

# SPEAK OUT!

PITTSFORD DISTRICT TEACHERS ASSOCIATION



## Fix Tier Six

**Stephanie Warchol, President**

Since 2010, lawmakers have reduced retirement benefits in the newest pension tiers (Tier 5 and Tier 6) for newly hired public employees, including public school teachers and School-Related Professionals. Tier 6 requires public employees to work until age 63 (up to 40 years) in order to retire without penalty. Public employees in Tier 6 can no longer retire at age 55 with 30 years of service without suffering from significant penalties that reduce their overall pension. It is a problem for our new members to have such a reduction in their retirement security, but that is not all; it is a problem for all of our members. The shortages caused by the lack of people entering public service are real; we see it every day in our schools. These shortages impact our current members with major changes to programming, larger class size, fewer classroom assistants, fewer substitutes, and higher burn out rates. Tier 6 was imposed on our members by Gov. Cuomo in 2012, one of his many attacks on our members, public education, and public employees in general. While they still receive a defined benefit pension that our members cannot outlive, how much a member will receive in retirement, how long they are required to work for this lesser amount, and how much they must pay for it is far different than their Tier 4 and Tier 5 colleagues. Thirty years is a career; public employees should be able to retire with a secure retirement after 30 years of service without penalty!

### What is NYSUT doing about this?

NYSUT launched a long-term advocacy campaign to improve retirement benefits for public employees under

Tier 6. It took Union advocacy for over a decade to reform Tier 4, and we're going to keep fighting until Tier 6 is reformed to restore a secure retirement for all public employees in New York. We did it once and we can do it again! In the year 2000, after many years of lobbying the state, NYSUT and other public employee unions won the battle for tier equity for Tier 4 members. Tier 4 saw their employee contributions reduced to zero after 10 years of service and service credit calculations were adjusted benefiting employees across all public pension systems.

**THE NEW YORK STATE TEACHERS' RETIREMENT SYSTEM (NYSTRS) AND THE NEW YORK STATE AND LOCAL RETIREMENT SYSTEM (NYSLRS) HAVE SIX RETIREMENT TIERS. YOUR TIER MEMBERSHIP IS BASED ON YOUR HIRING DATE. IF YOU WERE HIRED ON OR AFTER APRIL 1, 2012, YOU'RE IN TIER 6.**

### We've already seen some progress.

Under Gov. Hochul we have seen the number of years required to vest in the pension system for Tier 6 members reduced from ten years to five years (the same amount required for Tier 4). More than 85,000 Tier 6 members are now vested in the retirement system thanks to NYSUT's advocacy. In Spring of 2024, thanks to our collective activism, we attained the biggest win for pension reform in 20 years: lowering the Final Average Salary (FAS) calculation from five to three years

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PRESIDENT,

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GRANT RECIPIENT

**6** SRP NEWSLINK,  
RESOLUTION SPECIALIST

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for Tier 6 members. Now, an average of Tier 6 members' last three salary years, instead on their last five salary years, will determine their lifetime pension payments. This is a big deal because educators usually earn more later in their careers. The new calculation means Tier 6 members will receive a bigger pension check every month for life.

### Let's continue to fight the Fix Tier 6 Fight!

While we have achieved big victories, we can't let up now. The goal is to get Tier 5 & Tier 6 members to parity with Tier 4 members, in both contributions and retirement age. The most important thing right now is that our lawmakers remember this is a top issue. As this year's legislative session progresses, NYSUT has made a commitment to solidarity and fairness, by advocating for equity amongst the tiers. **On Sunday, March 8, join 10,000+ fellow NYSUT siblings for the largest, and most powerful Fix Tier 6 rally yet.** This is our moment (during prime budget negotiations) to push these reforms across the finish line and secure the fair pensions our educators deserve.

Don't want to drive or go alone? NO PROBLEM! There will be buses from Rochester to Albany. If we get a strong showing from PDTA we can arrange for the bus to pick up/drop off right in our backyard. You are welcome to bring friends and family, just make sure you select the total number of guests when you RSVP. This is a kid friendly event with music, face painters, sign making parties and more. Also, NYSUT members will receive a t-shirt to wear. Know some PCSD retirees? They can join us as well! The rally is from 12-2pm in Albany. With travel time, you can plan to leave around 7-8am and return by 6-7pm. Each bus will have a budget for breakfast, and each attendee will be given a boxed lunch. There will

be concessions available at the venue, and dinner will be on your own. To learn more about the Fix Tier 6 efforts and sign up to attend the rally and secure a spot on the bus, [please check out this link](#).

It's been over ten years since Tier 6 was added to the pension system and now over 36% of NYSTRS members are in Tier 6. In that time over 100,000 of our union siblings have entered public service with a pension benefit that is significantly lower than our higher tiered members. With significant teacher retirements on the horizon and a teacher shortage, now is the time to come together to FIX TIER 6!



## RALLY IN ALBANY TO FIX TIER 6!

You've stood with us across New York State in the fight to Fix Tier 6. Your voices rang out, and lawmakers listened.

### Together, we've already secured historic wins:

- Reduced vesting from 10 to 5 years, protecting pensions for 85,000 Tier 6 members
- Achieved the biggest pension reform victory in 20 years by lowering the Final Average Salary calculation from 5 to 3 years

### Now it's time for the biggest action yet.

Join 10,000+ fellow NYSUT members for our largest, most powerful Fix Tier 6 rally yet. This is our moment to push these reforms across the finish line and secure the fair pensions our educators deserve—once and for all.

### RALLY INFORMATION

**WHEN:** Sunday, March 8, 2026

12:00 - 2:00 p.m.

(Doors open at 10:30)

**WHERE:** MVP Arena, Albany

**WHO:** You and 10,000+ of your fellow educators, union members, and allies ready to make history



### THIS IS MORE THAN A RALLY

It's the result of years of advocacy. Be part of the movement that will Fix Tier 6 for good.

### LEARN MORE AND REGISTER:

SCAN ME:



[nysut.cc/ft6bigrally](http://nysut.cc/ft6bigrally)

# Help NYSUT



## WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

It's been over a decade since Tier 6 was added to the New York state pension system.

Since then, over 100,000 NYSUT members earn a significantly reduced pension as compared to earlier tiers. Consider this:

**Tier 6** members pay 3 to 6 percent into the pension system their entire career — their contributions grow with pay raises.

**Tier 6** members must work to age 63, up to 40 years of service, or face heavy penalties.

**Tier 4** member contributions are capped at 3 percent and end after 10 years.

**Tier 4** members can retire at 55 with 30 years of service.

## HOW BAD IS IT?



**Tier 4 member**, retiring at 55 with 30 years, would receive 60 percent of her Final Average Salary with no penalty.



In order to retire with no penalty, a **Tier 6 member** needs to work an *extra 8 years until age 63*, and will still *earn tens of thousands of dollars less* in lifetime pension income.

## WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

### Fixing Tier 6 is about solidarity and fairness.

It's unfair that some educators and public workers must work longer, and contribute more, to earn a significantly reduced pension.

### Fixing Tier 6 is about dignity.

The hallmark of a public-service career is the promise of a dignified retirement. With Tier 6, the state abandons its commitment to that guarantee.

## 30 YEARS IS A CAREER!

Fixing Tier 6 is about keeping talented educators in the classroom and recruiting new educators into the profession.

A substantially reduced pension undervalues the education profession and is a major contributor to the teacher shortage. Our work is important. Our pensions should reflect that.



### THANKS TO OUR ADVOCACY, WE'VE ALREADY WON SOME PENSION IMPROVEMENTS.

In 2022, member vesting dropped from 10 to five years, guaranteeing a pension benefit for 85,000 Tier 6 members.

In 2024, we got the final average salary calculation changed from 5 years to 3 years. This means Tier 5 & 6 will get bigger pension checks, for life.

## HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

We know how to fix this ... but we can't do it without you. Whether you're a retiree or a Tier 4, 5 or 6 member, you can help NYSUT Fix Tier 6.

- Join NYSUT's **Fix Tier 6 Team** to help with direct outreach.
- Share the **Fix Tier 6 message** with other NYSUT members.
- Attend a **Fix Tier 6 event** near you.



**HELP NYSUT FIX TIER 6!**



[FixTier6.org](http://FixTier6.org)



# Executive Vice President

## Kim Chesko

### Pittsford PTSA Program Enrichment Grants: Funding to Bring Ideas to Life

#### Who can apply?

School faculty, staff, school-based organizations, and parents are all eligible to apply for Enrichment Grants. Teachers are especially encouraged to apply if they have an idea for a program, resource, or experience that would benefit students and aligns with the district and PTSA mission, found [here](#).

#### What types of projects are funded?

Enrichment Grants may support:

- Start-up programs
- Items or programs not part of the regular educational budget
- School sponsored clubs or ASE programs
- Teacher programs or instructional materials for enrichment
- District level speakers or programs
- Initiatives that impact a large percentage of the student body

Funding may be used for programs or events that are not otherwise supported through existing funding sources and that enhance student learning or engagement.

#### Important guidelines to know:

- Individual grant requests may not exceed **\$2,000**
- Grant requests are reviewed **monthly** by the PTSA Grants Committee
- Approved grants are awarded shortly after review
- The same program may not receive funding more than once within a **three year period**
- PTSA may not fund training, travel expenses, routine equipment, or stand-alone assemblies at individual schools

The process is designed to be accessible and supportive, while ensuring fairness and broad impact across the district.

If you have an idea that could enrich student experiences—or remove a barrier to offering something meaningful—this is a great opportunity to seek support. Additional details, as well as past approved grants as examples, and the application can be found on the Pittsford District PTSA Program Enrichment Grant [webpage](#).

**PDTA MEMBER MEETING**

HEAR ABOUT THE STATE OF THE UNION AND SUBMIT POTENTIAL CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS INTERESTS

**DATE** JANUARY 26, 2026

**TIME** 3:30-5:00 PM

**LOCATION** SHS AUDITORIUM

**We Educate.  
We Advocate.  
We Collaborate.**

**PDTA**

**MEMBER MINGLE**

Following the Active Member Meeting at SHS

Monday, January 26

Pittsford Pub

Hope to see you there!

# Wanda Ward Study Grant: Katie Curtis



This past summer, in order to learn more about East Asian culture and literature, I traveled to the state of Indiana. Bizarre, I know. But who knew that Indiana University is home to the globally renown East Asian Studies Center? I only did after hearing about the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia and their courses from colleagues here at Mendon High School and ELA teachers outside of the district. I've always wanted to learn more about Asian Literature and incorporate more Asian texts into my teaching of tenth grade and its traditional focus on World Literature. Thus, I was grateful to both attend a week-long course on Teaching East Asian Literature and receive the PTSA Wanda Ward Study Grant for travel.

One aspect of this course I found attractive was its intense study of literature. I admit to being completely ignorant when it comes to East Asian history and literature, so I happily absorbed the hundreds of pages of short stories, poems, and novels that I was expected to read prior to attending the course. (Social Studies colleague John Yaeger warned me about the reading load!) The texts, all in translation, spanned multiple East Asian cultures and time periods: Early China, Modern China, Korea, Taiwan, Early Japan, and Modern Japan.

What excited me more than the diversity of texts was the diversity of participants and teaching perspectives. Educators from all over the US (including Alaska!) attended, and while most of them were ELA teachers, there were a few elementary teachers and social studies professionals. We also looked at course texts and cultures through various lenses, visiting the university's world-class library and art museum to enhance our experience. I gained an even better taste (ha!) of East Asian culture

through the catered lunches. Every lunch was thoughtfully prepared by a local Bloomington restaurant specializing in whatever region we were studying that day. It was incredible.

In addition to the cuisine, I also appreciated how the course alternated between formal discussions facilitated by IU literature professors and sessions run by Education School faculty. I found workshops about leading difficult conversations and teaching graphic novels to be the most valuable. A culminating expectation of the course was to prepare and present a lesson inspired by content. The lesson I designed (and am about to implement with my tenth graders!) involved analyzing how the author of the graphic novel *The Boy from Clearwater* presents the protagonist's life and imprisonment during its struggle for independence. This lesson eventually motivated me to design a mini-unit around four graphic novels about imprisonment (*The Boy from Clearwater*, *Maus*, *Persepolis* and *They Called Us Enemy*). I'm about to implement it with my sophomores, and I'm particularly looking forward to drawing connections between ELA and World History.

**Take advantage of the Wanda Ward Study Grant! Find more information [here](#).**





# SRP Newslink

## Connie Maust

Thank you to everyone who RSVPed for the Active Membership Meeting on Monday, January 26, from 3:30 to 5:00 at Sutherland. Please remember to bring any contract interest topics you might have for the Professional Advancement Committee (PAC) to review, and the Negotiations Team to potentially bring to the table next school year.

### Reminders:

- For those that work in the District Based Programs or CSE Assigned Paras working with students that have unique needs, you should receive, sign and return your extra duty contract for the second semester distributions of the stipend.
- The spring catalog of Para Academy courses will be coming soon. Remember these are paid learning opportunities and a terrific way to connect with peers from other buildings.
- Please remember to always check your pay statement for accuracy, especially if you are being asked to fill in for

absences, working extracurricular activities, or if your deductions have changed.

### Important Dates:

- January Membership Meeting & Solidarity Wear Day- January 26, 2026 @ 3:30-5:00pm (SHS)
- Pink the Rink (Tim Horton's Iceplex on the MCC Campus): January 31, 2026, JV at 5:00 and Varsity at 6:30 pm (Wear Pink)
- NYSUT Fix Tier 6 Rally- March 8, 2026 @ MVP Arena, Albany, NY
- If you are an SRP Member considering retirement in June and eligible for the Career Award and still need to submit your letter to HR, you are encouraged to review the contractual provisions and adhere to the related timelines. Please contact the PDTA office if you have any questions. The retirement guide on the PDTA website is a valuable resource and has [a sample retirement letter](#). HR needs to receive your letter by April 1st.

## Follow us on social media!



@pdtunion



@ Pittsford  
District  
Teachers  
Association  
- PDTA



@PDTAunion



## Resolution Specialist

### Jennifer Villareale

Here are some quick updates:

#### Extra Duty Contracts (Second Semester)

Be on the lookout for second semester extra duty contracts this month.

Please check your contract carefully before signing.

If something looks wrong, or if you think you should have received a contract but didn't, contact your building representative right away.

#### Medical Leave Help

PDTA has a very [helpful leave guide](#) available to members. If you are in need of a medical leave or just planning ahead, this guide should be your first stop.

After reviewing it, reach out to me, your PDTA Leave Advocate, if you have any questions or concerns.

Your contract includes many benefits; make sure you're using them!

#### Change in Certification/TEACH

Please reach out to Tammy Vanderbilt in the HR office when you have certification changes or updates.

#### Snow Day Reminder

It has always been the District's practice that any advance requested sick/personal/vacation time that happens to land on a snow day is still deducted. This is long-standing and District wide, not just applicable to PDTA.



# Member Spotlight

## *Elective Edition*



### Allen Creek Elementary Karen Wilson



**Years in the district:** 17  
**Current Subject:** K-5 Library  
**Favorite PCSD memory:** My favorite will always be having therapy dogs come in to

listen to the kids read.

**Fun fact:** Ramona Quimby was my childhood hero.

### Park Road Elementary Martha Sullivan



**Years in the district:** 4  
**Current Subject:** Librarian  
**Favorite PCSD memory:** Every time a student tells me Library is their favorite special it

melts my heart.

**Fun fact:** I have a mannequin in our library, named Gladys, that I dress up in a new fun themed outfit every week.

### Calkins Road Middle School Mark Hurley



**Years in the district:** 28  
**Current Subject:** Physical Education and Boys Varsity Soccer at Mendon  
**Favorite PCSD memory:**

The personal relationships and friendships developed over the years are what I value the most.

**Fun fact:** I'm colorblind.

### Jefferson Road Elementary Kim Chesko



**Years in the district:** 19  
**Current Subject:** General Music  
**Favorite PCSD memory:** Every single full school Flag Day ceremony becomes my new favorite memory. It fills me with joy to hear the kids sing and see the pride on their faces as they share their talents with the school and their parents.

**Fun fact:** I once won an American Idol-style karaoke contest on a cruise ship.

### Thornell Road Elementary JT Ngiaw



**Years in the district:** 1  
**Current Subject:** K-5 General Music and Chorus  
**Favorite PCSD memory:** The first week of school where I got to

meet my students!

**Fun fact:** My sister is an Emmy-nominated film composer!

### Mendon Center Elementary Lynn Grossman



**Years in the district:** 4  
**Current Subject:** Elementary General Music and Chorus  
**Favorite PCSD memory:** Concerts! I love

the excitement students bring. Plus, the sense of pride, accomplishment and relief that follows builds camaraderie in the group.

**Fun fact:** Over the summer, my husband and I built a cabin in the woods.

### Barker Road Middle School Chatham Monk



**Years in the district:** 1  
**Current Subject:** Art  
**Favorite PCSD memory:** I love my Art Club crew. In our meetings so far there is a variety

of interests. They have awesome ideas for the club and their enthusiasm is unmatched.

**Fun fact:** I love to be outside. There is no such thing as bad weather just bad clothing!

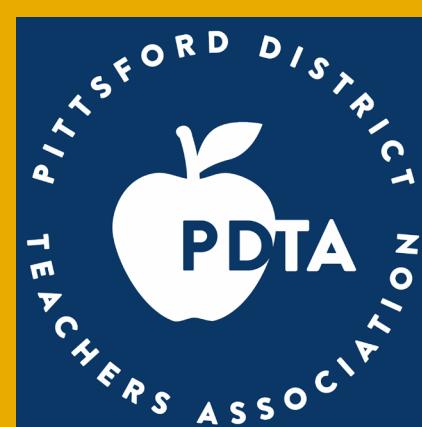
### Sutherland High School Suzanne Fess



**Years in the district:** 11  
**Current Subject:** Business Education  
**Favorite PCSD memory:** My favorite teaching memory will

always be the first week of school, when the energy is at its highest and everyone is so eager to begin.

**Fun fact:** I began waterskiing at six years old and have continued to enjoy the sport ever since.



**Would you like to be featured in the spotlight next issue? Would you like to nominate someone else?**  
**Email [marie\\_gillett@pittsford.monroe.edu](mailto:marie_gillett@pittsford.monroe.edu) so we can get to know our members!**



Another new year is upon us and with it comes the opportunity to take stock of where we are in our lives. NYSUT Member Benefits endorses numerous programs that can help with creating a plan to prepare for whatever the future brings.

**CREATE YOUR PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE UPCOMING YEAR TODAY.**

Learn more by scanning the QR code, visiting [mb-nysut.org/investinyourfuture](http://mb-nysut.org/investinyourfuture), or calling 800-626-8101.

SCAN ME



#### **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.

January/February 2026

## 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.

[ppta.logosoftwear.com](http://ppta.logosoftwear.com)

## Important Information and Dates:

- January Membership Meeting - January 26 @ 3:30 pm (SHS LGI)
- Pink the Rink - January 31st @ 5:00 pm (Tom Wahl's Iceplex)
- NYSUT Fix Tier 6 Rally- March 8, 2026 @ MVP Arena, Albany, NY
- SRP Members considering retirement in June who are eligible for the Career Award are encouraged to review the contractual provisions and adhere to the related timelines. Please contact the PDTA office if you have any questions. Your letter to HR is due by April 1st
- Wanda Ward Study Grant Application - deadline April 15
- PDTA Chicken BBQ & Budget Vote- May 19
- PCSD Retirement & Recognition Party- June 3 (Ravenwood Golf Club)
- PDTA Active Member Meeting- June 8 (SHS LGI)



Speak Out! is been edited and compiled by Murie Gillett. Feel free to contact me with any questions at [murie\\_gillett@pittsford.monroe.edu](mailto: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   1/4 Page: \$25.00   1/2 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](mailto:murie_gillett@pittsford.monroe.edu).

## Your PDTA Representative Assembly 2025-2026:

President: Stephanie Warchol \* (CRMS)

Executive Vice President: Kim Chesko \* (JRES)

Vice President for Negotiations: Dennise Zobel \* (BRE)

Secretary: Alyson Jacobs \* (ACE)

Treasurer: Ryan Domina \* (SHS)

Resolution Specialist (non-voting): Jennifer Villareale \* (MCE)

### Allen Creek Elementary

Michele Riedl, Building Representative \*

Emily Odhiambo, Assistant Building Representative

Susan Benson, Assistant SRP Representative

### Jefferson Road Elementary

Bret Burrows, Building Representative \*

Patty Steeley, Assistant Building Rep.

Heather White, Assistant SRP Representative

### Mendon Center Elementary

Nina Dezio, Building Representative \*

Erin Ciccone, Assistant Building Representative

Erin Cregan, Assistant Building Representative

Deborah Ricketts, Assistant SRP Representative

Rebecca Tan, Assistant SRP Representative

### Park Road Elementary

Jackie Bowser, Building Representative \*

Kelly Jordan, Assistant Building Representative

### Thornell Road Elementary

Greg Bischoping, Building Representative \*

Lindsay Stephens, Assistant Building Representative

Radhika Ramesh, Assistant SRP Representative

### Barker Road Middle School

Kristen Dolan, Building Representative \*

Jennifer Robinson, Assistant Building Representative

Ellen Fox, Assistant Building Representative

Karen Grace, Assistant Building Representative

Connie Maust, SRP Representative \*

### Calkins Road Middle School

Jessica Wojcik, Building Representative \*

Jaclyn Anderson, Assistant Building Representative

Jessica Bonadio, Assistant Building Representative

Farida Patrawala, Assistant SRP Representative

### Mendon High School

Samantha Hyde, Building Representative \*

Brandon Mauks, Assistant Building Representative

Erin Moses, Assistant Building Representative

Jake Thompson, Assistant Building Representative

LaShanda Clark McCadney, Assistant SRP Representative

### Sutherland High School

Amanda Marshall, Building Representative \*

Marc Hellems, Assistant Building Representative

Brian Shafer, Assistant Building Representative

Jeff Wing, Assistant Building Representative

Kelly Nanavati, Assistant SRP Representative

### Non-voting:

Irene Hopp, Retiree Representative & Whitney Sienkiewicz, Ancillary Representative

### Standing Committee Chairs:

Communications: Murie Gillett, SHS

Extracurricular: Katie Shea, SHS

Membership: Paul LeVan, SHS

Political Action: Karen Grace, BRMS

Professional Advancement: Dennise Zobel, BRE

Professional Growth: Nicole Barry, BRE

Public Relations: Kelly Jordan, PRE

Safety and Wellness: Robyn Paino, PRE

Special Events: Erica Bonin, MHS

### Delegates:

1. Stephanie Warchol

2. Kimberly Chesko

3. Katie Shea

4. Karen Grace

5. Alyson Jacobs

6. Jennifer Simons

7. Jennifer Birdsong-ng



\*Indicates Executive Committee Member