Concurrent Local 4100 strikes achieve gains for students, faculty, and staff

April’s famous “showers” came in the form of concurrent strikes this year for three chapters of the University Professionals of Illinois (UPI, Local 4100) and a fourth walkout was authorized but averted just hours before members took to the picket lines. Instead of bringing the proverbial “flowers,” the actions by these brave UPI members resulted in important gains for students and the dedicated professionals who teach and support them as they pursue their higher education goals.

All the strikes – at Governors State University (GSU UPI), Eastern Illinois University (EIU UPI), and Chicago State University (CSU UPI) – shared similar causes, including administrations that refused to bargain seriously until members took to the picket lines. But the most troubling commonality was that none of the universities shared the unions’ priorities to invest in the needs of the special student populations each campus serves, whether Black, Brown, rural, commuter, or first-generation.

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ILLINOIS HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING IS BROKEN – EVIDENCE-BASED FUNDING IS THE FIX

The Spring, Illinoisans saw dramatic strikes by faculty and staff at three Illinois public universities (Chicago State, Governors State and Eastern Illinois), while another campus (Northeastern Illinois) narrowly averted a walkout. This was an unprecedented situation in our state, and it should have made one thing crystal clear to the public, the media, and our elected leaders – Illinois has a serious problem with higher education funding. It is urgent that we find a solution.

Our students – particularly those who are Black, Brown, and low-income – cannot wait. Here is the brutal reality.

State support for higher education has declined significantly over the last two decades; it is now 40% less in real terms than in 2000. That means dedicated faculty and staff at most Illinois colleges and universities have seen minimal, if any, wage increases for years, and some have even suffered pay cuts.

During the same period, tuition costs grew over eight times faster than median income, jumping by 127% after inflation. Students and families are shouldering the burden of Illinois’ underfunding, as colleges and universities are forced to hike tuition to make up for lost resources.

Put simply, the long term disinvestment from the state has made higher education increasingly inaccessible, particularly for those who would benefit from it the most.

This is not a new problem. But former Governor Bruce Rauner made it significantly worse during his term by holding Illinois’ budget hostage to his extremist political agenda, starving our colleges and universities of funding, and eliminating Monetary Assistance Program (MAP) grants for thousands of our neediest students, particularly in Black and Latinx communities. Research proves the positive impact of a college education on everything from wages and economic mobility to economic development and community health.

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Illinois has a systemic solution to our broken system. And we can.

An evidence-based funding (EBF) model is the answer. Just like they did for our public PreK-12 schools in 2017, Illinois lawmakers should consider taking this path for higher education.

As instituted for our K-12 schools, EBF guarantees that no district receives less than what it did the previous year. When more state money becomes available for education – as it has nearly every year since EBF began – districts with the greatest need receive additional funds first.

An EBF model for public higher education makes sense. Such a system could provide a permanent solution to our underfunding crisis by ensuring equitable funding and improving access and affordability, starting with the colleges and universities that serve those with the greatest need.

We gratefully recognize Governor Pritzker for investing in our students or our state. We must continue the good work of striving for a systemic solution to our broken system.

On April 4, Illinois voters chose unity and hope over division and fear. IFT members helped to elect Brandon Johnson, a public school teacher and union organizer to head the city of Chicago; (see story, page 6) and our union’s powerful grassroots efforts were key to defeating extremist school board candidates with harmful political agendas.

IFT members from Waukegan to Quincy knocked on thousands of doors, made countless phone calls, and hosted virtual and in-person events. You understood what was at stake and worked to make a difference.

Public education in Illinois won big…because of YOU!

Around the state, our local unions endorsed 79 candidates in 30 districts; an incredible 76 percent won their races! By comparison, Awake Illinois endorsed 117 candidates in 43 districts; only 29 percent of their endorsed candidates won.

Special recognition goes out to those IFT members who ran for school board. It takes courage to step up and run for office to bring change. Congratulations to all who won. Your campaigns were inspiring. You lifted up important issues like equitable public school funding, teaching accurate history, and the harms of banning and censoring books in our schools.

IFT members worked hard and generously donated time and energy in this important election. Thank you for helping to build a better future for us all. Thank you for making us #IFTstrong.

Interested in running for school board or local office? Contact the IFT Department of Political Activities for more information.

Read more online at ift-aft.org.
Members at the state’s only Predominantly Black Institution were fighting for what their students need to succeed, including fair pay to help retain and attract world class professionals at CSU, and manageable workloads to ensure faculty and staff can best serve students. After 10 tough days on the lines and with overwhelming support from students, the community, and labor allies, members won their fight for fairness.

The new contract includes key gains: wage increases of about 14% over the four-year agreement, dedicated research time for faculty, and an important new family benefit - five weeks of paid parental leave for the birth, adoption, or fostering of a child.

Throughout negotiations, the EIU administration proposed that members accept overwhelming workload increases that would have negatively impacted the time available to support students. At the same time, they asked faculty and staff to accept insulting wage increases, which would have effectively cut their pay. EIU UPI members stayed strong with the support of students and allies. After six days on the picket lines, the union prevailed. The new agreement includes a 15% salary increase over four years. The union also won paid parental leave for new parents, including adoptive parents, which was previously not offered to university employees.

More than 95% of the voting faculty and staff members of NEIU UPI voted to authorize a strike in April after nearly a year of unproductive bargaining and unacceptable proposals from the university. The key issues at stake at the state’s first federally-designated Hispanic Serving Institution mirrored those at CSU, EIU and GSU – workload and fair pay. Thanks to the union’s commitment to reaching an agreement – combined with new, more collaborative appointees to NEIU’s Board of Trustees made by Governor Pritzker – the union was able to secure necessary contract improvements just hours before a scheduled walkout was set to begin, including 3% pay increases each year of the agreement, better balanced workloads, and the return of awarded merit pay.

"I’m so proud of our members for standing up for what students need and professionals deserve. By staying strong together, they showed the true power of solidarity."

- John KNNer | UPI President
The Illinois General Assembly wrapped up its spring legislative work on May 27. The Illinois Senate, working late into the night, approved the FY24 budget and sent the bill to the House for early morning approval. Governor Pritzker signed the budget in early June.

The FY24 spending plan is $50.7B. This is a balanced budget that makes transformative investments in early childhood and higher education, workforce development, and efforts to address violence and poverty.

The legislature adjourned for summer without extending the Invest in Kids Tax Credit scholarship program beyond its statutory sunset of January 1, 2025. IFT opposes the Invest in Kids program and will continue to lobby against any extension of the voucher-like scheme between now and the fall Veto Session.

Legislative highlights for spring session

April 4, 2023 was truly an historic day for Chicago and our state! For the first time, a public school teacher and union organizer was elected to lead our proud, working class city. Voters recognized that Brandon Johnson was the clear choice, and every Chicagoan will be better off with him at the helm.

IFT President Dan Montgomery sent this message to members after Mayor Johnson’s incredible victory.

“I am so proud of you, our IFT members in Chicago and across the state, who worked hard to help get Brandon to the fifth floor. Mayor Johnson’s work to uplift the students, schools, workers, and businesses in Chicago will positively impact our entire state. I thank all our members who donated their time and energy to Brandon’s campaign.”

We made history together!

IFT/CTU member Brandon Johnson wins mayoral race

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“At a time when some other states are fanning the flames of racism and LGBTQ+ hate, we’re proud that Illinois has once again taken a stand for what is right.”

Dan Montgomery
IFT President

Illinois makes history by prohibiting book bans

Illinois has become the first state to officially end the practice of banning books. Governor JB Pritzker signed House Bill 2789 into law, which prohibits book bans in public schools and community libraries. The law will take effect on January 1, 2024.

“As an English teacher and parent, I was honored to join Governor JB Pritzker and Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulias at the bill signing requiring libraries to adopt the American Library Association’s Bill of Rights to be eligible for state grants. We all have an obligation to step up and defend our freedoms,” said IFT President Dan Montgomery.

“There are few perils to our democracy as dangerous as book bans. They threaten the very freedom of thought and speech that underpin our republic. That’s why the IFT supports this bill and thanks Governor Pritzker for signing it, Secretary of State Gian-noulias for advancing it, and all the legislators who passed it, especially State Senator Laura Murphy and State Representative Anne Stava-Murray.

"At a time when some other states are fanning the flames of racism and LGBTQ+ hate, we’re proud that Illinois has once again taken a stand for what is right."

Dan Montgomery
IFT President

Read more online at ift-aft.org/news.

We look forward to working with our union brother Mayor Brandon Johnson to help make his inspiring vision for Chicago a reality for us all.”

Brandon Johnson will be a mayor who listens to the voices of the people he serves, not political insiders or special interest groups with harmful agendas.
As your union, the Illinois Federation of Teachers is your partner and advocate, from your first day on the job until the day you retire — and beyond. One of the most important ways we work together is by helping you protect your retirement security.

Learn more at IFT-AFT.org/Benefits