



# *District 75 News*



**David Doorga**

## **To my District 75 family,**

Thanksgiving is my favorite holiday. For my entire life, I have celebrated with my biological family, blending the foods and culture of my Indo-Caribbean grandparents with the traditionally American Thanksgiving dishes. And for my entire adult life, I have shared a communal feast with my fellow District 75 UFT members and our students. We gathered together to share what we had — a feast where every UFT member contributed a specialty dish year after year. Every child and every UFT member enjoyed the banquet as we took an afternoon to be grateful for each other, for our calling to teach special education, and our union. It was a tradition where the staff and students transcended simply being a District 75 school and became a real family. We often spend more time involved and engaged with our co-workers and students than we do with our

biological families — let's count our blessings and be grateful for each other.

Another thing that we are profoundly grateful for is the UFT Paraprofessional Chapter. You have probably heard me saying that the paraprofessionals are the backbone of District 75, and I truly believe that. It is remarkable to me that this year celebrates the 50th anniversary of the Paraprofessional Chapter. 1968 was a year of revolutionary change in the United States, and I truly feel that the creation of the Paraprofessional Chapter was one of the great social justice advancements of the 1960s. Today the chapter is 25,000 members strong, led by the incredible Shelvy Young-Abrams (please [read her biography](#) on the UFT website – what an amazing story), and people are still benefiting from the UFT contract which allows people early release time to attend classes. I began my career with the DOE as a paraprofessional, and the number of paraprofessionals who have advanced to becoming teachers, school psychologists, related service providers, assistant principals and principals is proof that the UFT helps the American dream happen every day. Happy Thanksgiving to all of you and your families.

Stay Strong, Stay United, We are One.

As always, I am very honored to serve as your district representative.

In unity,

David Doorga  
District 75 Representative



## For Baby Boomers and Gen Xers: Those Who Aspire to Retire

One of the most complex dilemmas facing UFT members who are thinking about retiring soon is striking a balance between timing retirement and funding children's college tuition. For so many of us, myself included, the UFT's hard-won contractual battle allowing paraprofessionals to attend classes while working full time with benefits made all the difference in the trajectory of our professional lives. Becoming a paraprofessional allows a person the opportunity to embark upon a career with advantages and benefits which are not offered in any other field of employment.

However, you may find that you are being asked to co-sign loans or pay tuition which will negatively affect your own financial security and your hard-earned retirement. The first step is to have a frank and honest discussion about what you can realistically afford. We tend to shield our children from the hard realities of finance, but these conversations need to take place before college applications are written or college visits take place. The last thing you want is for your child's heart to be set on an expensive private school that will endanger your financial security. Also, have a career in mind as part of the college selection process. Even if your child is convinced that she will be the next Lady Gaga, please make sure that your student will graduate with a skill or profession that will pay the bills while he or she auditions.

Finally, keep in mind that you have earned that secure retirement. It is yours, and you should not allow anyone to jeopardize that financial well-being. Be compassionate, but intelligent, and remember that there are hundreds of different ways to support a child.

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## The Plan Book

In conjunction with this month's theme of being thankful for what we have, please spare a moment to think of the California communities devastated by the fires which are, as of this writing, raging uncontrollably. I heard that the people of several communities were given exactly one hour to grab their most precious belongings and evacuate.

We prepare for the worst while hoping for the best at school through fire and other safety drills. Take a moment and check to make sure that all of your parent contact numbers and emergency numbers are up to date and correct them if any are incorrect. Be sure that more than one person has this information and is ready to use it in case contacting parents becomes essential.

Then take a look around your home. Imagine being told that you have one hour to gather your most precious belongings and leave, then set a timer and have a trial run! Do you know where your passport is? How about your children's baby pictures? Do you have a pet carrier ready to go? I pray that no one in the District 75 family ever has to face such an emergency evacuation, but it is worth thinking about. Consider this — our schools must conduct a minimum of 12 safety drills per year. How many safety/evacuation drills have you ever run in your own home?

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## Paid parental leave

Thanks to a public campaign by thousands of union members, the UFT became the first public-sector union in the history of New York City to negotiate paid parental leave for the people it represents. The UFT secured paid parental leave for UFT-represented employees in June 2018



after months of intense negotiations with the Department of Education. The policy provide six weeks of time off at full salary for maternity, paternity, adoption and foster care leave. The policy provides six weeks of time off at full salary for maternity, paternity, adoption and foster care leave. When combined with current sick leave provisions, the new policy will allow birth mothers to take up to 12 to 14 weeks of paid leave after giving birth. Eligible UFT-represented employees must apply for paid parental leave at least 15 days in advance of the anticipated date of the birth (or other covered event) using the [Self-Service Online Leave Application System \(SOLAS\)](#). After the actual date of the birth or covered event, you have 10 calendar days to notify the DOE via SOLAS. Using SOLAS, you must submit the required documentation no more than 21 calendar days after the birth or event. The [paid parental leave section](#) of the UFT website has more details about eligibility and the application process as well as many helpful links. For more information, read the [UFT's FAQ on paid parental leave »](#)

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## **A dental plan for noncovered relatives of UFT members**

The UFT's Direct Access Dental Plan provides access to quality dental care at a discounted rate to UFT members' family members not covered by the regular UFT dental plan. Parents, married children up to age 26 and other relatives of UFT members may take advantage of this plan, in addition to UFT family child care providers, part-time employees and per-diem substitutes without benefits.

Working in cooperation with 700 dentists who belong to the Self-Insured Dental Services (SIDS) plan in the New York City area, this plan can significantly reduce dental costs for these people. With individual plan rates of \$36 a year and family rates of \$48 a year, your noncovered family members have access to a panel of dentists — from general practitioners to specialists — who will charge a discounted, prenegotiated rate that is published in the schedule of benefits.

Here's how it works: As a Direct Access Dental Plan subscriber, you schedule a visit with one of the 700 dentists in the plan. You are responsible for paying the dentist at the time of service. Your charges, as indicated in the [dental schedule](#) of payments listed will be significantly lower than your dentist's usual and customary charges. There are no frequency limits or exclusions, no claim forms to file, no pre-authorization required, no maximums and no deductibles.

For more information on how the plan works, visit [UFT Direct Access](#) or download the [application and a brochure](#) about the plan.

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## **Other member benefits**

In addition to health and pension benefits and a variety of member help programs, the UFT and its affiliates offer UFT members a variety of discounts and promotions through various programs. These range from serious matters like long-term care insurance to lighter things like movie tickets.

### **[Just for Fun](#)**

The UFT's Recreational Activities Department runs a beloved program called "Just for Fun" – which is pretty much what it sounds like, discounts and group trips that help restore the soul and ease the mind through fun activities.



## NYSUT Member Benefits

Our state affiliate, the New York State United Teachers, offers a broad range of discounted services, including insurance benefits, financial and legal services, and store discounts.

## AFT Member Benefits

The AFT offers benefits, discounts and promotions to its members with its AFT+ Member Benefits Program. These benefits can only be accessed by visiting the [AFT+ Member Benefits page](#) and logging in with your UFT/NYSUT member ID.

## UFT Member Discounts

Using the same bargaining power the union devotes to negotiate strong contracts for its members, the UFT has negotiated special member-only discounts for apparel, gifts, travel and more through our UFT-Mobile app. The list of vendors that have agreed to offer special discounts to UFT members is growing each week. These member-only discounts are available only through our UFT app.

## UFT Merchandise

The UFT Just for Fun department offers many quality items that are practical to own and make great gifts. Plus, they all bear the UFT logo, which lets you show your union solidarity while looking stylish.

## Solar Power

UFT members who live in New York State and are interested in cutting their electric bill while also helping the environment can participate in a [UFT Member Benefits-endorsed solar program](#). American Solar Partners offers a [free solar assessment](#) to show homeowners how they can potentially save thousands of dollars on electricity through owning a solar system. Check out the New York Times article, [Is New York Ready for Solar Power?](#)

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## Donate a new toy

The UFT, in collaboration with the Coalition for the Homeless, needs our help to make this holiday season a joyous one for girls and boys without a permanent home. Donate an unwrapped, new toy for children and teens — newborn to 16. Members may bring donations to UFT borough offices. Chapter leaders and delegates may also bring donations to the Dec. 12 Delegate Assembly. We will accept donations until Monday, Dec. 10. For details, including borough office contact information, see the [Share in the Season of Joy flier](#).

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## Report safety incidents

UFT members must report school safety incidents, especially for line-of-duty injury and Workers' Compensation claims, to the school's administration within 24 hours. Members should use the UFT's online and confidential [Safety Incident Report](#) to notify us about the incident. A UFT health and safety specialist will follow up within 48 hours. The UFT Safety and Health Department with



specialists in every UFT borough office can also assist schools with environmental health issues including school construction concerns, air quality testing, the presence of mold and pest control. UFT Safety and Health Department representatives, on request, can conduct a safety walkthrough at schools to help improve overall school culture and climate. They're also available to speak at chapter meetings about incident reporting, environmental issues and school safety protocols. Please use this UFT online form to [request a school visit](#).

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## In the event you are arrested

If you are arrested for any reason, even for civil disobedience and even if it happens out of state, you must immediately contact the Office of Personnel Investigations: call 718-935-2666 or email [OPlarrestnotifications@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:OPlarrestnotifications@schools.nyc.gov). You must also notify your principal. If you are arrested on school property and/or for anything related to your job, please immediately contact your district representative.

Paraprofessionals gained several new protections in 2016 as a result of the UFT's union-initiated grievance that challenged the unfairness of automatic suspensions for paraprofessionals who have been arrested. Under a Department of Education policy issued on March 22, 2016, paraprofessionals arrested on the job or on their own time, now have a new review procedure to determine if a suspension without pay is warranted. For more details about the policy, [read the New York Teacher article](#).

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## Upcoming District 75 Events

**Tuesday, Dec. 4:** District 75 Brooklyn Meet & Greet at the UFT Brooklyn borough office, 3:30 to 6 p.m. [Directions »](#)  
[Register now »](#)

**Thursday, Dec. 6:** District 75 Staten Island Meet & Greet at the Richmond Republic at 4459 Amboy Rd., 3:30 to 6 p.m. [Directions »](#)  
[Register now »](#)

**Wednesday, Jan. 30, 2019:** District 75 tenure workshop at UFT headquarters, 3:30 to 6 p.m. [Directions »](#)  
[Register now »](#)

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## Send me your feedback about this newsletter

Thank you for all your feedback about our newsletters. I have enjoyed reading your thoughts and suggestions, and I will be addressing topics of interest from time to time in this and future newsletters. So keep reading and continue sending your feedback.

As your representative, I hope to communicate with you often about topics that are of help and interest to you. If you haven't already, please fill out this online form to let me know what you found most valuable in this month's newsletter and how I can improve it.



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## Stay in touch!

For news alerts and important information about your rights and benefits as a UFT member, [sign up on the UFT website](#), opt in for [text messaging](#), "like" the [UFT on Facebook](#), follow the [UFT on Twitter](#) and read the [New York Teacher](#).



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