post is considered to be speech. It has also become common for public employers to use information found on their employees' social media pages as bases for discipline. The law in this area is always evolving, therefore, members are cautioned that their use of social media may have a negative impact on their employment.

No such thing as truly 'private'

The best way to prevent a problem arising from a social networking site is to simply not use one, but for many that is not realistic. For those who do have one, you should take certain steps to ensure that your information remains private. You need to realize, however, that what you do on social media sites is never truly private. Despite Facebook's assurances that you can change your settings so only friends can see what you post, don't be fooled. Those friends are free to share what you post — in both the virtual and the real world. Also, hackers have no compunction about invading your privacy.

Courts also have little trouble finding that your constitutionally guaranteed right to privacy does not apply to what you put on the Internet; once you publish something to one or 100 people, any reasonable expectation of privacy disappears. Courts have also permitted parties in civil litigation to force one another to produce both public and private portions of their social networking pages.

So, disabuse yourself of the notion that what you put on Facebook is private. Rather, recognize that it may as well be on a billboard for all to see. That said, if you want to connect with friends, families and colleagues, you should feel generally comfortable doing so, as long as you use the utmost discretion in choosing what you post.

My time, my business?

Just because you might use social media in your off-duty time does not automatically shield what you post from employer scrutiny. Before the advent of social media, both courts and arbitrators had held that an employer may impose discipline for certain off-duty conduct. New York's highest court has said that discipline can be imposed for off-duty conduct if the "... conduct in question directly affects the performance of the professional responsibilities ... or if, without contribution on the part of [the employer], the conduct has become the subject of such public notoriety that it significantly and reasonably impairs [an employee's] ability to discharge the responsibilities of the position."

Schools and other employers use this standard in arguing that certain social media usage is deserving of discipline, if not termination. Some public employers have already done so, citing job-related "posts," "tweets," or pictures of employees engaging in even entirely legal behavior, i.e. drinking, as bases for discipline.

What About Freedom of Speech?

Public employees do NOT have an unfettered right to free speech. While all First Amendment cases are intensely fact-specific, in general, if the speech is considered non-duty speech, the First Amendment will protect the speech as long as the speech is a matter of public concern and will not disrupt the provision of services. BUT, if the speech is 1) made pursuant to official duties (no matter where it occurs); 2) is not a matter of public concern (i.e. saying mean things about a student on social media); or 3) disrupts the District's ability to provide services (i.e. speech that leads parents to complain about you as a teacher), the First Amendment does not protect the speech.

Here's what you should take away from this information:

Do:

- Be familiar with any employee work rules or policies dealing with electronic communications.
- Set your social media page privacy settings so that only friends can view it and maximize all possible security settings.
- Be very mindful of who you accept friend requests from and to whom you send requests.
- Use group email or texting apps to coordinate student activities or sporting events.
- Stop and think before texting, emailing, posting, or sending.
- Assume that everything you post may be seen by everyone.

Don't—

Many of the actions below may be completely innocent or explainable, but employees should use their discretion when engaging in the following:

- Accept friend requests from, or send requests to, students.
- Post any comments about, or any pictures or videos of students on your personal accounts.
- Post comments that an administrator might find inappropriate if read by students or parents.
- Post photos of yourself engaging in any behavior that an administrator might find inappropriate if seen by students or parents.
- Think you can make comments private by sending them by direct or private message. You have no control over what the recipient will do with them.
- Use Facebook or Twitter to attack your students or parents.
- Use Instagram to share your political views with your students.
- Have private email conversations or text message conversations with students. Even if the content isn't objectionable, the mode or timing could be.

Remember:

- All employees should also avoid using an employer's computer for personal purposes, as all of the information you enter may be readily accessible by your employer.
- If you text, call, e-mail, chat, tweet or Skype (or even have your dog deliver a letter) with/to student(s), someone is going to find out about it.
- Your posts show where you are, when you were there, and what you were doing.
- The internet is forever. What you post, email, or tweet, leaves a footprint that can be recreated long after you delete the original message.
- If you are trying to illicit a reaction, you will, and it may not be the one you wanted.
- Educators are held to a higher standard and viewed as role models in the community. Therefore, your freedom of speech does not mean freedom from consequences.
- And most importantly, think twice before you post – if you think it may be a bad idea, or someone tells you it is a bad idea, it is a bad idea!!



Your Union-Endorsed Benefits: Debt Consolidation & Mortgage Savings

NYSUT Member Benefits understands the challenges that the hardworking women and men of this labor union face when it comes to financial issues such as student loan re-payment options, credit card consolidation or debt management, or saving on purchasing or refinancing a home.

Student Loan & Debt Counseling Program

Your union membership allows you to receive a no-obligation debt and/or student loan consultation at no cost with a certified counselor through the Member Benefits Corporation-endorsed **Cambridge Credit Counseling** program. Cambridge provides individualized student loan counseling along with a unique web portal available at a reduced rate to help explain the various options when paying student debt; debt relief services are also offered.

UnionDirect Mortgage Discount Program

The Member Benefits Corporation-endorsed **UnionDirect Mortgage Discount Program presented by Mid-Island Mortgage Corp.** offers union members and their families savings of up to \$2,700 on lender fees and closing costs. Your union membership also entitles you to no application or processing fees; no commitment fees; no underwriting fees; no lender or broker fees; and reduced attorney and title fees.

The Power of the Union

Regardless of whether you are participating in either of the programs mentioned above; one of our endorsed insurance, financial or legal programs; or our many shopping, entertainment or travel offerings, NYSUT members receive a quality product and enjoy the "**Power of the Union**" behind them. Unlike when purchasing products available to the general public, Member Benefits is here as your advocate if you ever have any issues or concerns with our endorsed programs.

To learn more about Member Benefits-endorsed programs, visit memberbenefits.nysut.org or call 800-626-8101.



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