If passed by Illinois voters on November 8, the Workers’ Rights Amendment (WRA) - formally known as Senate Joint Resolution Constitutional Amendment 11 - would amend the Illinois Constitution to guarantee the fundamental rights of workers to unionize and collectively bargain.

Put simply, the Workers’ Rights Amendment would guarantee the right of workers to bargain for safe working conditions, fair pay, and benefits.

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Moving forward TOGETHER in 2022

DANIEL J. MONTGOMERY
President

After nearly two long, difficult years with the pandemic, I know we all hoped for a much smoother and healthier start to the New Year. Unfortunately, the Omicron variant has reared its ugly head with a vengeance, making the early days of 2022 more stressful than we could have imagined. Still, there are many reasons to be optimistic about the coming year and I’m choosing to focus on the positive, despite the challenges.

Although we’ve seen the new variant is the most transmissible thus far, thankfully the availability of life-saving vaccines for school-aged children and adults has dramatically reduced the rate of severe illness, death and hospitalization among those who are fully vaccinated and boosted. (If you and your eligible family members are not, I urge you to become so!) Combined with regular testing, proper masking and other safety precautions, I am hopeful that the vaccines will help us avoid lengthy closures of schools and workplaces during this surge. I continue to be thankful for President Biden’s and Governor Pritzker’s firm leadership and the amazing doctors and scientists who made the vaccines possible in record time.

Despite the ups-and-downs that we will continue to face, I believe many of us are ready to cautiously look ahead. For me, that means thinking about the amazing opportunities for us as IFT members in 2022.

The most important of those is our chance to pass the Workers’ Rights Amendment (WRA) in November. The WRA – formally known as Senate Joint Resolution Constitutional Amendment 11 – would amend the Illinois Constitution to guarantee the fundamental rights of workers to unionize and collectively bargain. Put simply, the WRA would increase worker power.

How? The WRA would prevent Illinois from passing any so-called “right-to-work” laws in our state, which are designed to reduce worker rights and benefit big corporations. Every worker in Illinois – current union members and future ones alike – deserve this fundamental fairness.

Please watch your inboxes and future issues of Union Link for more information about how you can help get this critical amendment passed.

The upcoming session of the Illinois General Assembly will also provide us with new opportunities to advocate for legislation that benefits students, citizens, and our members. Just think of what else we can accomplish in the upcoming session and beyond! Starting in mid-January, keep an eye on the IFT website at ift-aft.org for weekly legislative updates.

Finally, I’m excited to announce that we’ll be holding the 2022 IFT Convention in-person from October 21-23 in St. Louis. This year’s theme is simply “TOGETHER,” and it couldn’t be more appropriate! I look forward to hosting an energetic and inspirational event where IFT leaders, delegates and guests can reconnect, highlight members’ extraordinary efforts and contributions, renew the focus on our collective goals, and envision what we can achieve by working as one. Local leaders have already received preliminary details about the event and more information will be coming soon. Stay tuned!

These are just a few of the highlights in store for the year ahead. I hope you’re looking forward to them as much as I am and have given yourself permission to feel optimistic once again. After your extraordinary efforts over the last two years, no one deserves it more.

Thank you for all you do.

Daniel J. Montgomery
President

Welcome to the IFT

Northbrook teachers and certified staff join our union family

The IFT is proud to welcome our newest members from Northbrook School District 28!

These educators and certified staff from Chicago’s northern suburbs filed authorization cards with the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Board (IELRB) in late November, affirming their intent to form a union and join the IFT. Once certified, the new unit will be the Northbrook Federation of Teachers District 28, a council of the North Suburban Federation of Teachers, Local 1274. The group consists of 230 teachers and certified staff. They are one of the last few remaining groups of school professionals in the state to organize.

“We are proud and excited that the outstanding educators and staff in Northbrook School District 28 are joining our ranks,” said IFT President Dan Montgomery. “Throughout the pandemic, men and women across the state have organized with the IFT in record numbers because they understand that standing together in a union is the best way to improve student learning and keep communities safe. With a union, everyone wins.”

As the Northbrook Federation of Teachers, the teachers and staff will help increase the collective power of our more than 100,000-member statewide union while ensuring they have a stronger voice to help them negotiate fair contracts that address curriculum, health and safety, equitable working conditions, and other provisions that improve student learning and help attract and retain outstanding professionals in their district.

The IELRB is expected to certify the new union soon. Members will then begin the process of establishing the union’s governing structure and electing leadership.

In my 11 years in District 28, I have worked with the most innovative and caring staff and administrators in the profession. As the Northbrook Federation of Teachers District 28 and part of IFT Local 1274, we’ll be able to collaborate in a transparent way to provide the best possible student learning outcomes. We’re excited to get started.

Nicole Gas
Teacher, Northbrook Junior High School
Northbrook Federation of Teachers District 28, Local 1274

To learn about the value of collective voice, visit ift-aft.org/iftstrong.
IFT makes early endorsements in key races

The IFT Executive Board voted in December to make early endorsements for federal, state, and judicial races in the June 2022 primary election.

The IFT has endorsed Nikki Budzinski for Congress (13th District), Alexi Giannoulias for Illinois Secretary of State, and Justice Mary Kay O’Brien for Illinois Supreme Court (3rd District).

“We are proud to come out early to support Budzinski, Giannoulias and O’Brien,” said IFT President Dan Montgomery. “They have each demonstrated a strong commitment to protecting collective bargaining and workers’ rights and championing public education and public services. These outstanding candidates represent the collective values of IFT members, and we know they’ll work with us to advance our shared goals on behalf of students and communities.”

The endorsements reflect the results of our union’s robust candidate review process, which includes candidate questionnaires and surveys, regional discussions, and thorough consideration by the board, which is comprised of 40 elected members who represent our diverse local unions statewide.

I'm honored to receive the support of the IFT. As the granddaughter of public school teachers, this is especially meaningful to me. I look forward to partnering with the IFT to strengthen public education and services that provide all students in Central and Southern Illinois with opportunity.

I share IFT’s commitment to providing a first-rate education for every child in this state – regardless of where they live – and supplying our students with the tools they need to succeed after they graduate. All Illinois students deserve a quality education. To make that happen, we need to best position our teachers and provide the support, equitable funding, and resources they need.

It is a great honor to receive the endorsement of the IFT, who are at the forefront fighting to protect collective bargaining and defend public education. Our shared values of fairness and leveling the playing field for working families have served as a north star throughout my career, and these values are what I will bring to the Illinois Supreme Court.

Let teachers teach not test!

ISBE is trying to expand testing again – we need your help to stop them.

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) is considering a proposal to replace the annual math and reading tests for 3-8th grade (IAR) with interim tests given three times a year and made available for K-2nd grade.

To meet federal requirements, Illinois school districts will need to pilot this new test until 2024 or 2025. This means 20 percent of students would take both the IAR and these new tests until then. The expected cost of the new test is $228 million over the next 10 years (on top of the cost for the remaining four years of IAR testing), yet there is no evidence that these commercial interim tests increase student achievement.

WHY IS THIS A PROBLEM?

- This proposal would require high-stakes state tests three times each year—adding even more time for high-stakes testing and test prep to the school year.
- Students in grades K-2 do not need the pressure of high-stakes state tests, and standardized tests have little reliability or validity in early childhood. The federal government does not require K-2 testing, so why should Illinois?
- Commercial interim assessments are not designed to be used for high-stakes accountability and do not provide valid diagnostic information for day-to-day instruction. Using large-scale interim assessments as part of state testing puts the State Board’s seal of approval on a practice that assessment experts do not endorse.
- Recent research on growth and achievement in Illinois districts’ use of commercial interim tests coincided with declines in academic growth in grades 4 through 8. Chicago has now dropped the NWEA MAP test altogether.
- Federal law requires states to use test results to rate schools. We know that when high-stakes ratings are attached to standardized tests, the result is often “teaching to the test.” Increasing high-stakes tests from one to three times per year will exacerbate this problem, especially in underserved Black and Brown communities.

To help inform your responses to ISBE’s assessment survey, the IFT has created a new website, teachnottest.org. The site provides information and resources, including an important fact sheet about ISBE’s claims versus reality when it comes to their assessment proposal.
WHAT IS THE WORKERS’ RIGHTS AMENDMENT?

The WRA would prohibit Illinois from passing any state law (and any municipality from passing a local ordinance) “that interferes with, negates, or diminishes the right of employees to organize and bargain collectively over their wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment and workplace safety.”

That means the WRA would prohibit the passage of any so-called “right-to-work” laws in our state, which are designed to reduce workers’ rights and benefit big corporations.

DON’T “RIGHT-TO-WORK” LAWS PROTECT WORKERS?

No, “right-to-work” laws are meant to weaken unions, reduce worker rights, and benefit corporations. These laws have a devastating impact on the economy. In Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin, the introduction of “right-to-work” laws lowered hourly wages by 3 percent (on average). By contrast, Illinois workers earn higher wages, are more likely to have health insurance coverage, have higher rates of homeownership, and are more productive than their counterparts in “right-to-work” states.

Research continually shows that “right-to-work” laws are bad economic policy. A May 2021 report from the Illinois Economic Policy Institute and the Project for Middle Class Renewal at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign shows that “right-to-work” states lag in creating middle-class jobs and delivering economic growth. (These findings accounted for factors such as cost of living, occupation, race, gender, wages, and income.)

Thanks to the efforts of Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFT) members and other union workers over the years, Illinois currently has no “right-to-work” laws on the books. The 27 states that do have paid the price.

DOES THE WORKERS’ RIGHTS AMENDMENT CHANGE OUR STATE’S LABOR LAWS?

The amendment does not change our state’s current labor laws. It only creates a constitutional floor for collective bargaining that will prevent future attacks like those we’ve seen in many neighboring states.

HOW WILL THE WORKERS’ RIGHTS AMENDMENT PROTECT MY RIGHTS?

A stronger middle class helps us all. When people are paid fair wages, it boosts local economies and strengthens our communities.

Union contracts guarantee fair treatment for all, including ensuring equal pay for people of color and women — putting more in families’ bank accounts.

WHEN DO I VOTE FOR THE WORKERS’ RIGHTS AMENDMENT?

On Tuesday, November 8, 2022. Illinois voters will have the opportunity to vote YES to protect worker rights. Let’s help Illinois’ working women and men access good jobs and secure a respected voice in their workplaces!

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

In the months ahead, please watch your inbox and future issues of Union Link for more information and action alerts about how we can pass the Workers’ Rights Amendment.

Visit ift-aft.org/wra for additional Resources.

Our union puts strength behind fighting for equity and empowers us to solve problems using our collective ideas and voice.

Taeggy Gomez (left) and Aasia Shahid (right)

Shakie 73 1/2 Support Staff

Black Lives Matter at School Week

JANUARY 31 - FEBRUARY 4

Since delegates overwhelmingly passed a convention resolution in 2019 declaring IFT’s support for Black Lives Matter at School (BLM at School), our members and locals have been working hard to fight for racial justice in our union and communities. Don’t sit on the sidelines!

In 2022, Black Lives Matter at School Week occurs January 31-February 4 during the first week of Black History Month. You and your local can participate by recognizing and celebrating the history, culture, and contributions of Black Americans during this special week.

From teaching about the principles of BLM in the classroom to spreading the word on social media to doing some personal reading, we’ve compiled a list of resources and ideas to help decide how you will make a difference during Black Lives Matter at School Week - and all year long.

IFT WEBSITE
Black Lives Matter at School | ift-aft.org/blm
Tackling Racism in Our Union | ift-aft.org/oei

On these pages you’ll find a variety of helpful information and graphics to download, print, and share, including our NEW IFT Antiracism Organizing Guide, a Critical Race Theory fact sheet, a digital Zoom background, links to classroom resources and much more.

BLACK LIVES MATTER AT SCHOOL WEBSITE
blacklivesmattersatschool.com

Learn about the movement’s 13 Guiding Principles, download a Starter Kit for your Week of Action activities, find curriculum resources, and more.

SHARE MY LESSON WEBSITE
sharemylesson.com/collections

This FREE online resource for educators offers lesson plans on Black History Month, the Black Lives Matter Movement, the Civil Rights Movement, and more.

“BLACK LIVES MATTER AT SCHOOL: AN UPRISING FOR EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE”
A book by Jesse Hagopian and Denisha Jones
haymarketbooks.org

Visit ift-aft.org/blm for additional Black Lives Matter at School resources.

Visit ift-aft.org/blm for additional Black Lives Matter at School resources.

Black Lives Matter at School: An Uprising for Educational Justice centers the humanity of our children. It is a sharp rebuke of white supremacy—the very thing that interrupts the healthy development of Black youth. School communities must affirm Black lives. Educators have to dismantle systems of oppression—systems that we influence daily. We have to be radically different from the missionary educator depicted in popular culture. BLM at School is essential. Period.

Stacy Davis Gates
IFT Executive Vice President
Moving forward TOGETHER in 2022
President Montgomery looks ahead to our opportunities in 2022.

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Let teachers teach not test!
The IFT has created teachnottest.org, a new website to help inform you about ISBE’s harmful assessment proposal.

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

SAVE THE DATE IFT CONVENTION OCTOBER 21-23, 2022 MARRIOTT RENAISSANCE, ST. LOUIS