



UPDATE

American Federation of Teachers Local 604, AFL-CIO

www.aftlocal604.org

April / May 2023

Scholarship Winners Announced

Competition this year for the Jacqueline B. Vaughn and Paul O. Johnson scholarships is evident. A total of 48 applicants competed for the \$2,000 award, each semester.

Nadia Salcik topped 14 other candidates to win the Paul O. Johnson Scholarship for those majoring in education. Chloe Whalen and Priya Thackett won over 31 to capture the Jacqueline B. Vaughn Scholarship. In addition, Jonathan Zadel was awarded second place, \$1,500, in the Johnson Scholarship.

Nadia is the daughter of Yvette Salcik, a member of the Homer 33C Support Staff Council, and the late Joe Salcik. She is studying Physical Education Teacher Education at Illinois State University and is a graduate of Lockport High School.

In her essay with the prompt—"The teacher shortage is a crisis not only in Illinois, but also throughout the country, as a future professional educator, what do you see are viable options to correct the problem?"—her response was both creative and thoughtful.

Nadia wrote, "From my experience with wonderful, impactful teachers and an involved family, I've learned that the best and most effective educators are the ones with the best support – from parents and school administration." She went on to write that "insufficient administrative support will cause teacher burn-out, negatively effecting both physical and mental well-being."

Chloe is the daughter of Jill and Mike Whalen. Her mother is a teacher in the Herscher School District. Upon graduation from HHS, Chloe will attend Vanderbilt University with a Communications in Science and Technology major.

Her essay prompt was "Detail how unions played a major role in the development of our country and are important to the future of our country." Last November, Mike Pompeo was asked who the most dangerous person in the world was. His answer, AFT President Randi Weingarten. Chloe wrote, "Mike Pompeo is right to fear Randi Weingarten; she has the ability to step up and protect the rights of millions of nationwide teachers, who are arguably some of the most essential, yet underappreciated workers in the entire field of labor."

Priya, a senior at Naperville Central High School, is the daughter of Sherry Tharayil, a teacher in the Valley View School District. Her father is Tom Thackett. Although she has not yet selected a university to attend, Priya's major will be biochemistry.

In her essay conclusion, Priya wrote, "Unions have been accused of 'bankrupting America' and destroying state budgets.' However, unions have fought throughout history to support the middle class, and as union membership goes down, middle class income gets smaller."

By far, the total number of applicants is the largest we have had. The quality of the respondents helped the readers understand the impact these students' teachers had on them.

Congratulations to ALL



Priya Thackett
Jacqueline Vaughn-
Co-1st Place



Chloe Whalen
Jacqueline
Vaughn Co-1st
Place



Nadia Salcik
Paul Johnson-
1st Place



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We all need to WOKÉ up!

ELECTIONS MATTER, period!



Bill Briggs

By now, the commercials have stopped, and the people have spoken. Since this was written two weeks before the election, I can only hope that our worse nightmares have not come true and sensible, responsible adults will guide our boards for the good of the children.

When I was growing up in Huntington, IN, no one really questioned what political party a candidate for school board was in. But times have changed, and not for the betterment of the children and staffs.

Recent decisions by state leaders make me think that the Hoosier State is attempting to become the Florida in the Midwest. In the Sunday *Indianapolis Star*, Mar. 19, I saw an advertisement from the ACLU with the headline: NO SLATE OF HATE. Of course, it caught my attention, but it was the content that made me stop and wonder what has happened to the GOP. **ELECTIONS MATTER**

In the ad, I read that “Indiana lawmakers have launched an unprecedented attack on LGBTQ youth and families by attempting to pass laws that would:

**FORCE TEACHERS TO OUT STUDENTS,
CENSOR IN-SCHOOL DISCUSSIONS ABOUT LGBTQ AND
BAN GENDER-AFFIRMING CARE FOR MINORS**

I was speechless, and I would hope you are too. Imagine being the professional educator who had to notify a parent that a son or daughter was gay or transgender. I can't, but what came to mind is the reality that suicide among gay teens far exceeds that of their straight counterparts. Now, take it to the next level. We know many “Christian” families disown a child who comes out. And what if that teen can no longer take it and commits suicide? Go back to the one who originally had to out this student because of state law. I know I could not live with myself. Maybe the professional educator should have just kept quiet. But in Florida, that could cost the individual a job.

The final one blows my mind. A medical professional would have to refuse treatment for a trans youth. Could the parent then sue? I don't know. But what about the Hippocratic Oath, where physicians “pledge to prescribe only beneficial treatments; to refrain from causing harm or hurt; and to live an exemplary personal and professional life.” Will this force doctors to flee the state for one that cares about all its residents?

In my adoptive state of Michigan, with the House, Senate, and Governor's office now controlled by Democrats, they are starting to roll back draconian laws produced by Republicans. How did this happen in a state that had been controlled by the GOP for over 40 years?

The then party in power so gerrymandered the state after the 2020 elections that the courts forced realistic districts, something that should be done everywhere including Illinois.

So far in 2023, Michigan is no longer a Right to Work State, sensible gun laws are being proposed, LGBTQ student rights are on the table, and retirees will no longer have to pay income tax on pensions or retirement income. Governor Gretchen Whitmer, to no surprise, is pushing forward an agenda for the working class of the state. **ELECTIONS MATTER**

But why the WOKÉ reference in the headline? We hear it often coming from far-right politicians and TV commentators; as a journalism/communications major in college, I refuse to use the term “news commentators” for individuals who continue to spread the big lie.

Clarence Page of the *Chicago Tribune* wrote last month about the book *Stolen Youth* by Bethany Mandel and her appearance on *Rising*, the Hill's daily online news show. According to Page, her book “argues at length about how that woke agenda supposedly indoctrinates kids to make them feel miserable.”

When asked what that means by the show's host and “would you mind defining woke?” Mandel had a look of terror on her face, she stumbled, and could only answer “This is gonna be one of those moments that goes viral.” Why? She did not have an answer!

In Florida, Gov. DeSantis created Stop the Wrongs to Our Kids and Employees (W.O.K.E.) Act “to help businesses, employees, children, and families ‘fight back against woke indoctrination’ and make sure ‘Florida is where woke comes to die.’”

In other words, schools in Florida cannot teach history that might make students feel uncomfortable to have discussions about slavery, their gay classmates, or any other topic down the road that adults feel students can't handle.

The following might mean you have symptoms of woke-mind virus: you read books and don't burn them; [you embrace science](#); you are willing to change your mind when new information becomes available; [you understand that most issues aren't black and white](#); you believe in true equality for all people; [you like to share](#); you embrace cooperation; [you respect other's rights](#); you believe culture and the arts has value; and [you care for the planet and all of its life.](#)”

To that, I have to say I am **WOKÉ** up and proud of it. **ELECTIONS MATTER**



IFT Addressing Tier 2 Pensions

TRS, SURS, IMRF
hope for change

For over 12 years, anyone new to either the TRS, SURS, or IMRF pensions are in line to receive fewer benefits than their coworkers hired before Jan. 1, 2011. Members of all three groups have argued that these changes are not fair and are driving people away from education-related jobs.

Now, the IFT and IEA are co-sponsors of SB 2024, which seeks to change the Tier 2 benefits. Sen. Robert Martwick (D. Chicago) is the bill's sponsor. IMRF is coordinated with Social Security while TRS and SURS are the sole source of retirement security for members of these systems.

According to an IFT news release, these changes focus on four areas of benefits to Tier 2 members, and all hired after the enactment of the legislation. Reducing the retirement age, increasing the automatic annual increase or "COLA" for retirees, reducing the number of years of salary used for calculation of final rate of earnings, and increasing pensionable salary used for pension calculation are all addressed in the legislation.

Specifics of the bill with sponsor Sen. Martwick are

Make retirement eligibility 60 years of age with 35 years of service or 62 years of age with 10 years of service.

Tier 2 is currently 67 years of age with 10 years of service or 62 years of age with 10 years of service reduced by 6% per year under the age of 67.

Adjusts the automatic annual increase (AAI) to be the GREATER of ½ CPI or 3%.

Tier 2 is currently the LESSER of ½ CPI or 3%.

Changes the final rate of earnings calculation to the highest 6 years of salary in the last 10 years of employment.

Tier 2 final rate of earnings calculation is currently the highest 8 years of salary in the last 10 years of employment.

Modifies the annual increase in the amount of pensionable salary that can be used to calculate a pension the GREATER of 3% or ½ of CPI.

Tier 2 is currently the LESSER of ½ CPI or 3%.

According to the Illinois State Board of Education, currently, there are 5302 unfilled educator positions. The data shows that since the creation of Tier 2, there has been an increase in the number of vacancies in the educational field. The Unions firmly believe that this shortage is not by chance, and that educators and potential educators are realizing the deficiency and inequity in the Tier 2 retirement benefit structure.

The above information after the first paragraph is the document being sent out to elected officials for support of the bill and solving the professional educator and support staff shortages in Illinois.

FYI, just a little
information

Teacher pipeline initiative: Gov. J. B. Pritzker announced in March a proposal that would give \$210 million over the next three years to 170 schools districts with the most needs and teacher vacancies to help alleviate chronic shortages. According to The Tribune, these districts "represent 80% of the unfilled teaching positions and 871,000 students in Illinois." IFT President Dan Montgomery said the shortage is real. "There are classrooms right now where there is no teacher in the room – students might be sitting in a gym, in a room, in the library, in front of a television, or in front of an adult who isn't qualified or certified to teach the subject."

Increase for support staff hourly rate: House Bill 2534 would increase the starting rate for support staffs to not less than \$20 an hour for the 2023-24 school year; \$21 for 2024-25, and \$22 for 2025- 26. This increase would be for, but not limited to, custodial employees, transportation employees, food service providers, classroom assistants, administrative staff, or paraprofessional educators. The bill provides the minimum hourly rate for each school year thereafter to equal the minimum salary rate for the previous school year increased by a percentage equal to the increase in the Consumer Price Index. Sponsors believe this increase will make schools competitive with big corporations, like Amazon or McDonalds.

Lockport High School teacher honored: Donald McKillip has been named the Illinois Teacher of the Year Award for Driver Education. He is acknowledged for being the best driver's education instructor in the state. Officials said he received the honor because of his leadership and abilities in teaching teens to drive and motivating them to be safe on the road. In May, Donald will become president of the Illinois High School and College Driver Education Association, where he has been a member for 10 years.

Invest in Kids: Intended to sunset this year, the program has been extended another year with the strong possibility it could become permanent. The program allows for up to \$75 million in tax credits. The program appears to have good intentions, but it gives parents money to send their children to private or charter schools. The IFT is encouraging members and friends to write letters to their state representatives and senators and encourage them to stop this program after next year.

AFT Trauma Services: A free program for members, the information is at AFT.org. Then, on the right side of the page, click on membership Benefits. Next, click on Benefits for AFT Members Only. At that point, you will be directed on how to access Trauma Counseling and Trauma Coverage.

Your rights under the workers' compensation act

By James M. Ridge, attorney at law

What is Medical Negligence?

As most of you know from previous articles, negligence law involves a duty of care, a breach of that duty, and injuries proximately caused by the breach. For example, in order to prove negligence arising out of a motor vehicle accident, the injured party has the burden of proving that the at-fault driver had a duty of care (i.e., to follow traffic laws), that they breached their duty (i.e., failed to act with reasonable care) and that the carelessness resulted in an injury. The same concept applies in premises liability cases where the business or property owner has a duty to provide a reasonably safe place for persons invited onto the property, but then creates or allows a hazardous condition to exist on the property which subsequently causes an injury.

Medical negligence or medical malpractice is similar to other types of negligence in that it also involves the concept of duty, breach of duty, and injury proximately resulting from the breach. However, in simple terms, the main difference is that it involves professional negligence or deviations from generally accepted professional standards of care. Unlike motor vehicle accidents where the lawyer can usually point to a specific traffic law that was violated, in the medical profession there are generally no books or publications setting forth or describing the standard of care. Rather, the standard of care is what a reasonably careful physician within the same specialty would do under the same or similar circumstances. This means that a lawyer will usually have to consult with an expert witness (i.e., a physician within the same specialty as the alleged negligent physician) to determine whether there was a deviation from the standard of care. In fact, before a medical negligence suit can be filed in Illinois, the law requires that the attorney consult with a qualified physician who has determined that there is a meritorious

basis for bringing the action.

Medical errors can result in serious injuries and/or death. While medical malpractice lawsuits are generally complex, difficult to prove, and expensive to litigate, they are often the only mechanism available to recover full compensation for the injuries caused by negligence. A medical malpractice action must be filed within two years of the date on which the injured party discovers that he/she has been injured as a result of negligence. For this reason, if you believe that you, a loved one, or a friend has been injured as a result of medical negligence, you should always consult with an experienced medical malpractice attorney. Ridge & Downes will guide you through the process and determine whether it is worthwhile to pursue an action.



For more information on your rights contact:

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AFT Local 604 Organizing Training Class Offered for the First Time – Tony Floriani, FSD

We were proud to present the first of an ongoing series of organizing trainings for our AFT Local 604 leaders this winter. Over 30 union members joined us to learn more about this critical skillset and take it back to their councils.

We are looking forward to making this a regular offering in the AFT Local 604 training schedule!

In particular, we wanted to connect with people at the level of member-to-member engagement, teaching people not only how to think about a larger campaign, but how to have a structured conversation about their union and shared goals. I am personally already seeing some of my councils put those skills into practice to support their contract negotiations, and in planning new member outreach.

Our simple message is this: ***building power starts with building relationships***. Creating those strong relationships with your members gives your union the opportunity to fight and win when your bosses say “no.”

The classes were taught by Tony Floriani and Adam Harding, both IFT Field Service Directors who work out of the AFT Local 604 office.

Kim Crowe, President of JJC Tech & Support Council says, “As a union leader I am always looking to further my knowledge by attending training sessions whenever they are



available, this organizing training did not disappoint. This training was very informative by taking you through all the steps of organizing, talking points to assist you with one-on-one meetings with members and how to approach objections. After this training I now have the proper tools to make my council more powerful to help us achieve desired outcomes. I recommend anyone in a union leadership role to attend this training as you can use what you learn here and apply it to many different issues that unions have.”

Election Results Positive for Members

Local 604- and IFT-endorsed school board candidates had strong showings in the April 4th elections. Voters soundly pushed back against AWAKE- and IPI-endorsed candidates in most cases.

In addition, IFT member Brandon Johnson will be the next mayor of Chicago, and in near-by Wisconsin, Janet Protasiewicz earned over 55% of the vote to defeat Dan Kelly and reverse the control of the court.

In local board elections where 604 was asked to endorse, in all but one case, we were successful.

In the hotly contested contest for Oswego 308 retention seat, Valley View teacher Jared Ploger soundly defeated his opponent, who was given strong financial backing from groups, like AWAKE.

In New Lenox District 122, all three candidates won: Nicole DeGrave, Stephanie Peltzer, William Pender.

In Park Forest District 163, again, our two endorsed candidates won: Kim Elmore-Perkins and Christina Dupee took the top two spots with the most votes.

In Lockport Township HSD 205, our support helped one of the three endorsed candidates win: Dr. Veronica Tylka-Shaw.

Two former council presidents also will join school boards for the first time. Vicki Sutterlin, former council president in Valley View, and Lisa Holmes, former council president for the Wilmington Support council, will have voices in

their former districts.

Brandon’s victory for mayor might have taken a lot by surprise when the day before the election, the pollsters had him down by 4% points. However, he gained over 51% of the vote. He was often criticized for a comment made about Defund the Police in the past. However, his explanation of what he meant stuck with the voters.

According to Rich Miller from *Capitol Fax*, 82% support increasing the number of police. However, after answering that question, “63% supported the idea of decreasing police funding and investing in addressing the root causes of crime. According to the poll, 68% of Blacks, 66% of Latinos, and 58% of Whites supported the idea.”

Before the election, FOP president John Catanzara said that “there would be mass resignation and blood in the streets” if Brandon won. Mayor-elect Johnson will not have to overlook this comment as he lives up to his promise to make Chicago a safer place to live and visit.

Finally, the Wisconsin results in the Supreme Court race could signal the way elections will trend the next few years. Negative backlash of the Dobbs decision which overturned Roe v. Wade and gave states the power to regulate any aspect of abortion not protected by federal law was sound. Protasiewicz’s victory signaled this issue will be upfront in many swing states.

In defeat, Kelly took a page from the Trump playbook when he said, “I do not have a worthy opponent to which I can concede.” He added that she is a serial liar and “deceitful, dishonest, and despicable.”

Beth Anderson,

someone you
should know!

Never
too busy
to help members!



Recently, Beth Anderson was reelected to the Teachers Retirement System (TRS) Board. Beth has been a professional educator since 1995 when she started at Bourbonnais Upper Grade. In 1997, she started her tenure in the Kankakee School District where she serves as council president to the professional educators and clerical staffs. In addition, she is a Local 604 and IFT vice-president. Beth's husband Shannon is the superintendent of Momence Community Schools in Kankakee County.

1. What is TRS and which of our members have this retirement benefit?

Illinois TRS is the state pension system for persons employed in positions that require state licensure. Illinois TRS membership does not include public schools in the city of Chicago. Administrative positions that require licensure are included in the plan as are some positions with agencies such as ISBE or TRS.

2. What is the difference between the two retirement tiers?

Members who joined TRS prior to January 1, 2011, are Tier I. Members hired after this date are Tier II. The age of retirement and how retirement is calculated are the two main differences between the Tiers. Please check the TRS website for a more detailed explanation. The differences will depend upon your age and years of service.

3. If members have questions with TRS, what is the easiest way to find the answers?

The TRS website is helpful in answering general questions about the fund. Members should contact TRS and make an appointment with a counselor to ask questions specific to their individual retirement benefits. Educators should not rely on their peers or school district personnel for retirement benefit information. There are several factors considered when calculating individual benefits and TRS is the most reliable source for that information.

4. What is the main function of the board?

The TRS Board of Trustees has 15 members. Seven of the members are elected and 5 are current union members (4 from IEA and 1 from IFT). Our role as a trustee is that of a fiduciary. It is our responsibility to assure member contributions are being invested in a prudent manner and risk of loss is minimized.

5. When is the best time for those close to retirement to reach out to TRS for guidance?

As noted previously, retirement decisions are specific to the individual person. Members should make appointments with TRS counselors to inquire about individual benefits. In addition, TRS offers several opportunities for education throughout the year in several locations around the state.

6. Why is it never too early for members to understand the system?

Educators in Illinois do not contribute to Social Security. The TRS benefit will be your salary for the rest of your life after retirement. It is important to understand the benefit and your potential earnings so that you can plan accordingly for your individual goals of financial independence and security.

7. Can you explain the 6% rule for members?

When calculating a member's final average salary, employers must pay TRS for the actuarial value of a pension benefit for an annual salary increase greater than 6%. Many districts have policies in place for educators close to retirement that cap educators' salary increases at 6% in order to avoid paying TRS.

8. Closing comments

One of our greatest challenges is advocating for legislative changes to the current Tier II pension benefit. Persons hired after January 1, 2011, will have to work longer and will earn less of a benefit than Tier I members. Our pension is part of our total compensation for serving our communities as public educators. Tier II pension is contributing to the educator shortage not only in Pre-K - 12 but also higher education. When asked by union leaders in your district to participate in contacting your legislators regarding pension reform, please consider doing so and encourage your peers in education and outside of education to do the same.

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Update

Council Presidents & Senators Voice Priorities at January Meeting

Occasionally, we hear our members say that their voices are not heard. A belief exists that maybe the IFT does not always hear them. At AFT Local 604, we strive to correct that.

At the January Senate meeting, council presidents, leaders, and senators were asked to complete one simple question: “What are the priorities related to education that you believe Local 604 and/or the IFT should focus on for the remainder of this school year and in 2023-24?”

Not surprisingly, they came through. The following are the results with some extended comments. Since this was done anonymously, no names are included, but the wording is that what was written.

With the school board elections this year, Florida-type candidates have emerged in some of our districts. This reality might have prompted the following: “Answering (supporting) teachers who may cover hot-button issues (sexual, social issues, literature) are protected, especially from families who try to railroad their opinions through school boards.”

Two issues that appeared repeatedly are recruiting/ retaining teachers and Tier 2 retirement. The IFT is listening and are in collaboration with the IEA and Senator Robert Martwick (D Chicago). The senator has introduced SB 2024, which seeks to correct the major problems with the Tier 2 current wording.

Correcting the Tier 2 problems should help in staff recruitment. In addition, dealing with Senate Bill 100, which addressed the causes and consequences of the “school-to-prison pipeline” has become front and center. Intended to be a guideline for disciplinary procedures, the bill, for some districts, has become a reason not to remove a student from the classroom or building. As a result, problems continue to grow. Helping administrators understand the intent of the law is a priority of Local 604.

In support of how our members feel, one wrote, “State lawmakers empowering kids and parents to the point where schools can’t govern school rules...in turn, students can do pretty much whatever they want, parents come to the school to ‘chew’ out teachers, who experi-

ence little to no support from administration.” Tied with this problem is the safety of staff and students. “How can we get equal focus on rights for teachers that protect them from student violence that are just as important as the child’s rights.” Added to this comment, “Discipline along with restorative practices, which does not mean no consequences.”

The need for emotional and trauma support, also, is evident. AFT Local 604 is in the process of addressing this issue for members. A three-day workshop will be offered June 13-15 in the Crest Hill office.

Not to be forgotten are the support staffs who often feel a lack of respect and a concern over “the rising cost of health insurance” with small raises. Along with insurance costs, they are feeling the lack of support from administration and a disrespect from students. One wrote schools also need to address “food security for students.”

Another member’s comment is a perfect summation. “Not being able to acquire and/or retain quality staff is dramatically affecting how needs of the students are met as well as putting additional pressure on current staff. **Discipline**, student behavior has been escalating over the last few years, and methods of discipline currently being used are ineffective at changing behavior. **Safety**, with the escalation of student behavior and discipline appearing ineffective, staff has felt unsafe in many instances. This also applies to keep our students safe.”



Local 604 Retirees Council News Update

By: Phil Staley, 1st Vice President
AFT Local 604 Executive Board

AFT Local 604 Retiree's Council voted on March 29, 2023, to ratify the Council's Bylaws. The Bylaws were supported by the 604 Senate at the April 2023 Senate meeting. The final vote was 66 YES, and 1 NO vote. The council will move forward with the election of officers on Wednesday, May 24, 2023.

Any current member of the Retirees Council interested in running for an office, which are defined in the by-laws, should submit their name and the office for which they seek. Candidates may submit their name beginning Monday, April 10, 2023, and no later than the end of office hours on Friday, May 5, 2023. Candidates are to call the Local 604 office staff at 815-725-0402 to be placed on the May 24, 2023 ballot.

One of the goals of the Retirees Council is to grow the membership. As we approach the end of the school year, any active 604-member planning on retiring may continue their membership in Local 604, the IFT and AFT. If you are retiring at the end of this year, please contact the 604-office staff to pre-enroll prior to retirement. Annual dues of \$20.00 can be deducted directly from your TRS monthly statement upon retirement. This union membership includes continued AFT benefits, and in addition, a \$5000.00 accidental death and dismemberment insurance policy.

If you are not retiring this year but know of other members who are, please alert them of this pre-retirement enrollment.

With Respect,
Local 604 Retirees Election Committee



Next Senate Meeting
Wednesday, August 9, 2023 @ 6pm
AFT Local 604 office in Crest Hill



IFT/AFT, AFL-CIO

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