

INFORMATION, NEWS AND SUPPORT SPEAK OUT!

PITTSFORD DISTRICT TEACHERS ASSOCIATION



Hope Renewed in a Simple Question Dwayne Cerbone, President

Recently I was spending time with my youngest son when one of his friends casually expressed that she was considering a change in college major and asked me, "Would you recommend that I become a teacher?" I am going to ask you to pause from reading this article for a moment to consider: how would you respond to someone that asked you about committing their life to pursuing a job in education?

I was not at all surprised by the question, as I have been asked this by many others over my 31 year career and I have always responded quite positively, citing an extensive list of convincing reasons. However, I was caught off guard this time by the significant pause I sustained prior to responding. My mind started racing as I contemplated the significant changes I have experienced over the duration of my career and tried to imagine what the field will be like 30 years from now. I will regrettably confess that my first thoughts were to counsel her to seriously consider another path. I was instantaneously consumed by thoughts of the impact of Tier 6, diminishing benefits, the teacher shortage, increased workloads, unreasonable expectations to fill an ever-growing list of roles in our community, inadequate funding, safety concerns, state

and federal mandates, continued disparagement of educators in a vast array of public forums, challenges with student engagement and behaviors... and then I looked at her, and all of these thoughts stopped instantly.

I realized: "Wait, I love my job! Why would I not want someone else to have the same wonderful opportunities afforded to me?" I truly believe my work investing in thousands of students over the years has positively influenced their lives and our society in significant ways. Simultaneously, this work has made me a better person: developing character, strength, empathy, and an ability to see good in others. Though all of the previously mentioned challenges may indeed be relevant, I still believe I have the best job in the world. I have never spoken to someone whose description of their work left me wishing I had chosen a different path. My friends in the private sector will never know the fulfillment I experience daily, the hope gleaned in a child's moment of success or the restoration provided by a fresh start each year. I then, with this correct perspective renewed, enthusiastically spoke to this future educator about the field of education with the same passion, love, and commitment that has sustained me through the past three decades.

Having pondered this conversation

In this issue:

- 1 from the PRESIDENT
- 2 SRP NEWS, EXECUTIVE VP
- 3-4 NYSTRS UPDATE
- 5 PROFESSIONAL LEARNING, RESOLUTION SPECIALIST
- 6-7 ADS

further since that moment, it has caused me to reflect on the work of our union in this unique era. Here in Pittsford, PDTA leaders work collaboratively each and every day with District leaders who share our observations and concerns while jointly committing to excellence, sustainability and maximizing the limited resources available. Simultaneously, our state and national affiliates are focused on diligently addressing the safety, budgetary and Tier 6 issues within their respective spheres of influence.

I am hopeful that my sharing this mini journey of mind and heart resonates in some way with each of you. Please join me as we address challenges and lean on renewed hope for a promising today and tomorrow. I thank each of you for the vital role you play in Pittsford education, our union and the journey of our students.

Follow us on X
@PDTAunion



Like us on
Facebook

Pittsford District Teachers Association (PDTA) - A Union of Educators



SRP Newslink Connie Maust

In an earlier *Speak Out!* article, I listed the Para Academy course offerings. I always try to take advantage of these courses for both the learning opportunity but also to be able to come together with my colleagues to collaborate.

In December, I took part in the new Para Academy course Building Relationships with Students. It was a blended course with one-hour of independent asynchronous work and one-hour of in person course work with peers. The asynchronous coursework allows you the opportunity to take notes, review material, and pause to reflect on the information presented. The in-person session gives you and your colleagues the opportunity to have dialogue about the different perspectives, experiences, and strategies working with students.

This course is designed to help us understand and develop a positive relationship with students. It supplies suggestions and reminders on how to build those relationships. Building positive relationships with students is key to doing our job effectively. Without that relationship, it can negatively affect a student’s learning when learning may already be a challenge.

The asynchronous classwork focuses on different areas to understand and help build relationships. The first area is Interactions with Adults. Although it does not always feel like it, our positive interactions with students have a positive long-term effect. We convey messages with our attitude and behavior towards our students, not just verbally. The course work details ways to make connections with students to build those relationships. The four examples they give are: personal reflection, points of connection, positive verbal communication, and positive nonverbal communication.

The course continues with characteristics and attributes needed to help build and support those relationships.

Students are more willing to share with an adult that is kind, compassionate, and shows a genuine interest in them as a person. They highlight seven areas from effective communication skills to valuing everyone. When I was going through the information, I felt some of it served as important reminders of what our positions should involve and would be helpful to remember in all social situations. This section asks for some self-reflection of the participants’ strengths and weaknesses in the list of positive attributes and characteristics. It moves into sections on Positive Relationships, Activities, and finishes with Practices.

This is only a summary to highlight some of the valuable information in this course. The online course part provided more information and reminders that were then discussed, shared, and built on with real work experiences from my perspective and peers during the in-person class. The sharing of ideas and experiences during the in-person session provides another layer of learning that is so valuable when working with students. I encourage you to be on the lookout for more courses offerings in the spring to take advantage of this paid learning opportunity and take advantage of the opportunity to meet peers from other buildings.

General Reminders:

- SRP Members considering retirement need to send their letter to HR by April 9th (Modified from 4/1 due to break).
- Retirement Party (Eagle Vale) - May 23, 2024, at 4:30PM
- New contracts should be going out to those that work in District Based Programs or are assigned to students with unique needs for the second half of the school year. If you are eligible and don’t receive one by mid-February, please reach out to your building representative.
- Please continue to check pay statements for accuracy.



Executive Vice-President Stephanie Warchol

PDTA Student Benefit Fund

The PDTA Student Benefit Fund was established to provide financial assistance to PCSD families experiencing difficulties that could limit the opportunity for their child to learn or participate in school-sponsored educational activities. We encourage all PDTA members to utilize the Student Benefit Fund if you know a student in need.

Funding requests can be used for items including, but not limited to- field trips, extra-curriculars, college exam fees, Pittsford Youth Services programming, health or safety needs, etc. The selection committee, which consists of the PDTA Executive Vice President, Treasurer, and one additional member of the Representative Assembly, will determine the

merit of each request and identify the amount to be allotted (\$50.00 maximum), all while keeping the information confidential. The applicant must be a current student attending Pittsford Central Schools, but there are no specific income criteria.

If you are interested in learning more, use these links to find the fund [guidelines](#) and [application](#). Once the form is complete, please return it to the PDTA Office in the Lomb Building. These requests can be used in conjunction with the PCSD Student Opportunity Fund offered through the Student Services Department, but separate applications are required. If you have any questions about the fund, please don’t hesitate to contact me.

NYSTRS Annual Meeting for Delegates

November 5-6, 2023

Pittsford Delegates Kathleen Curtis, Dennise Zobel, and Stephanie Warchol attended the New York State Teachers' Retirement System's (NYSTRS) Annual Meeting to accomplish two goals: Elect a teacher delegate to the NYSTRS Board and attend seminar presentations to share with colleagues. Read on for the highlights and some valuable information!

Three Active Teacher Members on the Retirement Board for NYSTRS:

- Elizabeth Chetney of Baldwinsville Central School District, was elected in 2019, and was endorsed to continue serving on the NYSTRS Retirement Board on November 6, 2023.
- Eric J. Berger from Bayport Blue Point Union Free School District was elected to the NYSTRS Board on October 29, 2021, for a three-year term.
- Juliet C. Benaquistto from Schenectady City School District was elected to the NYSTRS Board on November 7, 2022.

The mission of NYSTRS is to provide members with a secure pension. The vision: To be the model for pension fund excellence and exceptional customer service. NYSTRS is among the best-funded plans in the nation. NYSTRS attributes its success to three primary qualities, (1) contributions are collected from employees and employers on time and in full. (2) Investments are diversified and long term. (3) System governance.

There are six tiers, each with different benefit structures and eligibility rules.

- Tier 1: Membership prior to 7/1/73
- Tier 2: Membership 7/1/73 — 7/26/76
- Tier 3: Membership 7/27/76 — 8/31/83
- Tier 4: Membership 9/1/83 — 12/31/09
- Tier 5: Membership 1/1/10 — 3/31/12

Workshop Highlights

The complete sessions can be found [here](#).

The Role of the Delegate

Did you know that NYSTRS is one of the ten largest retirement pensions in the country, managing over \$132

billion dollars as of June 2022? So the main focus of the role of a delegate is to act as a liaison between 'The System' and its members.

A NYSTRS delegate serves a two-year term, represents one of the 829 school districts in New York State, and is responsible for electing the three active teacher members to the ten-person NYSTRS Retirement Board. Here are some key ideas from the presentation:

- NYSTRS Membership: there is no downside to joining; you accrue 5% interest, you are vested with 5 years, if you switch jobs you are considered active for 7 years after service, and if desired, you can roll the money into a tax-deferred account.
- Beneficiary Designation: it is incredibly important to review, and potentially update, your beneficiary designation(s) for in-service or post-retirement death benefit. You can do this prior to retirement by using the 'Beneficiaries' tab under 'My Retirement' in your secure MyNYSTRS account.
- NYSTRS Website/App: the resources online are plentiful, and it is the quickest way to access forms you may need.
- 5+ years out from retirement: check out the PREP sessions this Spring or find all of the modules online.
- 3 years out from retirement: consider a Benefits Consultation meeting with a System staff member, call (800) 348-7298, Ext. 6100.
- Retiring soon: use the checklist to make sure you follow all of the necessary steps so you can seamlessly receive your first pension check.
- For more information about [Retirement Planning](#), [click here](#). For more information for [Active Members](#), [click here](#).
- Annual Benefit Profile: received the week of November 10th. Take the time to review it, ensure that everything is



accurate, and contact the District or System to make necessary changes. Your beneficiary designations will be listed there.

Social Security Information

Social Security is part of the retirement plan for a NYS public educator. The employer contributes 6.2% and the employee contributes 6.2%, while self-employed people contribute 12.4% to social security. Some people choose to apply for Social Security benefits at 62, others wait until 67. There are several variables that contribute to when you may choose to apply, for example: Are you working? Will this work put you in a different tax bracket? Do you have longevity? By collecting at 62, prior to full retirement age of 67, there is a 30% reduction in payout. There are approximately 2700 rules in social security legislation, so details can be complicated. In some cases, there are family benefits and survivor benefits to be considered. Currently, lifetime earnings and age determine AIME (Average Indexed Monthly Earnings). The more you earn the smaller percent payout on some of the monies earned; it is a social program. Actuarially speaking, there will likely be some reforms to the social security program because approximately 3.6 million people are retiring annually, and our working population is shrinking. By visiting [the Social Security in retirement website](#), members can access their social security statement, review earnings record, and estimate future benefits. You can also visit a local social security office (we have 2 in Rochester area: E. Main St. and W. Ridge Road) or call (800) 772-1213.

Tier 6 Overview

Educators that joined the system April 2012 or later are part of Tier 6. Like previous Tiers, this is a Defined Benefits Program, currently very few in the private sector have such a program whereas 85% of public servant careers have pensions available. Members can rely on a monthly benefit after retirement, a NYS Constitutional guarantee. To receive the full pension, Tier 6 members work to the age of 63. Like other Tiers, the final average salary, retirement age, and years of service determine your benefit. Approximately 37% of our members are Tier 6 members and, like the other Tiers, vesting occurs after 5 years. The annual contribution rate is determined by a sliding scale. For example, if the member earns \$45,000 or less, they contribute 3%, whereas if you earn between \$50,000 and \$75,000, you contribute 4.5%, and those that earn \$100,000 or more contribute 6% annually. Like other Tiers, if you have prior service in public employment or military service, apply early. To minimize the cost in purchasing prior service, Tier 6 members pay 6% of the salary earned and 5% interest for purchasing prior service. The member contacts the previous employer with the Prior Service Verification Form. Forms are located in MyNYSTRS to submit the request to purchase prior

service.

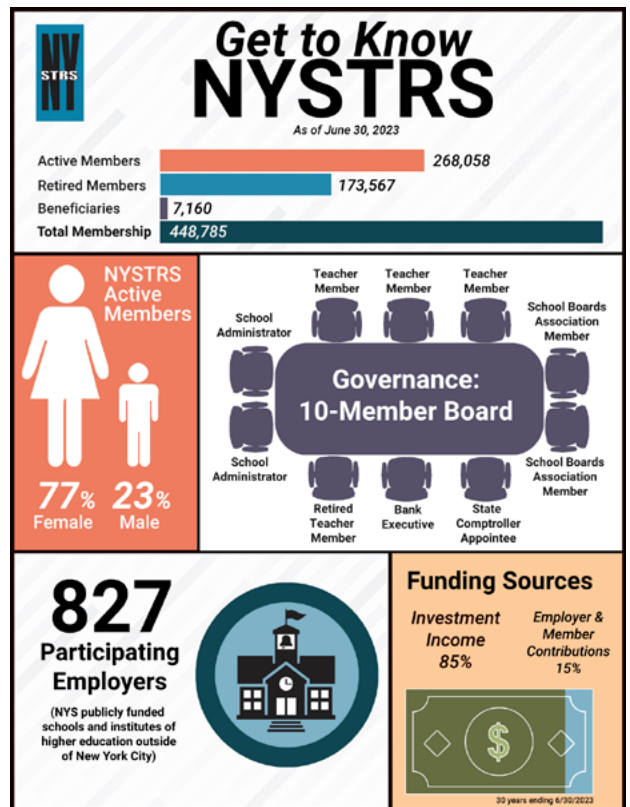
While it is glaringly obvious that there are flaws with Tier 6, NYSTRS made a point to share that they are not responsible for the legislation of the retirement system, only the maintenance. They assured those in attendance that NYSUT is actively pursuing legislative change connected with Tier 6, for more information, [please visit this website.](#)

Legal Update: Review of POAs, DROs, and Trusts

Trusts and Power of Attorney are created outside NYSTRS with an attorney or financial planner. A member could choose to pay monthly benefits into a Trust; however, the Trust has to be in the member's name. If a member has a POA, send the document to NYSTRS. When a POA is on file, members still can act on their own behalf. A domestic Relations Order (DRO) is a court signed order, separate from the Judgment of Divorce and from the Separation and Settlement Agreement, that sets forth how an individual's retirement benefits are to be divided between the parties who are divorced. Depending on the settlement and what the DRO states, an ex-spouse may be entitled to a percentage of the benefit. Documents need to be filed with NYSTRS.

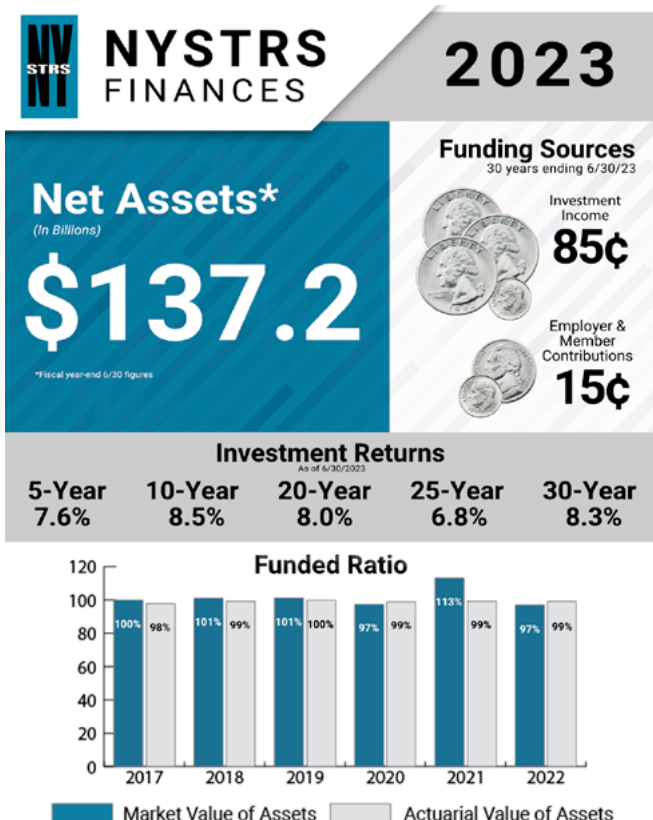
The Strength and Stability of the System

There are three sources of income for the Retirement System member: contributions, employer contributions, and investment income. The ECR Employer



Contribution Rate is 9.76% for '23-'24. The member contributions for Tier 5 is 3.5% of salary and Tier 6 is 3-6% of salary. Over the past 30 years, the System's net assets have grown from \$29.5 billion to \$137.2 billion, with 85% of NYSTRS' income generated by investment returns. In the short term, the 1 year return was 9%, 10 year return 8.5%, the 20 year return 8% and the 30 year return 8.3%. This shows the stability of the retirement program, with investments in several categories including Domestic, International and Real Estate Equities. The benefit of a diversified portfolio is that over a long period of time, being broadly invested across asset classes allows NYSTRS to deliver more consistent returns and minimize risk. NYSTRS approaches investing as universal owners with a long-term view of the markets. NYSTRS has identified climate as a key long-term risk to the portfolio, and thus the System seeks to mitigate this risk by identifying opportunities for investment in energy transition – renewable energy, energy storage, and carbon capture.

Thanks for taking the time to learn more about our Retirement System! If you have further questions, [their website has a wealth of information](#), and you can always ask our delegates for more details about their experience!





Professional Learning Updates

Julie Barker

The Spring catalogs for professional learning are now available in WinCap Web. Activities run from February through May.

All certificated staff members are encouraged to check their completed hours for the year to be sure they have met the contractual requirement. For any staff member who has not yet completed the required hours, there are activities in the Professional Learning Initiatives catalog to assist in fulfilling this requirement.

Please note that activities from the Electives catalog, such as Adult and Child CPR/AED and the CPI Refresher, do not count toward the contractual requirement for professional learning hours for certificated staff. In addition, activities that take place during your workday and are tracked for CTLE purposes do not count toward this requirement.

If you have any questions about your completed professional learning hours, please contact me directly.

Individual Initiatives

Certificated staff who participate in professional learning that takes place outside the district may request their principal's approval to count the hours toward their contractual requirement. To receive approval for Individual Initiatives, the professional learning must take place outside your regular workday and be aligned with your professional responsibilities. Full-time certificated staff members may receive up to 12 hours per year in Individual Initiatives. The form requesting Individual Initiative approval can be found on [the Teacher Center webpage](#).

Superintendent's Conference Day – April 26th:

Professional certificate holders are encouraged to enroll in the activity Superintendent's Conference Day – April 2024 so the hours can be used toward your CTLE requirement.

NOTE: Professional certificate holders received their certification after February 2004 and have completed the

requirements to move from Initial to Professional. If you hold Permanent or Initial certification, do not enroll in this activity.

CPI Refreshers

All staff members who have been certified in CPI are required to participate in one CPI Refresher each year. This spring we are offering Refreshers on February 28th and March 14th. Please go the Electives catalog for details and to enroll in one of these dates.

Upcoming dates of interest:

- March 1st: the last day to submit a collegial circle proposal for this school year.
- March 1st – 31st: Professional Staff/Teacher Mentor Applications will be accepted for certificated staff members who are interested in joining the mentor pool.
- April 1st – 30th: Para Mentor Applications will be accepted for paraprofessionals who are interested in joining the mentor pool.
- April 15th: the deadline for submitting an application for the PDTA Wanda Ward Study Grant for summer work. The Study Grant application and additional information about study grants is on the PDTA website.
- May 15th: Collegial Circle Final Reports for this school year are due.
- May 31st: the deadline for Certificated Staff to complete contractual hours for professional learning for this school year.

Wishing you all a great spring semester!

Julie



Resolution Specialist

Kim Chesko

Welcome to 2024! Please review the following reminders about contract interests that routinely come up at this time of year.

Extra Duty Contracts

All second semester extra duty contracts should be out to members or going out very soon. This includes paras with unique responsibilities if they are still in a position to warrant a stipend. If you have not received your second semester contract by February 2nd, please reach out to me or your building rep.

Keep an eye on paychecks

Please continue to check paystubs to be sure that your

pay is correct. Our new contract has added compensation for paras subbing, and it is important that each member is keeping track of when they sub, for whom, and that it is paid at the correct rate. Check Section 39 of the contract for more information.

Continuing Reminder - Maternity and Medical Leaves

Please remember that PDTA is here to help guide you through the process for requesting a maternity or medical leave, and we strongly encourage you to utilize this guidance. As soon as you know that such a leave will be necessary, please contact one of PDTA's Leave Advocates, me or Dwayne Cerbone, to begin the process.

Enjoy the beginning of a new semester!

Your Reps:

Building Representatives:

Michele Riedl, ACE
Bret Burrows, JRE
Jennifer Villareale, MCE
Spencer Jones, PRE
Greg Bischooping, TRE
Kristen Dolan, BRMS
Melissa Althouse, CRMS
Todd Warren, MHS
Amanda Marshall, SHS
Connie Maust, SRP

Assistant Building Representatives:

Alyson Hallett, ACE
Patty Steeley, JRE
Nina Dezio and
Trisha Sullivan, MCE
Kelly Sanderson, TRE
Ann Conciardo, Ellen Fox, and
Karen Grace, BRMS
Jessica Wojcik and Sophie
Spyra, CRMS
Mindy Johnston and Sam
Hyde, MHS
Marc Hellems, Brian Shafer,
and Jeff Wing, SHS

Assistant SRP Representatives:

Susan Benson, ACE
Julie Pellegrino, JRE
Rebecca Tan and
Debbie Ricketts, MCE and PRE
Radhika Ramesh, TRE
Farida Patrawala, CRMS
LaShanda Clark McCadney,
MHS
Brian Oliver, SHS



April 27-28
KIDS YOGA TRAINING
Learn how to share the power of mindfulness & movement with kids
MENDON, NY

A 2 DAY PLAYFUL AND IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE!

Our **BLENDED TRAINING** combines:

- Online Curriculum
- 2-Days of In-Person Training

JOIN US!
Educator Discounts Available

LET'S TALK
julie@kiddingaroundyoga.com



EMBROIDERED PDTA SWAG

15% of all sales go directly to our PDTA Student Scholarship Fund. We've raised over \$345 since the program began!

All products are embroidered.

Purchases are done online through the company and shipped directly to your house. Keep an eye out for sale codes and free shipping deals which are frequently offered.

Link will always be open - make purchases whenever and as often as you like.

Makes a perfect gift for yourself or your favorite PDTA member- feel free to share the link with friends or family.

pdta.logosoftware.com

Important Information and Dates:

- **Certificated Staff can find more information about APPR [here](#).**
- **5/23/24: Retirement Party at Eagle Vale**



Speak Out! has been edited and compiled by **Murie Gillett**. Feel free to contact me with any questions at murie_gillett@pittsford.monroe.edu.

SPEAK OUT! Ads

You and your family members are invited to place ads in future issues of SPEAK OUT!
Rates for members and family (price is for one issue):

1/8 Page: \$12.50 ¼ Page: \$25.00 ½ Page: \$50.00 Full Page: \$100.00

Above rates are for copy ready advertising. If additional design or set-up is required, an additional fee of \$25 will be assessed. Space for ads is limited per issue. Checks should be made out to PDTA and mailed to the PDTA Office. **Ad proceeds will support PDTA charitable efforts.**

Send copy and questions directly to murie_gillett@pittsford.monroe.edu.

Check out all your union membership has to offer!

Free Premium Calm App for All NYSUT In-Service AND Retiree Members!



- **The #1 app for sleep, meditation, and relaxation**
- **Unlimited access to the full library of content**
- **Add up to five dependents (age 16 or older) to receive their own premium Calm subscription**

The Calm app -- recognized as Apple's Best of 2018 award winner, Apple's App of the Year 2017, and Google Play Editor's Choice 2018 -- is the #1 app for sleep, meditation, and relaxation with over 100 million downloads. Whether members have 30 seconds or 30 minutes of time available, the diverse content library offered by Calm includes numerous resources for their schedule and needs.

Members can explore guided meditations and specialized music playlists to help with stress and focus, mindful movement video and audio, relaxing sleep stories, nature scenes and sounds, specific content tailored for children, masterclasses led by experts, and more.

To learn more about how to create your Calm account and access the premium content for free, visit memberbenefits.nysut.org/free-member-benefits and then click on "Premium Calm Service." From there, you will find detailed instructions on how to create your Calm account along with a helpful Frequently Asked Questions document about the service. You will need your NYSUT ID number to create an account with your email address and password. Your NYSUT ID number can be found on your NYSUT Membership Card or by visiting <https://www.nysut.org/memberid>.

Once you create your free Calm account on your computer, it is recommended that you download the Calm app for your iOS or Android device. After downloading the Calm app for your preferred mobile device, you can then log in with your email address and password to unlock the premium Calm content.



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.

Jan/Feb. 2024