



UPDATE

American Federation of Teachers Local 604, AFL-CIO

www.aftlocal604.org

August/September 2025

Consider an act of kindness

Bill Briggs, Retiree

Like most professional educators, when I was still in the classroom, I tried to find ways to reach students individually. I always thought I did a pretty good job of it until recently.

Earlier this summer while watching one of my favorite shows, Sunday Today with Willie Geist on NBC, a principal from Texas was spotlighted. And what he did brought tears to my eyes.

Jason Mutterer, principal at Arlington Summit High School, was preparing for graduation. Like most in charge, he wanted to make it special, but his imagination, a not-so-simple act of kindness, will live in the hearts and memories of not only the graduates, but also their parents.

Mutterer took the time to write an individual, heartfelt note to all 443 graduates. Included was a \$1 bill. Each note took around 15 minutes and included a specific thank you, nicknames and references only a caring person would know.

At the ceremony, the students were to his back, on a stage. When the principal, a former coach, started his speech, he turned his back on the audience and directly addressed his students. They were made to feel even more special.

One student, Eduardo Estrada told NBC "He knows almost everybody by name. He knows something going on in everybody's lives." Priceless!

Why include a dollar, which most consider insignificant?

Mutterer has a different view. In the same interview, he said, "If 443 kids are doing random acts of kindness

every day, it has a huge, huge impact on our society."

Daniel Ezenagu told NBC Dallas-Fort Worth, "Athletes, bands, regular students—whatever you do, he knew about it." In Mutterer's note to Daniel, he referred to him as "Dan the Man."

So, what can you do as the start to the school year is around the corner? Continue to make a difference, share the story, initiate random acts of kindness, and encourage others to work on stopping the hate that is spreading throughout this country.

After all, isn't that what great educators already do!



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Welcome Back!
by Attorney James Ridge

It's time to get "back to school."

Dan Mercer, President @ Local 604

It's "back to school" time! Whether you get a summer break or work year-round, the start of the new school year brings with it energy and excitement. For returning members, there are new and familiar names and faces, both of students and co-workers. For new members, it's the beginning of a chapter of your life, one which hopefully brings happiness and fulfillment. For all our members, I hope being part of your union community provides you with support, strength and camaraderie to aid you on the journey. Welcome (back) to all of you!

As a student, teacher, parent, grandparent and union representative, most of my life has revolved around the school calendar. I reflect on childhood memories of shopping for supplies—a new box of crayons with the sharpener built into the box, bright, squeaky gym shoes and maybe an outfit or two. As a teacher, I recall decorating my classroom, making seating charts and creating lesson plans to engage the young minds of those who entered my classroom. The feeling of a typical August day when the cool, humid morning gives way to the hot, sticky afternoon feels like the start of the new school year. The sights and sounds of the football team and marching band practicing add to the familiar feeling, and the theme song from "Welcome Back Kotter" plays in my mind. Even after seventeen years of doing union work, the rhythm of the school year remains strong.

There are other ways we, as a nation, need to get "back to school." As educators, we face many challenges. We strive to meet the needs of our students and inspire them to learn. We make do with available resources. We work hard and fight for the pay and working conditions we deserve. This has all been true from my earliest school experiences. Nowadays, we face additional challenges. Public education is under attack. A federal voucher program will divert more public funds to private schools this year than ever before. The false narrative of "failing public schools" is playing loudly, nationwide. Our unions are under attack by billionaires who want education to become a for-profit industry. Our Tier 2 members face a future with an inadequate pension that structurally guarantees they will fall further behind in each year of retirement. Insufficient higher education funding feeds drastically rising tuition, putting opportunities out of reach for many.

As a union of educators, we must stand up to these challenges. We must turn our nation's priorities "back to school." We must advocate for adequate funding for our public schools, colleges and universities. We must continue the fight for improvements to the Tier 2 pension systems. And we must fight against the diversion of public dollars to private institutions. The state of Illinois needs revenue solutions that end the reliance on property tax increases and do not add to the tax burdens of the middle class. Each of us as individuals can do only so much. We can face these challenges better as a union, working together in strength and solidarity. And that is exactly what we intend to do.



Richard Manley Scholarships

Current Professional Educators

AFT Local 604 is offering at least one scholarship up to \$2,000. The scholarship application is due in the office by 11/13/2025. Applicants must be a currently licensed, practicing educator and a member in good standing. He/She must be pursuing a certificate, endorsement in an education-related field or working on a district-approved master's program.

Current Support Staff Members

AFT Local 604 is offering at least one scholarship up to \$2,000. The scholarship application is due in the Local office by 11/13/2025. He/She must be pursuing a bachelor's or master's degree in an education field with the desire to become a classroom professional educator or taking classes directly related to his/her position in the district.

Please go to www.aftlocal604.org for more information concerning rules and requirements.





TREASURER'S TURN

Sean Hunt, AFT Local 604
Treasurer/Business Manager

The start of the new school year brings new treasurers for some of our councils. Keeping that in mind it is time to remind all treasurers of things that need to be taken care of beginning in September.

Monthly Checks and Balances

Be sure you balance your checkbook and receipts with your bank statement each month. Additionally, you need to make certain you have itemized receipts to coincide with expenditures. These receipts should be stapled to your monthly reconciliation sheet and kept in a monthly file. You do not need to send copies of the reconciliations or bank statement to our office.

Council Audit 2024-2025

It's time once again to complete your 2024-2025 council audit. All council presidents and treasurers received a memo detailing the directions for completing the audit. Make certain your audit committee gets a copy of the memo detailing the process for doing the audit and that they follow the directions that were highlighted. Please try and get this audit completed as soon as possible. The deadline for filing the completed audit with AFT Local 604 is November 15, 2025.

Council Dues Payments

At the end of each month, you need to complete and submit to AFT Local 604 the monthly dues remittance along with your payment. The forms are provided for your use throughout the school year. Remember, dues are paid over ten months from September through June of each school year. When submitting dues, please remember to fill in the number of members and do not staple the check to the remittance slip. Make all checks payable to AFT Local 604.

The Local now accepts dues payments electronically via ACH transaction. Payments can be made directly from bank to bank. For more information on this, please see your President/Treasurer packet or call me at the office 815/725-0402.

For members who begin employment after the start of the school year, their level of dues payment IS NOT based on how much they will earn in the amount of time they work. Their level of dues payment IS based on how much they would earn if they had worked the entire year.

Council Rosters

Along with each dues remittance payment, our office needs a roster of all members. The information needed for each person on the roster is their first and last name, address, employee number, and dues deduction (level of dues payment.) This is needed in an Excel format. By having it in the Excel format, it can be easily merged with our database therefore avoiding errors in our membership database.

990 Filing

It is the time of year again to file 990 forms in order to keep the tax exempt status. Be certain that your council provides me with the appropriate documentation so I can complete the returns by the deadline. Councils that are filing late are subject to a daily fine for each day the form is late. Information regarding the filing requirements for the 990 forms and the council's deadline for filing, based on the end of your fiscal year, has been sent to council presidents and treasurers.

FANNIE MAY DISCOUNT NOW 20% OFF

For AFT Local 604 Union Members

The Fannie May Gift Cards are available at AFT Local 604 at the discounted price of 20% off. You can use the gift cards at any Fannie May store for any items.

Just mail your check made payable to AFT Local 604 for the total amount and include \$1.00 for postage/handling or you can stop in the office for no additional fee to pick up.

Please indicate which Gift Card(s) you would like.

Fannie May Gift Cards	Union Cost	Quantity	Total
\$5.00 gift card	\$4.00	_____	_____
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AFT Local 604
1520 N. Rock Run Drive STE 1
Crest Hill, IL 60403

Your rights under the Workers' Compensation Act

by James M. Ridge, attorney at law

Welcome Back!

As you begin the 2025–2026 school year, you are welcomed back with pride, purpose, and deep gratitude for the vital work you do every day. Whether you're preparing classrooms, planning curriculum, or greeting returning students with familiar smiles, please remember *you deserve to feel safe, supported, and protected on the job.*

This fall, we want to reaffirm one essential message: **you have rights under the Illinois Workers' Compensation Act.**

Illinois law guarantees that if you suffer a work-related injury or illness—whether it's from a sudden accident or cumulative stress—you are entitled to key benefits, including:

- **Medical care** for your injury or illness
 - **Temporary or permanent disability benefits**
 - **Vocational rehabilitation** if needed
- Wage replacement** while you recover

Timely Reporting Is Crucial

If you experience a workplace incident, **you must report it to your employer within 45 days.** The sooner, the better. Delayed reporting can result in delayed or denied benefits. This includes not only sudden injuries but also repetitive stress injuries and/or worsening joint pain injuries.

Accurately Report Incidents

Please be sure to accurately report all incidents and be specific to outline defects and details of how the accident occurred. For example, something spilled on the floor, the tiles were broken on the stairs, children were racing down the hallway etc. Be specific on the mechanism of injury too. For example, was it lifting the box that caused ones back to give out or was did it give out while bending down to lift the box. The first is likely a compensable mechanism of injury, the second is likely not.

Seek Immediate Medical Attention

Do not delay medical treatment. It is important to establish a medical record as soon as possible, not just to confirm the nature of the injury but to also reiterate the history of how the accident or injury occurred.

Keep a Record

We encourage you to document all incidents, near-misses, or unsafe conditions. **Put it in writing** and notify your supervisor. Your union is here to support you through the reporting process and to advocate for your rights if any concerns arise. If you've already experienced an issue, or are unsure how to proceed, don't wait—**reach out to your union steward or contact the Ridge Law Group for review and discussion of your claim.**



For more information on your rights contact:

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Free consultations in Joliet and other areas throughout Illinois.

10 Reasons to Join and Stay in a Union

1. A POWERFUL VOICE ON THE JOB

Union workers have the right to negotiate with their employer over things like wages, benefits, and working conditions.

2. STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

As one of the largest labor unions in Illinois, IFT has strength in numbers & a history of affecting positive change from the workplace to the Capitol.

3. COLLECTIVE BARGAINING RIGHTS

IFT has helped thousands of members secure economic gains and other improvements for themselves and those they serve.

4. A CONTRACT

IFT members elect their bargaining team, negotiate terms & democratically vote to approve their collective bargaining agreements, which provide fair wages, benefits, work rules and job security.

5. PROTECTION & SUPPORT

The IFT provides support to help protect you against employer discrimination, questionable behavior, unfair labor practices and more.

6. PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES

IFT provides professional development training to enhance members' workplace and leadership skills.

7. LOBBYING & POLITICAL ACTION

IFT empowers you to make your voice heard by legislators on key issues that impact members, education, and public services.

8. CONSUMER BENEFITS

IFT and AFT offer members savings on a wide range of consumer benefits and services, as well as multiple scholarship programs.

9. PUBLIC RELATIONS

IFT works closely with media outlets to ensure our members' perspective is included in news coverage.

10. RACIAL JUSTICE ADVANCEMENT



“

Over the past 30 years I have experienced ebbs and flows of budget concerns and program cuts. However, this is different. I cannot recall the federal government outright attacking and attempting to dismantle public education. I understand public education isn't perfect but it isn't worthy of a wrecking ball.

Above: Beth Anderson, council president of Kankakee teachers and clerical, joined in a town hall with Illinois Attorney General, Kwame Raoul to talk about how federal cuts are attacking public education.

Un*ions *noun*.

A major inconvenience for those who wish to exploit and abuse the working class.

Taken from the Labor Newsletter..
International Brotherhood of Teamsters

Workers deserve to have a level playing field and a symbiotic relationship when it comes to their administration and what they need to have to thrive in their jobs. Students deserve to see familiar faces at their schools. This gives them a safe space to learn and grow into the adults that will eventually be the architects of our world. Unions make this happen.



Above: Rachel Tuley, treasurer of New Lenox school district 122

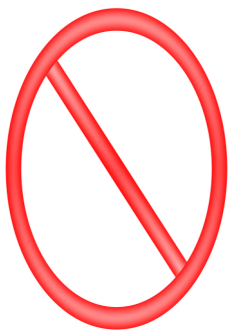
No Kings Rally in Joliet on 6/14/2025



Top...
IFT President,
Dan Montgomery with IFT
Field Service
Director, Katie
Kollross, and
Wilco member
as well as Lo-
cal 604 VP,
Margaret Janke

Left ...
President of
Kankakee's
Teachers &
Clerical Coun-
cil, Beth
Anderson, de-
livering a
speech at the
rally

Right...
Margaret Janke,
Wilco Council member
and Local 604 V.P.
along with Sally Darity!



Union Plus Scholarship

Addison Meadows, daughter of Sara Meadows, who is a member of our union family has won a \$1,000 Union Plus scholarship.

Sara is a member of the Tinley Park Teachers Council.
[Congratulations to Addison!](#)

[The Union Plus Scholarship Program](#) has provided over 30 years of higher education support for working families.

The Union Plus Scholarship program is an example of the U.S. labor movement's commitment to higher education.

The Union Plus Scholarship awards are presented annually to union members or members of their families who want to begin or continue their post-secondary education.

In 2025, 193 union members and union family members have been awarded \$250,000 in scholarships, ranging from \$500 to \$4,000.

ACTE Region 111 Award

Margaret Janke was awarded the Counseling and Career Development Award at the ACTE Region Leadership Conference held in Joliet on June 10, 2025.

She is now included in the national awards which will be held in Nashville in December! We wish you the best of luck! [Congratulations on this accomplishment Margaret!](#)



Meg Cappel Fundraiser



Attending the Meg Cappel fundraiser in April were from left to right, Alicia Edwards, Meg Cappel, and Grace Gonzalez.

Alicia is a member of the Valley View Office Personnel council.

Grace is a member of the Lockport council.

Commandments we can live by ...

Bill Briggs, Retiree

Louisiana already has a law that requires public schools to post the 10 Commandments in the classrooms.

Then in May of 2025, Texas enacted a law, Senate Bill 10, requiring public schools to display the 10 Commandments in every classroom. In doing so, the documents must be at least 16 x 20 and framed or a poster. Oh, and they must be easy to read!

That last line got me thinking. Would that mean in all languages spoken, not just English? Spanish might well be the main language in some districts. I am sure that would not make Gov. Abbott very happy.

But I digressed. Even though as a former Catholic and raised by nuns in grades 1-8, I am a firm believer of separation of church and state.

Recently, I came across a CNN report with the headline: "The Pope's 10 commandments on climate change." I believe this was one of the final reports from Pope Francis before his death.

In the 184-page document, the Pope called for "cultural revolution" to change our lifestyles. He wrote about topics ranging from technology issues to how many treat the poor. But what caught writer Daniel Burke's attention were the easy steps anyone can follow to stop the "disturbing warming" of the planet.

From his article, I believe professional educators can endorse and use these in the classroom without being challenged by the American Civil Liberties Union.

1. Think of future generations: "What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?"

2. Embrace alternative energy sources: "We know that technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels—especially coal, but also gas—needs to be progressively replaced without delay."

3. Consider pollution's effect on the poor: "Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth."

4. Take the bus! "Many specialists agree on the need to give priority to public transportation."

5. Be humble: "We are no God. The earth was here before us, and it has been given to us."

6. Don't become a slave to your phone: "True wisdom. . . is not acquired by a mere accumulation of data which eventually leads to overload and confusion, a sort of mental pollution."

7. Don't trade online relationships for real ones: "Real relationships . . . now tend to be replaced by a type of internet communication which enables us to choose or eliminate relationships at whim."

8. Turn off the lights, recycle and don't waste food: "Environmental responsibility can significantly affect the world around us, such as avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed . . . planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights."

9. Educate yourself: "There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions, and it is wonderful how education can bring about real changes in lifestyles."

10. Believe you can make a difference: "We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it."

I see all of these points, collectively or individually, as learning experiences to challenge students to understand each one and to add to the list.

Did any of these 10 really hit home with you? For me, it was number 10, especially with all that is going on in our country right now.

ATTENTION all council leaders and members! Please help us keep our records up-to-date.

Council leaders: Please notify the local office of all retirees in your council. Also, please notify us if there is a change in the officers (president, vice president, treasurer, secretary, or senator.)

Members: Please notify the local office if you have a change of address, phone, last name or home email address.

Contact us at 815/725-0402 or email one of us ...

Kristy Ledvina kledvina@ift-aft.org
Samantha Bullock sbullock@ift-aft.org
Darlene Mercer darmercer@ift-aft.org

THANK YOU!

Retiree News

Welcome all members to AFT Local 604 Retiree's Council. If you are aware of other retirees who have not joined the council, please encourage them to do so. If you are not currently a member, you may attend any of our meetings and sign up for council membership at the meeting. Questions can be emailed to president604retirees@gmail.com or vleuck13@gmail.com.

If you have not been receiving emails from the Local 604 office, please submit your email address so you can receive the Update and other important information in a timely manner. This year the Update will not be mailed through USPS. The Update will be emailed or downloaded from the Local 604 website. If you are paying your dues annually to our council, please make checks out to "Local 604 Retiree's Council". Dues can be sent to the Local 604 office: Local 604 Retiree Council, 1520 Rock Run Drive Suite 1, Crest Hill, IL 60403.

As members of the AFT, IFT and other retiree organizations, our council works towards the advancement of issues benefiting current retirees, as well as our union siblings who will be retiring in the future. Supporting political candidates who support retirees and changing Tier 2 are just a few of the current issues that we are focused on.

A 2025-2026 pocket calendar may be requested by contacting the Local 604 office, (815-725-0402). Information related to upcoming events for the 604 Retiree Council and Chicago Suburban Retirees Chapter will be shared via email.

We encourage all new and returning members to participate in the council's upcoming programs. All retirees may register or renew a membership at any of the programs throughout the year. The Program Committee is currently working to confirm our full schedule of 2025-2026 programs. Our meeting day has been changed to Thursdays with a few weekend events.

- **September 18, 2025** – Thursday, 2:00pm; Speaker, Krystle Able, IARA Executive Director, Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans, Social Security, OBBBA and Retiree Issues, 604 Office and via Zoom.
- **October 9, 2025** – 11:00am; Lock and Lunch, Ottawa, IL.
- **November**, TBA, Tentative: Joliet Junior College Planetarium
- **December 4, 2025** – 11:30am; Holiday Luncheon, Joliet
- **February 19, 2026** – 2:00pm; Election information and candidates forum, 604 Office
- **March 19, 2026** – 2:00pm, Spring TBA
- **April 26, 2026** – Sunday, 4:00pm; Joliet Symphony Orchestra, University of St. Francis, Joliet
- **May 21, 2026** – 11:00am; Nature Programs TBA

Our final event for the 2024-2025 year's programming found our retiree members at the Lake Renwick Preserve, Plainfield. We enjoyed a guided tour of the Heron Rookery by Greg Du-bois, preserve volunteer.

We were not sure who oversaw the weather, but the morning was perfect. Information shared and posted on the paths about the history of the Preserve, beginnings as a quarry, to a popular swimming beach, later as a fishing hole (for those who would sneak in), to finally as the rookery which was interesting even to those of us from the area.

We look forward to another successful year!

Phil Staley,
President, AFT Local 604 Retiree Council



**NEXT SENATE MEETING:
OCTOBER 15, 2025 @ 6PM**



IFT/AFT, AFL-CIO

UPDATE

American Federation of Teachers Local 604
www.aftlocal604.org

Office hours are 8am-3:30pm
Please call ahead if picking up supplies.
Use slot in door if dropping off information after hours.

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