



UPDATE

American Federation of Teachers Local 604, AFL-CIO

www.aftlocal604.org

August/September 2022

AFT Convention in Boston 2022 - 87th Biennial



AFT Local 604 Delegates who attended this year's convention:

Back row left to right: Kim Crowe, Jeff Mleczeko, Jason LaBroschian, Renee Calabrese, Sean Hunt, Katie Kollross, Adam Harding, Dan Mercer, Judy Durham, Yvette Justice, Heather Pilch, Jared Ploger, Bill Briggs, & Vicki Morris

Front row left to right: Stella Kapusta, Therese Skwarczynski, Sandra Williams, Beth Anderson, Darlene Mercer, Kristen Ryan, Julie Harris, Marybeth Scott, Linda Santillo, & Kathy Harris



Left: First Lady, Dr. Jill Biden spoke on the importance of teaching. She spoke to the challenges teachers are facing today, during a time of COVID academic slides and increased mental-health needs among students, and mass shootings at schools that have made active-shooter drills a common occurrence in classrooms.

Right: New frontiers in labor organizing, from Amazon to Starbucks to green jobs. Americans' approval of labor unions is at its highest point since 1965-the moment is now. "If we don't step up, who will?" asked Liz Shuler the AFL-CIO President. Chris Smalls has done just that!



Right: Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III, a minister and civil rights leader, shared a compelling story of his grandfather and his determination to vote. He rallied delegates to fight the cause of voter suppression.



Left: Senator Elizabeth Warren speaks to the top issues she supports: Adequate public school resources, sensible gun safety legislation, trust & respect for educators who teach the truth, and student debt relief.

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by Bill Briggs,
Local 604 President

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By Attorney James Ridge

I'm angry, frightened, & confused

Bill Briggs



The July 4th mass shootings in Highland Park coupled with the school massacre in Uvalde, TX, are just too much, and I cannot understand why everyone involved in education is not up in arms.

In recent years, I have grappled with two issues that tend to divide our Union: Pro Choice vs. Pro Life and the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. As Union leaders, we have tried to walk the fine line while realizing a solution was almost impossible.

Uvalde, TX. For many, before May 27th, the only person they had heard of from this a relatively small town near the Mexican border was actor Matthew McConaughey. But by the end of that day, we knew 22 children and professional educators were dead and an additional 17 had been wounded.

Since Highland Park is so close, it hit home. We have all seen so many real-life stories that have torn our hearts apart. Gun violence has made many immune to the pain created for the victims and their families. Within a relatively short time, one tragedy is forgotten, and another one takes its place in the headlines.

That day in Uvalde triggered a rare bipartisan bill in the US Senate that toughened background checks for buyers under 21 and provided financial incentives for mental health programs and red flag laws. However, 33 Senators voted no! I'm **angry**, but not surprised.

Now, for the foreseeable future, celebrations around the 4th of July will take on a different meaning in Illinois. At this writing, seven were dead and 30 injured.

What made these two stand out even more than all the other ones? One dealt with children and teachers, close to all our hearts, and the other one was its proximity to our offices and members. The difference, specifics that have emerged that might or should have prevented both tragedies.

In Texas, we have learned that police had the armed teenager in their site before he entered the building, but the officer was waiting for the approval to shoot. Inside the building, again, before they went into the classrooms, officers waited for the command to do so for over an hour.

In Highland Park, red flags existed with the individual's past: suicide attempts, threats to kill his family, and many knives that were taken from him a few years ago.

In both places, there were good people with guns, and the mass killings still happened.

A quick Google search shocked me. I wanted to see how many

shootings there had been between these two events. What shocked me was that from July 1-5, 22 events were recorded with 27 people killed and 130 injured. In addition, the Highland Park event was the 309th such situation this year, with varying degrees of deaths and injuries.

One thing has changed, though. Fewer politicians offered "thoughts and prayers," in part, because after Uvalde, many were taken to task. One would think that all our politicians in Illinois would show a little more heart.

Wrong again. Sen. Darren Bailey, Republican candidate for governor, recorded a campaign video to show his concern. You decide. He said, "Let's pray for justice to prevail and then let's move on and celebrate, celebrate the independence of this nation." And this man wants to lead our state. I'm **frightened!**

For some of our members, they will be angry with what I have written. But I deeply feel now is the time to speak up. I'm **confused** why all who care about education are not demanding to make assault weapons, only designed to not only kill, but also destroy a human body, illegal. And don't listen to those who say the left is coming after all the guns. It's a lie.

Remember, with bipartisan support, we had an assault weapon ban from 1994-2004. In 2004, there were five active shooter situations compared to 261 in 2021, according to the FBI.

What hit home the hardest was a comment I heard one morning on the way to the office. One Highland Park resident in the crowd said the calmest parade goers, in general, were the children. Shocking, not really. What generation has been trained with Active Shooter Drills in their buildings? What generation had drills to save their lives? Yes, our babies who will be walking into our schools this month.

So yes, this writing probably will ruffle some feathers, but this is the world we live in. We can stop this violence that seems only to benefit the NRA, gun manufactures, and politicians who want more donations to stay in office at any cost, even if it means the life of an innocent child.

This conversation is long overdue. The ballot box is the next stop. **Vote Democratic.**





Above: left to right, Sarah Lerner, RuQuan Brown, and David Hogg, are activists on the frontlines of ending gun violence. They are joined by AFT President Randi Weingarten at the convention to discuss this public health emergency. Each knows firsthand the devastation that gun violence brings. They shared their stories and offered up ways that attendees of the convention can take to help end gun violence.



Above: Left to right, AFT Leaders Fredrick C. Ingram, AFT Secretary/Treasurer Randi Weingarten, AFT President Evelyn DeJesus, AFT Executive Vice President



Above: AFT Local 604 group of delegates



Left: Voting time!



Above and left: IFT break-fast

Thank you ALL for giving your time...
"If not us, then WHO?"

Your rights under the workers' compensation act

by James M. Ridge, attorney at law

Lawsuits and the Internet

Injury victims must never forget that there is an entire industry of attorneys and insurance company claims department employees devoted to weeding out fraudulent claims. The way they accomplish that is by vigorously defending each and every claim and lawsuit as if it were fraudulent.

One current method being pursued is through statements injured parties make on the internet, whether in email messages, blogs, or posts on social media forums such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. During litigation, defendants generally request: "Any and all social media or other electronic postings, blogs, conversations, photographs, tweets, feeds, comments, or websites authored by or concerning the plaintiff for one year prior to the accident through the present date".

So how do you protect yourself from this intrusion into your privacy?

- Do not use social media while your case is pending.
- If you must use social media, do not discuss your injury, your lawsuit, and definitely don't discuss how your injury happened.
- Also, be mindful that your comments and photographs may contradict your claims in the suit, i.e., vacation photos when you are claiming loss of a normal life.
- Do not accept friend requests / invitations to connect from anyone you don't know.

Set your privacy settings to only allow your family and friends to see your postings, and not defense attorneys or insurance claims professionals.

What if it is too late and you have already posted before you consulted with an attorney? Unfortunately, you are stuck. If you delete the content you posted, the court considers this destruction of evidence. Courts do not treat destruction of evidence kindly. Remember, everything can be intentionally misconstrued if someone really wants to.



For more information on your rights contact:

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What Does My Union Do For Me?

By Vicki Goebel, Local 604 Field Service Director

A question asked by many! Field staff directors, council leaders, and local leaders share long lists of benefits to answer that question. Examples include the bargaining of a contract and, thus, protecting and ensuring that those benefits don't go away (Did you know that school code only mandates full time employees get 10 sick days a year? No personal days, no bereavement days; those are additional benefits an employee gets because they have a contract!); yearly increases, vacation pay, holiday pay, representation in discipline meetings are just a few of those benefits.

Many employees don't know all the financial benefits that are available to them. There's a 15% savings on cell phone plans, there's Accidental Death and Dismemberment insurance, there's savings on hotels, rental cars, theme parks, just to name a few.

SUMMER is a program designed specifically for our members to help them with their student loan debt. The union offers monthly meetings to help our members get out from under their crushing student debt. A member only benefit that is helping thousands of IFT and Local 604 members.

But there are other critical benefits that ONLY members receive; these are outside the contract and nonmembers don't receive these. Representation in DCFS cases, assistance with TRS and IMRF, workplace accommodations, disability pay and unemployment issues are a few of these benefits. One great example we continue to help members with is unemployment cases. During the pandemic, support staff were granted unemployment pay for two summers. This was an action the union actively supported for members and helped them get. Unfortunately, in the last year, IDES has attempted to make some employees pay back that unemployment. Many members have reached out to the union for assistance in disputing paying back this unemployment. Field Service Directors have sat in on interviews with members and judges. And when that didn't work the union provided those employees with an attorney to tackle their case. Just recently a Tinley Park 146 paraprofessional won her case. Not only did she not have to pay back thousands of dollars IDES was saying she had to pay back, but because of the great work of the union attorney, IDES had to pay her an additional second summer of unemployment that IDES had denied her. I think it's safe to say, the thousands of dollars that the union paid to the attorney for the member, is something a paraprofessional would have struggled to pay on their own!

So yes! There are many benefits for members that are both contractual and not contractual. It's critical to be a member and stay a member! Contact your council leader for a long list of the benefits you are entitled to as a member!

MEMBER



President/Treasurer Workshops

Workshops were held by AFT Local 604 on August 1st at Kankakee High School, August 2nd at LaSalle Peru High School and on August 3rd at the AFT Local 604 Office in Crest Hill.

If you are a president or treasurer of your council and were not able to attend one of these classes, you should have received an email with the Power-Point by now. If you have not, please contact our office and let us know because we may not have the updated information concerning council leaders.

You may call at 815/725-0402 or contact one of us in the office by email:

Kathy Harris– kharris@ift-aft.org
Stella Kapusta– skapusta@ift-aft.org
Darlene Mercer– darmercer@ift-aft.org



Left:
Dan Mercer,
IFT Field Service
Director



Right:
Adam Harding,
IFT Field Service
Director



Left:
Sean Hunt,
AFT Local
604 Treasurer/
Business
Manager

Back to School

When asked to tell us something positive about teaching and something you'd like to see changed, here is some of the feedback we received from AFT Local 604 members.

Linda Santillo from Joliet 204, Council Treasurer/Senator

Something positive is being able to help students succeed in school. The ability to help them be able and graduate and move forward in their lives is huge. Making connections with the students is key.

The only thing I'd change concerning my position is the pay. I'd like to see all paraprofessionals paid appropriately for the work they do. We are there to assist the teacher in his/her job duties.

Everyday is an adventure and I will always do my best to help ALL students go above and beyond if it's in my power!

LaMellis McCormick from Joliet 204, Council Senator

I have the pleasure of holding the position as a Paraprofessional-Security at the West/Administration Center.

One thing I would change is the view and the pay rate of the Paraprofessional in today's school environment. Paraprofessional Security and Non-Security both hold roles that have changed from the traditional roles 10 years ago. We are encouragers, mentors, we work very closely with the students, and have team building skills. Many of us have State required certifications as well as degrees in certain fields of work. Yet, I feel we are so underpaid.

Carrie Snyder from East Aurora, Council Senator

I love my students and their families. Being able to work with my students from age 3 through graduation and/or the Transition Program is a blessing.

If I could change something within education it would be the amount of paperwork! Less paperwork means more time for student direct services.

Megan Mikalik from Lincoln School, Council Treasurer/Senator

Something positive about my job as a teacher at Lincoln School is that I get to spend a lot of time building relationships with my students. Since our students only have 1 teacher, it is wonderful to be able and work at having a nice rapport with each of them throughout the day. Over the summer, I try to keep in touch with my students via Remind, but I am looking forward to seeing some familiar faces again this month and also meeting new ones!

If I could change one thing about education, it would be to have all of the necessary support available. Staffing has been an issue for my past 3 years as a teacher, and it makes the job difficult for everyone and it greatly impacts the students. I am anxious about this upcoming school year as we are still short on teachers, paraprofessionals, and counselors. This creates extra stress for the entire building. I also wish that we had more support for our student population in terms of special education needs and gifted learners.

Marybeth Scott from Valley View, Council Senator

I love being able to help students get excited about learning another language and the culture associated with those who speak the language. There is nothing more exciting than knowing you are opening up so many new doors and opportunities by learning a new language and all that encompasses—travel, experiences, friendships, art, music...just to name a few.

Something I would change is the ability to teach the subject matter with the topics that I feel are important, rather than teaching the content so that my students can score well with tests—either AP or Biliteracy. Testing has taken away so much joy of discovery for the students; as well as the joy of teaching for the teachers.

Jennifer Alessi from Wilco, Council President/Secretary

I enjoy sharing my knowledge with my students and staff. Also, looking forward to trying new things with the students.

I will be furthering my education in academic leadership. I believe there is an evolution in education which I would like to be part of.

Jared Ploger from Valley View, Council Vice President

The relationships I have built with students over the years that have lasted after they have left is one of my favorite positives. I look forward to meeting new life long learners.

I wish society looked at us as professionals and would realize we are the experts in our respective fields.

MaryBeth Graef from New Lenox, Council Senator

The positive for me is the eighth graders who I share my classroom with! They bring me such joy!

The stereotype that teachers use their personal time for grading! I am rethinking my position on the amount/type of homework I give in order to combat my own fatigue.

Timi Hensel from Joliet 204, Council Treasurer/Senator

My colleagues make my day! Just the 5 minutes between each passing period, we make the most of it. We are there for each other in good and bad.

I believe we need to get structure and discipline back in the schools. While restorative practice is good, it doesn't mean no consequences. Administration and the school board needs to back its teachers!

Mary Wolf from New Lenox, Council President

I look forward to getting to know new students every year. I love the beginning of the year - building relationships and trust and knowing that we have 9 months to foster those relationships. It is a powerful feeling knowing that on any given day, a conversation I have with a student might be the only attention they get that day.

One thing I would change about education is to de-emphasize academics and focus more on mental health. We screen for reading and math skills, we test to assess progress toward standards, but what if we could screen for mental health concerns that could help us identify issues before they escalate? Maybe it isn't legal, maybe it isn't feasible, but we need to stop looking at kids as a number and start focusing on the WHOLE child.

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Election closer than you think

By Bill Briggs, AFT Local 604 President

Although most of us are still thinking about the open of the 2022-23 school year, November's all-important election is not that far off. Critical candidates and issues are on the ballot that could have lasting effects for anyone involved in public education in Illinois.

Vote by mail ballots became available on Aug. 10 while **in-person early voting** will begin Sept. 29 in many areas of Illinois.

One of the key races is for the Illinois Supreme Court 3rd District. Both AFT Local 604 and the IFT strongly urge our members, families, and friends to support and vote for **Mary Kay O'Brien**. All one has to do is look around the country at what some states are trying to do to what one can teach, suppressing voters' right, and attack on pensions. Keeping Democrats in control of the Illinois Supreme Court is key to protecting our rights.

On the state level, our endorsed candidates are
JB Pritzker and **Juliana Stratton** for Governor and Lieutenant Governor
Kwame Raoul for Attorney General
Susana Mendoza for Comptroller
Michael Frerichs for Treasurer
Alexi Giannoulis for Secretary of State

Voters will also be asked to decide whether they support the **Workers' Rights Amendment** (WRA). This proposed amendment to the State Constitution would guarantee the right to collective bargaining and permanently ban the passage of any so-called "right-to-work" laws, which are designed to reduce worker rights and benefit big corporations, in the state.

All one has to do is to think about the negative campaign against the Fair Tax amendment that would have made the wealthy pay their fair share in Illinois while reducing the burden on working families. Support of the Workers' Rights Amendment is key to our future in public education.

Other endorsements in the area covered by Local 604 include

US Senate and House

Senator: **Tammy Duckworth**
2nd District: **Robin Kelly**
10th District: **Brad Schneider**
11th District: **Bill Foster**
14th District: **Lauren Underwood**

Illinois State Senate

19th District: **Michael Hastings**
38th District: **Sue Rezin**
40th District: **Patrick Joyce**
42nd District: **Linda Holmes**
43rd District: **Rachel Ventura**
49th District: **Meg Loughran Cappel**

Illinois State House

41st District: **Janet Yang Rohr**
76th District: **Lance Yednock**
79th District: **Erin Slone**
80th District: **Anthony DeLuca**
84th District: **Stephanie Kifowit**
85th District: **Dagmara "Dee" Avelar**
86th District: **Lawrence Walsh, Jr.**
97th District: **Harry Benton**
98th District: **Natalie Manley**

In addition, Will County Superintendent of Schools: **Shawn Walsh**; Will County Judges **John Connor**, **Jessica Colon-Sayre**, **Sonni Choi Williams**, and Will Co. Clerk, **Lauren Staley-Ferry**.

We can do this if We Get Out the Vote!



Continued from page 6... Back to School

Aubrey Meers from Hampton, Council President

I teach in a wonderful small community where the majority of families still value and support education!

One thing I would like to change is the lack of consequences for students not doing what they are supposed to (behaviorally and academically.)

Regina Alexander from Chicago Heights, Council Senator

Something positive in my job is that I support each student. I am one of the few people that get the pleasure to interact with every student and almost every staff member on a weekly basis. I get to see the growth in each student as the year progresses.

If I could change one thing about my position, it would be that I would be able to receive more formal training in teaching students strategies that would benefit them in the classroom and in the world!

Maureen Krok from Joliet 86, Council Senator

Something positive about my job or returning to school: I am excited to implement center activities that I have set up for my special education students in my self-contained classroom. I am looking forward to them gaining more independence by offering them choices during center activities which will allow me more one-on-one time with students so I can work on their IEP objectives. I am fortunate to have a special education coordinator who supports this and not forcing us to a modified version of grade level curriculum, just exposing students to the curriculum. My students' ability levels are getting lower and lower each year and it is becoming impossible to stick to the curriculum when they need basic skills. They all have O.T. services, speech/language services, and social work services which doesn't leave a lot of time for "curriculum."

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Please refer to our website above ...

Look under **RESOURCES** for:

Financial Topics, Legal Topics, Member Benefits, Political, Retired or Soon To Be, Recent Presentations, Scholarships, and Union Sites.

Look under **UPCOMING EVENTS** for:

Senate Meetings, Executive Board Meetings, Student Debt Classes, and information on Local 604 Retiree Programs.

Look under **ABOUT** for:

Staff and Executive Board.



By Lisa Dugan:

AFT Local 604 members Chuck Mallard and Karl Guiney both had students that were awarded a \$1500.00 KFL 2022 Community Service Wm. Lovell Scholarship. The names of the recipients are:

- 1) Logan Mallard who will be attending KCC
- 2) Matthew Guiney who will be attending KCC

Congratulations!

Right: Lisa Dugan golf outing



Next Senate Meeting

October 12, 2022 @ 6 pm

Location or ZOOM will be announced at a later date.



IFT/AFT, AFL-CIO

UPDATE

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