



Even before IFT President Dan Montgomery opened the 2019 IFT Convention on October 18, there was no doubt that members were ready to get to work!

**MORE CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS ON PAGES 4-5.**





# We have the energy. We have the edge.



DANIEL J. MONTGOMERY  
President

As I write this column, I honestly have to say that I have never have felt more excited about our union and our members than I do right now. Everywhere I look in the IFT, I see our union in action. I can feel the power and energy, and it's stronger than ever before.

I could feel it at the IFT Convention in October, when hundreds of delegates from locals statewide gathered to set the policies and direction of our union. Their commitment to the work ahead – including passing a Fair Tax constitutional amendment and ousting Trump and DeVos in 2020 – was inspiring. After thoughtful, thorough debate, the body passed important resolutions addressing everything from the need for diversity, equity, and inclusion in our unions to a commitment to support immigrant students to going green. (Read more about convention on pages 4-5.) It was crystal clear that **IFT members are determined to fulfill our vision and create the future we all deserve.**

I see that same commitment around the state in our local unions. At press time, thousands of members had been forced to the picket lines to fight for what kids need and professionals deserve, no matter the personal cost.

Teachers and staff in the **Chicago Teachers Union** (Local 1) won historic gains for schools and students by walking out for 11 days in October. The **Grayslake Federation of Teachers** (Local 504) hit the lines for a day in a successful fight for fair pay. The **mid-managers at Triton College** (who are members of the Cook County College Teachers Union, Local 1600) were continuing to bargain with a stubborn administration after a one-day strike. And the **Decatur Federation of Teaching Assistants** (Local 4324)

had walked out for three days in their ongoing struggle for affordable healthcare. Several other locals nearly walked out, but reached agreements after showing management they were strike-ready.

This commitment to our students, schools, and one another is what our union is all about! I wish you could have seen the solidarity when striking CTU teachers and paras came to Decatur! It was one of the most emotional and inspiring acts I have ever seen as a unionist.

It's amazing to see the power generated when members come together to demand what is right and necessary for kids and ourselves. These actions are inspiring others throughout Illinois and the nation — solidarity is contagious.

Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg said, "Fight for the things that you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you." That's exactly what our locals and members are doing.

I feel privileged to play a part in it. During the recent IFT Convention, I was honored to be reelected to lead this union for another three years. I thank you for the opportunity to continue the important work we're doing.

**We have the energy. We have the edge.** Let's get the job done in the only way we know how – together.

In gratitude and solidarity,

Dan Montgomery | IFT President

Write to me at  
[emaildan@ift-aft.org](mailto:emaildan@ift-aft.org) to  
share your thoughts.

# I see what you are doing



BETH SONNEBORN  
IFT Media Director

Paraprofessional,  
Instructional Assistant,  
Teacher Aide, Educational  
Assistant, or simply School Staff. . . you go by many names. **No matter what title you hold, I'm not sure people realize all that you do, but I want you to know that I see what you are doing.**

I see you early in the morning as you greet my daughter at the drop off lane in front of the school. I see how you smile with excitement about another day as she grabs your hand when you help her out of the car. I see you in class pictures sitting with my child. I see the gentle hand you use to guide her through the classroom and how you keep a watchful eye on her to make sure she isn't alone and that she is always safe.

I know that you have been there for my child as she struggles to keep up with the other kids. I heard how you placed your hands under her head

to help protect her from the hard ground when she stumbled in the hall. I know that you have walked the empty track a million times with my little one when she couldn't participate in certain activities. I know you follow a work schedule far more complicated than mine, moving between speech, specials, and grade levels without missing a beat. I know that you help my child with the smallest of tasks. You've learned her personality, her quirks, her strengths and her weaknesses. **Yes, I see what you are doing.**

I know you have days that are rewarding. I can see the love and trust my child has for you, and I hope you see that too. I also know you have days that are exhausting and discouraging. Thank you for not giving up. Because of your unconditional support for children like mine, my daughter knows that each day is a new day and that she is worth showing up for.

Yes, I see what you are doing. Your hard work does not go unnoticed. **My child notices you. I notice you. And I am grateful for you.**



Lexi Sonneborn and her individual aide, Mrs. Wilson.

Wednesday, November 20 (and the third Wednesday of every November!) was PSRP Day in Illinois, an annual day to show appreciation for the more than 100,000 dedicated paraprofessionals and school related personnel (PSRPs) who provide essential services in classrooms, school offices, cafeterias, buses, and more.

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500 Oakmont Lane,  
Westmont, IL 60559.

Phone: 630/468-4080  
[www.ift-aft.org](http://www.ift-aft.org)

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## FAIR TAX TAKES CENTER STAGE



The weekend was filled with conversation about how far **OUR UNION** has come and strategic planning designed to strengthen **OUR FUTURE**, including the critical need to pass a Fair Tax constitutional amendment in 2020. Delegates approved a resolution and committed to fight to pass the Fair Tax amendment next year. A video, speakers, and informative workshops also focused on developing a successful Fair Tax strategy, while an exhibit booth provided information and asked members to sign a pledge card to help in the effort and receive a free t-shirt.

## GUEST SPEAKERS EMPOWER AND INSPIRE

Illinois' leader in the Fair Tax fight, Governor JB Pritzker, was the event's keynote speaker. He thanked the crowd for supporting his campaign and for partnering with him during his first year in office to pass an impressive list of bills that will benefit students and schools, improve state services, and strengthen unions. The governor also advocated for the Fair Tax, saying that to avoid massive cuts to education and programs or a 15 percent increase in the state's flat tax, "There's only one choice, and that is to say YES to a Fair Tax."

IFT President Dan Montgomery gave his state of the union address, highlighting that our union has thrived in the wake of the Supreme Court's Janus decision, having more dues paying members now than before the court ruled. The IFT leader also recognized the striking members of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU, Local 1), who bravely took to the picket lines just days before convention to fight for educational justice and the schools Chicago students deserve.

## DELEGATES CHART THE COURSE

Establishing IFT's priorities and guiding vision for the next three years topped the convention agenda, and electing statewide officers was part of that business. **Daniel J. Montgomery** (Local 1274) was reelected to his fourth term as President, while **Stacy Davis Gates** (Local 1) was elected as Executive Vice President, and **Jane Russell** (Local 571) was reelected to serve a second term as Secretary-Treasurer. In addition, delegates voted for 40 IFT Vice Presidents who will serve on the Executive Board and represent their locals and councils around the state.

Delegates debated and voted on dozens of resolutions to set the union's direction too. Among those that were adopted by the body include: passing a Fair Tax, the importance of diversity in our workplaces and unions, supporting the needs of PSRPs, improving economic conditions for adjunct faculty, addressing the state's teacher shortage, investing in public higher education, ensuring safe workplaces for educators and school staff, protecting and supporting immigrant students and their families, encouraging participation in Black Lives Matter at school, expanding transgender-affirming healthcare coverage, and many others.



"**We are here for you CTU!**" declared Montgomery. "Wherever we have members in the struggle, we will be there. If Chicago kids are denied their basics rights, then every kid in every school district is denied theirs too."

"This isn't just about Chicago," he added. "From Kankakee to Peoria to Joliet to our rural districts, the need for adequate resources is a civil rights issue, not just a union issue."

Montgomery also introduced a special order of business to honor former longtime CTU President and retiring IFT Executive Vice President **Karen GJ Lewis**, who attended to accept heartfelt gratitude from the IFT for her nearly 30 years of service. After delegates were shown a moving video highlighting her accomplishments, Lewis spoke to the standing-room-only crowd.

Other inspiring speakers included IFT Executive Vice President **Stacy Davis Gates**, U.S. Senator **Dick Durbin**, State Representative **Mary Edly-Allen** (Dist. 51), retiring Illinois AFL-CIO President **Michael Carrigan**, IEA President **Kathi Griffin**, and AFT President **Randi Weingarten**.

Now armed with inspiration and ideas from the 2019 IFT Convention, members and locals have headed back to work to continue building **OUR UNION** and strengthening **OUR FUTURE**.



**"I'm not a militant, I'm just an advocate for everybody, and I want you to advocate for your students, your members, your communities, and for whichever candidates you like."**

**Remember that nobody is going to give you anything, you have to take it."**

Karen Lewis | Retired IFT Executive Vice President



# Chicago Teachers Union wins historic agreement after 11-day strike



In a strike heard around the country, the **Chicago Teachers Union** (Local 1) reached a historic tentative contract agreement in October after 11 days on the picket lines. Using the collective voice of their 25,000 teacher and PSRP members, the union won a contract that includes major gains for their students and schools.

“The 103,000 members of the Illinois Federation of Teachers stand proudly with the Chicago Teachers Union,” **IFT President Dan Montgomery** said in a statement after the agreement was announced. “We thank you for your courage to fight for equity and justice in public education. Congratulations on winning a contract that honors the dignity and respect that students, teachers, and school staff deserve and helps to deliver to all the children of Chicago the education and services they need.”

The IFT’s largest local was forced to the picket lines after nearly 11 months of difficult negotiations failed to produce an agreement that provided the resources students need. Teachers and staff in the nation’s third-largest school district were fighting for better conditions in their public schools, including more nurses, social workers, counselors, and other frontline staff and smaller class sizes that help students learn and teachers teach.

At press time for this *Union Link*, the agreement was being voted on by the general membership and was expected to be approved.

It contains numerous key gains, including:

- Enforceable class size limits for the first time in CPS
- Nurses and social workers in every school
- Increase of wraparound services for students
- A pathway to return librarians to schools
- A solution for thousands of homeless students that establishes community liaisons to assist those students and their families

“As a CPS parent and an educator, I am extremely proud of what our members have accomplished, together, over the past 11 days,” **CTU Vice President and IFT Executive Vice President Stacy Davis Gates** said. “We have bargained for the common good and put forth an agenda that prioritizes our students and most vulnerable families, and we made it clear that large class sizes, filthy school buildings, and special education neglect are unacceptable for our children.”

“This wasn’t simply a fight to mitigate the damage of austerity, it was a fight to create the conditions that both students and educators need,” **AFT President Randi Weingarten** said. “This strike, like so many other fights to fund our future, is about building the political will to strengthen our public schools so all kids have their shot at success.

# Strike wave hits Illinois

Across the state, IFT locals are taking a stand for the education their students deserve and for respect for their profession. Here are the battles our members were fighting as this nissue of *Union Link* went to press:

## DECATUR FEDERATION OF TEACHING ASSISTANTS (DFTA, LOCAL 4324)



They have become a familiar sight in Decatur, the blue and white signs that read: “We support teaching assistants.” Homes, businesses, and cars displaying this sentiment are a source of strength for **DFTA President Paula Busboom**, who has been with her 275 members on the front lines of a fight with the Decatur Board of Education for affordable health insurance. The board’s final proposal would increase health insurance costs for family plans by 247 percent (64 percent for single plans), and they refuse to negotiate.

As a result, the teaching assistants (TAs) had no choice but to go on strike for three days in October. Though strong on the picket lines, they ultimately decided to return to their classrooms for their students’ well-being. They assist special education students in Decatur and in the Macon-Piatt Special Education District who rely on them to get through their school day.

Since the TAs returned to work, the board has played games rather than work on a resolution, taking away their access to health insurance and life insurance, and even shutting down access to the teaching assistants’ flex spending account (which is their own money!). We stand with our members in DFTA as they continue their fight for a fair contract with affordable health insurance options.

## GRAYSLAKE TEACHERS AND SUPPORT STAFF COUNCILS OF THE LAKE COUNTY FEDERATION OF TEACHERS (LCFT, LOCAL 504)

The Grayslake councils of teachers and staff hit the picket lines for one day in early November after nine months of bargaining. In 2017, the unions and board agreed to reopen their four-year contract midway to set the last two years of raises based on the district’s financial condition. Though their finances improved, the board’s salary offer did not. The unions’ walkout quickly convinced the board that the teachers and staff were prepared to stand strong, and they won the increases they deserved!

## TRITON MID-MANAGERS CHAPTER OF COOK COUNTY COLLEGE TEACHERS UNION (CCCTU, LOCAL 1600)

Mid-managers at Triton College in River Grove have been fighting for a fair contract since March.



While administrator salaries have increased 14-20 percent, mid-managers are being asked to work an additional 16 hours for a 4 percent raise, and without standard backpay.

**Kay Frey, president of the Mid-Managers Chapter** and 32-year Triton employee, can’t remember a time when the unit has gone on strike. But in October, the chapter voted to do just that. Since then, they’ve been picketing and passing out flyers, and had a successful one-day strike on November 6.

## SETTLED AT THE LAST SECOND

Some of our locals were recently pushed to take a strike vote but were able to reach agreements in the final hour, including:

- **Blue Ridge Federation** (Local 3350)
- **Governors State University and Northern Illinois University Faculty chapters of University Professionals of Illinois** (Local 4100)
- **Evergreen Park Council of the Southwest Suburban Federation of Teachers** (Local 943)
- **DeKalb Classroom Teachers Association** (Local 4328)



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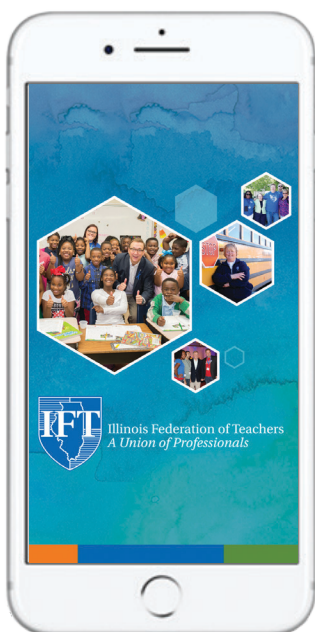
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## events

### REGIONAL UNION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

**January 25** | Peoria, IL

### REGIONAL UNION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

**March 21** | Fairview Heights, IL

### UNION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

#### WORKSITE LEADER TRAINING

**April 25-26** | Westmont, IL

### GREAT LAKES UNION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

**June 22-26** | Delavan, WI

### SAVE THE DATE FOR THE 2020 IFT PSRP CONFERENCE

**October 23-24**



*Members of the **Old Town School of Folk Music** entertained delegates and guests with a selection of labor songs during the IFT Convention.*

## INSIDE unionlink

### We have the energy. We have the edge.

IFT members are determined to fulfill our vision and create the future we all deserve.

### I see what you are doing

A heartfelt "Thank You" to recognize and appreciate what PSRPs mean to families.

### CTU starts a strike wave across Illinois

Across the state, IFT locals are taking a stand for the education their students deserve and for respect for their profession.