



CAMPUS Retaliation at York

Admin reacts
against
a union
member who
spoke out.

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OUR LEGISLATION

OUR CONTRACT

Governor Kathy Hochul's Executive Budget provides a good starting point for the PSC to win budget increases for CUNY. Winning a fair budget will be a big advance in securing the funding necessary to support the union's contract campaign.

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The Spring term begins

The Omicron variant has disrupted everyone's plans for the new year. Faculty and staff fear worker health and safety is not on CUNY Central's mind.

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A PSC leader moves on

Naomi Zauderer has worn many hats in her role as the PSC associate executive director, training union activists and leading the staff for more than a decade.

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CUNY fails Spring semester start

By ARI PAUL

Omicron ravaged New York City in January and CUNY was no exception. More students opted for online classes, affecting the enrollment of many in-person classes. The PSC responded to the crisis, demanding that college presidents “allow under-enrolled Spring semester classes to go forward as planned and to shift to online courses as appropriate to keep adjuncts on [the] payroll and maintain health insurance for insured adjuncts.” In a statement, the union also demanded that CUNY negotiate and clarify the state’s employee vaccine mandate, expand testing and provide medical-grade masks to all CUNY community members.

Although CUNY Central stuck to a mandate requiring that a minimum of 70% of classes be in-person for far longer than facts on the ground warranted, the union succeeded in preventing many layoffs and course cancellations by pressuring college administrations to reduce class size minimums and move classes online. Campus PSC activists also successfully helped reverse many denials for remote work requests for members.

NO CLARITY

However, CUNY failed to clarify implementation deadlines and processes for the faculty and staff vaccine mandate by the start of the semester, despite the union’s persistent demands to negotiate these questions. At press time, the University had also failed to address the union’s demands for masks and expanded testing. Union leaders noted that CUNY’s refusal to go remote for the first two weeks of the semester was unsurprising given the political climate.

Students, faculty and staff mobilized with urgency against a chaotic start to the semester.

Members rallied at Bronx Community College (BCC) and Medgar Evers College on the first day of the semester, January 28, in response to CUNY administration’s failure to adequately address safety concerns. At the Medgar event, the PSC gave away masks, while at the Bronx rally, Sharon Utakis, PSC vice president for community colleges and a former BCC chapter chair, spoke about the concerns around classes with low enrollment.

“Some colleges have been allowing small classes to run and have shifted some courses online, but it’s been very last minute and disorganized. Here at BCC, at the end of last week, some low-enrolled, in-person classes were converted to online. But it was a mess. Only classes with fewer than five students could be converted. I had a class with six,” said Utakis.

She added, “I know that some students and faculty desperately want to go back to in-person classes, but many do not. CUNY management didn’t listen to that and didn’t plan for that, and they insisted on counting hybrid classes as online, which is contrary to how they were counted in the past.”

Adjuncts hurt by class cancellations



Rosa Squillacote, PSC vice president of part-time personnel, addressed members at a Bronx Community College rally.

At the Medgar rally, City Council Member Crystal Hudson, whose district includes the college, said, “The demands are clear: come to the negotiating table in good faith, provide workplace protections and work with faculty and staff to address the impact of under-enrollment.”

PSC President James Davis (see President’s message, p. 12) explained in a recent *Daily News* op-ed, “One-third of the 105 academic department chairs across CUNY who responded to our recent survey report[ed] pressure from the administration to cancel low-enrolled, in-person classes. These departments and their faculty complied with a uniform administrative requirement, revising and resubmitting schedules repeatedly and in good faith. Colleges made commitments to faculty and students. CUNY must now avoid canceling classes due to low enrollment.”

ENROLLMENT DECLINES

Enrollment declines coupled with CUNY’s miscalculations have taken a disproportionate toll on adjunct instructors.

“Because the CUNY administration has so badly mismanaged the response to COVID-19, many colleges have faced severe enrollment crises this semester,” said Rosa Squillacote, the PSC vice

president for part-time personnel. “Some colleges have responded by lowering class sizes, a reminder that oversized classes are always a choice of the administration. But other colleges have simply canceled



On the first day of classes, PSC members rallied outside of Medgar Evers College to protest CUNY’s failure to clarify health and safety measures needed at colleges across the university system.

classes and adjuncts are just now being notified that they won’t have the classes, and thus income, they relied on.”

David Klassen, an adjunct assistant professor of ethnic and race studies at Borough of Manhattan Community College, said CUNY’s intransigence has shortchanged adjunct faculty and students alike. He told *Clarion* in an email, “Online classes are largely full and even have waitlists, while in-person classes are under-enrolled and likely to be cut as they fall below the set minimums. But instead of moving these classes online, administrators are stubbornly clinging to a 70/30 breakdown of in-person to online classes.”

HURTING STUDENTS

Klassen added that this amounted to a “back-to-normal, back-to-work” ideology that would inevitably leave students behind in their studies. “We know from previous studies that many of these students will not be able to make this up later,” he said.

Senior faculty members like Glenn Petersen, a professor of anthropology at Baruch College, fear that CUNY Central’s lack of leadership will force union members like him to choose between retirement and continuing to work in what many feel is an unsafe environment.

“The way CUNY is stumbling around makes it likely that for my own health and safety – at 75, I’m a lot more physically vulnerable than I’d like to admit – I will have to abandon an institution I’ve called home for a half century,” Petersen said.

That could have devastating consequences, not just for teaching, but for the entire university.

AN EXODUS?

“If enough of CUNY’s senior faculty determine that they cannot hang on, the university will be left without a cohort who is deeply devoted to its success and able to see us through this latest challenge,” Petersen said. “CUNY Central very much needs to think about the unintended consequences of its equivocations and find ways to make us all feel a lot safer and a lot more trusting in our leadership.”

The PSC has many political allies who have amplified the call to ensure health and safety on CUNY campuses for students, faculty and staff. State Assembly Member Yudelka Tapia and City Council Member Crystal Hudson both spoke at the January 28 union rallies. The PSC also received additional statements of support from City Council Member Rita Joseph and City Council Committee on Higher Education Chair Eric Dinowitz.

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PSC sees progress in budget process

By ARI PAUL

In Governor Kathy Hochul's Executive Budget for the 2023 fiscal year, she makes clear she is not the kind of penny-pinching, anti-public-sector executive her predecessor was. The governor's proposal presents an opportunity for the PSC as the union engages in the spring's state budget negotiations and a difficult fight to secure funding for a just, collective bargaining agreement with CUNY.

Governor Hochul unveiled her budget proposal in January, the first step in a monthslong budget negotiation process with the legislature. Under the New York State Constitution, the Executive Budget must be approved no later than April 1. At this stage in the process, the PSC usually braces for flat budget proposals for CUNY – or worse, devastating cuts to a university system that has been chronically underfunded for decades. Former Governor Andrew Cuomo, who resigned last year, was notorious for starting the year off with a declaration of austerity funding to undercut unions and public agencies.

SOME INCREASES

Hochul's budget proposal did not fully fund New Deal for CUNY legislation, but she did offer funding increases that put the union in a better negotiating position than any in recent memory.

"Governor Hochul has announced a combined \$1.5 billion increase in operating support for CUNY and SUNY over the next five years, including an additional \$170 million for CUNY senior colleges next year.... It's heartening to see that Governor Hochul is acting decisively to begin reversing the years of austerity funding for CUNY, New York's most powerful force for economic mobility for low-income New Yorkers, immigrants and students of color," the union said in a statement.

"We thank the governor for her proposed senior college funding increase, made without increasing tuition, and her plan to hold community college funding harmless against temporary COVID-related enrollment losses. We are also encouraged by the governor's plans to expand campus childcare and reform the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP)," the statement continued.

"After many years of disinvestment, CUNY needs this increased state funding and we look forward to reviewing the budget in detail. CUNY identified \$313 million in needed investments in its University Budget Request, and our students need additional full-time mental health counselors and academic advisors. PSC members are ready to work with the governor and the legislature to further increase the state's investment in CUNY and to enact the New Deal for CUNY legislation so that the public college students of New York City can have the free, fully-funded, high-quality education that they deserve."

A good starting position



Desiree Rios



Dave Sanders

State Senator Andrew Gounardes, left, and Assembly Member Karines Reyes are coauthors of the union-backed New Deal for CUNY.

In the governor's Executive Budget Briefing Book, she "provides SUNY and CUNY with \$106 million – \$53 million each – to hire additional full-time faculty at both four-year colleges and community colleges. This investment will fund an estimated 880 additional full-time faculty – 340 at SUNY and 540 at CUNY, including support for CUNY's plan to convert adjuncts to full-time faculty."

Funding for the next contract

The union embraced the additional funding proposed, but it will continue to push for elements of the New Deal for CUNY, including the hiring of more academic advisors and mental health counselors. Student activists and the union have repeatedly testified before the New York City Council this past year on CUNY's mental health staffing levels, which, in proportion to the student body, average much lower than those at national colleges across the country.

BREAK FROM THE PAST

In general, Hochul's budget proposal departs sharply from the austerity proposals often made by her predecessor. That's a positive sign for those committed to greater public investment as she campaigns for a full term as governor in the primary and general elections later this year. The fact that the editorial board of the *New York Post* hates Hochul's budget proposal is a testament to how much it deviates from the austerity program that has steered Albany for the last decade. The *Post's* loss can be construed as a gain for union members, working people and public institutions throughout the state.

The *New York Times* noted that Hochul offered "a record-high proposal that is about \$4.3 billion larg-

er than the budget approved last year," and that she "finds herself in the politically enviable position of leading a state in good financial health, boosted by a rebound in tax revenues, including \$5 billion more than originally expected in annual receipts over the next four years."

The *Times* noted that her budget director, Robert Mujica, who is also a member of the CUNY Board of Trustees, said this was "the first time that the state's budget division had published a financial plan with no budget gaps in any year; previous governors typically forecast billions of dollars in deficits in years ahead."

Luke Elliott-Negri, the PSC legislative representative, told *Clarion*, "The governor made a political commitment of \$1.5 billion to CUNY and SUNY over the next five years, including money for new full-time faculty, to close the TAP gap and hold community colleges harmless this year. It is a distinctly favorable environment in which to engage the legislature to pass the New Deal for

CUNY now, which is precisely what we must do across this whole union between now and April 1."

ADJUNCT JUSTICE

One major goal of the PSC in the long-term budget fight is to convert some adjunct lines to full-time lines. Rosa Squillacote, PSC vice president for part-time personnel, said of the governor's proposal to add 500 full-time faculty positions: "Those positions should prioritize adjuncts who have well-established teaching careers in CUNY. The PSC should push hard to get commitments for more conversion lines, and we should continue saying openly and frequently that we expect full-time hires to prioritize adjuncts."

The PSC's work hardly stops there, however. The union is still working with the CUNY Rising Alliance and its growing number of political allies in the state legislature to pass the New Deal for CUNY, a bill which would make CUNY tuition-free, add full-time faculty, mental health counselors

and academic advisors, increase pay for adjuncts and invest in infrastructure and the physical maintenance of CUNY campuses. The bill is authored by State Senator Andrew Gounardes and State Assembly Member Karines Reyes. They are both CUNY graduates. In February and March, the union is also planning to lobby its allies in the state legislature to increase funding for CUNY's maintenance and operating costs and investment in more faculty and counselors.

THE FIGHT CONTINUES

Remysell Salas, an adjunct lecturer in ethnic and race studies at the Borough of Manhattan Community College and campaign director of CUNY Rising Alliance, said that the alliance would remain "very active" in campaigning for the New Deal for CUNY, the PSC-backed bill aimed to eliminate "in-state tuition for undergraduate students, and deliver high-quality education to all regardless of race or income."

Spectrum News reported in January on the PSC's advertising campaign in support of the New Deal for CUNY, saying that the union has "proposed [a] \$1.7 billion package over five years that is backed in the legislature." The report added, the "campaign also comes after Governor Kathy Hochul last week proposed a \$216 billion budget that would boost spending at both the City University of New York and State University of New York systems."

Winning state funding increases for CUNY's operational budget and passing the New Deal for CUNY are just two of the several steps leading up to the union's next contract campaign (the current PSC-CUNY contract expires in February 2023). In prior rounds of negotiations,



Office of the Governor

Governor Kathy Hochul has proposed funding for new full-time faculty at CUNY.

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Disciplined for protecting fellow members

By ARI PAUL

Freya Pritchard, a professor of mathematics and computer science at York College and a PSC alternate delegate, simply wanted to protect the health and safety of her fellow union members. For that she's being disciplined by her college's administration, a move that the York PSC chapter says is part of a broader trend of trying to suppress faculty activism on the Queens campus.

In early September of last year, higher education officers alerted their PSC chapter about a busted pipe that had caused flooding in the Academic Core Building where their financial aid office was located. A delegation of union activists, including Pritchard, participated in a safety walk-through of the building on September 23, along with Charles Bozian, York's interim vice president for finance and administration.

On the walk-through, Pritchard brought up a concern about the existence of mold in the building, which she had said had been a problem in the past. While Pritchard remembers that Bozian was initially dismissive of her concern, he instructed Pritchard to alert him immediately if she saw any instances of mold, she told *Clarion*.

'SPECK OF MOLD'

Following the meeting, Pritchard returned to her office in the Academic Core Building and found a small speck of mold on one of her books, something that has happened many times in the past. She then went to Bozian's office and demanded to speak to him, but was informed that he was on Zoom call. When he eventually emerged, she says she showed Bozian the speck of mold on the book while standing about five feet away from him.

"He started freaking out," Pritchard said. "I was told to leave, and I did. I cleaned the mold off the book. I assumed that was the end of the story."

But it wasn't. In November, Pritchard was informed by York administration that she was under investigation for threatening Bozian with a moldy book, a charge she believed was absurd considering she was simply trying to show it to him. In retrospect, Pritchard wished she had brought a fellow union member to the meeting to act as a witness.

On December 21, the college's chief attorney, Russell Platzek, issued Pritchard a "letter of guidance," stating that while Bozian was in a meeting when Pritchard arrived at his office, she "insisted that his meeting be interrupted." When Bozian came out to talk to her, she held "out the book, saying it was contaminated with mold," and she "could be heard using abusive language as [she] left the office."

Platzek said that it "is substantiated that [Pritchard] acted in a disruptive manner" and that she "engaged in behavior that placed others in rea-

York College retaliates against activists



Freya Pritchard, a York College math professor, says she has been singled out for advocating for safety on campus.

sonable fear for their safety." While he did concede that "it is assumed that the actual danger of mold from the book was minimal," there was no way for the people in Bozian's office to know that at the time.

A letter of guidance in CUNY disciplinary procedure could be perceived as a relatively minor action against a senior professor, though a similar action would be more serious for a non-tenured faculty member.

Pritchard had feared after being told there would be an investigation that the college might issue something more substantial, like a letter of reprimand. But a letter of guidance is

no mere slap on the wrist, either. The letter will be placed in her personnel file – where she has a union right enshrined by Article 19 in the PSC-CUNY contract to submit comments, rebutting information in the letter. The letter of guidance does state that further misconduct could result in more serious consequences, including termination.

CHILLING EFFECT

Pritchard and Ian Hansen, the York College PSC chapter chair, say the letter could have a chilling effect on union organizing and sends a message that aggressive health and safety advocacy could land faculty, professional staff or anyone else in trouble.

"The incident described in the letter of guidance, even to the extent their account is accurate, should have simply tipped off the administration to two things: one, there is indeed mold in the building, and two, faculty and staff are angered at having their repeatedly expressed concerns about this dismissed," Hansen told *Clarion*. "The proper response of [Interim Vice President] Bozian to

Freya should have been, 'I'm so sorry for appearing to have dismissed your concerns. We will look into the situation right away.'"

Hansen, an associate professor of psychology, views the disciplinary action against Pritchard as an example of DARVO (deny, attack and reverse victim and offender), is a common manipulation strategy for psychological abusers.

ABUSIVE TACTICS

"This kind of DARVO inversion of reality could have a chilling effect on advocacy for the health and safety of college community members, as well as any kind of advocacy for the rights and welfare of PSC members," Hansen said. "It could also, however,

have an enraging and galvanizing effect that mobilizes more people to stand up for member health, safety and union advocacy rights. I hope it is the latter."

Pritchard isn't alone. Several other York faculty members have had troublesome run-ins with York administration after advocating for health and safety on campus.

"It is no coincidence, in my view, that several of us who were on the PSC-CUNY walk-throughs have been met with poor treatment following this," said Donna Chirico, a professor of behavioral sciences at York. "As a former dean and longtime member of the York faculty, I was able to take Interim Vice President Bozian and [Executive Director of Facilities Man-

agement] [Onyekachi] Akoma into spaces that were not in the pristine condition as the newly renovated labs faculty were shown during the first walk-through. In fact, it is bizarre that I showed them spaces they had never visited previously despite the claim that they had assessed 95% of the campus. I had several negative interchanges with Bozian about the lack of key card access for faculty teaching on campus. He kept saying that everyone had access when this was not the case."

PUNITIVE ENVIRONMENT

Fabiola Salek, a professor and the department chair of world languages, literatures and humanities, concurred that Pritchard's case was typical of the punitive environment at the college. She added the college had a "very difficult administration and Bozian is not an outlier.... Tone is set at the top with the [college] president."

Salek recalled feeling the administration's wrath during her time serving on the college's Personnel and Budget Committee with York College President Berenecea Eanes. "At some point last Spring, the president's harassment and outbursts against me were so bad that the [department] chairs presented the president with a statement of collegiality," recalled Salek. "I was one of [Eanes's] main targets because I did not fall in line." Salek said she was "trying to protect our classes and faculty, as is my duty as a chair in my opinion."

Salek noted that when Eanes became president in 2020, the meetings between the department chairs and the president became acrimonious.

"I've been a chair for a long term," she said. "There were times when it was testy," but she noted that under the current college president's leadership, meetings with the chairs have been "so stressful and so inappropriate."

Continued on page 5



Fabiola Salek, chair of world languages department at York College, says faculty-administration relations at the college are toxic.

Dave Sanders

Dave Sanders

A hateful incident, and the response

By ARI PAUL

On January 6, a swastika and the words “KKK LIVES” were found carved onto a public bulletin board at Queens College (QC). The antisemitic, anti-Black graffiti appeared inside Delany Hall on the one-year anniversary of the failed insurrection at the United States Capitol, where far-right protesters and paramilitary organizations violently attempted to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election and keep then-President Donald Trump in office.

The QC incident is just one of many across the country as racist and antisemitic acts targeting Jewish, Black and immigrant communities increase nationwide. Delany Hall may have been targeted because it is the first building at Queens College to be named after a Black faculty member. It is home to the Africana studies department, QC’s higher education access program SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge), and the Center for Ethnic, Racial and Religious Understanding (CERRU).

As Queens College activists noted, the very existence of Delany Hall is a hard-fought victory in the movement. It is a physical space where students of color can congregate and meet with faculty and staff, a place where students can hold open dialogues about racial and ethnic issues on campus. They say it is the very heart of multicultural scholarship and activity at Queens College.

INITIAL SHOCK

“My first reaction when I found out about it was shock, but [I] also just [felt] very upset, overwhelmed, confused, angry and, I think, overall, like I didn’t belong anymore,” said Allyson Regis, a SEEK counselor who works in Delany. “The building is kind of like a safe haven for students, faculty and staff, and so it felt very targeted. I felt like I wasn’t sure how to process it for a while, because it felt like home – like your home – was under attack.”

Disciplined for protecting members

Continued from page 4

ate,” a style of leadership that Salek believes has trickled down to the rest of the college’s administration.

The PSC chapter is currently reviewing its legal options on how to respond to Pritchard’s case.

“The union is extremely concerned that one of our active members has been targeted for advocating on our behalf with one of the safety issues we have had,” Salek said.

ACTIVIST TARGETED

Even though the official response from York administration is relatively minor, Pritchard said the whole ordeal has been emotionally trying. She recalled her time at Adelphi University in Long Island, where she was fired as a non-tenured fac-

A Queens College safe space targeted



Norka Blackman-Richards, director of the SEEK Program at Queens College, says staff feel threatened.

The next day, Queens College President Frank Wu sent a short letter to the college community, reporting the “discovery in recent days of offensive and hurtful graffiti in Delany Hall.” The letter continued, “Anyone who feels endangered or believes their rights have been violated should immediately notify Public Safety.”

For many campus activists, especially faculty and staff who work at Delany Hall, the tepid nature of the administration’s response only added to the feeling of injury. David Gerwin, the Queens College PSC chapter chair, said that the incident and the administration’s response has sparked campus organizing to demand greater attention to racial justice issues at the college.

Concern over a culture of impunity

“It might be time to shine a light on hate at Queens and publicize this and really get some resources to try to solve the particular crime. [We] also [need to] talk about funding operations on campus and the kind [of] security support that would make Delany feel safe,” Gerwin said.

Faculty and staff at Queens College sent a letter to Wu in response to his initial statement, in which they asked the college to:

- Address the emotional and psychological impacts the incident has caused the residents of Delany Hall.
- Provide a detailed timeline of the investigation along with specifics on what steps will be taken and by whom.
- Provide specifics on protective measures to be implemented for Delany Hall’s residents and premises, including the artwork donated by renowned BIPOC artists to the SEEK Program that is currently displayed on all three floors of the building.
- Establish a committee to develop a zero-tolerance policy at QC with member selection oversight by a collective that includes minoritized students, faculty and staff, and include punitive actions to be given for violations of said policy.

ADMINISTRATION RESPONSE

The letter stated, “Delany was believed to be a sacred place of communing, learning, gathering and healing. The blatant violation of this in the form of white supremacist messaging has left building occupants feeling unsafe and unprotected.”

The letter also noted that the most recent incident at Delany didn’t take place in a vacuum. It

cited the 2013 surveillance of CUNY Muslim students and a swastika etched on a campus bathroom stall in March of 2020, among several other racist incidents in and around Queens College.

“There is a concern of a culture of impunity of racialized, antisemitic and Islamophobic violence,” said Aysa Gray, associate director of CERRU. “We want to see this be different than those instances. This can’t continue. We want this to be a shift in the landscape of this issue. We’re hoping to push past performativity.”

As the Queens community began to express their frustration, the college administration issued a statement on January 14 that said they were working with both CUNY security and the NYPD to investigate the incident, saying that the campus was also “strengthening the training of Public Safety officers on how to respond to hate.”

The administration followed up with another message to the community with information about counseling services for those who might need them in light of the hate incident.

In a January 26 email, Gerwin told members that Wu had responded to faculty and staff concerns. “President Wu has offered concern, but nothing specific about his investigation, no immediate and dramatic security presence, and no targeted funds to the programs in Delany for the kind of programming and academic response that they could offer with such support.”

The incident has, indeed, shaken many who work in the building. Sophia McGee, the director of CERRU, told *Clarion*, “I’ve never felt unsafe in there before this moment, and now I feel unsafe,” adding that it has

forced her to consider the prospect of a violent attack at work. “How would I get out?” she wondered.

Such fears come from a heightened climate of fear in January, a month in which an Asian woman was pushed onto the subway tracks in Manhattan and four synagogue congregants were held hostage in Texas. It’s a context that has given the vandalism a deadly seriousness and it has had a direct impact on the work environment in the building.

Norka Blackman-Richards, director of the college’s SEEK Program, said the fear among workers in the building is palpable. “People are in distress,” she said of her fellow workers. “I have parents of staff asking me about their child. It’s a serious concern for us.”

Natanya Duncan, the director of the college’s Africana studies program, works in an office near the entrance of the building, a fact that has made her consider her own safety. At the same time, she believes the faculty and staff need to stay united against fear and hate.

“We don’t want to be intimidated out of the building,” Duncan said. “The atmosphere of impunity, the lack of speedy and concise and clear and spelled-out processes and repercussion for this kind of behavior continues. As a result, it contributes to the level of uncertainty that we have about our own safety and the physical space itself. We cannot ignore the history and richness of the building and its contents. This is about an affront to the physical building and the artwork and the spirits that still walk those halls [and] have served as guideposts to persons of color, not just the students, of all levels on campus.”

FEAR AT WORK

Queens College faculty and staff who spoke to *Clarion* said they hoped that the college administration would work with them on not just addressing safety at the building, but ensuring that there is no longer a culture of impunity on campus.

The PSC’s top officers and the union’s Anti-Racism Committee endorsed the faculty letter, saying in a statement to Wu, “[W]e agree with the Queens faculty and staff who are looking for ‘more than words’ from you. The Queens administration must respond with the necessary resources and a comprehensive plan to address the following needs of the community.”

The PSC principal officers and the PSC Anti-Racism Committee co-chairs wrote a joint letter to CUNY Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez and Wu, demanding “the development of a CUNY Central anti-racist response team composed of faculty, staff and students, so that these situations are not isolated and institutional responses are therefore not limited to the judgment of individual administrators” and calling for the “identification, protection and construction of safer spaces.”

Educators hail teacher cert reform

By ARI PAUL

A PSC-backed reform to New York State's teacher certification process could help more aspiring educators enter the teaching profession and make the process more fair.

In December, the New York State Education Department proposed eliminating the edTPA (education teacher performance assessment) requirement for teachers. The exam, which is administered by the testing giant Pearson, requires teacher candidates to pay \$300 and submit a portfolio of materials on planning, instruction and assessment.

The move to eliminate the exam comes after years of criticism by the PSC state affiliate, New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), saying that edTPA is keeping too many people from becoming teachers at a time when the state needs more educators. PSC leaders agree, noting that the testing process makes it difficult for teacher education faculty to teach and assess student teachers adequately.

MANY OBSTACLES

David Gerwin, PSC chapter chair at Queens College and a professor of education at Queens College and the Graduate Center, noted that edTPA created "all kinds of intractable problems in secondary education" and placed "the certifying and licensing authority in the hands of Pearson, who administered it," thus stripping "faculty of the autonomy to recommend people for licensure."

For Gerwin, this type of test has "kept people out of the profession," especially immigrants for whom English was not their first language. "This is a huge barrier that's being removed," Gerwin said, speaking about the reform. "It's restoring the opportunities to have more meaningful performance assessments."

The state adopted edTPA as a requirement for teacher certification in 2014. That same year, a coalition of union representatives – from the PSC, NYSUT, and United University Professions (UUP, the union representing SUNY faculty and staff) – was formed and empowered by the New York State Education Department to make recommendations about edTPA.

State may lift onerous requirements



Steve London, former PSC first vice president, was part of the a labor coalition formed to protest the adoption of edTPA.

"We very early on had a united front in questioning the state education department's adoption of this test," recalled Steve London, an associate professor of political science at Brooklyn College and the PSC first vice president at the time when the coalition was formed.

TEACHER SHORTAGE

In June 2020, Georgia dropped the edTPA requirement for its teaching certification. *Education Week* reported "critics [of edTPA] have long worried that it has forced colleges of education to teach to the test and has pushed aspiring teachers – especially those from marginalized backgrounds – out of the profession."

In other words, critics say, the onus of the test has converted the student teacher process into a cold metrics game, rather than learning a skilled pedagogical craft.

"It is about time to change this unreasonable edTPA requirement during the serious teacher shortage," said Carol Huang, an assistant professor of education at City College and a former PSC chapter

chair. "Recording student teaching sessions for outside reviewers for [a] teaching certificate creates extra barriers for our students at this uncertain time."

Drew Gitomer, a professor at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education, has been one of the nation's leading critics of edTPA. He has co-authored several research essays about edTPA and called for a general moratorium on the use of the assessment method.

"Our research suggests that edTPA does not appear to meet the minimum standards of the field of educational assessment," he told *Clarion*, adding that "edTPA has been using procedures and statistics that are, at best, woefully inappropriate and, at worst, fabricated to convey the misleading impression that its scores are more reliable and precise than they truly are."

VIDEO REQUIREMENT

London noted that another common criticism of the exam is that edTPA requires a vast amount of video recordings of student teachers. He points out that private institutions can often provide more technological support to their student teachers than cash-strapped public universities like CUNY. This system, he said, has left student teachers at public institutions at a distinct disadvantage.

K-12 education advocates posit that dropping the edTPA requirement will not only be more fair to student teachers, but it will also address the pressing teacher shortage.

NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango said in a statement, "We've heard too many stories about edTPA's needlessly onerous requirements and costs negatively impacting the student-teaching experience. It's policies like this that drive people away from the profession before

they even get started in their own classroom." She added that action by the Board of Regents to lift the edTPA requirement would work "toward ensuring the next generation of students will have the high-quality educators they need to be successful."

State ed board listened to critics.

But the removal of the edTPA hurdle is not a done deal. Public comment on the proposed amendment is being accepted now through February 28, 2022, and the PSC will submit a letter in support of the proposal to remove the edTPA requirement. *Chalkbeat* reported that "the earliest the state's Regents will vote on the proposal is April," and "if the proposal passes, educator preparation

programs must choose or develop a new assessment by September 2023."

The proposal to lift the edTPA requirement was among other successful efforts to reform teacher certification in New York. Governor Kathy Hochul signed into law two bills reforming the admissions process for graduate-level teacher and educational leader programs. One bill, as it is written, "increases the percentage of students from any incoming class who can be exempted from the admission requirements... from no more than 15% to 50%." The other, for SUNY education programs, "removes the requirement for a minimum score on the Graduate Records Examination [GRE] or similar examination."

NEEDED AUTONOMY

Michael Fabricant, a former PSC first vice president and a professor of social work at Hunter College who was one of the PSC representatives in the edTPA coalition, said that all of these developments helped restore the autonomy of teacher education programs.

"This victory will allow faculty to make decisions that no longer privilege a GPA but rather the fuller biography and capacity of applicants," Fabricant said. "The benefits to students will be significant."

London believes that the PSC's role in possibly rolling back the edTPA [requirement] will be a proud milestone in the union's history.

"We're an academic union and we stand for quality, and a quality education means having academic freedom," London said. "It's also one of the most important anti-racist campaigns we've carried out. The edTPA requirement was clearly discriminatory in its application to students of color. To impose a bogus test that screens out students of color from becoming teachers is a racist action."



David Gerwin, PSC chapter chair at Queens College, said the edTPA testing requirement has "kept people out of the profession."

Columbia strikers win contract



UAW Local 2110 members, representing graduate student workers at Columbia University, ended a tumultuous 10-week strike and ratified a contract that includes raises and increased benefits. PSC members rallied in solidarity with the strikers.

Fighting spirit in PSC contract team

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

Faye Moore, the new PSC director of contract enforcement, grew up surrounded by union organizing. At a young age, she knew who a scab was, what a picket line was and why one should never cross one and how fellowship brought members together at the workplace.

“When [unions] would do the negotiations and they would be on the news, nobody had a jacket on and everyone was sweating,” recalled Moore, who grew up following the struggles of municipal unions in New York City. “I actually said, ‘I want to do that.’”

PUBLIC SECTOR ADVOCATE

That inclination was natural. Her mother worked in social services and was a union steward at Communications Workers of America Local 1180 and her father was a construction worker and a union member. Moore’s grandmother took part in the 1965 Welfare Strike in New York City, where workers and clients walked out together to demand better working conditions. Advocacy for the public sector and for the labor movement was part of her upbringing. Moore brings these core values and decades of experience in the labor movement to her new role at the PSC. She also holds a degree in criminal justice from John Jay College.

“I think we’re all better served when we’re pushing to make the workplace and the world better for somebody else,” said Moore, talking about her work as a contract enforcer and advocate for PSC members. “This is not easy work; it is not an

Moore brings decades of labor experience



Faye Moore, the new director of contract enforcement, leads a team of nearly three dozen people trained in contract issues. She hopes members familiarize themselves with their contract and reach out to the union when there are issues.

easy population. This is not an easy administration.”

She heads up a department of nearly three dozen people – both PSC staff and members trained in the intricacies of the contract as grievance counselors and HEO and CLT advisors.

“Faye is smart, thoughtful, tough and sensible,” said Carla Cappetti, a PSC grievance counselor since

2006 and chair of the PSC Grievance Policy Committee. “Even in stressful moments, Faye is levelheaded and unflappable.”

UPDATING THE CONTRACT

Cappetti, a professor of English at City College, added, “You know that she is not phased that something is rubbing her the wrong way.... She neither flies off the handle nor pre-

tends that nothing happened.”

Moore began as a PSC contract coordinator in 2018. In her new role, Moore has specific goals. She wants to make sure that there are grievance representatives at each chapter to ensure the best possible coverage. Along with her department, she plans to look at outdated contract

language – places where the contract no longer reflects how PSC members do their work – and devise new language to present to the Committee on Contract Negotiations for the next round of negotiations.

Moore wants every PSC member to have a good working knowledge of the contract, so they know for themselves what protects them and what is prohibited. Members should not shy away from asking PSC grievance representatives questions about their rights.

“Faye knows the importance, relevance and leverage power of our contract. She is highly responsible and dedicated to working on and applying contractual fairness for our members,” said George Emilio Sanchez, a PSC Executive Council member and PSC chapter chair at the College of Staten Island.

DIGNITY AND RESPECT

Moore’s ethos is simple: members’ work must be respected by management and members should expect to be treated with dignity on the job. But she noted that finding a leadership position to fight for those ideals isn’t always easy.

“You look at the [labor] movement and say, ‘Why do some people succeed, and why do some people not?’ And then, you have to define what success is,” said Moore, talking about the challenges and opportunities in organized labor. “For any Black woman in the labor movement, I would define success as no matter what level you achieve, you’re still true to yourself.”

Prior to joining the PSC, Moore served as president of a 17,000-member public sector union, Social Services Employees Union Local 371, one of the largest locals in District Council 37. Before that she was the union’s vice president of grievances for nearly 15 years, where she managed grievance representatives and fought against nearly every agency in New York City government.

ONE UNION

The ultimate goal in her union work, Moore said, is to build solidarity across titles. She has worked in unions where she represents both the people who clean homeless shelters and the people who run the shelters.

She knows that the strength of a union is when all titles are united and see themselves as members in one union. At the PSC, it means part-time and full-time faculty, HEOs and CLTs coming together.

“I’m not going to try to sell a fantasy, [saying] that it always works,” Moore said. “Because it doesn’t. It’s very hard, but it can be done.”

Read the contracts that represent PSC members at psc-cuny.org/psc-contracts. If you have a workplace issue, go to psc-cuny.org/who-we-are/grievance-counselors to find a grievance counselor.

HEO eyes state assembly

By ARI PAUL

Anthony Andrews, assistant director of student activities at York College, already knows how to build political alliances to bring resources to York College students. He has been active with the union’s Committee on Legislation and was instrumental in organizing to get the college to address its rat infestation (see June/July 2017 *Clarion*). Now Andrews wants to use his skills as a state assembly member.

ADVOCATING TOGETHER

Andrews – who has worked in student affairs at York for 28 years and received a bachelor’s degree from York College and a master’s degree in public administration from Baruch College – said that he has worked with local elected officials to secure City Council funds for student resources.

But he believes more can be done to secure capital funding for the campus. The union is currently organizing for more capital investment as well as more state and city

For York and Jamaica



Anthony Andrews

funding for operational costs that will increase the number of faculty and staff. In this year’s Democratic Party primary, Andrews is running for the state assembly seat in Jamaica, Queens.

“Medgar Evers College has had major construction and has built

buildings over the years,” he said in an interview with *Clarion*. “Why has Medgar Evers gotten so much attention? Why not York? Because the legislators around Medgar Evers, they work together. That doesn’t happen at York. We have two temporary buildings that have been there since the 1980s.”

Vivian Cook has represented York’s State Assembly District 32 since 1991. For Andrews, she has been a part of a lackadaisical local leadership that has not created the kind of coalitions necessary to bring more resources to the district and the college.

“York College is the anchor tenant in Jamaica,” Andrews said. “Those coalitions [built at Medgar] have not been built with this community and so York College lags behind in infrastructure.”

He added that when one looks at “the track record of things getting done and not done, there’s room for

new leadership and new vision.” To the school’s credit, in December, York “unveiled seven capital projects that represent a \$29.2 million investment of public funds” according to a CUNY press statement.

A CUNY CANDIDATE

Cook had also garnered attention last year for initially taking a publicly neutral stance on sexual misconduct allegations against then-Governor Andrew Cuomo despite calls for him to resign from members of both state legislative chambers. Cuomo resigned in August after the New York Office of the Attorney General released a report regarding the allegations. Cuomo was long seen by the PSC as one of the main drivers of fiscal austerity in the state, especially at CUNY.

Andrews vows to be an advocate for CUNY if elected.

“We need to be looking at candidates who put students first, and that’s what the New Deal for CUNY is all about,” he said, referring to the PSC-backed legislation to increase faculty and staff at CUNY and to make the university system tuition free. “I am one of those candidates.”

‘Faye is smart, thoughtful, tough and sensible.’

Building coalitions for more resources

David Sanders

Ellen Moynihan

Organizing in her quiet way

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

CUNY's original mission always spoke to Naomi Zauderer, who served as PSC associate executive director for nearly 14 years. That mission – to educate the children of the whole people at a university to be controlled by the popular will and not just the privileged few – was part of what powered her through her work at the PSC. She retired at the end of January.

“I believe strongly about the importance of public education in a democracy. You cannot have a democracy without providing a quality public education to the citizenry,” said Zauderer, who is also involved in civic engagement initiatives in New York City to increase voter registration and oversee campaign funding. “It’s a question of full citizenship and a functioning democracy.”

KINDNESS AND DILIGENCE

Equally important to her is accountability to others. At the PSC that meant not letting union members and PSC staff down.

“I don’t think I have ever met anybody as conscientious as Naomi.... There was a quality in Naomi of not giving up, never feeling like she could cut a corner,” said Barbara Bowen, who was the PSC president at the time Zauderer was hired. “Naomi never ever let us down, and that’s a huge thing to say in all those years,” said Bowen.

Anais Surkin, the PSC’s new associate executive director, began working at the union in January. (See Surkin profile, page 9).

Although she often avoided the spotlight, Zauderer helped steer the union’s work in her own quiet way.

Sometimes her work was behind the scenes, like her leadership in building the PSC’s new database and developing and updating the information clearinghouse that is the PSC website. But there were other times where she was the leading face of a

Zauderer retires after 14 years



Dave Sanders

Naomi Zauderer led many initiatives at the PSC, including centralizing the database, creating the Next Generation Leadership Program and overseeing collective bargaining for the Research Foundation units.

union effort, including her initiative to develop union leaders through the PSC Next Generation Leadership Project or overseeing collective bargaining for the Research Foundation units and a new bargaining unit of Research Professors.

INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY

“Naomi is a holder of the institutional memory of the PSC,” said Janet Winter, a HEO who works in enrollment management at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and a member of the PSC Executive Council. “I will miss being able to contact her and receiving a quick reply, usually including references with the answer I was looking for,” she said.

When the pandemic hit, Zauderer was part of the team that helped

transition the union to remote work, which is no small task. Later in the summer of 2020, she filled in as interim PSC executive director after Debbie Bell’s retired from the role.

For the final six months of 2020, Zauderer had the unenviable task of steering the union through the general difficulties of remote work and the various campaigns the union had against layoffs and budget challenges at CUNY. She persevered with grace and consistency, acting as a go-to person for PSC staff and members when they needed it.

“There’s not a hat – or not a role in the PSC – that [Naomi] could not fill.... I’ve watched her juggle with her hands and her feet,” said Moses Merisier, an assistant for organizing and communications at the PSC who worked directly for Zauderer. At a farewell party for her in December, Merisier talked about the unassuming way Zauderer approached her work, saying, “She makes moves. She just doesn’t talk about it. She walks it. And that’s just real.”

At the party, PSC leaders noted Zauderer’s kindness, patience and innovations. Staff members spoke about her work ethic and her ability to recognize and understand other people’s work, no matter their position in the union.

BUILDING IT BETTER

A common theme throughout Zauderer’s career is building information systems – from newsletters to databases – and teaching and training members and union staff for the challenges they will face in their work.

Before coming to the PSC, Zauderer worked at other progressive organizations and unions in New York. She was executive director of the New York Professional Nurses

Union, an organizing and campaign liaison with the National Employment Law Project, and an organizer with the National Writers Union. She did doctoral work in political science at the University of California, Berkeley, where she was involved in graduate student organizing. She grew up in Columbus, Ohio. Her father was a product liability lawyer and her mother was a psychologist who worked with Vietnam War veterans suffering from PTSD.

“[My parents] were solid Democrats and they were very immersed in their own private lives,” recalled Zauderer, who in college realized that she could carve a career path in social and economic change. “I think I actually saw activism as a way to escape that immersion in private life.”

TRAINING LEADERS

At the PSC, she developed the Next Generation Leadership Project, a yearlong program for union activists who want to become union leaders. As part of the program, participants are asked to take part in union and union-affiliated meetings that they would not normally attend, and write “insight reports” to share their reflections. At the monthly meetings, PSC leaders presented on crucial union issues, including contract enforcement, the PSC budget and contract negotiations. Participants also completed a project that they developed through the course of the program.

“I first met Naomi when I participated in the PSC Next Generation Leadership training in 2016. In her thorough preparation and guidance, I transformed myself from an outsider to a believer in unionism,” said Youngmin Seo, an adjunct lecturer in the social science department at LaGuardia Community College and a PSC Executive Council member. “She has been my mentor and

a union comrade, but most importantly, my dear friend.”

Her final piece of work for the union will be the completion of a new PSC database, which Zauderer will continue to work on as a PSC consultant. When she began at the PSC in 2008, there was no organizer database and other points of crucial union information were in disparate places, oftentimes in paper files. The latest version of the database will centralize information in one place – membership, organizing, arbitrations, grievances and informal contract enforcement inquiries – so union staff and activists can continue to build a stronger union.

THE LONG STRUGGLE

One of the things that Zauderer has learned through her years of union work is that the struggle is long and that change takes time. Zauderer oversaw the bargaining for Research Foundation contracts. While the units began to organize around 2005, the first contract didn’t come until 2011.

“You have to learn to take pleasure in small, incremental gains and we have to celebrate those victories along the way,” said Zauderer.

In the coming months, Zauderer plans to spend some time in Costa Rica with her husband Stephen Choi, a registered nurse. Their immediate plans are to relax, bike and do some yoga. She will remain a consultant with the PSC.

‘She has been my mentor and a union comrade.’

As far as other work, there are no concrete plans, but Zauderer is interested in organizing a collective of workers and families caring for aging family members. It’s an idea that arises from her experience being the

primary caretaker for her mother, Eva Struve, who has dementia. It is work that fits Zauderer’s experience and personality.

“[Naomi’s] kindness and consistency and sense of fairness and deep knowledge of what we do has been so valuable to me and to so many of us,” said PSC President James Davis at Zauderer’s December farewell party. “We are going to miss [her] profoundly.”

Adjuncts: Update your info

Health Insurance: If one of your classes is canceled and you begin teaching another class or start a non-teaching adjunct assignment at a different CUNY college, be sure to inform the Office of Human Resources (HR) at your primary school that you still qualify for health benefits because you are teaching six hours or the equivalent. Please read any emails from UniversityBenefitsAdjuncts@CUNY.edu, as it is the email address of the office that monitors adjunct eligibility. If you lose your insurance, you will be informed via email and sent a COBRA application.

Pension: All adjuncts are eligible to join the NYC Teachers Retirement System (TRS) and tax-deferred annuity programs from your first semester at CUNY. For application forms, contact the Human Resources (HR) office on your campus or visit the TRS website (trsnyc.org). You are also eligible to join the NYS Tax Deferred Compensation 457 Plan. If your title or school changes at any time, be sure you inform the HR offices at all the colleges where you work of your TRS QPP number. Review your paystubs regularly to verify that mandatory contributions are being deducted from each place of employment to avoid huge deficits at the time of retirement. More information about retirement can be found on the PSC website (psc-cuny.org) and the Welfare Fund website (psccunywf.org).



Erik McGregor

Naomi Zauderer marshaled union members at a 2016 ‘Don’t Let CUNY Die’ PSC protest held in front of then-Governor Andrew Cuomo’s Manhattan office.

Surkin brings experience to PSC

By ARI PAUL

Becoming a union member when they were a graduate student worker at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst was a transformative moment in Anais Surkin's life and career path.

Before that they had worked a myriad of nonprofit, direct service jobs in the New York City area.

"I remember being super excited to sign my card," Surkin said, recalling the moment they joined UAW Local 2322.

EXPANDING CAPACITY

Surkin started working as a grievance coordinator for the UAW in 2013, and they ultimately worked their way up to being elected president of the "amalgamated" local, serving from June 2019 to June 2021. They represented over 5,000 members and oversaw more than two dozen contracts for bargaining units, ranging from graduate workers to municipal workers in Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont.

This January, Surkin returned to New York City to assume the role of PSC associate executive director, replacing Naomi Zauderer (see Zauderer profile, page 8). In their new role, Surkin will support the PSC

From UMass to CUNY

leadership by overseeing administrative areas and helping to expand the union's capacity for strategic planning, member mobilization, services to members, internal education and social change projects.

When Surkin was a grievance coordinator at UAW Local 2322, they saw the transformative power of labor union organizing. At the time, it wasn't unusual for UMass workers to go a month or more without receiving a paycheck. The pay delay was just an accepted fact of working at UMass. The administration's financial processes were notoriously slow and outmoded and workers tolerated this annoyance as a quirk of the job.

As they watched fellow workers struggle to pay rent and look after their kids, Surkin knew the situation was unacceptable; timely pay was a fundamental aspect of employer-employee relations, they thought.

CAMPAIGN BUILDING

After a long campaign of filing grievances, holding demonstrations and coordinating with other campus unions, UMass finally

agreed to revamp its payment system in order to ensure that UMass workers received their paychecks on time.

"It took a lot of organizing. It wasn't going to happen through simply legal means," they recalled. "It required really putting the university on blast."

CUNY ROOTS

Surkin attended Hunter College, which they recalled as a transformative experience. "Going to CUNY and going to Hunter was so definitive and shaped me in so many ways," they said, adding that it helped inspire them to pursue a graduate degree in social justice education, which is what ultimately brought them to UMass and the labor movement. Surkin is especially excited to contribute to the broad campaign to achieve full funding for CUNY and make it "the premier public urban university."

They added, "I have a lot of background in NYC queer community organizing and I've been thinking about so many people whom I knew who would have not sought or other-

A CUNY grad who knows the power of the university



Courtesy of Anais Surkin

Anais Surkin started in January as the union's new associate executive director.

wise had access to higher education who had access through CUNY. It transforms people's lives."

Surkin knows that there are a lot of challenges and hard work ahead

of them and the union, but they are ready.

"I'm really excited to be on the team, to get to know everyone and to be in the fight," they said.

Dinowitz: Higher ed chair

By ARI PAUL

Freshman City Council Member Eric Dinowitz of the Bronx is replacing former City Council Member Inez Barron as the new chair of the Committee on Higher Education. He plans to use his background as a high school special education teacher and United Federation of Teachers (UFT) chapter leader to bring more resources to CUNY.

Dinowitz, who received his master's degree in special education from Hunter College, told *Clarion* that he views K-12 education in New York City and public higher education at CUNY as part of the same project. They are different parts of what should be considered a whole system of public education, from early childhood to adulthood.

"So many of my [high school] students went on to CUNY," Dinowitz said.

A CONTINUUM

"Often when we talk about policy, we put them in silos," he said of CUNY, its colleges and the K-12 public school system. "The reality is that four-year colleges are not separate from the community colleges, and they're not separate from our high schools and our middle schools, our elementary schools and early intervention. It's a continuum of support and services." Dinowitz added, "We can't address these issues in isolation anymore."

Dinowitz said that CUNY campuses have many of the same issues that he dealt with when he was a UFT chapter leader, advocating for teachers. He fought to lower class sizes, not just because it lightened the workload for his fellow members, but because overcrowding is bad for student learning. He noted that "there's a strong relationship between the needs of staff and the needs of students."

As a UFT activist, he often had to fight for the basic maintenance of schools, including making sure bathrooms had soap. These issues, large and small, are not unlike the PSC's ongoing demands for adequate maintenance on CUNY campuses.

Dinowitz also expressed hope that there will be an opportunity for the New York City Council and the Mayor's Office to come to a consensus on adequate city funding for CUNY, noting that Mayor Eric Adams attended both the New York City public education system and CUNY's City Tech and John Jay colleges.

While CUNY's senior colleges are funded by the state, community colleges are primarily funded by the city. The PSC is pushing city council members to address the historic underfunding of CUNY in the next round of budget negotiations this summer. Dinowitz's district is in the Northwest Bronx and includes Lehman College.



Courtesy of Eric Dinowitz

Council Member Eric Dinowitz

"I think funding is a huge component of what we need to look at in the City Council," he said. "I'm working with advocates, professors, adjuncts and students to crystallize an agenda for the next two years."

INCREASING PAY

Among the issues at the top of his agenda are increased pay for full-time and part-time faculty. The collective bargaining agreement between CUNY and the PSC expires in the Spring of 2023. Dinowitz said the pay issue was critical to ensuring that CUNY is "really attracting and retaining high quality educators for our system."

In addition to securing fair funding for CUNY, Dinowitz said he wants to strive toward "making sure it's affordable and free."

Progress in budget process

Continued from page 3

the state has enforced austerity at CUNY, failing to include contractual increases in the state budget and forcing senior colleges to adjust their already meager budgets to cover the gap. Winning fair funding for CUNY at the state level will bolster the union's position at the city level when Mayor Eric Adams and the newly-elected New York City Council negotiate their first budget this summer. Adams, who is serving his first term as mayor, is a graduate of City Tech and John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

The PSC's website explains, "Public funding from New York City covers more than a third of CUNY community colleges' operating budget." Better budgets at both levels will provide CUNY with the revenue to fund economic improvements for faculty and staff in the next contract.

"Without a massive influx of money from the state, it becomes significantly more difficult to extract concessions from our employer," said Carolina Bank Muñoz, the PSC chapter chair at Brooklyn College. "Lack of state funding gives CUNY an easy excuse for its neoliberal austerity agenda."

She added, "Organizing for the New Deal for CUNY, having difficult conversations, holding ourselves accountable to each other and engaging in escalating actions and militancy put us on a good path for the contract fight."

This upcoming contract battle will be intense and should show the commitments of newly elected leaders, including Mayor Eric Adams and New York's governor, who will be elected later this year.

Hochul, who became governor when Cuomo resigned, is campaigning for the position, along with New York City Public Advocate Jumaane Williams and US Congressman Thomas Suozzi, who represents parts of northeastern Queens and Long Island. Williams, a graduate of Brooklyn College, is a vocal advocate for CUNY and the New Deal for CUNY.

SUPPORT FOR CUNY

Following the release of her proposed Executive Budget, Hochul met with local union leaders affiliated with the New York State United Teachers. A PSC source who met with the governor confirmed that Hochul believes CUNY needs more academic advisors and full-time faculty.

"We probably couldn't have asked for better," the source said, referring to the governor's acknowledgment of the need to hire more faculty and staff at CUNY.

NYSUT President Andrew Pallotta added that the governor's budget proposal includes "a significant increase in aid for K-12 schools and sorely needed operating aid for SUNY and CUNY."

CONTRACT

A contract fight like no other

By WILLIAM TABB

My father came to America as a young immigrant speaking no English, and when I attended City College, I knew firsthand the significance of having access to public higher education. For decades, I taught at Queens College. Like many PSC members, I know the importance of public higher education for the children of the working class in New York City. I also know the role CUNY has historically played, and why it must be properly funded to enhance its capacities to preserve in this role.

As the PSC looks forward to a new round of contract negotiations with CUNY, when a new mayor and a new governor will play key roles in the outcome of these negotiations, it is imperative that these elected leaders and others involved be aware of the significance of CUNY, and acknowledge the role we play in securing the future of our young people and the economy of the city and state. This is, as the union leadership state, the focus of the PSC's long-term strategic plan to fight for more funding for CUNY, both through the budget campaign and the New Deal for CUNY legislation.

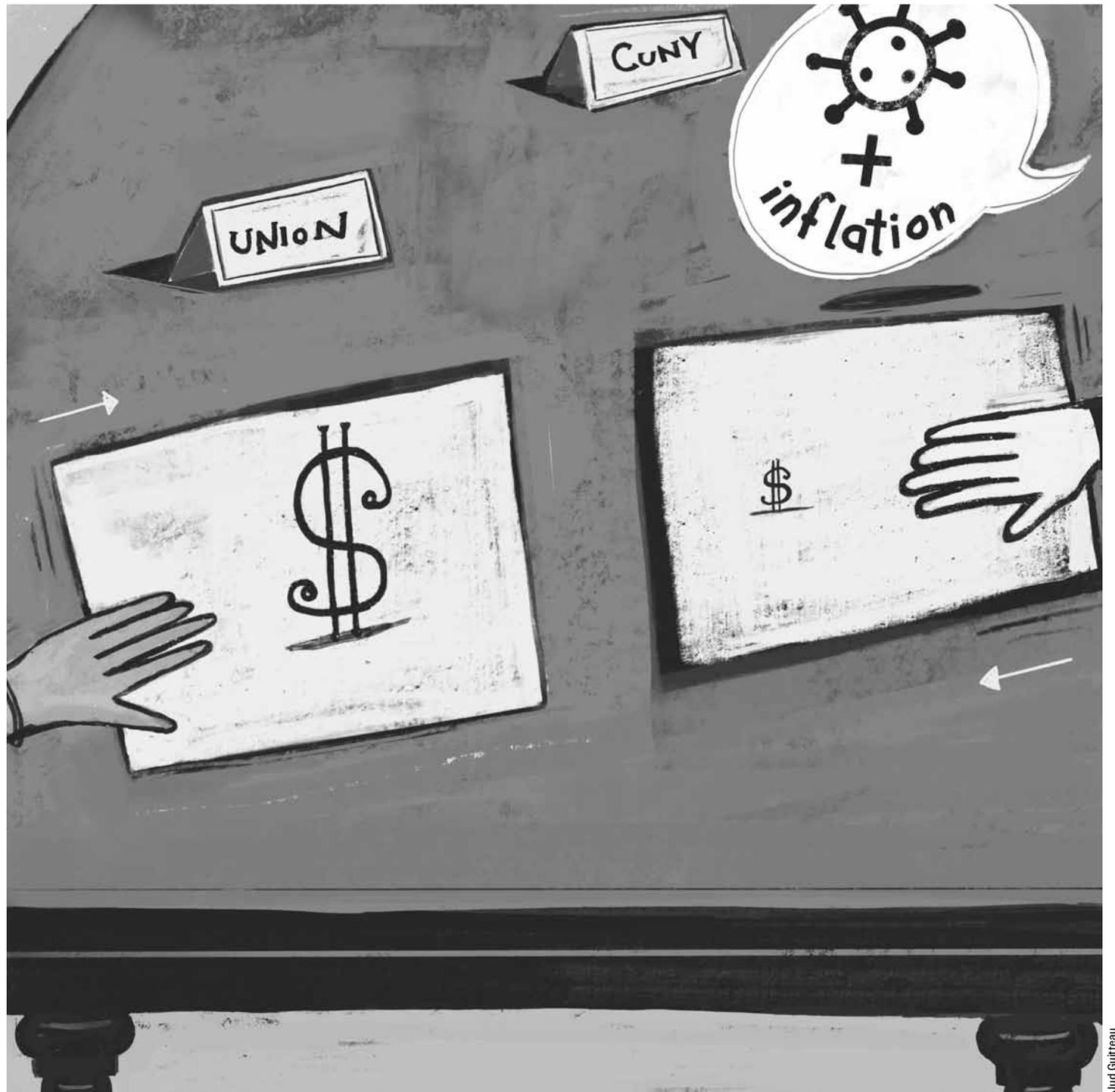
The PSC is also a beacon to other faculty and staff in public institutions elsewhere; our role in struggling for quality education and maintaining the quality of our colleges and the Graduate Center is part of a national crusade for a better future. As union members, we serve not only our own material interest, but coalitions fighting against austerity and for funding the public sector. This broad perspective is important.

LABOR SOLIDARITY

We are in kinship with the teachers who have won victories in the "Red State Revolt," the teacher strikes in West Virginia, Oklahoma and Arizona from 2018 that offer important lessons for activists seeking to build progressive power. Teachers from states where unions are weak or nonexistent, took on conservative governors and legislatures – and prevailed. These teachers won hard-fought raises when their salaries were being worn away by inflation.

We face a liberal state legislature and a Black mayor, Eric Adams, who has support in the communities from which many of our students come from. (Adams, for his part, received his associate degree from City Tech and his bachelor's degree from John Jay College.) The struggle here at CUNY is therefore different than it has been in the past decade. There are similar goals across red states and blue states, for example, in Chicago teachers mobilized community and coalition support for the common cause of advancing the excellent public education that unionized workers can provide. CUNY provides life-altering opportunities for its students. The education it offers needs to be paid by raising taxes. That is always a hard sell, since business interests are experts in threatening government with moving to lower tax jurisdictions. In fact, businesses rarely move, since high tax states that provide better public services grow faster than the low-tax, austerity-driven jurisdictions in the country.

A fair contract would retain and attract the faculty and staff needed to educate students, who not only earn a degree, but get an education that can fill the jobs necessary to make New York prosper. The mayor and governor



Jud Guitteau

must be bombarded by letters and demonstrations. Legislators need to be met in their offices by constituents, parents of CUNY students, CUNY students and faculty. The union can help organize such pressure, but only if union members who have sat on the sidelines become activists.

SKYROCKETING COSTS

The last contract, with its hard-won annual pay gains and heavy pay boosts for adjunct members in particular, has not kept up with the crises since its passage. The COVID-19 pandemic and skyrocketing inflation have dramatically raised the cost of living in New York. While the prevailing annual salary increases were based on an estimated 2% rise in inflation per year, economists have talked about an inflationary increase nearing 7% as recently as November.

The annual raises and step increases for city and state workers aren't keeping up with the financial reality. Union members are finding that their wage increases don't matter as much when the utility companies, gro-

cery stores and pharmacies are taking more and more of their paychecks every week.

The financial forecasts predict banks will be more profitable in the coming year with the expected rise in interest rates. Other large corporations headquartered and doing business in the city have seen their profits increase as they have taken advantage of shortages to increase their profits far more than their costs. In contrast, the income of PSC members, after adjusting for inflation, has gone down considerably and threatens to be reduced still further by continued inflation.

Nationally, labor's share of the national income has fallen while the profit share has reached record proportions, not seen since the 1920s. The dangerous growth of anti-democratic, violent political forces has acted as a cover for regressive economics and the attack on the public sector.

BUILDING INSTITUTIONS

The PSC contract expires in the Spring of 2023. Next year will be a test of the city and state labor movements and of the new gover-

nor and mayor. The PSC and its sibling unions shouldn't just advocate for dramatic wage increases that respond to the financial realities of COVID and inflation, but use the contract fights as a call for public investment. In light of this economic reality, we must say, "We need less austerity and more social investment in general in our public institutions, like CUNY," not only to fund wage increases but to grow these institutions and revive them, in order to provide services that residents depend on. Think of it as a labor-led New Deal.

LACKING PROTECTIONS

In our struggle for a just contract, we are also engaging in the wider battle to reverse these developments. In our teaching of critical thinking skills, we are contributing to a better world. We can also set the example for our students that the powers that demand low pay and concessions can be defeated by worker militancy. Teachers are not simply researchers and intellectuals, but working people who understand the meaning of struggle. They know how to act on this knowledge.

Raises that keep up with inflation

William Tabb is a professor emeritus of economics at Queens College.

HEALTH CARE

Stop the nightmare of privatization

By BILL FRIEDHEIM

Editor's note: In December, a state judge ruled that the city's plan to switch municipal retirees to a privatized health-care plan will "be delayed until at least April 1, 2022" and that municipal retirees "will have until June 30, 2022, to opt out of the plan," according to a joint report by The City and New York Focus. In January, PSC President James Davis and the PSC Retirees Chapter Chair Bill Friedheim wrote a letter to Mayor Eric Adams, who has previously spoken out against the switch to privatized benefits, asking his administration to reexamine and reconsider the deal. Other retirees have made similar appeals to the Adams administration, according to the NY Daily News.

Retirees are the canaries in the coal mine. The coal mine is a metaphor for New York City union health-care benefits.

Over the past decade, there has been a slow but relentless decline in those benefits, mainly for in-service members – a co-pay here, a deductible there, a shift of health insurance in 2018 for new hires from EmblemHealth to HIP. But then, in July 2021, the "slow" decline metastasized into something much more ominous. The New York City Office of Labor Relations (OLR) and the Municipal Labor Coalition (MLC) announced a massive restructuring of NYC retiree health-care insurance.

While city unions individually bargain directly with the city on wages, the MLC negotiates health-care benefits for more than 100 municipal unions, including the PSC.

The story does not end with retirees. The re-engineering of retiree health care grew out of a June 28, 2018, OLR-MLC agreement. On a recurring basis from fiscal year 2022 forward, that agreement calls for "\$600 million per year savings" in municipal employee health benefits. Savings is a euphemism for cutbacks. Given this grim reality, the health-care benefits of every municipal union member, including NYC and PSC union members, are potentially next on the "\$600 million per year savings" cutting block.

RUNAWAY COSTS

When OLR and the MLC signed the June 28, 2018, agreement, they targeted eight areas of potential savings, but only seriously considered one, reaching for the low-hanging fruit: retiree health benefits. For all but a few MLC unions (the PSC being one), retirees are denied membership and effectively any voice in union decisions. Cutting retiree benefits was easier and preserved the fiction, over the short term, that in-service benefits remain whole.

Among the menu of eight options, there were two with potential for major cost-savings that OLR-MLC did not pursue: (1) Exploring self-insurance (many states and cities self-insure to reduce costs); and (2) Municipal unions and the NYC government exercising their collective leverage to reduce runaway hospital costs. The PSC has



Mayor Eric Adams assumed leadership at the beginning of the year. PSC leaders have written to the new mayor, asking him to reconsider the privatization of health care for municipal retirees.

subsequently joined a labor coalition examining how to reduce hospital costs, but this is outside the MLC.

Consider the path chosen by the OLR and MLC: Most NYC retirees and their spouses are Medicare eligible, so traditionally it became their primary health insurance, covering 80% of costs. The city provided premium-free, secondary insurance, paying most of the remaining 20% with few out-of-pocket expenses for municipal retirees. Combined with robust benefits (particularly prescriptions) from the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund, PSC retirees had excellent, affordable health-care benefits, before the proposed restructuring of retiree health insurance.

The goal of the restructuring, approved by the MLC last summer over the dissent of the PSC and several health-care unions, is to move the bulk of New York City's 250,000 retirees from traditional Medicare administered by the government to a privatized Medicare Advantage Plus plan (MA+). The MA+ plan is premium-free and ostensibly covers 100% of costs, but it has co-pays and requires pre-authorizations for multiple procedures and treatments (which is not the case with traditional Medicare). Though it claims retirees can access any doctors, medical providers and hospitals that accept Medicare, the reality has proven more complex.

CIVIL LAWSUIT

Responding to a lawsuit brought by the NYC Organization of Public Service Providers in October, a state supreme court judge issued an injunction, admonishing the city and the MA+ vendor for not providing an accurate list of providers who would accept the MA+ plan and calling upon both to make "corrections and additions" to a flawed enrollment guide previously distributed to municipal retirees. The judge characterized the

original "implementation of this plan" as "irrational and thus arbitrary and capricious."

In December, the judge issued an order delaying implementation from January 1, 2022 to April 1, 2022, with an option to move in either direction between the premium-free MA+ and NYC Senior Care (for which retirees must now pay a premium) by June 30, 2022. He also ordered the city and the vendors to correct errors in the enrollment guide and to provide him with periodic reports of their efforts to recruit providers and educate members about the terms of the new plan.

MORE BUREAUCRACY

What particularly irked large numbers of retirees was that implementation of the plan made MA+ the default. That meant that the city would automatically enroll retirees in the MA+ plan, removing them from traditional Medicare. On its face, this looked legally dubious, but there was precedent for it in other municipalities and states that had taken similar measures.

To stay in traditional Medicare, members must jump through hoops, notifying the Medicare vendor that they are opting out. In many instances, those who opt out have not received a confirmation from the vendor (although one is promised), creating uncertainty about their coverage.

In addition, keeping traditional Medicare coverage comes at considerable cost. To remain on NYC Senior Care, the secondary insurance for Medicare for most municipal retirees, members must pay a minimum of \$191.57 a month for a plan that, until the restructuring, was premium-free. Compounding the financial pain, EmblemHealth, which provides NYC Senior Care (and is one of the partners administering the MA+ plan along with Empire BlueCross BlueShield Retiree Solutions) has instituted new co-pays as of January 1.

Fighting increased health-care costs

EmblemHealth's management, unlike its municipal retiree clients, is feeling little economic constraint. President and CEO Karen Ignagni saw her compensation at EmblemHealth – salary, bonuses, stock awards, option awards and other payments – rise to \$5,342,500 in 2020, up 66.58% over 2019. (Source: *Becker's Hospital Review*.)

DISTURBING TREND

New York City is now the largest government entity – larger than any other municipality or state – to have moved the health insurance of its retired public workforce to a Medicare Advantage plan. It accelerates a disturbing trend toward the privatization of Medicare. In 2021, a Kaiser Family Foundation report found that 42% of those Medicare eligible were in Medicare Advantage plans, up from 13% in 2004. Most of those plans are run by corporations that get a direct subsidy from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). The financial subsidies from the federal government is what the city and the MLC are counting on to pay for the \$600 million in savings called for by their 2018 agreement.

Medicare Advantage programs provide insurance to seniors at higher cost to CMS (and hence the US taxpayer) than traditional Medicare. CMS pays Medicare Advantage providers a lump sum based on a complicated formula of aggregate risk scores of a company's customers. Private Medicare Advantage companies know how to game the system. An important new study by a former federal health policy analyst and University of California at San Diego professor Richard Kronick documents how CMS has overpaid Medicare Advantage plans by more than \$100 billion over the last decade.

The retreat from Medicare to privatized insurance complicates labor's role in health-care reform, particularly any agency it has in the movement toward single payer. NYC public sector unions are now in the uncomfortable position of partnering with management (OLR) to oversee health-care austerity in what is arguably the richest city in world.

PSC PUSHES BACK

PSC President James Davis delivered testimony at a tumultuous hearing conducted by OLR in November, pointing out that the contract between New York City and the Medicare Advantage vendor lacks many of the protections that are standard in agreements between a public employer and a health-care vendor, highlighting the vendor's limited accountability and its ability to make changes without consultation or approval by OLR and the MLC.

Meanwhile, rising numbers of PSC retirees have pushed back, part of a larger movement of municipal retirees demonstrating, petitioning, testifying, contributing thousands of dollars to a lawsuit and joining mass educational events about the health-care changes. PSC Retiree Chapter meetings, which in the past typically ranged from 50 to 100 participants, now sometimes engage over 600 members. (For more details on the chapter's role in the retiree health-care crisis, go to www.psc-cuny.org/whats-happening-retiree-healthcare.)

But the forces aligned against us are powerful and well-financed. We need to grow the retiree pushback. We need to grow the forces for affordable health care inside our own union and within the New York City labor movement beyond retirees.

We need to be part of the movement for both short-term health reform and longer-term universal, single-payer insurance. Join us.

Bill Friedheim is the chair of the PSC Retirees Chapter.



15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

Press state lawmakers

The PSC and its coalition allies are pleased with Governor Kathy Hochul's proposed budget increases to CUNY. But faculty, staff and students are continuing to push the governor and the state legislature to fully fund the New Deal for CUNY bill, which would add more full-time faculty and mental health counselors and make CUNY tuition-free again.

To make your voice heard, send a letter to state leaders, demanding that the next budget fully fund the New Deal for CUNY. The letter can be found at cunyrisingalliance.org.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Our fight for safe campuses

By JAMES DAVIS
PSC President

As the Spring semester approached, PSC members and chapter leaders consistently rose to the challenge of multiple compounding crises. Enrollments lagged behind set targets on many campuses. Several community colleges had sharp declines in enrollment for in-person classes. Having issued a firm 70% minimum for in-person classes for the Spring semester at every college, CUNY management found themselves in a bind as student demand for remote and hybrid options surpassed demand for in-person classes in many instances. Rather than modify the in-person requirement by permitting hybrid courses to count, as they had in the Fall semester, and as the PSC had urged, CUNY stayed the course and reiterated inflexible guidance. Even as the Omicron surge coursed through the city, confounding everyone's best-laid plans and driving many ill New Yorkers into quarantine if not into the hospital, CUNY refused to relent on the 70% in-person minimum.

WEAK CUNY RESPONSE

At the same time, PSC activists and staff fielded many questions about Governor Kathy Hochul's vaccine requirement for CUNY and SUNY faculty, issued during her State of the State Address. Did she really mean just faculty? On what date would the mandate take effect? Would boosters be required? Would medical or religious exemptions be available? How would the policy be enforced? CUNY management offered little clarity, despite the union's repeated requests to negotiate the implementation of a vaccine mandate for faculty and staff. Even as the start of the semester neared, meetings yielded no formal proposals from the administration and no language from the state on which to base a policy.

Uncertain about the safety of their offices and classrooms and their commute on public transit, many faculty and staff sought extensions to remote work agreements while the union pursued expansion of the eligibility criteria to include employees who, whatever their personal safety threshold, live with someone who is immunocompromised or unable to be vaccinated for medical reasons.

The speed of Omicron's spread stood in sharp contrast to the slow pace of CUNY's



On the first day of classes, PSC members rallied at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn.

response to rapidly changing conditions. Despite encouraging vaccination, CUNY left too many decisions about health and safety to individual campus administrators, even as they took the reins from those administrators on the scheduling crisis that their own miscalculations produced.

In late January, more than 4,500 union members responded to a PSC poll about safety and the Spring schedule. The high response rate clearly indicated the urgency that faculty and staff felt about these matters. For 87% of respondents, it was moderately or very important that CUNY permit greater flexibility for remote work and teaching, and equally important that CUNY define the scope of the vaccine mandate to include everyone in CUNY buildings. Following closely on these priorities, members expressed, was the provision of requiring N95 or KN95/KF94 face masks in the campus community. These and other poll results bolstered PSC health and safety demands at the CUNY Central and campus levels that were included in a union petition to the chancellor and the college presidents.

Our demands to CUNY Central:

- Clarify the proposed scope, timeframe and enforcement protocols for the vaccine mandate, so that any policy the Board of Trustees reviews has the union's agreement.
- Make rapid test kits and N95/ KN95 or equivalent-grade masks available on-site to all members of the university community,

in keeping with CDC guidelines for masking while indoors.

- Expand surveillance testing of vaccinated individuals to better monitor rates of infection and improve the COVID-19 tracking website to provide meaningful information to college communities.
 - Release the ventilation data the PSC has requested and systematically upgrade ventilation on all campuses for protection now and into the future.
- In support of local needs, we asserted that CUNY should clarify the following:
- Spring classes with low enrollments may run. The enrollment crisis at several colleges is of the administration's own making. The university administration must take responsibility and refrain from canceling classes and laying off adjunct faculty.
 - Supervisors and chairs should have the authority to set the modality of work for their programs, offices and departments, including allowing remote work and teaching to begin the semester. Such flexibility should account for the needs of members whose households remain especially vulnerable to COVID-19 infection due to individuals being immunocompromised or medically contra-indicated for vaccinations.
- Even before the Spring semester began, PSC members mobilized to move a largely unyielding administration from its intransigent positions:

- Interim University Provost Daniel Lemons issued revised guidance to college presidents two weeks before Spring classes started, reducing the minimum in-person schedule requirement from 70% to 55%-60% and permitting colleges to open additional online classes to meet student demand.
 - CUNY reduced the work-schedule requirement for professional staff to work on campus from 70% to 50% through the end of February.
 - Many colleges facing enrollment drops stabilized the Spring schedule and permitted classes with low enrollment, even with those classes with rosters in the single digits, to run. Classes with five or more students got the green light at Lehman College and the Graduate Center and those with six or more students at Brooklyn College and Hostos Community College were also approved.
- Any CUNY college president still insisting in late January that double-digit enrollment be a requirement for running a class, the union asserts, is doing so on their own without PSC support. Such decisions jeopardize the income of adjunct faculty (some of whom receive health insurance through CUNY employment) and the academic progress of CUNY students.

SPIRITED RALLIES

In-person rallies organized by the PSC at Bronx Community College and Medgar Evers College, on the first day of the Spring semester, galvanized nearly 100 members, many of whom had not participated previously in a union action. Members distributed face masks as faculty, staff and students came to attend, and PSC speeches and chants reinforced our key messages for the start of the term: *Keep us safe! Keep us employed!* Protesters donned red PSC sweatshirts emblazoned on the back with the words: *Everyone Loves Someone at CUNY*. The warmth of that sentiment and the fervor of our activists and allies was enough to thaw the crowd as snow flurries arrived to blanket the city.

If CUNY can demonstrate COVID-19 safety on our campuses, faculty, staff and students will all be eager to return. Likewise, the commitment that PSC members have already shown to this year's budget fight and to championing the New Deal for CUNY legislation has been extraordinary. The union has built an effective ground game to engage Albany and City Hall by deepening the CUNY Rising Alliance coalition and fostering grassroots member activism in electoral districts across the city and beyond.

Despite the enormous challenges, the past few months have demonstrated the resilience and ingenuity of PSC members. We have also shown solidarity across rank and job title, and we have demonstrated the tremendous progress we are capable of when we stand united together.

Clarity needed on COVID-19 policies