FINDING MY WORKSPACE
My two children are honor students at Granite City High School, so they have rigorous schedules filled with Facebook Live lessons, Zoom meetings, and Google Classroom work… To give them their space and to save myself from those distractions, I leave the house as much as possible to work from home.

Luckily, we have a park right across the street from my house, so on nice days, I put on my walking shoes and call my 29 students on our “social and emotional health days.” **Ironically, it seems like some of the parents need support more than the students!** … I find myself repeating, “Just do the best you can” over and over. I also keep hearing, “I don’t know how you do it, especially with 28 other students!”

These conversations highlight how overwhelming and frightening this pandemic is… Realistically, we teachers have to keep doing our jobs knowing that some students are managing their schoolwork with limited support as their parents struggle with work challenges, caring for elderly family members, or just dealing with… this horrific situation.

**TEACHING IS A TEAM EFFORT**
Teaching remotely is very difficult! We have a packet of materials covering various subjects that students pick up every few weeks… For students whose parents don’t have reliable transportation, my cohorts and I deliver these materials ourselves. We also offer a web-based reading and math series if they have a device and internet access. (If they don’t, we help students obtain one.)

We rely heavily on parents to make sure students complete their work, and so far, they are doing a phenomenal job… Some parents are inspiring their kids to go above and beyond the school workload, like Evie, whose mom sent along photos of her working on her monthly KiwiCrate activity – a solar system project…

**CHALLENGES TO STAYING ON TRACK**
Keeping my students on the same path has been challenging. Writing is the subject I miss teaching the most… I’ve been monitoring my students closely and making sure, especially for those students who are very interested in writing (like Patrick, pictured at right), that they keep it up and their interest doesn’t falter…

**THE STUDENTS ARE COPING**
Children are so resilient and are adjusting well, but they are affected by this on so many levels.

One student, Mia, hasn’t missed a beat despite having her days and nights confused. She is reading fluently, successfully practicing her math skills, and finishing her packets expeditiously… I was thrilled to receive a call from her promising a special surprise on my front porch… It was toilet paper!...

Another student, Haley, is spending most of her time with dad while mom works on the front lines as a neonatal nurse. Dad helped Haley complete a writing assignment that conveyed how fearful Haley is about her mom getting sick at work...

This is something we would have covered during one of our “thoughts and feelings” lessons… I teach my students the importance of conveying their feelings.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5
As I write this, we have seen many days of civil unrest around Illinois and the nation after the murder of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis. When I was teaching my introductory high school film class, a film I constantly returned to was Spike Lee’s *Do the Right Thing* (1989). It’s a complex view of race relations in New York in the 80s, a volatile time. The film concludes with the death of a young black man at the hands of police, followed by rioting. There were no easy answers then... just as we find today. No easy answers. But lots of sadness, Frustration, Despair. And pain. I cannot pretend to know the depths of the pain our black brothers and sisters feel at this time.

These emotions are compounded by the losses from COVID-19 — the deaths and illnesses, the losses of experiences, and the trauma of separation (think of what our high school graduates are missing this year, for instance). Then there is the staggering economic toll of the pandemic — over 20 million people unemployed (with projections of 40 million) and a $10 billion hole in our state budget. The repercussions boggle the mind.

Under the weight of these burdens, we could all easily fall into a sense of defeat and catharsis. Older colleagues tell me that the closest reference point for this time to them is the United States in 1968, when the nation was facing the trauma of separation (think of what our high school graduates are missing this year, for instance). Then there is the staggering economic toll of the pandemic — over 20 million people unemployed (with projections of 40 million) and a $10 billion hole in our state budget. The repercussions boggle the mind.

In this toughest of times, we need to care for ourselves and find these moments of joy and hope. In a recent *New York Times* interview, Spike Lee said, “All of us, and humanity as a whole, have to learn to think about more than just ourselves. If the pandemic has shown us anything, it’s that we’ve got to support one another. We can’t go back to what we were doing in B.C., before corona, with great inequalities between the have and have-nots.”

I know in the months ahead, we will all join together to rebuild our communities, find new ways to relate to one another, teach and care for our students, and do our work remotely. We will also protect one another in the workplace. In other words, we’ll be an even better union. Commit with new resolve to rebuilding our society in a more just, equitable, socially just way.

End the corrosion of poverty

Dismantle the structures of racism

Work hard to defend education and public services funding, with increased federal investments to protect from coronavirus related losses

Commit to passing the Fair Tax so we have more funding and tax everyone fairly

Educate our members and families to register and VOTE!

While these actions are consistent with our long-standing ideals, we must bring new zeal and fervor to our efforts.

One of the best parts of my job is meeting the students who have won our Porter and Megel scholarships. This year I had joyful phone calls with three amazing scholars and their parents and sponsors. Their intelligence, positivity and plans for the future inspired me and gave me a much-needed sense of optimism for the days ahead. The large presence of young people at the peaceful protests around the George Floyd murder gives me hope too.

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In solidarity,

DANIEL J. MONTGOMERY
President

"Do the Right Thing"

ILLINOIS COVID-19 BY THE NUMBERS

AFRICAN AMERICAN SPREAD

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AFRICAN AMERICANS makeup 15% of Illinois’ population

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HISPANICS makeup 17% of Illinois’ population

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The IFT has also created an Organizational Equity and Inclusion (OE&I) taskforce. This taskforce, made up of IFT officers, executive board members, and staff, is charged with guiding the union towards becoming an organization that prioritizes racial justice and solidarity within all of its processes, policies, and practices and uses its collective power to dismantle racist and oppressive systems that rob people of their humanity.

The COVID-19 crisis has made doing the work of advocating for racial justice a dire urgency. For our black and brown communities, it’s literally life or death. Please join us in committing to be an advocate for much-needed change.

At the 2019 Convention, IFT members recommitted to the fight for racial justice by approving resolutions that include building awareness around issues of racism and bigotry, supporting initiatives like Black Lives Matter at School Week, advocating for a more diverse staff and leadership, and integrating the interests and concerns of underrepresented groups more fully into IFT’s organizational, political, and legislative agendas to have a greater positive impact on racial issues that reach far beyond our union.

We’re also providing training to staff and members to help each of us recognize our own socially-learned biases so we can overcome them in our professional and union work. In collaboration with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the IFT’s Union Leadership Institute (ULI) offers “The Union Response to Student’s Stress and Trauma,” a three-day course that provides an in-depth discussion of historical trauma, the ways in which racial biases impact us and manifest themselves in our work, and strategies we can use to combat them.

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Pandemic makes a Fair Tax more important than ever

Even before the COVID-19 crisis, Illinois had a lot of bills to pay, and our current tax structure was hurting more than helping. Now our state is facing a staggering $10 billion deficit because of the pandemic.

As a result of COVID-19 related job losses, more than 1 million Illinoisans filed for unemployment benefits by early May, and countless others have suffered income loss from furloughs or reduced work hours. Others still fear layoffs and financial instability in these uncertain times.

All the while across our state, working people continue to suffer under Illinois’ unfair, inadequate tax system, paying twice as much as the wealthiest as a share of their income at a time when they can least afford it.

A Fair Tax would help.

In the November election, Illinois residents will be asked to decide whether or not to enact a Fair Tax. This progressive way of taxing income asks the wealthiest to pay their fair share. It’s the same kind of tax that 34 other states – including government already use. It’s time for Illinois to do the same.

The COVID-19 crisis has reinforced our need for a new tax structure that is fair to the middle class and ensures state and local governments have the resources they need to serve communities and fund public schools and services. That includes resources for our state’s under-resourced black and brown communities.

The pandemic has shed a bright light on the racial inequities that already plague our communities: many of Illinois’ black and brown residents who work in frontline jobs and risk greater exposure to the virus. They also disproportionately live in multi-generational households with less ability to physically distance when sick, suffer more than other groups from health conditions like heart disease and diabetes, and have less access to healthcare.

(See story, page 3).

No matter the color of your skin or where you live in Illinois, the issues at stake impact us ALL. The current crisis has made it more important than ever that we fund essential priorities like education, public health, public safety, and social services – areas that have been hit hardest by the pandemic.

A Fair Tax would help address these inequities by providing critically-needed resources to communities in greatest need.

A Fair Tax would help those in greatest need.

Now more than ever, we need a Fair Tax. Please vote YES for fairness on November 3.

A Fair Tax would:

- Make the wealthy pay their fair share
- Ensure 97 percent of Illinoisans see their taxes cut or remain the same – only earners making $250,000 or more per year would pay more
- Lift the burden off lower- and middle-income Illinoisans
- Generate additional revenue to fund our schools and state services
- Fix Illinois’ structural budget deficit

CONTINUED FROM COVER: A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A TEACHER DURING COVID-19

When addressing tough situations or unsettling topics, my students and I put our hands on our hearts, close our eyes, take a deep breath, and send a “well wish” to someone in need… I told Haley’s mom I’d just do that, and she passed it on to Haley to help deal with her fears.

I’M COPING TOO

I have a very busy family life. In addition to my two kids, I help take care of my uncle who was paralyzed in the Vietnam War, so I spend a great deal of my time in the evenings at his house…

I’m staying connected to my colleagues through a Facebook Messenger group. We talk about school-related issues, but we also serve as a support group for one another – just as we did during a regular school year. We planned and created a video to share with our students, organized a drive-by parade for our beloved secretary, celebrated the birth of a fellow teacher’s grandchild, and have prayed for one another’s family members along the way…

For self-care, I try to keep up with my exercise routine. I am trying to slow down and enjoy more time with my mother…We watch a lot of movies together as a family and have made our own fun inventing new ways to work out…And while it’s difficult to find solace in the midst of this pandemic, I have truly cherished the quality time it has allowed me to spend with my family.

IFT to recommend how to safely reopen schools

After months of staying home to fight the spread of COVID-19, we all desperately want to get back to “normal.” Educators and PSPPs are missing the daily personal interaction with students and colleagues, and many parents are struggling to help their kids with remote learning while working remotely themselves. Still others are unable to work at all because of a job loss or lack of access to daycare for their children.

As schools begin to reopen, IFT will recommend a fair and reasonable approach to getting back to normal. The safety of our kids, our teachers, and our colleagues is our number one priority. We have started a national campaign called Safely Reopen America’s Schools and Communities.

Throughout May, the union focused our efforts on collecting member feedback. Through a joint survey from the IFT, Illinois State Board of Education, and other stakeholders, we sought input from educators and PSPPs about how remote learning worked during the spring and what resources and supports members and their students need in the future to teach and learn effectively online. They survey also asked for opinions about what safety precautions need to be in place before students and staff can safely return to classrooms.

IFT constituency councils, made up of members from local unions all over the state, also met to discuss their online teaching and student support experiences and ways to make remote learning work better for students. The members expressed their fears about reopening too soon and the need for safety measures like social distancing, face masks and other many other essential precautions in our schools and on college and university campuses.

Our union will consider all this member feedback as we work to develop our own set of recommendations. IFT will also refer to recommendations set forth earlier in the spring by our national union, the American Federation of Teachers. In April, AFT released a 20-page, science-based report, “A Plan to Safely Reopen America’s Schools and Communities.”

“IFT’s guidelines are very helpful, but we want to go a step further and incorporate the specific needs of our members here in Illinois into a comprehensive set of recommendations,” said Russell. “Whether in-person, remotely, or under some sort of hybrid, education will continue in the fall and our union will be at the forefront of making that happen in a safe way that serves students and our members.”
Legislature passes budget, COVID-19 relief efforts

During a shortened session from May 20-23, the Illinois House and Senate convened for the first time since early March to pass a state budget and address critical COVID-19 relief efforts.

Beyond the public health impact, COVID-19 has devastated the state’s economy and working families. With most business and commerce shut down to prevent spread of the virus, the impact on Illinois’ finances has been severe and immediate. In April, the governor announced a projected $2.7 billion deficit for the rest of FY 2020 and a FY 2021 deficit that could reach $7.2 billion.

With the projected hit to state finances, the IFT organized and mobilized to advocate for public education (preK-12, colleges, and universities) funding, vital state services, and much-needed economic relief for residents.

Before the pandemic, there was a possibility of continued increases to Evidence-Based Funding for K-12 education and a long-overdue learning plans unless the parties mutually agree otherwise in writing.

Because of uncertainty about whether federal dollars will replace lost state revenues, lawmakers approved a $40 billion maintenance budget that includes relief for those most-impacted by the fiscal downturn. To maintain necessary spending, the state may borrow up to $5 billion from the Federal Reserve. The borrowing plan is far better than the alternative – a 35 percent across the board cut in state spending – would have been.

The budget includes:

- Funding for PreK-12 and higher education at FY 2020 levels.
- Funding for Monetary Assistance Program (MAP) grants at FY 2020 levels.
- Full funding for payments to the state retirement systems.
- Full funding for state retiree health insurance systems.
- $400 million for rent and mortgage relief.

Additional bills that were passed:

- Codify many K-12 policy changes included in Governor Pritzker’s coronavirus-related Executive Orders, including extending the deadline for renewal of professional educator licenses set to expire on June 30, 2020 to June 30, 2021; allowing school districts to utilize e-learning days for remote learning days; and waiving timelines for teacher remediation plans unless the parties mutually agree otherwise in writing.
- Allow a retired teacher who receives Teachers’ Retirement System (TRS) benefits to substitute teach for up to 120 days per school year without jeopardizing their pension benefits.
- Allow PSRP’s to qualify for unemployment insurance benefits during the summer break. (The provision expires on December 31, 2020.)

An overview of the FY 2021 budget and other legislative action is available on Under the Dome at ift-aft.org.

Vote by mail expanded for November 2020 election

Given the likelihood of social distancing continuing into the fall, the legislature approved an expansion of the state’s vote by mail system for the upcoming General Election.

In prior elections, each voter had to contact their local election authority to get a vote by mail application and each county’s application process was different.

Under the new legislation, local election authorities will automatically send vote by mail applications to certain voters and a universal vote by mail application will be available on the Illinois State Board of Elections website.

Expanding the vote by mail system in Illinois will help ensure voter participation in the November election. Five states already conduct their elections entirely by mail and there is no evidence it leads to election fraud.

The upcoming election is important for so many reasons, including the critical need to pass the Fair Tax and elect a new president. The IFT encourages members to vote by mail or vote early, both to stay safe by avoiding crowded polling places and to avoid any unforeseen event that may interfere with your ability to cast a ballot.

New Changes for the November 3 General Election

Election Day, Tuesday, November 3, will be a state holiday for government offices, K-12 schools and university civil servants.

Vote by Mail applications

- By August 1, election authorities will mail or email a vote-by-mail application to any voter who cast a ballot in the 2018, 2019, or 2020 primary election
- Applications will also be sent to any voter who registered or changed their address after the March 2020 primary
- By September 15, the Secretary of State will send reminder notices to voters who received an application but haven’t yet returned it
- Those registering to vote for the first time can request a mail ballot at the time they register

Voting in person

- Voters will still be able to vote in person
- Election authorities may provide a curbside voting option

Early voting

- Voters will still be able to vote early in person
- For the 15 days prior to Election Day, permanent early voting locations will be open from 8:30 am to 7:00 pm on weekdays and 9:00 am to 5:00 pm on weekends and holidays

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IFT-AFT.ORG/VOTE

SUPPORT for COVID 19

Visit ift-aft.org/COVID for the latest information, including learning resources, COVID-19 safety practices, member news, and more.

#IFTSTRONG

Go Vote

more at

IFT-AFT.ORG/VOTE
Do the right thing
I call on all of us to join in the fiercest spirit of our unionism...we must bring new zeal and fervor to our efforts.

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50 YEARS
University of Chicago Lab School Faculty Association, Local 2063
Goreville Federation of Teachers, Local 2112

25 YEARS
Havana Support Staff, Local 4885
Granite City Federation of Secretaries, Local 4956

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OUR SITE IS BRAND NEW!
VISIT IFT-AFT.ORG NOW
Easily access information important to you from any device.
COVID-19 resources & stories
Voter information center
Fair Tax campaign hub
News, and more!