



THE NEWSLETTER

of the CSA Retiree Chapter, Central New Jersey Region

Fall 2020

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Message from the Unit Leader

Lucille Vecchiarelli, Regional Unit Leader
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Dear Fellow Unit Members,

By now we have all adjusted our lives to living during a pandemic. We've added new skills to our toolbox! We Zoom, Skype, FaceTime, Google Meet and Microsoft Team. We didn't lose our book clubs, Zumba classes, yoga, museum tours, trips to exotic places home and abroad. We adapted and did them all virtually. We remained informed and were socially connected even if it was through technology. Thankfully, we have all the technology to keep us connected and informed.

YouTube is a great tutorial resource to learn to Zoom or go to Zoom.us for a tutorial to learn to Zoom before our general meeting on September 23, 2020 at 11 am. Mark Brodsky will send you the email invitation. Be on the lookout for the email and don't forget to download Zoom on your computer or phone. IT IS FREE!!

Thanks to Lark Morrison, Unit Leader of Northern New Jersey, I learned of another resource to avoid feeling lonely and isolated. It is Connect2Affect.Org (<https://connect2affect.org/>). This is an organization that provides a network of resources for anyone feeling isolated. It provides social connections for older adults.

We are an amazing group. Look at how we have adapted! We are flexible, intelligent, driven to survive. We will get our lives back, but our lives will forever be changed. We have learned how important social interactions are and will strive to maintain and deepen our relationships. We will forever be aware of how disease spreads and will do our part to contain the spread. In the upcoming months, a vaccine will be approved, and we will once again be able to meet, maybe in the fall of 2021. Until then, we will meet virtually via Zoom and emails.

See you on September 23 at 11am. Dr. Douglas Hathaway will be our guest speaker. Please prepare questions in advance for Doug.

If you need assistance, please know that we are here for you and will support you in any way we can.

Stay Safe. Stay Well. Stay Happy. Stay in Touch.

Lucille

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It has been a year like no other, one that would have been momentous even without the unthinkable happening.

When we returned to our buildings in September 2019, we had no contract, and we were battling over the thorny issue of paid parental leave. Our members stood solidly together, even if they were beyond that stage in life. Thousands of you wrote letters and rallied on the steps of City Hall. Finally, in February, our patience and solidarity paid off: We secured raises, reversion rights and much more. But the real emotional win was paid parental leave.

Just as we were celebrating, there were reports of coronavirus in Asia, then Italy. On March 1, we learned that a young woman returning to Manhattan from Iran was infected. Suddenly, a hot spot in New Rochelle. Few of us expected a bomb of disease to explode overnight. Yet, Governor Cuomo declared a state of emergency on March 7. Your union fought relentlessly to close our schools. On March 19, New York schools went dark.

At the outset of the pandemic, you rallied for our children, plunging into remote instruction. You worked with your teachers to pull students together on learn-as-you-go platforms. Some kids came up with online pranks; a few thrived; many couldn't without live contact. And some kids just didn't show up. The most economically challenged suffered most, many of them simply lacking access to these platforms.

The health and safety of absentees worried you as much as their need to learn, and you tried to track them down. Some of you delivered laptops to children's doors. Some helped launch the grab-and-go meal program. Many of you have found ingenious ways to acknowledge your students' achievements and keep alive commencement and other coming-of-age rituals.

Then, on May 25, the nation witnessed the murder of George Floyd. Following so soon after the shootings of Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, protests erupted around the country and throughout New York City. For the first time since 1943, our mayor imposed a curfew requiring that we remain indoors after 8pm. Our students needed to express themselves and they needed our reassurance. You did your best via social media and online forums.

You miss your kids and want to be with them again. But we fear losing more people. As I sit on the mayor's Education Sector Advisory Council, I remember losing two bigger-than-life union members — Principal Dez-Ann Romaine and Assistant Principal Omara Flores. When I spoke at Ms. Flores' online service, I hoped no one could see me tearing up. Her colleagues and family described a woman of stunning inner beauty, who had transformed more lives than most people ever touch. Listening from our kitchen, my wife Barbara dissolved in tears.

Because we want to spare lives, reassembling our schools feels like solving a three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle: physical, logistical and emotional. To reopen in September will take skilled and creative programming as well as sufficient resources.

Leadership teams will address the philosophy of reopening, including the paths to healing and grieving for those we've lost, for irreplaceable time on task, for missed social life, and for fear of a new surge. To program a school for student success, even under normal conditions, takes an extraordinary amount of time. The DOE must set the parameters and issue adequate budgets so that you and your team can create a schedule that best serves students.

Even if kids resist their natural need to socialize, distancing won't be enough. We will need access to soap, water and sanitizer on entry to schools, screening for signs of the virus in children and staff, and a bunch of complex health protocols. And approaching the whole issue of transportation seems like a bridge too far.

At the heart of everything, will be overcoming the emotional trauma of this pandemic and the resulting economic crisis, now compounded by a social justice protest movement that has rallied our city and the world. Some say it feels like we're living through a version of the 1918 flu pandemic, the Great Depression and the civil rights movement all at the same time.

Our children will depend on us to help them make sense of it all. Are we going to be ready to talk to them about this? That question has been eloquently raised by AFSA president Ernest A. Logan in his brief essay, *Are We Now Ready to Have a Serious Conversation about Race?*

As school leaders, many of you have led the way and have provided a safe forum for conversations. We profile three members in this issue who exemplify such efforts at constructive communication and empathy. Recently, the CSA Black Caucus provided a space for our members that included a discussion with Brooklyn Tech graduate and America's Psychologist, Dr. Jeffrey Gardere. Dr. Gardere spoke frankly about the pandemic and race in America. He offered tips for discussions with staff and students and he stressed self-care.

There will come a time when people with no direct memory of it will be talking about 2020. They won't know about it firsthand and they won't know much about the finest souls among our first responders and in our schools, who made life possible. Those who walk quietly among us, changing and saving lives, without making history. Things will get better for our students, for us and for our nation. As we head into summer and fall, I thank you again for your incredible devotion to our children and pray for your good health.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION
(from Summer 2020 Rockland-Orange-Bergen Newsletter,
Bart Bookman, Regional Leader)

Medical Conditions and COVID-19

As you probably are aware, people of any age, but especially senior citizens, who are seriously compromised with certain medical conditions, such as heart disease, diabetes or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), are more susceptible to getting the COVID-19 disease. Right now, the United States has only 4% of the world's population but has over 25% of the COVID-19 cases. Fortunately, Medicare and the Welfare Fund will cover most of the costs for diagnosis and treatments. Medicare strongly recommends that if are in the designated category for increased risk for COVID-19, you must take special protections. These are some of the recommendations:

- Do not forget to take your medicines and treatment plans as directed by your doctor.
- If you are not feeling well, CALL your doctor. Do not delay in getting emergency medical attention if it becomes necessary.
- If you must go out in public, wear a mask and keep socially distanced.

Keep in mind that Medicare covers the following related to COVID-19:

- Telehealth and virtual visits as long as it isn't related to a medical visit within the previous 7 days or doesn't lead to a medical visit in the next 24 hours (or soonest appointment available).
- COVID-19 Lab tests.
- FDA-authorized COVID-19 antibody tests if you had, or were suspected of having, COVID-19.
- COVID-19 hospitalizations; this also includes: if you were ready to be discharged from a hospital but need to stay because you contracted COVID-19.
- Although there is no approved vaccine, it will be covered when it becomes available.

COVID-19 has provided a whole new fertile ground for scammers.

Because people, especially those at risk, can be distracted by the disease, scammers have jumped in to try to get your personal information. As always, guard your Medicare card and check your Medicare Claims Summary forms for errors or possible fraud. Do not respond to anyone who alleges there is something wrong with your Medicare card and needs certain information. Just, hang up. Remember, Medicare does not call, they write.

Home Health Aides

One of the most frequently used CSA Retiree Welfare Fund benefits is the Home Health Aide. Home health aides are invaluable for people who become incapacitated as a result of injury or illness. The aide will take care of personal needs such as bathing, toileting, dressing and food needs. How Does the Benefit Work? After an annual \$100 deductible, the CSA Welfare Fund will reimburse you for 80% of your cost up to the \$10,000 annual maximum, lifetime \$30,000. In addition, the CSA Retiree Chapter will reimburse you in a separate check for an additional 20% of what the Fund reimburses you. For example, if at the start of the year, you used an aide and it cost you \$300, the Fund would reimburse you, after a \$100 deductible, \$160 (80% of \$200). The Retiree Chapter would then give you an additional

additional \$32 (20% of \$160). Your total reimbursement would be \$160 + \$32 or \$192. If you needed an aide again during the same year, there would be no deductible so you would be reimbursed 80% of the full amount. If you maximize the annual benefit each year that you use it, the \$30,000 lifetime benefit would be depleted after 3 years. However, you can spread the use of the benefit over more than 3 years by not using up the full annual benefit. For example, suppose you collect only \$5,000 of the benefit in a given year. The \$5,000 left will then roll over so that you now have \$25,000 left in the lifetime benefit, which require more than 2 years to deplete.

How do You File a Claim for a home health aide?

To file a claim, submit the following to the CSA Retiree Welfare Fund (nothing is needed for the CSA Retiree Chapter)

- A doctor's prescription showing the need for the aide.
- Proof the aide is certified.
- A log of the date and hours the aide provided service.
- Proof of payment. You will need a copy of a credit card or check payment. Cash payment is not acceptable.
- A completed Home Health Aide form. You can obtain a blank form from the CSA Welfare Fund.

Within approximately 2-3 weeks after you receive the Fund reimbursement, you should receive the Chapter reimbursement. (Thank you, Norm Sherman, Florida CSARC Liaison)

Social Security

President Trump has backed away from his threats not to sign COVID-19 assistance without a payroll tax cut. The "payroll tax cut" would cut Social Security's dedicated contributions and not even help the 40 million people who are unemployed. The "so called" tax cut would only add a few hundred dollars to each person's paycheck, but would add millions to companies who no longer have to pay the 6% as well. However, according to the New York Times of August 4th, the payroll tax will not be a forgiveness, it has to be repaid in 2021. That plan has been publicly ditched, for now. Social Security relies solely on the payroll taxes not government funding. But the Republican COVID package now includes Mitt Romney's TRUST Act. The TRUST Act would create a closed-door process to fast track cuts to Social Security and Medicare. This will not impact us but will definitely have an impact on our children who are currently working.

KEEPING YOUR BRAIN HEALTHY

Brain health is a hot topic among older adults and even a bigger concern for retirees who have rigorously challenged their own brains throughout their careers. A ritual of careful eating, and stimulating and meditative activities are part of a regimen that experts now believe is likely to help fight dementia.

Dementia is defined as a decline in mental ability severe enough to interfere with daily life, and it affects about 50 million people worldwide. About 70% of those who suffer from dementia have Alzheimer's disease—when sticky plaque builds up between the brain cells, or when strands, called tangles, grow within the cells, hindering their function and ability to communicate through the network of the brain. There is clear evidence that lifestyle choices can help fend off or slow the disease if it is already indicated.

Interventions, including exercise, maintaining social engagement, reducing smoking, and management of

hearing loss, depression, diabetes and obesity could have the potential to delay or prevent many cases of dementia. Staying physically fit is one of the best ways of slowing mental decline. 150 minutes a week of aerobic exercise (vigorous walking, swimming, jogging, yoga, etc.) helps the brain cells work better and aids in building new cells. Volunteering in community groups, reading, hobbies, researching interesting topics, playing or listening to music, taking classes, doing puzzles are also recommended activities. You need to do some things that force your brain to work and learn. Don't just focus on one thing.

WHEN NOT TO WORRY AND WHEN TO WORRY

NORMAL CHANGES AS WE AGE—Making a bad decision once in a while; missing a monthly payment; forgetting which day it is and remembering it later; sometimes forgetting which word to use; losing things from time to time.

SIGNS OF MILD COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT—Losing things often; forgetting to go to important events or appointments; having more trouble coming up with desired words than other people of the same age.

SYMPTOMS OF DEMENTIA Personality changes; memory loss; problems with language skills or having conversations; trouble paying attention; getting lost in familiar places; inability to follow instructions; becoming confused about time, people, and places; often making poor judgements and decisions; problems taking care of monthly bills; misplacing things often and being unable to find them.

ANTI-CHOLINERGIC DRUGS AND ALZHEIMER'S (Excerpted from Kaiser Health News)

Are you taking drugs such as Benadryl (for seasonal allergies), antihistamines for itching, Seroquel (an anti-psychotic for mood fluctuations), and medications for incontinence and urinary upset? An estimated one in four older adults take anti-cholinergic drugs—a wide range of medications used to treat allergies, insomnia, leaky bladder, diarrhea, dizziness, motion sickness, asthma, Parkinson's disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and various psychiatric disorders. Older adults are highly susceptible to negative responses to these medications. Since 2012, anticholinergics have been featured prominently on the American Geriatric Society's List of medications that are potentially inappropriate for seniors. To various degrees, each of these drugs block an important chemical messenger, acetylcholine. It is a chemical messenger in the parasympathetic nervous system that dilates blood vessels and regulates muscle contractions, bodily secretions and heart rate, among other functions. In the brain, acetylcholine plays a role in attention, concentration, and memory formation and consolidation. Some medications have strong anti-cholinergic properties, others less so. Among prescription medicines with strong effects are antidepressants, brand name Trofanil, antihistamines such as hydroxyzine, known as Vistaril and Atarax, antipsychotics such as clozapine known as Clozaril and FazaClo, anti-spasmodic drugs such as dicyclomine known as Bentyl and drugs for urinary incontinence such as tolterodine known Detrol. In addition to prescription medications, many common over the counter drugs have anti-cholinergic properties, including antihistamines such as Benadryl and Chlor-Trimeton and sleep aids such as Tylenol PM, Aleve PM. and Nytol. Common side effects include dizziness; confusion; drowsiness; disorientation; agitation; blurry vision; dry mouth; constipation; difficulty urinating and delirium, a sudden and acute change in consciousness. Several recent reviews have found that physicians often attribute anticholinergic symptoms in elderly people to aging or age-related illness rather than the effects of drugs.

Seniors are more susceptible to adverse effects from these medications for several reasons: their brains process acetylcholine less efficiently, the medications are more likely to cross the blood-brain barrier in their bodies

and take longer to break down the drugs. Doctors used to think that the effects of anticholinergic drugs were short term and when older adults stopped taking them, everything would go back to normal. However, research in the last 10 to 15 years has found that anticholinergic drugs would have a long term effect, possibly leading to the death of brain neurons and the accumulation of plaques and tangles associated with neurodegeneration. The thinking now is to wean older adults off anticholinergics; although the findings don't constitute proof that anticholinergic drugs cause dementia, they only show association. Seniors concerned about taking anticholinergic drugs need to consult with their primary care physician and talk about the risks versus the benefits of taking these medications. They should not try to stop on their own. It may take 3 to 6 months to slowly overcome the effects of the drugs. In most cases good treatment alternatives are available. Also, seniors should not make the assumption that if a drug is available over the counter that it is automatically safe. Finally, the article recommends that doctors should not give anticholinergic medications to people with any type of dementia. It will not only interfere with their memory but is likely to make them confused and interfere with their functioning.

———Be sure to get your flu shot this year. We still need it!

———There are some dangerous hand sanitizers out there that contain METHANOL(which is toxic), not ETHANOL (non-toxic). Many were sold by Target, Shoprite and Walmart. To get the list, google “FDA recall sanitizer list” to find the FDA site.

MEETINGS:

There will be an online meeting via Zoom as follows:

Time: Sep 23, 2020 11:00 AM

Guest Speaker: Dr. Douglas Hathaway, Administrator, CSA Welfare Fund

Check your email to see a message from Mark Brodsky with the link to this meeting.

No in-person meetings are currently scheduled

When we do schedule the next in-person meeting, YOU will be one of the first to know!

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No dues will be collected this year!!

If you have paid for 2020, the dues will be credited for 2021!

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CSA Members Arrive in the Halls of the Capital Promoting the 2020 Budget and Legislative Agenda

by Al Jurpalis

On February third and fourth of this year I was honored to represent the Central New Jersey Retiree Chapter as a lobbyist and participate in CSA's annual lobbying effort in Albany. Together with 24 of my retired CSA brothers and sisters, we trekked up to Albany to voice our union's concerns to lawmakers, as they move important legislation forward during the coming year.

In Albany we were joined by many of our active in-service members, who took time off from their busy lives in their schools to strengthen CSA's voice as we lobbied. CSA's political team could not do this important work without the invaluable input, active participation and unwavering support of all of our members retired and in-service alike.

Gabe Gallucci, CSA's Director of Governmental Affairs said, "We are the Dream Team." in this regard. In our ranks, we had a broad spectrum of exceptionally talented representatives, retired and in-service, who drew upon wide ranging experiences that helped to underscore the realities that impact our city's schools.

As we met with our assembly men, women and senators during the two days, we made them aware of key budget and legislative priorities that have broad impact on our schools, our in-service members; as well as our retiree members. It was evident by the way we interacted with our specific team-members, and in general, by the professional way we conducted ourselves, that Albany took notice of CSA and our lobbying efforts made an impact.

CSA's budget and legislative priorities that were presented to our lawmakers, spanned wide ranging concerns that impact our schools, in-service members and retiree members. The budget issues brought to the table, were a request for significant increases to school aid and a commitment to fully funding Foundation Aid, which has been long over due to properly fund our schools. We also lobbied for an increase in funding of \$100,000.00 for the Executive Leadership Institute, to help support an additional cohort of future Principals in training and continue the work of supporting our members through ELI's Professional development opportunities.

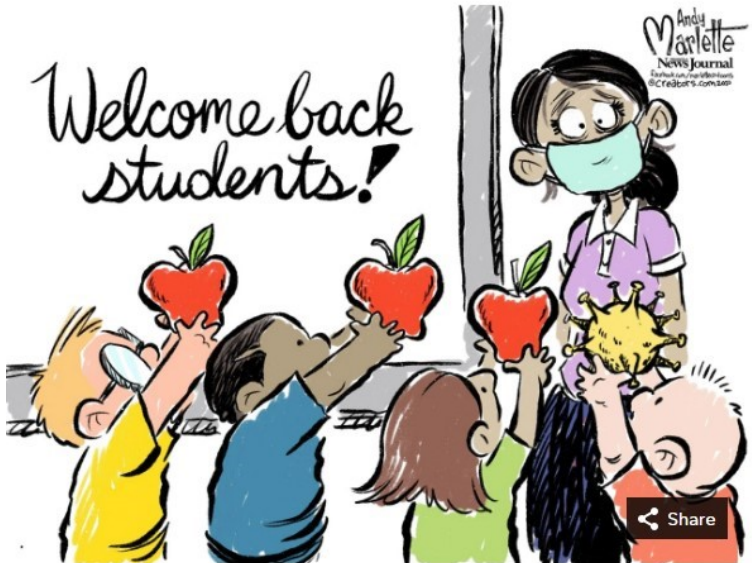
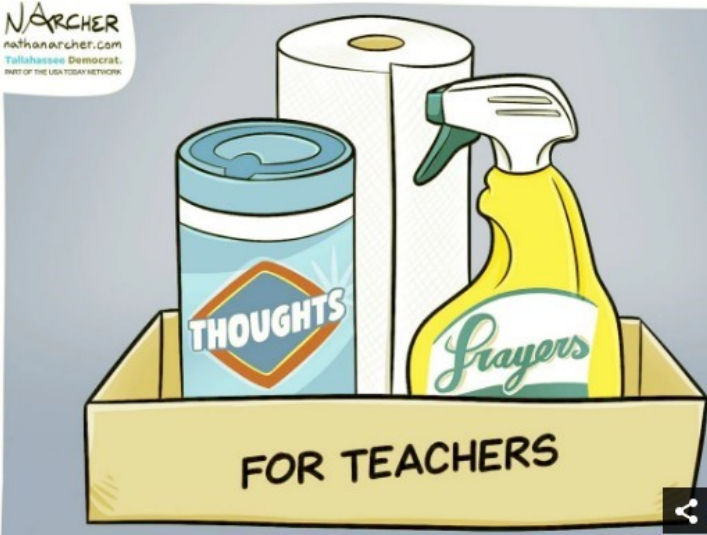
As we met with legislators, we voiced CSA's concerns regarding the Executive's proposal to increase the number of Charter Schools in New York City; as well as his proposal to merge expense-based school aid with the Foundation Aid. Our team was firm in our rejection of both proposals and drove home CSA's message.

Two other concerns were addressed with our lawmakers. Vaping has become a serious health issue as well as a disruptive issue for our schools and young people. Our team brought to light the need for Albany to address this by formulating guidelines for schools to follow; as well as provide funding for education programs to eliminate this health hazard for our young people. Support was also requested for a bill limiting the use of schools as polling sites and a request that principals be given the option of declining. Support was also requested for bill providing existing military veterans in active service in our schools on tier six reduced costs from 6% to 3% of their pension contribution.

Additional legislative priorities addressed with our lawmakers also focused on the concerns of our retiree members. Lawmakers were asked to support legislation preventing price gouging of prescription Drugs, oppose a bill calling for decreasing health insurance benefits to public employees and to pass legislation creating additional COLA's for public employee retirees.

A legislative breakfast sponsored by CSA also took place on Tuesday and was well attended by our Senators and Assembly men and women. It was encouraging to see our members in deep discussion over breakfast with our elected officials, promoting the union's agenda. Our lobbying teams had opportunities to meet with 12 different lawmakers each, over the two days and present the legislative and budget agenda of our union.

Most importantly, we were speaking with one voice committed to ensure that our elected officials heard our concerns and were receptive and responsive to our issues. We demonstrated that organized and strategic political action is crucial in influencing government and addressing the concerns and welfare of our members. Political action is an integral part of unionism and our members demonstrated that with style and grace as they moved through the halls of the capital.



Reminder

**Zoom Meeting featuring
Dr. Douglas Hathaway**

Sept. 23

11.00am

**Check your email for link sent by Mark
Brodsky**

Quick Quiz

Question: When, oh when, will 2020 end??

Answer to previous quiz: Built in 1867, after the end of the Civil War and the assassination of President Lincoln, P.S. 34 is the **oldest continuously operating Elementary School in Brooklyn**. For nearly a century and a half, P.S. 34 has been a neighborhood institution in the Greenpoint section of Brooklyn.

