



#IFTSTRONG

Growing membership, increasing strength

About a year ago, our state, nation, and entire world encountered one of the greatest challenges we've ever known: the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since early 2020, the deadly and highly contagious virus has infected millions worldwide and killed more than half a million in the U.S. alone. Initially it wreaked havoc on our health care system, overwhelming doctors and nurses and flooding hospitals and Intensive Care

Units. Schools and offices were forced to close, many public services were temporarily eliminated, non-essential stores, restaurants, salons, gyms, and more were shuttered. The result has been grief, stress, and economic depression that impacted every one of us in unprecedented ways.

This crisis has forced each of us to adapt to new realities, from quickly learning

cutting-edge technologies to effectively work remotely to wearing masks, social distancing, and using countless bottles of hand sanitizer. **But despite the physical, mental and emotional hardships, the pandemic has brought out the best in our members and our unions.**

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Illinois Federation of Teachers
A Union of Professionals

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unionlink

Members fighting powerfully for a **strong union and the future we all deserve.**

One year later: Grief, growth, and PRIDE



DANIEL J. MONTGOMERY
President

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It’s been a little more than a year since our lives were turned upside down by COVID-19. Before March 2020, few among us would ever have believed we’d be looking back now upon the most challenging time of our lives. Emotionally, physically, financially and even politically, the pandemic has shaken our world to the core.

On a personal level, too many of us have dealt with tragic losses from the deadly virus. Professionally, nearly all of us have been impacted by difficult and ever-changing work conditions created by the necessary shuttering of school buildings and offices; we have been required to learn new technologies and strategies to help ensure we could effectively work or teach remotely, which often dramatically increased our workloads. At the same time, many of the parents among us have also juggled helping our kids navigate COVID-related changes while attending school online at home. Let me tell you, it was hard to see my 17-year-old son lie in bed and “do school” remotely! And we had it easy compared to many. The struggle was real!

Thankfully, we’re finally seeing some light at the end of the long, dark pandemic tunnel. While we are not out of the woods, vaccines and safety practices are making a difference and glimpses of “normalcy” are slowly emerging in our workplaces and communities. I’m certain I am not alone in feeling a sense of relief and hope for the brighter days to come.

Perhaps what is most exciting to me, though, is the intense and overwhelming sense of pride I’m feeling – pride in our members and our unions.

During these unprecedented times over these many months, I’ve been truly awed by each and every one of you. Every IFT member – whether a K-12 teacher, PSRP, higher education faculty or staff member, or state employee – has boldly stepped up to meet the challenges presented to you. You have shown your communities and our state that your work is invaluable and your dedication is unparalleled. Our cities, towns, and state could not have made it through these

difficult days without your commitment and professionalism. You kept this state running and Illinois’ students learning, no matter what obstacles were laid in your path or what sacrifice was required.

Together in your local unions and councils, you absolutely SHINED. Across our state, IFT members and leaders came together to fight for and support students, Illinoisans, and each other. In places where employers tried to rush a return to in-person work despite the science, you put your collective foot down. You stood up for the best interests of kids, communities, and your own families to demand that health and safety be prioritized above all else. I am convinced that these efforts helped prevent greater transmission of the virus in our state.

Your struggles not only helped to save lives, they inspired others. During the last year, hundreds of new members have united with their colleagues and joined the IFT family. From comedy educators at The Second City to part-time clerical professionals in Skokie (see related article, page 3), our union has seen phenomenal growth since last year because you have demonstrated the true meaning of solidarity and its role in advancing the greater good.

As your president, I’m grateful to have had the opportunity to shepherd these efforts and ensure you were supported by the IFT every step of the way.

As we look to the fall, I know the pandemic will continue to factor into our lives and workplaces. But if the last year has taught us anything, it’s that there is absolutely nothing that we can’t tackle – and overcome – when we do it together in our unions. NOTHING.

I couldn’t be more proud to work alongside you. Thank you and have a wonderful summer!

Thoughts? Email me at emaildan@ift-aft.org.

RECLAIMING THE PROMISE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

Sustainable Community Schools

Since last spring, crises have upended our world: from COVID-19 and its devastating impact to police violence against Black and Brown people, these crises have illuminated the essential role that schools play in our communities.

People of color and rural and low-income communities have borne the brunt of the pandemic because we failed to address the inequities in these communities pre-COVID. The Sustainable Community Schools (SCS) model is an antiracist endeavor that can help change that.

WHAT ARE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS (SCS)?

SCS are hubs that provide wraparound academic, health, and social support for the entire community. SCS bring students, parents, educators, school staff, community members, and service providers together in a coordinated effort to promote neighborhood health and well-being. It is a community-led, community-driven approach to educational justice and equity.

PRINCIPLES AND PILLARS OF SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

SCS are grounded in these principles that guide every school decision:

- **Racial justice and equity.** SCS center the needs, assets, and voices of those who have been traditionally marginalized in our education system.
- **Community self-determination.** Decision-making power lies in the hands of those who are directly impacted by SCS policies and practices.
- **Valuing community knowledge and wisdom.** SCS rely on the people in each community to identify their unique needs and help their schools thrive.
- **Shared leadership.** Students, parents, educators, and community members share in decision making and leadership.
- **Transparency and trusting relationships.** All stakeholders work together towards a clear, shared vision of transformative education.
- **Reflective learning culture.** Assessing the effectiveness of SCS practices and policies by those directly impacted is a key part of this antiracist work.
- **Whole-child/person approach to education.** SCS address external factors like employment, housing, healthcare, and food security because they play a key role in academic success.

- These principles are realized through six pillars:
- **Curricula that are engaging, culturally relevant, and challenging**
 - **An emphasis on high-quality teaching, not high-stakes testing**
 - **Wrap-around supports and opportunities**
 - **Restorative/transformative justice and other positive discipline practices**
 - **Authentic parent and community engagement**
 - **Inclusive school leadership**

WHAT DO SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS PROVIDE?

- Every community is unique, so all SCS offer different programs and services. Among them are:
- Academic offerings, including tutoring and enrichment opportunities
 - Afterschool clubs and programs
 - Curriculum development cohorts of educators, parents, and students
 - Medical and nutritional services
 - Youth and parent leadership development
 - Adult education
 - Workforce development opportunities

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO ADVOCATE FOR SCS

- Unions play a vital role in this important work. Here’s how you can help:
- **Work with your local or council** to convene a coalition of community partners and labor groups to advocate for SCS and antiracist education.
 - Present the SCS model to your **school improvement team**.
 - **Attend a local school board meeting** to explain why SCS is needed in your school/district.
 - **Encourage lawmakers** to invest in Sustainable Community Schools.

For more information about SCS, visit ift-aft.org/scs or contact your IFT Field Service Director.

Welcome to the IFT

Over the last year, the COVID-19 pandemic has made it crystal clear that labor unions play a critical role in the workplace by giving employees a powerful collective voice. Our union and others have stepped up throughout this crisis to fight on behalf of our members and those we serve to demand the resources and policies necessary to keep everyone safe.

All around our state, unorganized workers took notice of IFT's advocacy and successfully fought to join our union family to secure a safer workplace, a voice on the job, and a brighter future.

We're so proud of the following new local unions and councils who found dynamic and creative ways to organize, despite the obstacles presented by the pandemic over the last year. Together in this union, we are all #IFTstrong.



I support the union because I want every improviser to feel safe, empowered, and nurtured in their creative homes. We can achieve this by remaining in constant, formal, and brave conversation with the community at large.

Sheri Flanders

Association of International Comedy Educators

ASSOCIATION OF INTERNATIONAL COMEDY EDUCATORS

After a nearly two-year multi-union, multi-country organizing campaign, the 160 faculty and facilitators from the famed The Second City (TSC) training center in Chicago overwhelmingly voted to join the IFT in April 2021. Along with their TSC colleagues in Hollywood and Toronto, the Chicago-based members formed the 300-member Association of International Comedy Educators (AICE). (Toronto and Hollywood AICE members are part of the CWA-Canada and CWA-California, respectively.)

Now organized as AICE and with the support of the IFT and CWA, the new union members will have a stronger voice to fight for fair wages and change the culture of workplace bullying and racial and gender discrimination they have long encountered. AICE Chicago and the CWA units will soon begin the work of bargaining first contracts with their employer, a private equity group.

IMSA RESIDENT COUNSELORS COUNCIL – AFT LOCAL 604

The 22 Resident Counselors (RCs) at the acclaimed Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy (IMSA) in Aurora were certified earlier this year after filing an overwhelming majority of union authorization cards in January 2021 demonstrating their desire to join the IFT. IMSA faculty previously joined the IFT in late 2019.

The IMSA RC's provide onsite support to the more than 650 students who live in dormitories at the college preparatory academy. As union members, the RCs will use their collective power to advocate for equity and justice for students, their colleagues, and the community. Unionizing will also give these members a greater voice in decisions that impact their working and living conditions, including fair compensation and a transparent salary schedule.

The RCs will be part of the IMSA RC Council of AFT Local 604 and will begin bargaining their first agreement this summer.

SKOKIE DIST. 73 ½ SUPPORT STAFF OF LOCAL 1274

In December 2020, the 30 clerical workers in Skokie School District 73 1/2 filed a supermajority of authorization cards with the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Board (IELRB) to receive recognition as a union, the Skokie Dist. 73 ½ Support Staff Council of Local 1274.

These new members were voluntarily recognized by their employer and officially certified earlier this year. They will begin negotiating a first collective bargaining agreement this month.

THE JOSEPH SEARS SCHOOL – KENILWORTH DIST. 38

The 12 support staff members at the Joseph Sears School – a K-8 school in Kenilworth Dist. 38 – were certified as an IFT local in February this year after previously filing a majority of authorization cards with the IELRB. The members work in a variety of critical paraprofessional and school-related personnel roles.

These new members organized to have a seat at the table on important decisions, including pay, workload, and job duties. They expect to begin negotiating a collective bargaining agreement this month.

EPIC ACADEMY

The educators at EPIC charter school in Chicago voted in July 2020 to join the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU, Local 1) and the IFT. The election results were overwhelming, with more than 90 percent voting “yes.”

As members of the CTU/IFT, the nearly 30 teachers at EPIC now have greater power to advocate for the class size caps, better working and learning conditions, and improved teacher retention needed to meet the needs of students and the entire school community.

ASSOCIATION HOUSE ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL

Educators at Association House Alternative High School in Chicago voted to join the CTU and IFT in May 2021. The 14 teachers at this charter school expect to begin bargaining their first contract this summer with the goals of securing additional educational resources and supports for students and raising the floor on their wages and benefits.

CHRISTOPHER HOUSE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The 40 teachers and PSRPs at this Chicago charter school voted three to one in June 2021 to be represented by CTU and IFT. The new members plan to bargain this summer to secure an agreement with their employer that invests in supports for special education students and English language learners and decreases administrative costs.

LATIN SCHOOL

The 190 faculty at the Latin School of Chicago voted in June 2021 to join the IFT ranks. These educational professionals organized to secure a more powerful voice in decision making at the school to help them advocate for their students and professions. The Latin School Union hopes to begin bargaining a first contract this summer.

The support staff at Skokie District 73 ½ organized with the IFT because we knew that, as Helen Keller said, “*Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.*” Our union puts strength behind fighting for equity and empowers us to solve problems using our collective ideas and voice.

Tseggy Gomez (left) and Aasia Shahid (right),
Skokie 73 1/2 Support Staff



CONGRATULATIONS AND WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST IFT MEMBERS!



It’s really important that districts are working with their staff and community to see what they need. Safety needs to be the number one priority.

Rachel Esposito
IFT Local 571

STANDING UP FOR SAFETY

Throughout the pandemic, IFT locals and councils statewide have drawn on their unity and power to fight tough battles on behalf of students, families, and communities.

When many employers tried to return to in-person work or instruction too soon - despite the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) - our unions stepped up to demand that the safety of all children and adults be the top priority. From Chicago to West Frankfort and every place in between, **members joined together to insist that their schools district and employers follow the science to keep everyone safe.**

With support from the IFT, locals and councils bargained safety agreements with employers, made direct appeals to parents and community members, and issued press releases to the media to demand that science-driven safety measures be implemented, from employer provided PPE to social distancing to appropriate ventilation. While the voices of individuals would have been silenced, our collective voice in the union made a powerful difference and ensured safety was prioritized in our schools, campuses, and offices.

OPPOSING TESTING

Along with the Chicago Teachers Union (Local 1) and the grass-roots organization Illinois Families for Public Schools, the IFT and our members also took a stand against standardized testing.

Our union and allies adamantly believe that testing students this year will be unproductive and waste precious instruction

time that can be better used to help students regain any lost learning that resulted from the pandemic. As a result, **we have urged parents to opt their students out of such stressful and unnecessary testing this year** and have worked to educate our members about the opt-out process. That effort continues.

GROWING MEMBERSHIP, INCREASING STRENGTH

IFT members’ collective efforts to advocate for themselves and those they serve clearly hasn’t gone unnoticed, despite these challenging times. Hundreds of professionals have joined the IFT family since the pandemic began so they, too, could be empowered.

From comedy educators at The Second City to part time clerical staff, women and men around Illinois have come together and filed authorization cards or held successful union elections to send the message to their employers that they deserve a respected voice in their school or workplace. *(See related article, page 3.)*

Our growth during the pandemic has increased our collective strength, which benefits every IFT member.

PART OF THE VILLAGE

IFT members and our local unions have stepped up in amazing ways over these many months and demonstrated astounding dedication, creativity, compassion, and (socially-distanced) collaboration to harness their collective power and make a difference – for students, colleagues, families, and communities. **Together, we’ve shown that the Illinois Federation of Teachers is a key component of the “village” that makes our communities strong.**

Illinois General Assembly makes progress towards educational equity and worker fairness

The 102nd Illinois General Assembly adjourned in the early hours of June 1 after passing a budget that funds the Evidence Based Model (EBM) and avoids a tax increase on working families. Key legislation that will benefit IFT members, students, and communities was also passed and awaits action by the governor as this issue of *Union Link* goes to press. Here’s an overview of the budget and some key legislative wins from this session.

FISCAL YEAR 2022 BUDGET

Better-than-expected state revenue helped shrink the FY22 budget deficit from \$3 billion in February to less than \$1 billion at the end of May. Facing a smaller deficit and the certainty of federal dollars coming from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), the governor and lawmakers crafted a \$42 billion budget (SB 2800) that includes the scheduled \$350 million increase to the Evidence Based Model for K-12 education. The budget also allocates full payment to state pension systems and closes three corporate tax loopholes that will generate about \$650 million each year going forward.

Key bills pass both chambers, head to governor’s desk.

IFT INITIATIVES

House Bill 18 improves the teacher evaluation process by extending the time between evaluations for teachers previously rated “proficient” or “excellent” from two to three years.

House Bill 375 provides university and community college adjuncts with advance notice of the status of the class(es) they were hired to teach.

WORKER RIGHTS

Senate Joint Resolution Constitutional Amendment 11 would amend the Illinois Constitution to state that employees have a fundamental right to organize and collectively bargain. It would also prohibit so-called “right-to-work” laws. This proposed amendment will be on the November 2022 ballot and must be approved by 60% of the voters.

Senate Bill 525 allows more state employees to join a union and negotiate collective bargaining agreements by

changing the definition of confidential and managerial employee status to be based on their actual job duties and not outdated job descriptions.

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

House Bill 12 grants Family and Medical Leave to an employee of a school district, public university, or community college district who has been employed for at least 12 months and has worked at least 1,000 hours in that period. (The previous requirement was 1,250 hours.)

CURRICULUM/SCHOOL DAY

House Bill 376 requires public schools to provide a unit of instruction on Asian American history.

Senate Bill 564 requires the teaching of the contributions made by Muslims and Muslim Americans to society as part of U.S. history. The bill was amended to include several other religions as well.

Senate Bill 654 requires all public schools to provide 30 minutes of supervised, unstructured, child-directed play daily for students in grades K-5.

REDISTRICTING AND THE PRIMARY ELECTION

House Bill 2777 redraws House and Senate districts in Illinois. Redistricting occurs once every 10 years after each census. The pandemic has caused a delay in the delivery of census data and corresponding delay in the redrawing of congressional districts. As a result, the General Assembly voted to move the 2022 Primary Election normally held in March to June 28, 2022 (SB 825).

To learn about other important action taken during this legislative session, view a comprehensive wrap up on ift-aft.org.



➤ One year later: Grief, growth, and PRIDE

The pandemic has shaken our world to the core. Thankfully, we're finally seeing some light at the end of the long, dark pandemic tunnel.

➤ Sustainable Community Schools

SCS bring students, parents, educators, school staff, community members, and service providers together in a coordinated effort to promote neighborhood health and well-being.

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Visit ift-aft.org/professionaldevelopment for upcoming courses, trainings, and webinars.

10 Reasons to Join a UNION

1 A POWERFUL VOICE ON THE JOB

Union workers have the right to negotiate with their employer over things like wages, benefits, & working conditions.

2 STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

As one of the largest labor unions in Illinois, IFT has strength in numbers & a history of affecting positive change from the workplace to the Capitol.

3 COLLECTIVE BARGAINING RIGHTS

IFT has helped thousands of members secure economic gains and other improvements for themselves and those they serve.

4 A CONTRACT

IFT members elect their bargaining team, negotiate terms, & democratically vote to approve their collective bargaining agreements, which provide fair wages, benefits, work rules, & job security.

5 PROTECTION & SUPPORT

The IFT provides support to help protect you against employer discrimination, questionable behavior, unfair labor practices, and more.

6 PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES

IFT provides professional development training to enhance members' workplace and leadership skills.

7 LOBBYING & POLITICAL ACTION

IFT empowers you to make your voice heard by legislators on key issues that impact members, education, and public services.

8 CONSUMER BENEFITS

IFT and AFT offer members savings on a wide range of consumer benefits and services, as well as multiple scholarship programs.

9 PUBLIC RELATIONS

IFT works closely with media outlets to ensure our members' perspective is included in news coverage.

10 RACIAL JUSTICE ADVANCEMENT

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FIND MORE AT IFT-AFT.ORG/IFTSTRONG.