



UPDATE

American Federation of Teachers Local 604, AFL-CIO

www.aftlocal604.org

February/March 2024

AFT Local 604 Hosts IFT Region M PAC Meeting

By Dan Mercer, IFT Field Service Director

Prior to each Primary and General Election, the Illinois Federation of Teachers conducts eighteen regional Political Action Committee (PAC) meetings throughout the state. All IFT members are welcome to participate in this democratic process. Attendees interview candidates to determine where they stand on important issues. Voting records of incumbents are evaluated and may be used to recommend endorsement without an interview. Non-incumbents must complete a candidate survey to be considered. At the conclusion of each regional meeting, members decide on endorsement recommendations that are shared with the Statewide PAC and ultimately with the IFT Executive Board for final approval. Candidates who earn an endorsement are eligible to receive financial and organizational support from the union.

On Tuesday, January 16, eighteen IFT members and staff representing three locals met to consider candidate recommendations for the 2024 Primary Election. Delegates representing Local 604 included Local President Bill Briggs; Local Treasurer Sean Hunt; Local Vice Presidents Beth Anderson, Sofia Thomas, Yvette Justice, Phil Staley, Therese Skwarczynski and Vicki Goebel; IFT Staff Tony Floriani, Adam Harding, Katie Kollross and Dan Mercer; Jared Ploger and Marcy Staley. Sue Caley-Opsal and Mike Phillips represented Local 1810 (IVCC Instructors) and Audrey Manley represented Local 4100 (Retirees Chapter). Beth Anderson served as Regional COPE Chair and IFT Political Director Kelly Turner helped facilitate the meeting.

Delegates interviewed Cohen Barnes, Amy "Murri" Briel and Carolyn "Morris" Zasada who are vying for the Democratic nomination to run for Illinois House District 76 Representative; Robert Ellington-Snipes, William "Billy" Morgan and Generva Walters who are competing for the House District 79 seat; Heidi Henry, who is a Democrat running to represent House District 75; and Senator Patrick Joyce who is the incumbent in Senate District 40. No Republican candidate responded to the invitation to complete the survey or attend the Region M meeting. Anecdotally, in 2023 the Illinois Freedom Caucus urged the state Republican party to prohibit any legislator or candidate from accepting any support from teachers' unions.

The Region M PAC committee made the following endorsement recommendations:

Lauren Underwood (D, incumbent)	U.S. Congressional District 14
Patrick Joyce (D, incumbent)	State Senate District 40
Rachel Ventura (D, incumbent)	State Senate District 43
Meg Loughran Cappel (D, incumbent)	State Senate District 49
Heidi Henry (D)	State House District 75
William "Billy" Morgan (D)	State House District 79
Anthony DeLuca (D, incumbent)	State House District 80
Dagmara "Dee" Avalar (D, incumbent)	State House District 85
Larry Walsh, Jr. (D, incumbent)	State House District 86
Harry Benton (D, incumbent)	State House District 97
Natalie Manley (D, incumbent)	State House District 98

The Primary Election takes place on Tuesday, March 19. Early voting varies by county and begins as early as February 8. For more information, visit elections.il.gov.



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The New Year gives us a chance to

Start Fresh



Syma Kharal once wrote, "It's time to also think about the relationships, situations, and patterns that gave you a lot of grief—whether that showed up as anger, resentment, judgment, scarcity, anxiety, or any other form of negativity. Whenever we let something go, we create room for something new to enter. After releasing old emotional baggage, we are now ready to consciously create a blissful beginning for the year ahead."

I heard this quote on New Year's Eve, and it started my mind to speculate how we could learn from this passage. When we have so many negatives thrown at public education, especially by the far right, and we are told over and over that public education is failing, it is easy to fall into the trap that it can never be better. But we can improve if we face the "grief" head-on.

Defining "the grief" is difficult. Each district or teacher might have a different opinion. But to be sure, the key issue facing Illinois now is the pension nightmare. That said, we do have current examples of how working together as a union makes a difference.

Invest in Kids was defeated last December; how, in part, because our members let their elected officials know that public money should be used for public schools. But we also had elected Democrats who were on the fence because of constituents pressuring them to keep the giveaway active.

And that could be the first grief to face head-on. Republicans tend to stand by their person no matter what. Democrats, on the other hand, often eat their own if the elected officer strays just a little from the desired outcome. But I am optimistic that we can overcome this.

I don't want to sound like a Pollyanna, yes, I am showing my age on this one, but if we do not begin to challenge ourselves to think of all the positive situations in public education, we, too, will be defeated.

According to Disney Studios, the 1960 movie starred Haley Mills as Pollyanna, "the orphan who brings sunshine into the lives of everyone she meets. But her Aunt Polly (Jane Wyman) is too concerned with appearances, propriety, and local politics to appreciate her effervescent niece." And who can forget Agnes Moorehead, from *Bewitch* fame, the cranky spinster who allowed her mind to be open by Pollyanna.

I know that I am preaching to the choir about the importance of educating every child who walks through the door. We do not have the option to say, sorry, we cannot help your child, or

your beliefs do not parallel ours, so find someone else to educate your child.

But this argument was key in making the public realize that some private schools do discriminate, some intentional by not allowing LGBTQ students to enroll, and others because they just do not have the staff to provide services to severely handicapped children.

As a Union, we also need to be more aware of what our members are experiencing on a day-to-day basis. And this is where "A lot of Grief" hit home. Although some districts are not experiencing major shortages in staff, many in Local 604 are. We have members who have had to give up plan periods most days because of a lack of substitutes. They are being pushed daily to cover for others.

Now, you may be asking yourself, where is he going with this? I don't see much to be positive about. Funds are starting to dry up, which might affect the raises gained through negotiations. Illinois colleges are reporting that even fewer students are selecting education as a major. And we still do not have a solution to the problems with Tier 2 pensions and the inequities compared to Tier 1.

The phrase, "What has my Union done for me lately" surfaces on a more regular basis. As our membership is now about 50/50 split between the two tiers, we need to be even more concerned that a solution to this problem is not as easy as many hoped. If we are not careful, this issue will divide, not unite us. So, how do we avoid doing the work of the Illinois Policy Institute. On their website, you will find the IPI believes, among others points, "That a public pension system that threatens to bankrupt our state, drive down economic growth and evaporate retirements for public-sector workers is immoral — but that modest reforms can solve this crisis."

Back to Pollyanna, I do have that optimistic view. It was not that long ago that all in education had to face e-learning because of Covid 19. For more senior professional educators, it was a challenge to learn this new method of education, but we relied on our younger colleagues, and we thrived. We worked together and did not give up.

We can do it again. In my view, we have to take a fresh look at how we approach correcting the inequities of a Two-Tier Pension system. We need to educate our members on the stark differences between the two plans and foster an understanding that although it is not realistic to believe we can have just one pension plan, we can all work together to bring Tier 2 more in line with what Tier 1 offers.

We need to start Fresh in our push to make our elected officials hear our concerns while offering workable, pension solutions. And that might mean becoming one-issue voters. Because if we cannot attract more to the profession and then keep them in the classroom, few will survive.

Officers, AFT convention on the ballot

Local 604 election news

The Illinois primary is not the only election of concern to AFT Local 604 members. As per the Constitution, election officers and delegates to the convention in Houston are on the April ballot.

Anyone wishing to put his/her name on either ballot should contact Darlene Mercer, Local 604 Office Manager, by phone or email by the end of the business day, March 15. To be eligible to run, the person must be an active, current dues-paying member in good standing. The person must be a member in good standing on the day of the election and for a period of two (2) years prior to the date of the election.

Positions on the ballot include Local 604 President, Secretary, and Treasurer. Also, all 14 seats on the executive board will be on the ballot. The term is for two years and begins on September 1, 2024.

Anyone elected to the board is expected to attend the five scheduled board and senate meetings during the school year—August, October, December, February, and April—plus any additional, unscheduled meetings called by the president.

The AFT convention is in Houston from July 21 until the 25th. Currently, 604 is planning on sending between 25 and 30 delegates to the event at the George R. Brown Convention Center. With limits, most expenses for the delegates will be paid by Local 604.

Some election restrictions are spelled out in the Constitution. For example, whenever there is an uncontested position on the ballot, the Local 604 Senate may vote to affirm the candidate on the ballot by an oral vote of acclamation, or if there is an objection to such an oral vote, by a formal ballot in which two-thirds (2/3) of the Senators present vote to affirm the candidate.

In addition, whenever there are two or more candidates from the same Council for Vice President, and the remaining candidates on the ballot for Vice President are affirmed by Senate acclamation under Section 7.3.E., there shall be a Local 604 election limited to the candidates from the same Council in order to elect one of them to a Vice President position.

If there are questions, contact Darlene Mercer at darmerc@ift-aft.org or Bill Briggs at bbriggs@ift-aft.org or call us at 815/725-0402

Rauner surfaces again ready to blame unions

To be honest, all issues have at least three sides: my side, your side, and reality. After the Illinois legislature allowed Invest in Kids to sunset in December, you might have thought the issue was dead.

But some on the right will not let it go. Maybe you saw the news reports of two or three Catholic elementary schools in the Chicago area closing because the Invest in Kids program no longer exists. Then, on Jan. 24, former governor Bruce Rauner had an opinion column in the Chicago Tribune.

Of course, he is blaming Unions. In his opinion, he writes that “Illinois successfully reformed public school funding, provided more school choice to families and leveled the playing field for students all within the last decade.”

Now, his view is that “much of that progress is now being reversed by groups such as the Chicago Teachers Union that are actively fighting against families and the choices they desire.”

He goes on to say that many families will have to make tough decisions on what to do next, attempt to find tuition money or find a public schools to send their children. What he fails to mention is that the Invest in Kids did not have a requirement that if a school accepted the state funds, it could not discriminate against anyone applying.

The December Update gave specific examples of an Illinois Catholic diocese, Catholic schools, and private schools that discriminate for a variety of reasons, like being a gay teacher or a student who is LGBTQ+. In addition, some of these schools, even with vouchers from the state, do not have the funds to educate every child who wishes to attend, like students with severe handicaps.

Nowhere in his opinion does he address these issues. Rauner goes on to attack CPS. To quote him, “Unions also have spent years inflicting their wrath on public school choice, promoting caps on charter schools, limiting their pathways to authorization and pushing for charter unionization requirements what would destroy teacher freedom and school autonomy.”

Ironically, it is the Unions that have fought for academic freedom in the classroom and for educators who can and do teach every child who enrolls. So the battle is back in the forefront, like public school teachers already did not have enough on their plates.

Your rights under the workers' compensation act

by James M. Ridge, attorney at law

Anatomy of a Lawsuit

People often ask: What if I am involved in a motor vehicle accident and the driver who caused the collision refuses to accept responsibility? Generally, there are two available options.

The first option is to initiate a claim with the at fault driver's insurance carrier and then attempt to negotiate a fair and reasonable settlement. It is usually a good idea to first speak with an attorney who understands the issues and can assess both liability and damages. Sometimes negotiations are successful; however, oftentimes the insurance carrier makes a "low-ball" offer and refuses to negotiate in good faith. When this happens, the second option is to commence a lawsuit against the at fault driver and any other responsible parties. It is important to note that this must be done within 2 years of the date of the accident, or else the claims will be time-barred under the statute of limitations.

A lawsuit commences when the attorney files in court a formal complaint at law against the responsible parties alleging specific acts of negligence. Once they are served with a copy of the complaint and summons, they must then file an appearance and formal answer admitting or denying the allegations of negligence.

The next phase of the lawsuit is known as discovery. During this phase, the parties serve each other with written interrogatories (questions) and requests for production of documents aimed at gathering pertinent information necessary to either prove or defend the claims. Additionally, the parties may take oral

depositions of eyewitnesses and treating physicians to obtain factual information relevant to the claims. In some instances, it may even be necessary for the parties to hire expert witnesses to assist in explaining technical information to a jury. The entire purpose of discovery is to allow the parties to gather evidence in preparation for a potential jury trial. Depending on the complexity of the case, discovery can take months or even years to complete.

Lawsuits can be settled anytime during the course of the litigation. In many instances, cases are settled during the discovery phase, after the pertinent facts become known and the parties have had an opportunity to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their respective claims and defenses.

If the parties cannot reach a settlement, the final phase of a lawsuit is a trial by a jury of their peers who will ultimately hear the evidence and decide the issues of liability and damages.



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For more information on your rights contact:

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Manley scholarship winners announced

Abigail Goy from LaSalle-Peru High School and Peter Kishline from Lockport High School have been named the winners of the Richard Manley Scholarships for 2023-24.

Abigail is a Special Education English teacher and is pursuing a Master's of Science—Teaching and Learning (Major) Education Technology (Concentration) at St. Francis University.

Peter is currently a paraprofessional and is also attending St. Francis University. His degree is a Master's of Education in Special Education with Licensure.

In her application, Abigail wrote, "I am fully engaged in curriculum design and development in my teaching and learning core coursework. I have had the experience of redesigning assessments to align with stand-based grading, designing a department plan to support culturally responsive teaching in Special Education, and creating a mock 60-minute faculty meeting to introduce the newly designed PLCs for the 2023-24 school year."

Abby's response after learning she was selected was, "I am honored to be chosen as the Richard Manley certified Staff scholarship recipient as I pursue my Masters Degree in Teaching and Learning. It is such a great gift to receive the continual support of our ATF Local 604 Union to provide us with these excellent opportunities to continue our education."

Peter, who has been a Paraprofessional for seven years, wrote in his application, "During my tenure, I have been surrounded by outstanding administrators, excellent teachers, incredible co-workers, and talented coaches. All are individuals who work together as a cohesive team to create the best possible learning environment for our students and community. Working with and listening to their supportive words convinced me I can do more to impact students and student athletes. This began my journey to become a Certified Teacher in Illinois."

After winning the scholarship, Peter said, "I am beyond honored and thankful for being chosen as the recipient of the Richard Manley Support Staff scholarship. Richard Manley was a fearless leader of Lockport Township High School for many years. My hope is to make his family proud by putting this scholarship to great use by continuing to impact the lives of students that attend Lockport Township High School both in the classroom and on the playing fields."



Thank you so much. I am honored to be chosen as the Richard Manley certified Staff scholarship recipient as I pursue my Masters Degree in Teaching and Learning. It is such a great gift to receive the continual support of our ATF Local 604 Union to provide us with these excellent opportunities to continue our education.

Sincerely, Abby Goy

I am beyond honored and thankful for being chosen as the recipient of the Richard Manley Support Staff scholarship. Richard Manley was a fearless leader of Lockport Township High School for many years. My hope is to make his family proud by putting this scholarship to great use by continuing to impact the lives of students that attend Lockport Township High School both in the classroom and on the playing fields.

Sincerely, Peter Kishline



THE SPIRIT OF GIVING THIS PAST HOLIDAY SEASON



Food brought in from councils to the AFT Local 604 office.

Stephanie Jerabek picked up the food for Bags of Hope. The food was then distributed to Local pantries.

Thank you



Cynthia Lopez, Council President, from Joliet 86 School Related Personnel sent in these photos of their food & sock collections.

Just wanted to send you these pictures from our food and sock drive. We donated the food to Morning Star Mission in Joliet and the Socks to Sunny Hill Nursing home



**WE MAKE A LIVING BY
WHAT WE GET BUT
WE MAKE A LIFE BY
WHAT WE GIVE**



Heather Pilch from LaGrange Highlands sent in these pictures.

We collected hundreds of canned goods and other food items to take to a local food pantry, and we also raised \$3795 with our virtual food drive with the Chicago food depository. This will provide meals to over 11,000 families in need.





Laura Dermody, council senator from Summit Hill School District 161 submitted these photos of their food drive.

They donated the food to a pantry of their choice.



Below, Homer 33C Teachers Union and Support Staff Union collaborated again this year for the food drive! Andrea Durbin, council secretary and senator says, "I want to specifically thank Erin Sichak (VP Support Staff) for collecting food from all 6 buildings and delivering to the Lockport Fish Pantry. That was a big job, and she is awesome! We were very pleased with the amount of donations from our members and hope it can make the holidays happier for our local families."



To All JTHS 204 Paraprofessionals:

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation for all of you that donated to our Christmas Food Drive. We had a great response; we had over 12 boxes of can goods and non-perishable items to donate.

A special thanks to Carlotta, Rodney, Marcus, and Derrick our Building Reps, for setting up the boxes and picking them up. Also, I would like to thank the "Transitional Center", for also donating to help our Food drive. We will be able to feed many families over this Holiday season! Thanks again to ALL

Sarah McLaurin, Council President

AFT Local 604 again this year, put all council names in a drawing who collected food for donation. We pulled 3 names from the box and donated \$100 to that council's choice of food pantry in their council's name.

The council winners were, Local 604 Retiree Council (Marie Wilkinson Food Pantry)
LaGrange Highlands (Greater Chicago Food Depository)
Joliet 86 SRP's (Daybreak Food Pantry)

STUDENT DEBT RELIEF VIRTUAL CLINICS

By Katie Kollross & Bryan Devine

Please choose the Student Debt Clinic that best meets your needs:

Full Clinic – This 90-minute program will introduce Income Driven Repayment (IDR) Plans, Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF), legislative updates, and next steps for you. If you are a recent college graduate, or if you took Parent Plus Loans to help your child graduate recently, this Full Clinic is the program for you.

PSLF Clinic – This 45-minute program will dive deeper into Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) and answer questions you have about the forms. This program is geared towards people who have already entered into an Income Drive Repayment plan and need help with the PSLF process.

Q & A Clinic – This open session is to ask specific questions about your situation. Understand that this not a one-on-one session. There is no formal presentation to this session; it is targeting those who are already in IDR and/or PSLF plans but need answers.

Full Clinic

Wednesday, January 24, 5pm
Monday, February 26, 5pm
Monday, March 18, 5pm
Wednesday, April 24, 5pm
Monday, May 20, 4pm

PSLF Clinic

Wednesday, January 31, 5pm
Wednesday, February 28, 5pm
Wednesday, March 20, 6pm
Monday, April 29th, 4pm
Wednesday, May 22, 4pm

Q & A Clinic

Wednesday, January 31, 6pm
Wednesday, February 28, 6pm
Wednesday, March 20, 7pm
Monday, April 29, 5pm
Wednesday, May 22, 5pm

More clinics will be scheduled for future months.

These **UNION BENEFIT** programs are available not only to teachers but also to ANY educational employee.

These clinics are **FREE** to our card-signed union members as a benefit of being part of the IFT. You are encouraged to bring your union peers with you. **All of these clinics are held over Zoom.**

Sign up for one of these clinics by emailing Stella Kapusta at skapusta@ift-aft.org or call the AFT Local 604 office at 815/725-0402.

Please have available:

1. Your laptop computer.
2. Your latest loan servicer(s) statement and /or online account information.
3. Type of loan(s) held.
4. Type of repayment plan(s) enrolled.

Next Senate Meeting
Wednesday, April 17, 2024 @ 6:00 PM
AFT Local 604 office in Crest Hill



IFT/AFT, AFL-CIO

UPDATE

American Federation of Teachers Local 604
www.aftlocal604.org

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