



# SCHOOL-RELATED PROFESSIONALS : A HISTORY OF UNION ACHIEVEMENT

**1930** American Federation of Teachers begins to organize support staff; first are secretaries of Chicago.

**1946** Federal school lunch program starts.

**1966** Chapter 1 legislation supports paraprofessionals in classrooms.

**1970** AFT wins elections to represent paras in New York City.

**1971** AFT Convention resolution recommends organizing school personnel.

NYS regs establish teaching assistants as part of the teaching staff.

**1972** New York State United Teachers is created by merging NYSTA (New York State Teachers Association) and UTNY (United Teachers of New York).

Velma Hill, UFT para, joins AFT Executive Council, chairs new Committee on Paraprofessionals.

**1973** NYSUT becomes an AFT affiliate. AFT has first paraprofessionals conference, changes constitution to set dues categories.

**1975** AFT convention has resolutions on organizing paras, secretaries. IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) gives all students, regardless of disabilities, rights to a free, appropriate public education, spurring continued growth of School-Related Personnel in public schools.

**1978** Recognizing need for union development training, NYSUT holds its first SRP Leadership Conference in Syracuse. Baltimore para Lorretta Johnson is elected to the AFT Executive Council, named chair of the paraprofessional committee.

**1979** NYSUT forms the SRP Advisory Committee; Joan Weisbrod of Nyack Secretaries Association is first chair.

**1980** NYSUT's Maria Portalatin, United Federation of Teachers para, is elected to AFT Executive Council.

AFT publishes first issue of *AFT Reporter*, a publication for paras. It will grow to cover all support staff.

The Public Employee Safety and Health Act (PESH) becomes NYS law.

**1982** Organizing school support staff takes off in New York state as NYSUT recognizes all school employees need the benefits and protections the union provides to teachers and paras.

**1983** AFT's Paraprofessional Committee expands to 14 members to include secretaries, bus drivers, custodians, food service workers and college classified members. It is renamed the Paraprofessional and School-Related Personnel (PSRP) Committee.

**1984** AFT encourages state federations to appoint state-level PSRP committees and to offer conferences for support staff. Only 15 states have statewide committees. (NYSUT has had an SRP committee since 1979, conferences since 1978.)

**1987** AFT convention has resolutions on school bus safety and school bus seat belts.

**1988** AFT convention has resolution on health care responsibilities in special education.

NYSUT's 2-for-1 program defrays costs for SRP leaders to attend national AFT-PSRP conference.

**1989** Retirement legislation: 12-for-10 bill passes — a huge legislative victory for NYSUT.

**1990** NYSUT creates a team of four consultants to help SRP members with retirement questions.

NYSUT produces the first ERS Questions and Answers booklet for SRPs.

AFT works with National Education Association (NEA), National Association of School Nurses (NASN), Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) to create guidelines for delivery of specialized health care in the educational setting, helping staff caring for medically fragile students.

**1991** Federal Commercial Motor Vehicle Drivers License applies to school bus drivers.

**1992** The PSRP Committee becomes the PSRP Program and Policy Council (PPC) and adds six new members; its chair, AFT Vice President Lorretta Johnson, joins AFT Executive Committee.

**1994** NYSUT's inaugural SRP of the Year award goes to Claire Quirk, a secretary from Massapequa, Long Island.

**1995** AFT-PSRP Task Force is appointed, conducting nationwide poll of PSRP members for the AFT.

School transportation workers are subject to federal drug and alcohol testing regs.

NYS Ed. Dept. issues guidelines on use of teacher aides and teaching assistants.

**1997** NYSUT President Tom Hobart launches SRP Task Force to shape service to SRPs.

NYSUT creates post of SRP coordinator, naming Margaret MacCartney to work with task force.

NYSUT appoints SRPs to standing committees.

**1998** SRP members Shelly Abrams, Sandra Carner, Glenn Lucas and Minnie Wheeler elected at-large directors to the NYSUT Board.

NYSUT President Hobart appoints Wheeler, a teaching assistant from Hempstead, as first SRP member of NYSUT Executive Committee.

Retirement system changes from 10- to five-year vesting after aggressive NYSUT lobbying.

**1999** NYSUT initiates SRP workshops at Local Presidents' Conference prior to Representative Assembly.

NYSUT institutes VOTE-COPE awards for SRP locals at the SRP Leadership Conference.

**2000** NYSUT's Education & Learning Trust creates an SRP Professional Development Program of workshops delivered by trained SRP members.

AFT/PSRP department launches a professional development initiative to help affiliates advocate for SRP training in districts.

Permanent pension COLA is enacted after huge NYSUT rally; NYSUT wins elimination of 3 percent contribution after 10 years of service.

**2001** Federal government amends drug and alcohol regs for school transportation workers.

**2002** NYSUT publishes first issue of *SRP NewsLink* for leaders.

At RA, NYSUT elevates status of SRPs by changing their title from School-Related Personnel to School-Related Professionals.

NYSUT's SRP Professional Development Program receives the national Union Builders award from the AFT.

**2004** NYSUT convinces State Ed to agree that teaching assistants tenured by 2006 are qualified under NCLB.

**2005** NYSUT provides guidance, coursework, workshops and test prep materials in helping thousands of teacher aides become teaching assistants and come into compliance with NCLB.

NYSUT creates the Program Services department which houses the SRP program along with the New Member, Health and Safety, Training, and Retiree programs. Program Services is overseen by NYSUT Vice President Kathleen Donahue.

**2006** NYSUT's SRP Professional Development Program receives the national Excellence in Education award from the AFT.



A historic vote at the NYSUT Representative Assembly merges together NYSUT and NEA/NY into one unified union. This merger joins NEA-ESPs (Education Support Professionals) with NYSUT School-Related Professional members to bring total SRP membership close to 90,000.

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# KEY to the photos on the front:

Top row, left to right:  
SRP leaders Minnie Wheeler, Florence Fidell and Glenn Lucas at a 1993 NYSUT SRP conference.

In the wake of merger in 2006, ESP (Education Support Professionals) leaders from former NEA/NY locals meet NYSUT President Richard Iannuzzi, Secretary-Treasurer Ivan Tiger and Vice President Kathleen Donahue.

SRP members and then-NYSUT President Tom Hobart sing “Solidarity Forever” at NYSUT’s 2001 SRP Leadership conference in Buffalo.

Middle row, left to right:  
Members of NYSUT's SRP Advisory Committee with a Membership Growth award from the AFT at a national conference in 1996.

Members of the School Secretaries Union of Chicago, the AFT’s first support staff local, with school board members in a 1955 photo.

UFT President Al Shanker and legendary activist Bayard Rustin at an October 1970 rally to save paraprofessional jobs in New York City.

Secretaries and paraprofessionals from the United Federation of Teachers receive a 1999 NYSUT award for VOTE-COPE efforts in political action: From left, Shelvy Young Abrams, Maria Portalatin, Jackie Ervolina and Doreen Raftery.

Bottom row, left to right:  
A button from a 1980s national AFT/PSRP conference.

SRPs forge bonds in 2005: From left, Jo Ann Sweat; Lynn Romanick; Sandra Carner-Shafran; and Debbie Minnick.

SRP leaders present a donation of \$10,000 for hurricane relief to Vice President Kathleen Donahue. From left, Pat Weinwurm, Deb Paulin, Donahue, Laura Harper of the Jefferson Parish (La.) FT and Margie Brumfield.

Bert Boehm and Arlene Hanley discuss priorities for one of the first NYSUT SRP Advisory Committee meetings.

Velma Hill meets with New York City paraprofessionals in 1971.