

# Around the State

## NYSUT tops in lobbying, campaign spending

Public advocacy group Common Cause released the top 10 list of lobbying spenders of 2006.

New York State United Teachers came in at the top with more than \$3 million between lobbying and campaign contributions. The Healthcare Association of New York State was second, followed by Verizon.

"The fact that these fat cats can come into Albany and they get their issues heard right up front because they have that money to pay to play the game, that's the difference," said Barbara Bartoletti of the League of Women Voters. "It dims the voice of the average citizen."

— *www.wnyt.com (3/19/07)*

## Students' test rulers don't measure up

More than a million plastic protractors mailed out by the state last month with math test packets are missing 1/16th of an inch from the four-inch ruler along the bottom of the angle-measuring tools.

Moreover, 1.6 million plastic rulers also sent out by the state are irregularly marked, with quarter-inch hash marks that are shorter than three-quarter-inch marks. Those lines are equal on standard rulers.

The State Education Department says it purchased the Chinese-made devices for \$324,000.

Department officials first became aware of the flaws Feb. 28, through a call from a regional BOCES agency serving schools in the Syracuse area. In response, Steven Katz, the department's assessment director, wrote that the protractors and rulers were "the best plastic measurement tools that the department was able to procure in the large volume required at a reasonable cost."

— *Newsday (3/12/07)*

## Broome, Tioga schools to serve the same lunch menu

Starting in September, elementary school students in Broome and Tioga counties will eat the same school lunch on the same day under a plan being developed by food service directors in both counties.

The directors will prepare the daily menus that will be reviewed by a certified dietitian-nutritionist, said Mark Bordeau, Broome-Tioga Board of Cooperative Education Services food services director.

Some savings is expected because every single district will be using the same brands or products. But the main reason for the coordinated menu is to ensure quality control and nutritional content, school officials said.

— *(Binghamton) Press & Sun-Bulletin (3/1/07)*

## NYC Council bans metal bats in high school

The New York City Council passed a bill recently banning the use of metal bats in high school baseball games, securing enough votes to override a potential veto by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg. The vote set up a possible legal challenge from the metal-bat industry.

Industry officials, who opposed the bill, said they believed that the Council was the first legislative body in the nation to pass such a measure.

The bill's original sponsor, James S. Oddo, a Staten Island Republican, called the risk associated with metal bats unreasonable. In 2003, an 18-year-old American Legion pitcher in Montana, was killed when a line drive off a metal bat smashed into his left temple. His mother and uncle supported the bill.

— *The New York Times (3/15/07)*

# Children of prisoners seen as vulnerable group

By Sheila Carmody  
Senior Writer

**H**ow should you respond when a student tells you his or her parent is in jail?

That's one of the questions Alison Coleman answers for educators during training workshops she called Working Well with Children of Incarcerated Parents.

Children whose parents are in jail come to school angry, worried, confused and unable to focus on learning, said Coleman, director of Prison Families of New York, Inc., a nonprofit organization that supports families with loved ones in prison. Educators need to know how to address students' needs to allow learning to take place in school, she said.

Between 120,000 and 150,000 New York State school children have a parent in prison, estimates Coleman, who lives in Albany. While no formal report exists for how many students in a given school have parents in prison, students sometimes volunteer the information.

Ani Mooney, a Troy school district nurse, said she has about two students a week tell her a parent is in jail or prison. They usually bring it up when it comes time to call a family member to pick them up from school.

Mooney was among nurses, psychologists, assistant principals and school counselors who recently attended a staff development workshop that Coleman presented in the Rensselaer County school district.

Coleman and her daughter Cecily were brought in to discuss ways school personnel can assist children who have a parent or sibling in prison, said Mary Capobianco, Troy's assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction.

Coleman started the Prison Families of New York organization as a result of her personal experience. She raised Cecily while her husband was incarcerated for a nonviolent crime. He was recently released after spending 25 years in prison.

"There were times when I worried about him or was upset in school after a weekend visit to see him and did not want to leave him," Cecily Coleman said. "It is not something that a child is able to check at the door to school. It adds another layer of stress to a child's life."

The Colemans recommend that educators organize support groups similar to peer-support groups schools have established for children of divorced parents. Such groups already exist outside of schools but not in schools, Coleman said. Some of the activities she suggests include:

- Reading books about prison.
- Pulling out maps and locating prison facilities.
- Talking to other children with parents in prison.

"We need to demystify prison for kids," Coleman said. They worry because they don't have any information about prison, she said. They fear their parents have nothing to eat and no place to sleep.

Educators' jobs will be easier if

they address the problems children have when a parent is in prison, Coleman said. Children perform better in school when their emotional needs are met.

"School is where they vent by fighting or not doing their work," Mooney said.

The students form a hard shell and

convince themselves they can deal with their emotions on their own, she said. "Once you break through that shell, you may find a person who's willing to learn."

For more information on programs for educators, go to [www.prisonfamiliesofnewyork.org](http://www.prisonfamiliesofnewyork.org).

## Ithaca loves teachers



Photo by BruceStoff/Ithaca CVB Convention and Visitors Bureau  
Michael Burns, a fifth-grade teacher in the Cazenovia school district, took advantage of an event promoting Ithaca as a tourist destination for February break. Hundreds of teachers were lured to the area with discounts on lodging, dining, shopping and a host of free activities.