

West Suburban Teachers Union, Local 571, IFT, AFT, AFL-CIO

Union Messenger

"A Union of Professionals"

WSTU October Calendar

10/10-Deadline for the submission of names for 571 Legislative Breakfast
10/15-Deadline for filing IRS forms for Councils that closed their books in May
10/18-Deadline for registration for the 571 Legal Limits for New Teachers Wkshp.
10/18-20-IFT Convention-Intercontinental Hotel-Rosemont
10/21-571 EB Mtg. - Westmont-5:30 p.m.
10/21-571 HOR Mtg.-Westmont-6:45 p.m.
10/24-571 Legal Limits Wkshp. For New Teachers Westmont-4:30 p.m.
10/26-571 Legislative Breakfast-Double Tree Hotel- Oakbrook

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Lessons Learned

by Jane Russell

"Don't have regrets in life, only lessons learned."

— Heather Romiti Health & Wellness Coach, Motivational Speaker

Where can you find over 2,000 teachers from all over the U.S. in mid-July? In steamy Washington, D.C., of course at AFT TEACH.

The three-day conference is held on the year opposite of the AFT Convention. There are a few program similarities between the AFT TEACH and the convention, but generally AFT TEACH is described as "the convention minus the politics." I had the opportunity along with four other West Suburban Teachers Union members to attend the conference as well as the Local Presidents Conference held prior to the TEACH conference.

Local Presidents Conference

Over the two days of the Local Presidents Conference, many issues were discussed. Local leadership development is important, but so is work on community engagement, providing an awareness of and defining the groups that work to monetarily destabilize public education and countering the attacks on public schools. President Randi Weingarten introduced to local leaders, "Reclaiming the Promise, Uniting for Public Schools", saying, "In some ways, it feels like we are back to where we were." Public education is in a "Now what?" position and our vision has to be to reclaim the promise of public education for all students. Union

members cannot do this alone. We need the community with us too. With over half of school children coming from homes in poverty, we need to make the case that this is the union's core work; this is not just a campaign, but rather the public's view of public education needs to be turned around. This is a movement.

For more information about the "Reclaiming the Promise" movement and how to join, see page 4.

The final presentation of the Local Presidents Conference was both uplifting and gut-wrenching. Three local leaders told their stories of success, sometimes through tragedy.

We are fortunate in Illinois to have the Quincy Federation of Teachers who won a two-year AFT Innovation Grant to work with the parents and community to provide information and understanding for the new state common core standards and resulting curricular changes in their district. QFT is just one of several IFT locals who have embraced the formation of community schools. President Valarie Borden-Kircher described the plan, the work, and ultimate success of the program. In fact, Valerie believes that the experience helped to turn around the relationship with the Quincy Board of Education, which is far more collegial than it had been in the past.

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Helping Grieving Students by Bonnie Saracco

We have many grieving students in our classrooms. Most children experience the death of a family member or friend by the end of high school. A high school survey by Ewalt and Perkins found that 90% of students have lost a friend or close relative. Also, 5% of students experience the death of a parent by age 16.

Despite the prevalence of students coping with grief, a survey of 1200 AFT members by the New York Life Association found although 92% of teachers see grief as a serious problem, 93% of classroom teachers have never received bereavement training and only 3% of districts offer it. Insufficient training is the biggest obstacle preventing teachers from offering helpful support.

Dr. David Schonfeld is the Director of the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement, Pediatrician-in-Chief of St. Christopher's Hospital for Children, and Chair of the Department of Pediatrics of Drexel College of Medicine. He gave a presentation titled "Supporting the Grieving Student" at the AFT TEACH 2013 conference. Dr. Schonfeld has spent 20 years working with grieving children and adolescents all over the world. The session was even more poignant because of the presence of many teachers from Newtown, CT in the audience, some of whom dabbed their eyes during the presentation. Dr. Schonfeld explained that a young child's ability to cope with grief is limited by the fact that children are egocentric, have a limited grasp of causality, and have magical thinking. All of this results in guilt.

Children need to be reassured by trusted adults that they are in no way responsible for the death. They need to understand that death is irreversible, that the person who died is not struggling with

physical or emotional pain, and that everything alive will eventually die due to physical reasons. These understandings are crucial to the grieving process, and they lessen guilt, anxiety, and futile hoping for a loved one's return.

Many people believe that because adolescents do have the ability to think rationally, they don't need as much support as younger children. This is not true, and adolescents' problems can be com-



pounded by the fact that they are sometimes expected to provide comfort to others and take on adult responsibilities.

Dr. Schonfeld pointed out some practices that are not helpful, such as trying to cheer up survivors or encouraging them to be strong. He also said to avoid telling a student that you know what he or she is going through, or that you have experienced a similar loss. This sets up a competition for sympathy and can give the student the job of comforting the adult. A social worker in the audience said that she does share information about her own losses, and has found that it fosters trust.

Dr. Schonfeld told her that is much better to create trust by empathetic listening.

What else helps? Teachers should demonstrate empathy, encourage children to express feelings, help the family become aware of community resources, and remember that grieving is long term. We should make referrals to outside services if the child shows continued school problems, aggressive behaviors, guilt, anxi-

ety, depression, social withdrawal, self-destructive behaviors, or suicidal talk.

Funeral or wake attendance by teachers can be very comforting. As for funeral or wake attendance by a grieving child, Dr. Schonfeld suggested letting the child decide whether to attend and to what degree to participate. Often a simple symbolic act can be more helpful to a child than a formal commemorative event. He said that if the child does attend the wake or funeral, a non-grieving friend should be assigned the role of being there to take the child for a walk or a meal if the child needs to talk or take a break.

A student suicide is a special circumstance. It requires the school to clarify information, identify and intervene with other students who may be at risk, and educate faculty and staff about warning signs and symptoms of other potential suicides.

Students should be encouraged to seek help and tell a trusted adult if a friend is showing suicidal symptoms. While acknowledging the individual who died, schools must also try to minimize media coverage and any glamorization of the suicide by students.

The National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement, www.schoolcrisiscenter.org, can provide information, training materials, consultation and technical assistance.

Finally, Dr. Schonfeld stressed the importance of professional self-care. It is very stressful to work with traumatized children, and often teachers themselves are also grieving. A school should create a culture where grieving is accepted, and where teachers and staff model and normalize asking for help.

Lessons Learned by Jane Russell cont.

Tom Kuroski is the President of the AFT Newtown Federation of Teachers, Local 1727, Newtown, CT, with a union membership of 435. Sandy Hook Elementary School, where the horrible tragedy occurred in late 2012, is part of the Newtown District. Tom talked about the lessons he learned through this ongoing experience. Crisis management proved to be significant. He questioned to whom he should speak and how to stay connected to the myriad of events that occurred surrounding the events of December 14, 2012. To stay connected was difficult because Tom believed that the union was often an afterthought of the school district's administration and board. It was the union who stood up for the teachers of the district, otherwise they would not have had a voice.

Tom supported that there be regular communication with members which proved to be of the utmost necessity. What was essential to his work was to keep an open mind and to ask for help, not to do it all by himself. During the weekend following the horrific events of that Friday, Tom spoke to U.S. Secretary of Education Arnie Duncan imploring him to have the district work in concert with the union. Tom was most emphatic about school safety training for everyone in the schools including not just the teachers, student services staff and administrators, but substitute teachers, support staff and the custodial staff too.

In fact, the principal of Sandy Hook Elementary School followed the school safety plan and procedures for the safety drill early in the school year with everyone participating. Continued review of the plan and additional drills are also important. Tom credits the principal's work in instituting and scheduling the drills as significant in not having more students and teachers hurt in the incident.

Even as the new school year has begun, many issues still remain, especially for the staff of Sandy Hook Elementary School who desperately seek closure for the tragedy on December 14, 2012. The entire school has moved to another school building in the district that was not being used at the time because of a decline in student enrollment. Without the crisis team support of the AFT, President Tom Kuroski would not have

been as capable in helping the NFT members. As Tom surmised, "No one can plan for what happened that day".

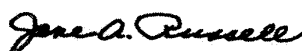
AFT TEACH Conference

While the extensive list of the TEACH workshops included presentations about teaching the Common Core State Standards, other workshops as mentoring in early childhood, using social media, strengthening schools through partnerships, combating dropouts with early warning systems, and assessments/testing were available to participants. During the workshop about "Making Data and Classroom Assessments Work for You", categories of data described as assessment and contextual both need to be collected. For both assessment types, formative and summative, research shows that descriptive feedback to students has a much greater positive effect with student performance improving by as much as 30% over just assigning a grade. The presenters from AFT cautioned that making decisions about students, staff, or schools without identifying, understanding and analyzing the data can be dangerous. The AFT teaches a course about collecting, use and analysis of data. Contact Heidi Glidden, hglidden@aft.org, for additional course information.

Learning is lifelong. How we use what we learn is important for our students. The AFT, IFT and West Suburban Teachers Union provide many professional development courses for both teachers and support staff. To get information about courses offered, go to the AFT website, www.aft.org, the IFT website, www.ift-aft.org or the Local 571 website.

See you in class.

In unity,



Local 571 President



AFT's Reclaiming the Promise



Uniting Public Schools

It's Time to Reclaim the Promise of Public Education

Our public schools represent our nation's commitment to helping all children dream their dreams and achieve them. A high-quality public education for all children is an economic necessity, an anchor of democracy, a moral imperative and a fundamental civil right, without which none of our other rights can be fully realized.

It's time to reclaim the promise of public education—not as it is today or as it was in the past, but as we imagine it for our children—to fulfill our collective obligation to help all children succeed. Reclaiming the promise is about fighting for **neighborhood public schools that are safe, welcoming places for teaching and learning.**

Reclaiming the promise is about ensuring that **teachers are well-prepared, are supported and have time to collaborate** so they can meet the individual needs of every child.

Reclaiming the promise is about making sure our **children have an engaging curriculum** with art, music and physical education, as well as math, English and social studies, to bring the joy back to learning.

Reclaiming the promise is about ensuring that **children have access to wraparound services to meet their emotional, social and health needs.**

To join the movement, go to <http://go.aft.org/promise>.

Retirees Corner



The Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans (IARA) is an organization of retired union members and other senior and community activists advocating a progressive political and social agenda that respects work and strengthens families. The IARA seniors are from many different unions including AFSCME, SEIU- Healthcare, UAW, Steel Workers, as well as community and faith based groups like Progressive Baptist Church-Chicago. The IFT is a sustaining member of the IARA and the Local 571 Retirees Council is a Club member. Dues are on a sliding

scale based on the size of each member group. Business is conducted at regular Executive Board meetings that are held in Chicago as well as the biennial convention in Ottawa, Illinois.

The 650+ Local 571 retiree members were well represented at the 6th Constitutional Convention of the Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans on September 4, 2013. Delegates from Local 571 were Julie Phillips, Dee Pospishil (Retiree Council Secretary -Treasurer), Phyllis Meade (Retiree Council President) and Bonnie Saracco. The convention assembled heard several speakers and elected the Executive Board members for a two year term. Jane Russell, Local 571 President, was re-elected as the IARA Recording Secretary.



IARA delegates (l-r) were Julie Phillips, Dee Pospishil, Phyllis Meade, Bonnie Saracco

Our Path Forward by Jane Russell



For over a year, IFT officers, administrators, professional and support staffs and Executive Board members have been working together on moving the IFT forward, to be more responsive to the times and our members. IFT President Dan Montgomery talked about “Power Forward” at the August 26, 2013, Local 571 House of Representatives meeting. Dan shared his vision of everyone working together within the IFT. The work was done by committee, of which there are four. Each of these committees called workgroups consist of those persons listed above. Each of the workgroups met numerous times to prepare recommendations to the IFT Executive Board and for the IFT Convention held in Rosemont on October 18-20, 2013. The workgroups presented their findings at the July IFT Executive Board retreat.

Public Education Champions Workgroup

To champion public education, we must work both within and outside the organization to promote the important role of public education to our members, communities and legislators. Recommendations included promoting quality public education as a civil right, training our legislators, and enhancing Union Leadership Institute programs to reflect the needs of local leaders and members. The workgroup also provided several suggestions for convention workshops as well as resolutions to be taken up at the IFT Convention.

Fair Economy Workgroup

The workgroup identified ways the IFT can advocate broadly for a fair economy that will benefit our members and the broader community. Recommendations included a mission statement defining “a fair economy,” increased member access to pension information and work on the fair-tax campaign. Both IFT Convention workshops and resolutions were suggested as well.

Forging Strategic Alliances Workgroup

This workgroup has identified new ways that the IFT can join with others to advocate together for issues that affect us all. Several pilots were launched in locals around the state with the charge to build community partnerships and allies. Strategic partners such as the Illinois Education Association, the Illinois School Board Association and a Service Employees Union local were interviewed to determine what is working and what is not. Finally, a “Guide to Building Partnerships and Creating Allies,” promulgating best practices, will be provided to all IFT locals. The workgroup recommendation to involve IFT convention delegates in the AFT’s First Book program has already begun. Again, convention resolutions were submitted.

Next Generation Workgroup

Developing a plan on how best to engage and develop the next generation of union members was this workgroup’s mission. The next generation was defined as those members 35 years old and younger. That means there are 20,000 to 30,000 IFT members in this group which is the fastest growing age group. After doing considerable research on younger members’ attitudes, the workgroup suggested that 30 scholarships be given to under-35 non-delegates to attend the IFT convention as observers. The selection process for the non-delegates has already taken place, and two Local 571 members received the scholarships. There is also a special social activity at the IFT Convention planned for the Gen Y participants. A recommendation to hold an annual statewide conference offering workshops and events geared towards younger members was also considered in next year’s budget. Suggestions for convention workshops and resolutions were discussed.

As a member of the IFT Executive Board, I am fortunate to serve on the Public Education Champions Workgroup. I am one of 14 members and helped to present the group’s work to the rest of the IFT Executive Board. During the summer IFT Executive Board retreat, IFT President Dan Montgomery thanked the workgroups for their inspired work which was done in an unprecedented partnership between the professional and support staff and elected leaders. Dan further says:

“That working together is emblematic of our commitment to try new things, to seek new ways, to find the Path Forward, whatever direction that it takes us, in order to get the job done and succeed in our mission to be a dynamic, effective and powerful force for good in the lives of our members and our society.”

We look forward to October’s IFT Convention to participate in the fruits of our labor. Our work has only begun as we “power forward.”

Union Leadership Institute Details Available

The 2013-14 Union Leadership Institute course schedule and registration information will be available soon on the IFT website, (www.ift-aft.org). ULI courses are held at the Robert M. Healey Conference Center in Westmont. Most courses are held over three weekend-long sessions, and participants must attend all three sessions to complete the course. Possible courses offered will be Building a Political Powerhouse, Grievance Administration, Introduction to Collective Bargaining, and Union Leadership Development. There will also be other workshops which will take place during one weekend. The ULI training sessions will be held on the following dates:

Fall Session: November 9-10, 2013

Winter Session: February 8-9, 2014

Spring Session: April 26-27, 2014

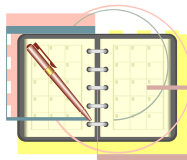
Watch for more information on the IFT website so you do not miss the deadline for registration!

In order to register, you must have the signature of your Council President on the registration form.

What's Missing from the Messenger?



Please e-mail comments and suggestions to Kyra Lopez at Kyra_Lopez@hotmail.com.



Mark Your Calendars for the Legal Limits for New Teachers Seminar

Members who are non-tenured teachers, especially first- and second-year teachers, are invited to attend the Legal Limits for New Teachers Seminar sponsored by the West Suburban Teachers Union Local 571 on October 24, 2013, at our conference center in Westmont. An IFT attorney and a School Board attorney will present information focusing on professional conduct, DCFS obligations, adhering to district policies, confidentiality issues, internet and technology issues, student discipline, suspensions, certification, special education, tenure, free speech, leaves of absence, etc. See your Council President or Building Representative for registration information.

Announcing Local 571's 8th Legislative Breakfast

It's time to sign up for the West Suburban Teachers Union Local 571's 8th Legislative Breakfast. Here are the details:

When: Saturday, October 26, 2013

Where: DoubleTree Hotel, Oak Brook, Illinois

Agenda:

Plated breakfast

Introductions

Meet and greet Illinois legislators and members of Congress

Three panel discussions and questions answered by Illinois legislators and members of Congress (different format than in the past)

Gift card raffle (Proceeds go to WSTU scholarships and COPE.)

If you wish to attend, please contact your Council President by Friday, October 18.



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02/13

We're on the Web!!!
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West Suburban Teachers Union Local 571
500 Oakmont Lane
P.O. Box 390
Westmont, IL 60559-0390
Phone: 630-468-4098 Fax: 630-468-4088
E-mail: jjennings@ift-aft.org