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The Real Best Of 2024 Isn't Quantifiable

With the December holidays and the approach of the new year comes a time of reflection. Online there are countless lists published that quantify the year that is ending: *Billboard's* 25 best K-Pop albums of 2024, the *New York Times* 100 best books of the year, *Variety's* 19 best TV shows of 2024, OpenTable's Top 100 restaurants of 2024, and the list (of lists) goes on.

How do you look back on your past year? Do you count and rate things, or do you reflect holistically on the experiences you had and the people you spent time with? I'm a science teacher, and I love counting and quantifying, but I don't generally try to sum up my own life that way. Maybe because, in the grand

scheme of things, it is unremarkable. I wasn't the best at anything, I didn't do the most of anything, didn't break any records. That is probably true of most of the

By nature, teaching is not a competitive profession. We know that we're better, and our students benefit, when we work together. This time of year, along with all of the year-end summations, we also see the apex of our helpful and caring natures.

people reading this. We, as educators, don't strive to make any Top 10 lists, but when we look back at the past year we can be proud of the differences that we were able to make in the lives of our students.

By nature, teaching is

not a competitive profession. We know that we're better, and our students benefit, when we work together. This time of year, along with all of the year-end summations, we also see the apex of our caring natures. Not only do we continue helping our students in the classroom, but we join forces to try to provide some holiday spirit for them outside of school, with our annual food and toy drives, and other charitable giving. No lists are needed to know the value of that.

Whether you celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, the winter solstice, or just getting time off from school, Happy Holidays!

-Sam Falk,
ATA Communications Chair



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Member Spotlight: Kathleen Vogt

Trivia Challenge

Answer the question below correctly and you could be the proud winner of ATA gear!

In 1992, which NY town passed a resolution making snow illegal?

Last month's winner was Kim Trahan from BES. She correctly identified **2019** as the year that early voting was first allowed in NY. She will be the proud owner of ATA gear. Answer this month's question and you could win ATA gear too!

Submit your answer to the above trivia question to sfalk@acsdny.org by December 31. The winner will be randomly selected from the correct submissions.



Photo courtesy of Sam Maier

UVMS health teacher Kathleen Vogt (center) presented on November 22 at NYS AHPERD's annual conference. Two former students (shown above), who are now also health teachers, attended her talk.

Kathleen Vogt isn't the kind of educator who is content to teach the same lessons year after year. Now in her 20th year teaching 8th grade health at UVMS, Vogt is always looking for ways to improve her teaching, and to help others. According to 6th grade health teacher Sam Maier, "Skills-based health education is fairly new. Kathleen helps teachers (both veteran and rookie) with how to interpret our new national standards and design great activities and valuable lessons. Last year, Kathleen served as a teaching mentor for the first time. She works closely with three new teachers and is helping to strengthen the 6th grade health curric-

ulum. Kathleen is a dedicated educator and colleague, plus a confidante for her students. She hardly looks to be in the spotlight, but she, herself, is particularly bright and humble."

At Arlington Vogt is on the district Wellness Committee, and, in the past, she has been an advisor to UVMS's yearbook and community service club, track and field coach, AHS Assistant Swim coach, ATA PR committee member, and photographer, and member of the district Wellness and Belonging Committee.

At the state level Vogt is active in the New York State Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (NYS AHPERD). She says, "I'm really lucky to have such a strong network of professionals as a result of our State Association for Health and PE teachers. I have been a member of NYS AHPERD since 2006 and because of this I've had the chance to connect with other health educators, some who are just beginning their careers. Sixth grade health ed. was added to our district curriculum in 2023, and this has led to a more formal mentorship position for me. It's been wonderful to learn from our new hires and to have the opportunity to help positively influence

this new program."

Vogt also extends herself to connect with others on the national level through the Society of Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE). She explains that this society, "serves as the voice for professionals in this field all over the United States. SHAPE works to advance professional practice and promote research in the fields of health, PE, dance, and sport. The work of SHAPE serves as the foundation for PE and Health programs around the country." She has been a member of the SHAPE America Health Education Council for two years and was recently part of a task force that created the newly released guidance document "Inclusive Practices in Health Education".

In April 2025 Vogt will begin a three year term as a council chair with SHAPE. The 10-member council meets at least once a month and consists of college professors, public health professionals, district coordinators, and school health teachers from across the country.

Reflecting on her continued passion for learning and teaching, Vogt's advice for others is to, "Stay curious. Curious about the work, curious about the students you teach. Grow your professional learning network for support and inspiration. And, give yourself grace- this work is full of ups and downs."

Which ATA member should we feature next month? Please email Sam Falk at sfalk@acsdny.org with your suggestions.

Need Money? Have a Medical Issue? You'll Be Surprised Who You Should Talk To

Like many people, I've been under the false impression that you only need to think about your retirement system when you're about to retire. It seems logical, but it's wrong. NYSTRS, the New York State Teachers' Retirement System, provides multiple valuable services that are available to you right now. Here are a few of the things that I wish I had known earlier in my career.

NEED MONEY NOW?

If you do, you can borrow from the required contributions that you've already made to the retirement system. Depending on how long you've been teaching, you might be eligible for tens of thousands of dollars in loans at an interest rate of 5.95%. And since it's your money that you are borrowing, your loans won't show up on any credit reports, and they won't affect your credit scores in any way. Repayments are made automatically by payroll deduction, so you won't have to worry about any loan-related expenses in the months of July and August. How's that for a nice teacher-friendly feature of the system! If you need money now, call NYSTRS today and see what they can do for you.

FACING SURGERY? SERIOUS ILLNESS? ROUTINE COLONOSCOPY?

If so, consider filing for "disability retirement for protection only". This one requires a little more explanation, and it touches on the issue of how NYSTRS deals with the death of an educator. In the eyes of the retirement system, there is a big difference between dying "in-service" (while still working) and dying in retirement. The amount of

money that is paid to beneficiaries in these two scenarios is strikingly different, and in most cases, the money is far better when the death occurs in retirement.

At a recent NYSTRS conference, a speaker presented a few scenarios involving a hypothetical teacher earning an annual salary of \$75,000. In the case of an "in-

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service" death, this teacher's beneficiaries would receive \$260,000. But if the teacher had been classified as "retired," the payment to beneficiaries would have been increased to \$412,500. That's a huge difference of \$152,500, and it all hinges on how this teacher was classified at the time of death. There's a similar case in a NYSTRS brochure where the difference is a whopping \$180,000! The amount of the difference will vary from person to person based on a variety of factors including salary and years of service, but the numbers will almost always be higher with a retirement classification.

Here's why this is important. If you are facing a situation of elevat-

ed risk to your health—a surgery, a critical illness, or even something as routine as a colonoscopy—you have the option to file for "disability retirement for protection only." In other words, prior to an event like a surgery, NYSTRS allows you to temporarily put in place a retirement safety net for your loved ones, even if you have no intention of actually retiring. If everything goes well with the surgery, then you can keep your "in-service" classification and continue teaching. But if the worst-case scenario happens, and you pass from complications, NYSTRS would immediately reclassify you as "retired," and your loved ones would qualify for the better beneficiary payments mentioned above.

There is literally no downside to filing for such protection, and you can do it as often as circumstances require. But it has to be done in advance, and it is well worth repeating that any failure to take this precaution could cost your loved ones over a hundred thousand dollars in their moment of greatest need. Think of it as a free insurance plan that you wouldn't be able to get anywhere else. Filing for protection only allows you to play both sides of the fence during a time of uncertainty, giving you and your loved ones the peace of mind that the best possible protections will be in place no matter what happens. If you are facing a serious illness or a medical procedure, call NYSTRS to ask about "disability retirement for protection only."

For more information visit nys-trs.org, or call 800-348-7298.

-Andrew Stock, ASM
Alternate Delegate, 2024 NYSTRS
Annual Delegates Meeting

PAGE 4 **ATA Holiday Party 2024**



The ATA's annual children's holiday party took place on December 5 at ASM. The annual movie morning fundraiser for the Arlington Education Foundation was held on December 8. *Toy Story* was shown at Roosevelt Cinemas.

ATA Movie Morning



Photos by Lara Ivchenko



2024 — 2025 ATA Officers

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Bob Maier

Elementary Vice President

Nicolle McMorris

Secondary Vice President

Greg Nieman

Vice President For Membership

Steve Hertzog

Treasurer

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OPS — Christene Way

Traver — Diana Judge

JDWR — Barbara Mackey

TIS — Heather Blatz

LMS — Bill Mueller

UVMS — Jim DeBonis

AHS — John Filor

AHS — Theresa Daleo-Stock

What's Going On?

"What's Going on" is a monthly feature of The Educator. It highlights noteworthy accomplishments by ATA members. Do you know of a colleague who deserves recognition? Let The Educator know by emailing sfalk@acsdny.org. We can't know what's going on at all of your schools without your help!

Congratulations to the following ATA members for their contributions to the Arlington community and beyond.

Master Teacher Program

Scott Adams (VF), Alicia Jazayeri (BES), Michelle Malkischer (VF), and Hung Su (AHS) have been selected to the most recent cohort of the New York State Master Teacher and Counselor program. The program, established in 2013, recognizes outstanding K-12 public school STEM teachers and counselors with a four year stipended fellowship.

Arlington High

In October, English teacher Tina Tamweber was recognized as an Educator of Excellence by NYSEC, the New York State Council of English teachers.

Science teacher Kristy Zukswert is teaching a class through the Mid-Hudson Teacher Center called "The Story of Plastics - Film Screening and Discussion" about the dangers of single-use plastic on January 8.

Beekman Elementary

Speech language pathologist Christina Gibson participated in an alumni panel discussion on pathways in communication disorders at SUNY New Paltz on October 18.



Photo Courtesy of Damian Kortan

Overlook Primary

First grade teacher Damian Kortan (above right), played with his band (Damian Ecco Band) on Thanksgiving morning for the 15th straight year to benefit Family of New Paltz. According to the charity's website, its primary functions are "Crisis intervention; emergency short-term counseling; information and referral; case management; care coordination; emergency food; and access to Adult, Adolescent, and Domestic Violence Case Management, Child Care, and Emergency Housing Services. The catchment for this office is the entire southeastern quadrant of the county."

She was able to encourage undergraduates and answer their questions.

Overlook Primary

Everyone who knows reading teacher Sarah Armstrong quickly realizes her love of literacy, learning, and teaching. Sarah's focus is always on the learners who surround her, whether in her own classroom, throughout the school, district, and now even across the whole state of New York! The 57th annual New York State Reading Association Conference in Albany on November 11, was Sarah's most recent platform; her presentation, entitled "Weaving it all Together: Featuring Knowledge Building in Literacy Through Multifaceted Ap-

proaches", drew from the Active View of Reading as well as considered the impact of childhood trauma. As a stalwart advocate for diversity and inclusivity, Sarah shared practical strategies to enhance literacy instruction in diverse classroom settings with NYSRA conference attendees.

-Karen Maher

Vail Farm

Second grade self-contained teacher Jennifer Sullivan and her students collected over 120 blankets with donations from friends and family to donate to Hope On A Mission, a local organization based out of Poughkeepsie that provides meals and other supports to homeless and addicted men and women.

NYSUT Conference Explores Tech Harms

On September 20, I attended the "Disconnected" conference in Albany, hosted by NYSUT in partnership with the NYS School Board Association, the NYS PTA, the School Administrators Association of NYS, and the Council of School Superintendents. Nearly 500 people attended this conference to explore the impact of cellphones, social media and technology on children, schools and learning. It was a disturbing and powerful reminder as to why more and more schools are becoming phone-free spaces. Although we don't see phones just yet at the primary level, we do see the impact of screen overuse in our students. Tablets and video gaming have replaced traditional forms of play that are crucial to a child's social and emotional development. As a result, we see shorter attention spans, low frustration tolerance, deficits in empathy, and an inability among our students to connect and problem solve.

One of the most memorable moments of the day was when two high school students spoke about their personal experience of attending a phone-free school. One of these



students described how (in her old school), she would actually use her phone as a social barrier to hide and avoid social interactions. Because her new school had a phone-free policy, she no longer had the ability to hide behind her device. As a result of this, she flourished, making new friends and getting more involved in school-based activities.

I came away from this conference wanting to do more for this generation of children. We regulate every other addictive industry. We know these apps are harmful. We know our kids are struggling and screen overuse puts both their men-

tal and physical health at risk. This is not about collective punishment; it's about collective protection. I think creating more phone-free spaces, starting with our schools, is one part of the bigger picture. It's going to take all of us - administrators, educators, parents, legislators - to make this happen. Our district Wellness committee is beginning to explore ways we can help disconnect our students from their devices in order for them to feel more connected to this big, beautiful world around them.

-Laura Bagnarol, OPS Social Worker

The PTA Needs Your Help!

The PTA units have reached out looking for interested ATA members to help them with two upcoming events. Steve Hertzog (shertzog@acsdny.org) represents the ATA at the monthly PTSA council meetings and would be the person to contact if you have an interest in helping out with either of these events.

The first event is a family friendly community event where the Harlem Wizards will be coming to AHS on Sunday, February 2 to play a team of volun-

teer players and coaches from the Arlington School District, including ATA members, administrators, and other familiar faces to the kids and families who will be buying tickets. There will be two games, one at 1pm and the other at 5pm. The PTA could use a few more players, and also logistical volunteers to help make this a successful fundraiser for Arts in Education programs for our elementary students.

Secondly, for many years the PTA has been the driving

force behind the Arlington MST (Math Science and Technology) Fair. Sharon Lovell has led the team for the last few years, and with her kids aging out it is time to have someone else take the wheel. The PTA is considering putting together a committee to share the work and bring this magnificent community event and opportunity for students back to its pre-COVID glory. This event usually takes place on a Saturday morning in late February or early March.

Dates to Remember



DECEMBER

- 5th—ATA Children's Holiday Party, ASM
- 8th—ATA Movie Morning
- 10th—Board of Education Meeting, 7 p.m., VF
- 23-31st—Winter Recess - No School

JANUARY

- 1st—Winter Recess - No School
- 7th—Board of Education Meeting, 7 p.m., LMS
- 10th—Deadline for June 2025 Retirement Decisions
- 20th—Martin Luther King Day - No School
- 21st—ATA Executive Council Meeting, 4 p.m., AHS Room 1432
Board of Education Meeting, 7 p.m., CAO
- 21-24th—Regents Week



FEBRUARY

- 11th—Board of Education Meeting, 7 p.m., TRP
- 14th—Professional Development Half Day
- 17th—Presidents' Day - No School
- 18th—ATA Executive Council Meeting, 4 p.m., AHS Room 1432



Announcements

Looking to get a start on your taxes before you receive your W2 form from the district? Make sure to save your December 27 pay stub. It will contain your yearly totals for salary and paycheck deductions.

Make sure to check out our web page for photos of the annual ATA holiday party and movie morning fundraiser!

Stay informed! Follow us on Facebook and Twitter, or check out www.arlingtonteachers.com for forms, photos, calendars,