



UPDATE

American Federation of Teachers Local 604, AFL-CIO

www.aftlocal604.org

April/May 2021

Presidents' Conference presents challenges

I have an idea. Let's plan a conference that will appeal to IFT leaders who represent councils as large as Chicago with some 27,000+ members to Ohio with its 14 membership.

What could go wrong! It was a beautiful Spring Saturday with bright sunshine and warm temps. For some who have been on ZOOM most of the week keeping their students up to date, in person would have been better, but with COVID-19, that was not an option.

The IFT spent months planning a program that would touch leaders: Leading Through Uncertainty: Connecting the Dots on Recovery, Anti-Racism, and Sustainability; and Mastering the Balance: Living and Leading with Purpose.

What could go wrong! Wait, did I just read Anti-Racism? No one in his/her right mind would think that anyone participating in this IFT-sponsored conference could be considered a racist or condoning racist acts, right? So how could this topic be a problem?

Because we had intentions of reporting on the day in the April Update, the call went out to our participants, AFT Local 604 had almost 1/5 of those who signed up, for honest responses. And maybe not surprisingly, some were upset with this session.

Now, the hard part: how to write this article that sheds light on the issues without upsetting members.

Any time race enters a conversation with a mixed crowd, someone is going to question what's been presented. Here are a few of the responses.

The part I probably enjoyed the most was the equity discussions and going into the chats with our group those two times in all honesty.

This one is tough to say, but to be honest the racism angle was overdone. As a historian, I know the ugly role racism has played in the history of our nation. Although I'm not perfect, I am not a white supremacist.

I found value in the anti-racist work.

I wish they (the IFT) had surveyed us first to see what we are doing with social injustice. For years, we have had training and have sent staff to Harvard to be trained and share.

I love that they did the land acknowledgement and fully explained the vision and mission for social justice—these are difficult conversations to have.

So, where do we go from here? This brief discussion does reflect the concerns we have in the country now. Mainly, how do we have a conversation and not offend? How does someone express his/her feels without being chastised?

Concerned, I took this issue to field staffer Dan Mercer, who went through staff training with the IFT last year on social justice. In the discussion, he wrote, "The more I've learned and thought about it, the more I see undeniable examples of it. The most dangerous part of white supremacy isn't extremists—it's the things many people aren't even aware of, don't even see, and don't believe exist because they haven't been impacted by it and want to think better of our people and our country."

One thing is clear, the issue is not leaving, and we cannot just walk away from it. How do we continue to have a conversation that builds unity and works to solve the problem? One problem is obvious; using ZOOM for a topic like this does not work when most of the people participating do not know each other. One suggestion would be to offer an AFT Local 604 roundtable for those who are interested to address the topic. This is a goal for the future when we can assemble in person.

Another timely topic dealing with this issue was the recent murders of Asian Americans in Atlanta. State Senator Ram Villivanlam (D 8th District) spoke to the group about the attacks and how attacks against Asian Americans have increased since the former president started referring to the pandemic as the China plague. He gave testimony as to why Illinois needs to pass legislation to teach Asian American history. One only has to think back to WW II to see how Japanese Americans were mistreated in this country after Pearl Harbor, but German Americans continued to live their normal lives.

To be clear, though, the day did not just produce tension. One of the biggest hits of the day seemed to be the breakout rooms. Mammie Kernagis, new president at the Chicago Heights Council, said, these "sessions that were facilitated by the IFT staffers were excellent, and I wished we had had an additional five minutes at least. Adam Harding was our facilitator and a friendly, familiar face. It felt nice to connect, to listen and learn from other leaders. I hope that future sessions will include more breakout facilitation like this."

Continued on page 7

2

Pensions under attack
By: Bill Briggs

3

Covid-19 pandemic/education
By: Bob Marcink, President, JJC Faculty Council

4

The case of the missing carrots
By: attorney James Ridge

After all we've been through, our

Pensions under attack



Bill Briggs

No one reading this article has to be reminded what the last year has been like for those involved in education. It doesn't matter if you're a classroom teacher, paraprofessional, clerical, custodian, or college professor; none of us were trained or ready for the impact of COVID-19.

I think back to my first training session on computers in the early 1980s. Fred Bell, a math teacher at Mornence High School, was explaining that learning to use new technology was really like our desks. First, you opened a drawer and saw all our files. In each one, class notes, tests, and handouts were organized.

On the surface, it seemed simple enough, and with enough practice, headaches over lost files, and happiness when a test printed, I started not to fear the unknown.

Fast forward to just one year ago when we attempted to have our first ZOOM AFT Local 604 e-board meeting. With complete trust in Sean and Dan, we gathered in the Senate room: we being our field and office staffs. The vice-presidents were at home waiting to participate.

Of course, the best laid plans often go out the window. We found that all of us, for some reason, could not be in the same room and on ZOOM simultaneously. We learned by practice.

Why drag you through all of this? It's simple. Most of you experienced like situations when remote learning started. Students with every technological skill imagined mingled with those who could barely log in. And reality set in; it's not always as easy as it seems. You had to adjust.

We are now close to the end of another school year unlike any before. You have been praised for all you have done while being taken to task by others who felt every child should be back in a classroom. Parents rallied in support or to question your loyalty to education and students.

So, on behalf of this office, the IFT, and AFT, thank you. You made a difference and will continue to do so. Summer, a time that once stood for relaxation, now means attempting to plan for the unknown again. And for some of you, it means continued negotiations.

As said before, none of us entered this profession to be political. We wanted to work with children/adults of all ages. With this dedication came the desire to be paid fairly and an anticipated retirement.

Recently, two bills were introduced in the House that should make most in the Teachers Retirement System happy. You were going to be rewarded for all the work put into this past year of teaching and dealing with the stresses of COVID. What could be wrong with HB 2997 and HB 2998, both initiated by Rep. Dave Saverin (R Benton)?

The first, "provides that a teacher may establish one additional day of service credit for each day of service credit that was earned between March 16, 2020, and June 30, 2021, in which the teacher provided in-person instruction if he or she pays certain contributions and supplies

satisfactory evidence." The bill would enable an individual in Tier 1 to retire at age 59 and in Tier 2 to retire at age 66 with no penalty.

HB 2998 is similar and has the same basic results but is intended for those who provide remote learning. It "provides that the service credit shall be granted without any additional employee or employer contribution." After a stressful year, anyone, on the surface, would welcome this "gift," a reward for doing the unexpected.

Remember the Trojan horse, though. We are also in a period where our pensions continue to be under attack. One political party has long said the system is not sustainable. That teachers don't deserve this underfunded perk. They have misled the public that we don't contribute to our retirement while conveniently forgetting that Springfield has not fully funded the system for years even though the Constitution mandates they do.

But how could one simple act like this one impact TRS? Think about it. We already have a teacher shortage. Wouldn't allowing teachers to retire one year early add to the problem? Some remember the "5 plus 5 program" of the early 1990s. Teachers and administrators could retire five years early if they paid the TRS contribution for that time.

Problems emerged right away as all districts needed staff. Wealthy districts were able to attract the experienced away, which created more problems for the districts with financial issues. Those against our pensions soon started to point to this as another reason why the system was sinking and could not recover.

Our pensions were on the last Illinois Constitutional Convention. We worked hard to show the public why they should support us, and it worked. But the atmosphere is different now. Hard to believe, but it's even more political.

Think not? According to the downstate WMAY Newsroom, Senator Darren Bailey (R-Louisville) has introduced an amendment that, if passed, would take away language that says "pensions for state workers, teachers, and other public sector employees cannot be impaired or diminished." His proposal would allow "pension benefits to be reduced or changed, regardless of whether those benefits have already been earned or when they were established."

Oh, and by the way, Bailey is running for governor.

Call me cynical, but on one hand you have a Republican wanting to allow some to retire one year early, adding additional problems to the system, while another one wants to cut the security of our pensions.

No, we did not enter this profession to be political, but reality has forced us into the political world. We must remember Greek mythology if we want to survive retirement.

In reality though, an elephant doesn't look that much different than a wooden horse, does it?

Covid-19 Pandemic

By Bob Marcink, President, JJC Faculty Council

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted education across the board, from K-12 through Higher Ed, but each level of education has been affected uniquely.

While many elementary and middle schools have been able to return at least part time to the classroom, most high schools and Higher Ed institutions have been reduced in large part to distance education.

That has been the case this academic year with Kankakee Community College, Waubensee Community College and Joliet Junior College, whose faculty councils are members of Local 604.

For much of the past 12 months, the vast majority of lecture classes at all three institutions have been remote, either fully online or delivered in some form of synchronized or asynchronous instruction. Although it has varied from program to program, most labs that could not be taught remotely were delivered face-to-face, with limits on the number of students based on state guidelines. But all of that is set to begin changing this summer, with significant changes coming in the fall.

With the rollout of the vaccine since January exceeding expectations, all three institutions are gearing up for a return to some form of pre-pandemic normalcy. The recent announcement that Higher Ed employees are now eligible to receive the vaccine—it was originally only made available to K-12 personnel—may lead to more scheduling changes as the three institutions prepare for the fall.

One change has already taken place. According to Steve DePasquale, president of KCC Faculty Council, KCC faculty were ordered back to campus on March 15 to hold regular office hours, 7.5 hours a week. DePasquale said that the office hours are a contractual obligation, but because very few students are on campus, that obligation was set aside for the past year. But although students are still not on campus, the administration has insisted that faculty maintain the 7.5 hours of office time on campus.

“Faculty had been allowed to maintain virtual office hours because most classes have been online,” DePasquale said. He said that faculty “pushed back,” but the administration insisted that they return to campus to do the office hours.

As for fall, DePasquale said the plan now is to return to face-to-face instruction.

“We are resuming our normal schedule in the fall as if there's no pandemic,” he said.

Jeanne McDonald, president of WCC Faculty Council, said recent changes in the “COVID landscape” have altered Waubensee’s original plans for the fall.

“We had planned for limited, but more face-to-face, hybrid and Flex modalities when we originally worked on schedules early in Spring 2021,” McDonald said. “However, because the COVID landscape is changing, the college is rethinking an expansion of all those modalities, and faculty have been asked to rethink their online asynch(ronous) and synch(ronous) modalities in favor of more in-person instruction.”

According to McDonald, WCC administrators think the college will also be able to accommodate more students on campus in the fall than they originally entertained because of state updates to physical distancing requirements.

McDonald said faculty was “wary” of these plans because vaccinations, at the time of the writing of this article, were not yet available to young adults. (They had just been approved for Higher Ed personnel.)

Faculty’s role in shaping the fall schedule has been minimal, she said.

“Faculty’s role is limited to how many sections we agree to teach that have an in-person component to the modality,” she said.

The WCC administration will make the final decision on how the fall will look. McDonald noted that WCC will need to improve its screening and cleaning protocols if the college plans to bring more students back to the classroom in the fall.

As with the other institutions, the JJC schedule for the fall had to be finalized several weeks ago. It is possible that some changes to the fall schedule may yet come if the conditions surrounding the pandemic change.

As of the writing of this article, JJC planned to bring most labs back on campus in the fall along with some additional face-to-face lecture classes. The majority of lecture would still be done remotely or through a variety of synchronous and asynchronous options, with a look towards a full return to pre-pandemic operations in the spring of 2022.

The college is trying to accommodate some larger face-to-face lecture classes by holding classes in some non-traditional spaces, like the field house or large gathering rooms. But those spaces are limited.

In developing the summer and fall schedules, JJC utilized a task force primarily made up of faculty, deans and the Vice President of Academic Affairs. Although not all the task force’s recommendations were approved by the administration, its input helped to shape the summer and fall schedules to a large degree.

Like everyone else involved in education from K-12 to Higher Ed, the three local community colleges are waiting to see how the next few months play out in regards to the pandemic. The situation is nothing if not fluid.

Your rights under the Workers' Compensation Act

THE CASE OF THE MISSING CARROTS

By: James M. Ridge & Amylee Hogan Simonovich

In this article, we discuss what constitutes a compensable accident under the Illinois Workers' Compensation Act. There is a common misconception that just because you are injured while at work, that your injury is compensable. That is not always the case. This is an area of the law that has come up numerous times for our education clients, especially as it relates to falls in the hallway, stairwell, or parking lot.

Proving an accidental injury is the first step to receiving benefits under the Illinois Workers' Compensation Act. This is a two-pronged analysis. Being at work satisfies the first prong: that your injury occurred "in the course of" your employment. The phrase "in the course of employment" refers to the time, place, and circumstances of the injury. A compensable injury occurs "in the course of" employment when it is sustained while a claimant is at work or while he performs reasonable activities in conjunction with his employment.

Where things become a bit trickier is the second prong: your injury must "arise out of" your employment. To satisfy this requirement it must be shown that the injury had its origin in some risk connected with, or incidental to, the employment so as to create a causal connection between the employment and the accidental injury. A risk is incidental to the employment when it belongs to or is connected with what the employee has to do in fulfilling his or her job duties.

The Illinois Supreme Court recently addressed this analysis in *McAllister v. IWCC*. In this case, the injured worker was a sous-chef for North Pond Restaurant. His duties included checking orders, arranging the walk-in cooler, making sauces, and prepping food. A co-worker mentioned that he misplaced a pan of carrots in the walk-in cooler. Mr. McAllister knelt down on both knees to look

for the carrots and when attempting to get up, felt a pop in his right knee.

The question in this case was whether Mr. McAllister was injured due to an employment-related risk. He was injured performing a common bodily movement or routine "everyday activity." All of us in the general public kneel down to pick things up, walk down a hallway, or ascend/descend stairs. The courts have disagreed on how to analyze these types of cases.

The Supreme Court defined an employment-related risk as follows: A risk is distinctly associated with the employment if, at the time of the occurrence, the employee was performing (1) acts he/she was instructed to perform by the employer, (2) acts that he/she had a common law or statutory duty to perform, or (3) acts that the employee might reasonably be expected to perform incident to his/her assigned duties.

The Court found that Mr. McAllister's knee injury arose out of an employment-related risk because the occurrence was caused by one of the risks distinctly associated with his employment as a sous-chef. That is, kneeling down on the floor to look for the misplaced pan of carrots was an act his employer might reasonably expect him to perform in fulfilling his assigned job duties. Mr. McAllister was not required to prove that he performed the common bodily movement of kneeling more than the general public for his injury to be compensable.

To learn more about the *McAllister* case, and other topics, check out our webinars on YouTube! If you have questions about an injury, whether at work or otherwise, please reach out to us.

For more information on your rights contact:

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Vaccinations NOT Mandatory for Staff: Rockdale Superintendent

Teachers Union: “This Is A Win Win For Everyone”

By: Justin Virgin, Patch staff

What originally began as a mandatory staff vaccination policy has now been changed to a “highly suggested” policy in what Erik Jurgens, AFT Local 604 Field Service Director, calls a “win win for everyone.” In a telephone interview with the *Herald News*, Rockdale School District 84 Superintendent Dr. Paul Shrik explained that “initially there wasn’t a clear determination from the Will County Health Department as to how the vaccination rollout would work. It wasn’t until Will County Executive Jennifer Bertino-Tarrant got involved that the vaccination program picked up speed and the school was forced to get some kind of policy implemented quickly.”

Jurgens said, “The initial policy faced little scrutiny as most staff members are in favor of receiving the vaccination, but some were uncertain as to how it would apply to those with underlying health concerns.” The teachers union and the school district wasted little time resolving this issue. The *Harold News* initially placed a call to Jurgens at 4:00 pm on Monday, and by 8:30 Monday evening a deal had been reached that was to the satisfaction of both parties. “This is a great example of how quickly we are able to get things done when both sides are open to and willing to negotiate,” Shrik said. He went on to add that he “highly suggests all staff members receive the vaccine but understands the concerns of those staff members with health issues.”

In a statement to the *Herald News* Jurgens said, “It is a great pleasure to work with a well-grounded and logical superintendent, Paul Shrik, who works for freedom and justice for all.” Dr. Shrik did receive the vaccination at 4:30 pm on Tuesday, with 36 staff members who signed up waiting to receive their vaccinations between Tuesday and Wednesday at JTHS West Campus Field House. The Rockdale Board of Education met February 17th, where it heard from the schools Transition Team as the district moves closer to in-person learning. Currently the district is fully remote and has been since August 19th, with a tentative restart date no sooner than March 22nd.



AFT Local 604 Scholarship winners!

This year for the Paul O. Johnson Scholarship Award, we have first and second place winners.

First place goes to Emma Harris, daughter of Kathy & Doug Harris who are both AFT Local 604 members. Kathy works for the IFT at the Local 604 office as support staff and Doug is a teacher at Streator High School.

Emma attends Eureka College in Eureka, IL. She is studying for a double major, special education and elementary education with a minor in psychology.

Second place goes to Colin Cunnane, son of Joseph & Jennifer Cunnane who are both AFT Local 604 members. Joseph & Jennifer work at Lockport High School. Joe works as a teacher and Jennifer works with support staff.

Colin attends the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and will major in physical education.

This year for the Jacqueline B. Vaughn Memorial Scholarship Award, we also have first and second place winners.

First place goes to Emma Bretzlaff, daughter of Pete & Katie Bretzlaff who are both AFT Local 604 members. Pete & Katie work for Kankakee school district 111. Both are teachers.

Emma is attending Kankakee High School and will be attending DePaul University in Chicago and majoring in communication.

Second place goes to Hannah Delorto, daughter of Cheryl Delorto, an AFT Local 604 member who works at Peotone as a Paraprofessional.

Hannah attends Illinois State University in Normal, IL and will major in political communication.

We, here at AFT Local 604, wish to congratulate the efforts of all applicants and we wish you the very best!

Congratulations

President's Conference...continued from page 1

One area, though, that all who registered early appreciated were the snack and swag sent out. Vicki Morris of Park Forest admitted that they are "my favorite part of Conferences! LOL.

What to take away from this day is not to stop talking about sensitive topics, but to be careful of the forum. In this way, opinions can be discussed and explained. But when ZOOM is used with one or two presenters, breakout rooms that do not report back are not enough to express feelings.

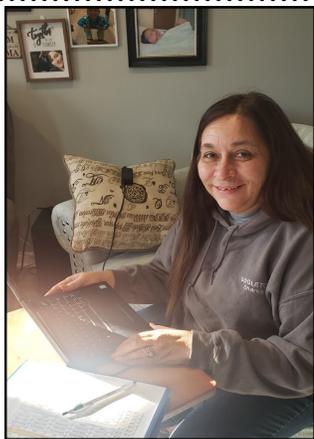
The consensus: the idea of the conference is good, in person is better, but surveys before the event to see what members want and need would create a better program. As one said, "I feel the topics and information would have been much more helpful last

summer...I was so beyond all the topics they discussed that it didn't help me or make me a better leader."

By: Bill Briggs, AFT Local 604 president



Members' responses on the effects of Covid-19 and their job



Hello All, my name is Sofia Thomas. I am a paraprofessional in District 86 @ Singleton Elementary in Joliet, Il.

I have worked in many different buildings and many different programs since I started with District 86.

The main thing that has changed since Covid-19 restrictions is that the district went remote. At that time I was told that I would be working with 3rd-5th grade. I was also told that I could set up my own schedule. I asked, "Where do I begin?"

I emailed the teachers and they responded with the times that I would be of greatest help. Before I knew it, my schedule was full and I felt I was able to accomplish the goal to help our students.

One of the challenging aspects for me was getting all of my teachers zoom meetings bookmarked on my computer. After learning how to do that, it made my work much easier. I do admit that being on a computer from 8:35-3:05 was very challenging.

The nice thing about remote learning is that I didn't miss a day! I enjoy working with the students online, but I sure do miss seeing them in person.

All in all, it was quite a challenge, and I feel good that I was able to do my part and help our students and teachers.



As a council president, I have seen first-hand how Covid-19 has impacted the ability to be a successful teacher. The teachers in my council have gone above and beyond to ensure success both academically and social-emotionally for their students.

One thing, however, that I didn't anticipate this year was the impact that the debate to reopen schools would have on myself, my members, parents, and the union's relationship with our current school board.

Throughout the stages of the pandemic, the union, administration, and school board worked together to make decisions that were safe for teachers and students. We felt that we had a seat at the table and were able to help drive decisions regarding health and safety.

All of that changed when the debate to reopen our schools full-time occurred. At a recent school board meeting, educators in my district became the target of several parents as well as some school board members. Union members who bravely spoke at that board meeting were reprimanded for speaking out publicly. The union was called out on social media for being selfish and only thinking of ourselves, not our students. One of my personal social media posts was even shared by parents on a Re-open Illinois School's Facebook page. I felt violated and saddened to learn that this is what the debate to re-open has become.

Educators want nothing more than to have life come back to normal. We miss our students. We miss teaching in person. We see the impact that the pandemic has taken on our students and their families. We have been there beside them each step of the way on this crazy journey. Our basic wish is for safety, safety for when students return to full-time instruction as well as ensured safety in our community.

There is healing that now needs to occur. It's going to take time to re-establish trust in our fractured relationships.

Julie Harris
Council President, Tinley Park Council



State Senator Meg Loughran Cappel, supported a donation drive for feminine hygiene products.

"I believe that every member of our community should be equipped with its most basic needs." February—March Senator Meg Cappel hosted a donation drive for feminine hygiene products that were donated to Guardian Angel Community Services.



"I couldn't be more grateful and appreciative of Local 604 for supporting the feminine hygiene drive for the Guardian Angel Home. The Guardian Angel Home has provided protective and community services for children and adults for over 100 years. As an educator, community member, and now State Senator, I look forward to partnering with Local 604 to continue to meet the needs of under-resourced women and children in our community. Thank you for your support!"

Senator Meg Cappel

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UPDATE NEWSLETTER... What would you like to share? What would you like to see this next school year?

Is there something exciting happening at your school? If so, we want to hear from you!

Email your news to Darlene Mercer at damercer@ift-aft.org



Retirees Meetings

May Meeting

Tuesday, May 11, 2021 @ 2:00pm
 Pilcher Park, 225 N Gougar Rd., Joliet
 Bird Haven #2 Pavilion
 Program: Ukulele Moonshiners-musical entertainment.
 Jurate and Jan are the contact people for this group.
 They have seen them perform and recommend them highly.
 Please bring a lawn chair.

June Meeting

Thursday, June 10, 2021 either 10:00am or 1:30pm
 (whichever time most attendees prefer)
 We will have lunch either before or after the tour depending on the time of the tour chosen.
 Tour of the B. Harley Bradley Home in Kankakee.
 This home was built in 1900 and designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.
 Cost is \$20.00

Page 8

Important Notice!

IFT office to close permanently

The IFT office located in Peru, IL closed permanently as of March 31st. Todd Stachowiak, IFT Field Service Director, will still represent his councils and locals in the area and can be reached via his cell or by email. Please if you need his information, call the Local 604 office at 815/725/0402 for assistance.

Next Senate meeting will be held at 6pm on August 11, 2021 @ the Local 604 office in Crest Hill. We will also be offering the meeting by Zoom for those that cannot make it.



IFT/AFT, AFL-CIO

UPDATE

American Federation of Teachers Local 604
www.aftlocal604.org
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