

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

# Union Messenger

## “A Union of Professionals”

### January-February Calendar

1/8—ExBd Mtg. (5:30 p.m.—Westmont)  
 2-3/2-4—IFT Winter ULI (Westmont)  
 2/5—HOR Mtg. (5:30 p.m.—Westmont)  
 2/5—AFT Convention Delegate  
 nomination deadline

### Union Messenger

Kyle Stern, President  
 April Giannosa, Vice-President  
 Sandra Erickson, Treasurer  
 Cathleen Pope, Secretary  
 Eugene Poull, Financial Secretary  
 Brett Blair, Legal Defense Secretary  
 Emily Moore, Cope Chair  
 John Wardisiani, Cope Treasurer  
 Rachel Esposito, IFT Field Service  
 Director  
 Max Schoenberg, IFT Field Service  
 Director  
 Renee Wagner, IFT Field Service  
 Director  
 Carolyn Wilson, Membership Support  
 Staff  
 Patty Clancy, Office Support Staff  
 Andrew Bendelow,  
 571 Web Administrator  
 Robin Hancock,  
 571 Union Messenger Editor



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## Intentional Communication

In the 1999 cult movie classic, “Office Space” one of the characters is named Michael Bolton and is often asked if he is any relation to the singer with the same name. This frustrates Michael and when a colleague asks why he doesn’t go by Mike, Michael responds, “[Why should I change? He’s the one who sucks.](#)” I think this is the feeling a lot of us have when we deal with a colleague that we dislike or don’t see eye to eye with. Why should we change, they are the ones that suck. Unfortunately, we cannot control other people as much as we may try and trust



me, I’ve tried. All we can do is control our own actions and behaviors. Maybe the better thing to do is think of the lyrics from Taylor Swift’s “Anti-hero” and possibly think, “I’m the problem, it’s me.” With that mindset we can work on ways of changing what we do to deal with troublesome colleagues and bosses. In the spirit of fostering unity within our union, over the next few Union Messengers, I want to share some insights and strategies, drawing inspiration from renowned experts Sarah Noll Wilson, Bob Sutton, Henry Cloud M.D., Project Aristotle, Kate Murphy, and David Posen M.D., on the importance of **intentional**

**communication.** I want all of us to know how to effectively work with people we may not always see eye to eye with. As an imperfect person, I do get emotional from time to time and don’t always follow this advice. I feel when I don’t follow this advice, I reach out and apologize.

Before delving into strategies for working with disagreeable colleagues, it’s crucial to acknowledge the role of workplace stress in our lives. In “Is Work Killing You?” Dr. David Posen highlights the detrimental effects of chronic stress on our physical and mental health. Prolonged exposure to stressors can lead to burnout, anxiety, and various health issues. If you are in this situation, please seek a medical professional, social worker, licensed counselor or therapist. You must begin by cultivating self-awareness about your stress levels and emotional responses to workplace conflicts. Recognize the signs of stress in your body and mind. Are you experiencing tension, irritability, or sleep disturbances? Understanding your stress triggers can help you take proactive steps to manage them.

Posen along with many other experts suggest prioritizing self-care as a fundamental aspect of dealing with workplace stress. Engage in activities that promote relaxation and well-being, such as mindfulness meditation, regular exercise, getting enough sleep and participating in hobbies you enjoy. By taking care of your physical and emotional health, you’ll be better equipped to handle disagreements constructively in and out of the work place.

Continued from page 1

## Intentional Communication

**Effective communication** is key to resolving conflicts at work. Posen emphasizes the importance of open and respectful dialogue. When you find yourself in a disagreement, consider the following communication strategies:

Both Posen and Kate Murphy believe in **Active Listening**: Truly listen to your colleagues' perspectives without immediately formulating your response. This can foster mutual understanding and create a more constructive atmosphere for resolving differences.

Both Posen and Dr. Henry Cloud recommend Using "I" Statements: Express your thoughts and feelings using "I" statements to avoid sounding accusatory. For example, say, "I feel concerned about..." rather than "You always..." This approach can make your feedback less confrontational.

**Seek Common Ground**: Look for areas of agreement or shared goals with your colleagues or even your bosses. Finding common ground can create a sense of unity and purpose, even amidst disagreements.

Kate Murphy, in her book "You're Not Listening", emphasizes the importance of active listening in effective communication. When dealing with colleagues you disagree with, adopting empathetic listening practices can be a game-changer. This means not just hearing words but also understanding the emotions and perspectives behind them. When you genuinely listen, you create a space for your colleagues to express their viewpoints fully.

Disagreements are a natural part of professional life. Posen encourages practicing constructive disagreement. Instead of avoiding conflicts, embrace them as opportunities for growth and innovation. Don't hesitate to seek support from trusted colleagues, mentors, or employee assistance programs if workplace conflicts become overwhelming. Sharing your concerns with others can provide valuable insights, emotional support, and guidance on how to navigate difficult situations and in this sometimes-crazy world, we need all the support we can get. I hope you have a joyful holiday season and come back refreshed in the New Year.

In Unity,

Kyle Stern



### IFT Applauds Illinois General Assembly for Ending Invest in Kids Voucher Program

Illinois Federation of Teachers President Dan Montgomery issued the following statement commending the Illinois General Assembly for their decision to end the tax credit scholarship/voucher program known as "Invest in Kids."

"Ending the Invest in Kids program is a significant stride in giving top priority to the needs of our public education system and guaranteeing equal opportunities for every student, particularly those from Black, Brown, special education, and LGBTQ+ communities."

"Educators and the unions that represent them will always fight for our public schools and the students that they serve. There is a nationwide push to divert public dollars from our public schools through vouchers or voucher-like programs like tax credit scholarships and

education savings accounts. Today, Illinois lawmakers chose to put our public schools first and end the state program that subsidized private, mostly religious schools, many of which have discriminatory policies."

"Even though the Invest in Kids program is ending, nothing prevents donors from contributing to private school scholarship funds and claiming any associated federal tax deduction in future years. In Illinois, we can now refocus on efforts to fund our public schools, which are still billions of dollars and decades away from being fully and adequately funded. Our message going forward is simple: Public funds belong in public schools that serve all students."

"We will continue to work with our school communities and lawmakers to advocate for equitable educational policies that uplift every child and strengthen our public education system by fully funding it and opposing any voucher or voucher-like programs in the future."





# Legislative Breakfast



On Saturday, September 30, at the Oak Brook Hilton and Resort, Local 571 hosted its 18<sup>th</sup> annual legislative breakfast. In attendance were State Superintendent Tony Sanders, Executive Director and President of Illinois Families for Public School Cassie Cresswell, State Legislators Jenn Ladisch Douglass, Maura Hirschauer, Michelle Mussman, and Mary Beth Canty with IFT's very own Cynthia Riseman as emcee. Topics ranged from asylum seekers to issues facing paraprofessionals to school vouchers. Attendees were asked to fill out postcards to mail to their legislators to oppose the state voucher system while treated to a nice breakfast and cupcakes. Representative Mary Beth Canty received the Jane Russell Defender of Public Education Award for leading the charge to make full day kindergarten mandated statewide.



Councils donated money for the raffles to raise money for our COPE (Committee on Political Education) fund. Raffles included gift cards to Southwest Airlines, Ace, Bass Pro Shop, Amazon, Target, and a surprise valued Visa Gift card (which ended up being worth over \$400). Additionally, new this year, was a bar featuring mimosas and bloody marys.

If you were able to attend this year, we thank you. If you were unable to attend, please consider attending next year. It is a great event.

**Thank you to Patty Clancy, April Giannosa, and the entire Legislative Breakfast team for running this great event.**





# Members Engaged



Kyle Stern, Gene Poull, and Nick Christen picketing with UAW



Kyle Stern and Representative Marcus Evans



Gene Poull and Kyle Stern with Representative Diane Blair-Sherlock



Senator Mike Porfirio and Kyle Stern



Representative Justin Slaughter and Kyle Stern



Council President Manny Reyes (right), Syed Wasey (left), and Financial Secretary Gene Poull (second from left) enjoy a day of golf, political discussion, and birthday celebrations with Barbara Hernandez in August.



Kyle Stern with Representative Hernandez, Representative Terra Costa Howard, Speaker Chris Welch, Representative Jenn Ladisch Douglass, DuPage County Chairwoman Deb Conroy and Jane Russell.



Argo teachers Bobby Markatos (left), Milosh Lukovic (second from left), and Financial Secretary Gene Poull (right) enjoyed a day of golfing and political discussion with State Senator Laura Ellman in September.



Ruthie Jennings, Congresswoman Nikki Budzinski, and Emily Moore



Representative Terra Costa Howard, Kyle Stern and Representative Kelly Burke



Kyle Stern and Representative Laura Faver Dias



Emily Moore, Ruthie Jennings, Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulis and Monique Manuel



April Giannosa, Kyle Stern and Monique Manuel at the Citizen Action event on November 10th



# Members Engaged



Monique Manuel, Attorney General Kwame Raoul, Kyle Stern, Ruthie Jennings and Emily Moore



Kyle Stern and Governor JB Pritzker



Senator Dick Durban and Kyle Stern



Congressman Chuy Garcia and Kyle Stern



Senator Raphael Warnock and Kyle Stern



Representative Kevin Olickal and Kyle Stern



Kyle Stern, State Senator Rachel Ventura, Will County Commissioner Jackie Traynere and Congresswoman Delia Ramirez



Kyle Stern and Representative Hohn Huynh



Judge John Anderson and Kyle Stern



Kyle Stern and Representative Sharon Chung



Kyle Stern and Senator Celina Villanueva



Kyle Stern, Ruthie Jennings, Emily Moore, Monique Manuel and Erica Swanson



Mandy Genge, Jennie Crownson, U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth and Kyle Stern

## The AFT Civil, Human, and Women's Rights Conference was held in Houston, TX October 20-22, 2023

The conference kicked off with a day of full-group sessions introducing attendees to the indigenous cultures of Texas and the issues facing people from a variety of marginalized groups. A recurrent theme from presenters was finding unity and solidarity in the fight for justice and finding solutions for students and communities. Many presenters reinforced messages from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s address to the 1961 AFL-CIO convention where he compared the Civil Rights movement and the labor movement saying, "Our needs are identical . . . decent wages; fair working conditions; livable housing; old-age security; health and welfare measures; [and] conditions in which families can grow, have education for their children, and respect in their community." It was a powerful reminder that we must work together in all things and remain united.



To conclude the work of day one, conference attendees were bussed to a rally in solidarity with Houston teachers who are fighting against state takeover of schools, scripted curricula, and other unjust treatment of students, parents, and teachers in schools. AFT President Randi Weingarten and others spoke to the ways in which "our democratic institutions are under siege from various fronts, including attacks on voting rights, banning books, rampant discrimination against historically marginalized communities, rejecting diversity and inclusion, suppressing educators and beyond." Weingarten and others carried the conference theme into the rally - "real solutions for kids and communities."

Day two of the conference included sessions in six different learning pathways. Each attendee was asked to attend sessions based on their pre-selected or assigned path. I attended path three: "We the People: Protecting Our Communities and Building Power with Intersectionality." Sessions included: "This is Your Fight Too: Standing Up for Vulnerable Communities," "Two Movements, One Goal: Organized Labor and Civil Rights," and "Together We Rise: Building Campaigns That Protect Workers and Families." It was energizing to hear from organizers around the country. Although there are obviously still many challenges facing the civil, human, and women's rights movements, there is hope and it was palpable at the conference.

I greatly appreciate the opportunity afforded to me by Local 571 to attend this conference. It was amazing to hear like-minded people in and out of the field of education talk about the fight for the rights of all.

~Heather Siegel-Hickman

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### Thanksgiving and Giving at Argo

Each year a member of the Argo Teachers' Council organizes a fundraiser called **Thanksgiving Giving** to give grocery store gift cards to students in the school whose families are in need. This year, members of the teachers' council, the PSRP council (also part of Local 571), the maintenance union, as well as administrators, board members, and other staff were able to raise \$4300! We gave Jewel and Aldi gift cards to 22 families in our school community.

The Argo Teachers' Council is also happy to report three successes over the last month. We closed two grievances and settled an incident of direct dealing. First, the District has agreed to resume sending all Board materials as required by the CBA to settle a grievance that arose when the District abruptly stopped doing so in June. Second, the District has agreed to the Union's interpretation of language regarding when to notify teachers of a complaint made against them and a procedure for handling that. This was settled prior to requiring arbitration. Finally, we settled an instance that arose out of the District engaging in direct dealing with the council's only non-member in April of 2022. Gene Poull, 571 Financial Secretary and Argo council member noticed a discrepancy in some salaries as members were ratifying the 2023-2028 CBA. When asked, the District admitted to its direct dealing. The council executive board and field service director, Renee Wagner, negotiated a settlement that got 18 additional members increases in salary rather than rolling back the salary deal made through direct dealing with one bargaining unit member. This settlement grants over \$100,000 in increased salaries for this year and increases step placement for those individuals for the remainder of their careers at Argo. We are super thankful to have resolved the grievances and the direct dealing without further ULPs against the district.

The Argo Teachers' Council wishes everyone a restful break this holiday season!

~Heather Siegel-Hickman



## Meet-a-Member

Local 571 is a 5900+ member union of teachers, paraprofessionals, school-related personnel (PSRPs) and retirees, employed (currently or formerly) in school districts in western Cook and DuPage Counties. We have many interesting and talented members among us! This column spotlights our members and gives a glimpse into what makes us exceptional. This month, I'd like you to meet... **Chris Aylward, math teacher at West Leyden High School!**

Q: What do you appreciate most about your current position?

A: *I appreciate teaching in the community that I grew up in. Like myself, many of my students are the first in their families to go to college. I enjoy learning their stories and sharing parts of mine with them as well. I have taught some students over the years who have overcome some extreme adversity, and yet still managed to come to school and put forth their best efforts each day. These students motivated me to be my best.*



Q: What strengths do you bring to your role as a teacher?

A: *I maintain a relaxed (yet structured) environment in my classroom, and I treat my students with kindness and respect. In turn, I find the kindness and respect to be reciprocated by my students to me. This opens the door to healthy student-teacher relations, and helps to foster an environment in which effective instruction can take place.*

Q: What do you appreciate about the Union?

A: *I appreciate the professionalism of our Union. I have always felt that we truly are a Union of Professionals. I feel that our Union has been an effective partner with our district by being an informed voice in dealing with the many issues that arise in a school district. I also appreciate what the Union has done in negotiating over the years on behalf of the teachers and staff. The benefits that we have are the result of the work of my predecessors, many of whom were my own teachers. I am grateful for the work that they did, and for the work that continues to be done on our collective behalf (and for our families). The Union has helped to ensure that we have fair working conditions, good benefits, and competitive pay. The work of the Union, however, is never done...*

Q: Who has been inspirational to you in your life?

A: *I have always been inspired by my grandfather, who passed away in 1997. He was a WWII Marine, and he was injured at New Georgia in the Solomon Islands when his transport ship was bombed and torpedoed by Japanese forces in 1943. He lived the rest of his life with shrapnel along his spine that was deemed too risky to remove. He received a Purple Heart for his sacrifice, and ultimately re-enlisted for a second tour of duty. After his honorable discharge, he spent his career as an active member of the Wood Finisher's Union local 611, which is part of the Painter's District Council 194. He and my grandmother served as treasurer and secretary for many years, and my grandfather also served as a business agent for the Local. He was a tremendous man, and I will always admire him.*

If you would like to nominate yourself, or another member you know, to be interviewed for the Meet-a-Member column, reach out to April at [agiannosa@wstu571.org](mailto:agiannosa@wstu571.org).

## Meet Sally!

You might have encountered Scabby the Rat at picket lines in the past. IFT leaders and staff have utilized such inflatables for protests on previous occasions. Inspired by the iconic figures of Mother Jones and Rosie the Riveter, IFT made the decision to craft our unique representation, one that embodies the spirit of our typical member. Allow us to introduce you to "**Sally Darity**"! If your council requires an energizing addition to your upcoming event or action, we encourage you to reach out to your field service director to inquire about the possibility of Sally making a special appearance!

You can get Sally D for your next Council event. Contact your field service director for more information.



## American Federation of Teachers

### CONVENTION

#### **Call for nominations**



Nominations are now being accepted for delegates to the American Federation of Teachers Convention that will convene in Houston, TX, on July 22-25, 2024. All Local 571 members are eligible to be nominated as delegates to this convention. There can be up to fifty-three (53) delegates, including the ten (10) Officers which include Area Trustees, who became delegates by virtue of being elected to office. Ballots will be counted, and candidates will be ranked by the number of ballots received. Allowing for the ten (10) Officers, the forty three (43) candidates with the most votes will be declared delegates. The remaining candidates will be declared alternate delegates; and should any delegate(s) notify the Local of an inability to fulfill the duties of delegate, these alternate delegates will be selected in rank order of votes received to serve in place of the delegate who is unable to serve. Delegates who attend the convention will be reimbursed for expenses up to \$2,081/delegate.

***Nominations must be printed or typed (name and Council) and received in the Local 571 office on or before February 5, 2024 by end of the business day. Nominations can be emailed to Patty Clancy @ [pclancy@ift-aft.org](mailto:pclancy@ift-aft.org).*** Nominees will receive a written or electronic acknowledgement of receipt. Voting will take place in April 2024 via secret ballot. Council leaders will notify members of the date(s) that voting will take place. Members' ballots without emails on file will be mailed via U.S. Postal Service to their homes.

## Local 571 Executive Board Area Trustees

#### **Call for nominations**



Nominations are now being accepted for Local 571 Executive Board Area Trustees. The Executive Board of Local 571 shall consist of the Officers of Local 571 which include four (4) Area Trustees, at least one of whom is a PSRP member, and the Local 571 Council Presidents who serve as Trustees. All Local 571 members are eligible to be nominated as Local 571 Area Trustees. The term of office is two (2) years beginning July 1, 2024, and by virtue of their election, they shall be elected also as delegates to the AFT and IFT Conventions. ***Nominations must be printed or typed (name and Council) and received in the Local 571 office on or before March 11, 2024 by end of the business day. Nominations can be emailed to Patty Clancy @ [pclancy@ift-aft.org](mailto:pclancy@ift-aft.org).*** Nominees will receive a written or electronic acknowledgement of receipt. Voting will take place in May 2024 via secret ballot. Council leaders will notify members of the date(s) that voting will take place. Interested individuals may request further information about the duties of the office by contacting Local 571. Members' ballots without emails on file will be mailed via U.S. Postal Service to their homes.





## West Suburban Teachers Union Local 571 Scholarship Opportunities



- ◇ **Mary Wheeler Scholarship**—Six \$3,300 one-time awards will be given to high school seniors graduating in 2024 whose parents or guardians are members in good standing of the WSTU, Local 571. Applicants must plan to continue their education full time in the Fall of 2024. Applications will be available at [www.wstu571.org](http://www.wstu571.org), Local 571's Facebook page, or by calling 630-468-4098. *All application materials must be postmarked on or before February 15, 2024.*
- ◇ **Jo Ann Horowitz Scholarship**—Two \$1,650 one-time awards will be given in 2024 to *current PSRPs* who are members in good standing of the WSTU, Local 571 and pursuing a BA/BS or MA/MS in an education-related field. Applications will be available at [www.wstu571.org](http://www.wstu571.org), Local 571's Facebook page, or by calling 630-468-4098. *All application materials must be postmarked on or before February 15, 2024.*
- ◇ **Julienne Phillips Scholarship**—Two \$1,650 one-time awards will be given in 2024 to current licensed, practicing educators (ex. teacher, social worker, counselor, psychologist, speech pathologist, librarian, nurse, or instructional coach) who are members in good standing of the WSTU, Local 571, and pursuing a *masters degree* in an education-related field. Applications will be available at [www.wstu571.org](http://www.wstu571.org), Local 571's Facebook page, or by calling 630-468-4098. *All application materials must be postmarked on or before February 15, 2024.*
- ◇ **Maryann Karlovsky Scholarship**—Two \$1,650 one-time awards will be given in 2024 to current licensed, practicing educators (ex. teacher, social worker, counselor, psychologist, speech pathologist, librarian, nurse, or instructional coach) who are members in good standing of the WSTU, Local 571 and pursuing a certificate or endorsement in an education-related field. Applications will be available at [www.wstu571.org](http://www.wstu571.org), Local 571's Facebook page, or by calling 630-468-4098. *All application materials must be postmarked on or before February 15, 2024.*

**YOUR CHANCE TO  
MEET THE CANDIDATES**



## Regional PAC Meetings

**SAVE THE DATE**

Interviews and potential endorsement of candidates running for state legislative offices in both Cook and DuPage counties will be conducted at the Regional PAC Area G & H meetings held on Thursday, January 11, 2024 at the Robert M. Healey Conference Center, 500 Oakmont Lane, Westmont, IL 60559 (entrance D or E). A light dinner will be served with the two endorsement meetings to follow.

Be part of the IFT endorsement process to meet, question and learn about the candidates for state office.

Detailed information with time and RSVP information will be available soon.

# West Suburban Teachers Union Local #571 2024 Convention T-Shirt Competition

In July, our elected delegates will be representing us at the 2024 AFT Convention in Houston, TX.  
**We are asking YOU to design a t-shirt for the convention.**



**WHO:** Any Union Member

**WHAT:** Submit a Union inspired design for a t-shirt for our delegates to wear that incorporates our logo. Our colors are blue and white. The winners will be decided at the January Executive Board Meeting by the Executive Board.

**WHERE:** Please submit your designs to Kyle Stern at [ksstern@wstu571.org](mailto:ksstern@wstu571.org)

**WHEN:** All designs must be submitted by January 5, 2024

**WHY:** One winner will be chosen. Winner will receive a t-shirt and gift card...and of course, bragging rights.

\*\*\*T-Shirts will be printed using a Union printer\*\*\*

## Book Study: We Want to Do More Than Survive

Members...click on the link below to register and receive a complimentary copy of the book, Abolitionist Teaching Joy and Justice: **We Want To Do More Than Survive**

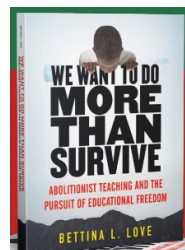
Starts: January 10 2024- [Flyer](#)

Dates: Jan 10, Feb 7, March 6 and April 10, 2024

Virtual 7-8 Central Time

[Registration Link](#)

[rb.gy/f7igmf](http://rb.gy/f7igmf)



~Christina Rodriguez/Equity, Diversity, Inclusion Committee

*Happy Holidays  
May your holiday  
season be filled with  
cheer and celebration  
for the new year.*



## What's Missing from the Messenger?

Is there something innovative or exciting happening at your school?

If so, we want to hear from you!

Email your news to Robin Hancock at: [rhancock@wstu571.org](mailto:rhancock@wstu571.org)



[www.wstu571.org](http://www.wstu571.org)

<https://www.facebook.com/WSTU571/>

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