



A Union of Professionals

1274 Newsline



North Suburban Teachers Union – Local 1274, CFL, IFT/AFT, AFL-CIO

February 2012

Local Action Plan: Confronting Challenges

These truly are troubling times for public employees in general, and especially for teachers. It seems as though every day we wake to a new attack on our profession and our rights as workers to have a voice in our workplaces and to fairly negotiate the terms of our working conditions. Just next door in Indiana, for instance, we have witnessed the recent passage of "right to work" legislation that can cripple our unions. (See Steve Grossman's column on page 3.)

To confront these historic challenges, unions across the country, at the national, state, and local levels – indeed right down to each individual member – are going to have to develop consistent, sustained, and coordinated strategies to blunt the attacks and turn the tide by changing the anti-union narrative.

It is not hyperbole to suggest that we fight not just for ourselves, but to ensure the existence of a strong, vibrant middle-class in America.

Towards that end, the American Federation of Teachers is developing leadership tools and training for its affiliates through its Executive Leadership Program (ELP), and our local, the North Suburban Teachers Union, is again at the forefront.



forward. Therefore, a key part of the plan will be to free the local president from full time teaching duties in order to put more time into union work.

The leadership of the NSTU is moving ahead with a bold Local Action Plan, as described more fully on page 2, to improve communications, community alliances, political action, and leadership training. But this cannot happen without someone to coordinate and push it

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Referenda ask voters for support

On March 20th, primary voters will find questions on the ballot in two districts whose teachers are members of Local 1274.

In West Northfield District 31, which includes Winkelman Elementary and Field Middle School, the district is seeking approval for a property tax hike that will circumvent \$1 million in proposed cuts.



In Golf School District 67, comprised of Hynes Elementary and Golf Middle School in Morton Grove, the district is seeking voter approval for a pair of measures that will maintain funding for education and make major improvements to its two school buildings.

In both districts, union members are playing an active role in drumming up support for the referenda. In District 67, teachers are helping to get the message out by canvassing, putting up signs and setting up social media sites. In District 31, teachers are part of Citizens for District 31, a coalition of parents, teachers and other supporters working to pass the referendum.

In both districts, Local 1274's COPE committee is providing financial support for the efforts of the council members.

In District 31, the March 20th referendum will be the second attempt to raise property taxes. Last year a similar referendum was rejected by the voters and the district made \$1.8 million in cuts. This year, another \$1 million in potential cuts has been planned in case the referendum fails again. The list of proposed cuts is long: elimination of sports teams, band, gifted education, after school activities and subsidies for student transportation; reductions in teaching staff for fine arts, physical

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The Local Action Plan:

Communications: The Local Action Plan places a heavy emphasis on improved internal and external communication.

Internally our efforts to improve communication with our own membership will center on a soon-to-be-unveiled, new and greatly improved website. Based on a template being designed by the IFT, our new website will allow us to post regular updates on vital issues, provide links to the IFT and AFT site, and make connections to individual pages for each of our councils so that you can keep abreast of the events within your own unions and work sites.

In addition to the new website, we plan to utilize a powerful email tool so that we can reach each of you with important messages in a timely fashion. Our goal is to establish lines of communication with our members outside of our school districts' servers.



Our Action Plan also seeks to improve communication with the community using a variety of strategies. One is to improve our earned media by establishing a consistent and sustained relationship with all local press outlets. We intend to position ourselves so that the local press will seek us out for our input on education related stories and issues, think twice before they jump on the anti-public employee bandwagon, and print our letters to the editor.

Finally, we plan to enter the world of social media.

Organization and Mobilization: An effective union depends upon an informed and engaged membership. The Local Action Plan includes a redoubling of our efforts to make each and every one of you feel a greater sense of connection to your union.

We will be implementing new and improved leadership training, expanding our network of building-level representation, providing more opportunities for our members to participate in union related roles and tasks, building an expanded base of active members and developing a new generation of leadership.

Politics and Legislation: Like it or not, it has never been more vital to our survival to be engaged in the battle over politics and legislation. Our efforts at the statewide and local levels have so far allowed us to fare better than some of our neighboring states but clearly more battles lay ahead.

The Local Action Plan involves ramped up engagement with our representatives in the Illinois House and Senate. We will primarily work through the IFT's LASR program (Local Action for Statewide Results), which creates small groups of our own leaders and members who maintain regular contact with area elected officials.

In addition, we plan to host more legislative events and meetings at our new and improved local office space.

Community Engagement: To win the battles ahead we are going to need to ally ourselves with community groups who share our interests. Community engagement serves to improve the image of public sector unions, expand the base of support for our issues, and generate a sense of goodwill.

The Local Action Plan includes the formation of a Community Engagement Committee that will work to identify potential allies, meet with community leaders, and develop a message that will help us build a level of mutual support.

Changing the Narrative: To regain the respect we deserve as teachers, paraprofessionals, and unionists, we need to transcend the negative stereotype of us as workers in pursuit of our self-interest. We must present ourselves as we truly are: experts on what makes for a quality school and authorities on what is in the best interest of the students and families that we serve.

Our Local Action Plan involves articulating our vision of teaching, learning, and serving our schools and communities. It means changing the narrative laid out by those who seek to bring us down.

Implementation: To coordinate these efforts, the local executive board is moving forward with a plan to give the local president more time in service to the union. Like the union leadership at all of our councils, the local president is a full-time employee of his school district (219), teaching a full load of classes and doing his union work after hours. Our union needs and deserves more.

The local is working on a plan to allow the president to teach part time so that he can maintain a daily afternoon schedule at the union office. Combining that agreement with some common sense belt-tightening engineered by local treasurer Robyn Caplan, the entire cost of the Local Action Plan can be financed with a modest dues increase of less than forty cents per paycheck. The exact cost of the plan will not be known until later in the fiscal year when the local executive board develops and passes the budget for next year. In the interest of transparency, we will keep you informed all along the way.

These are indeed challenging times but your union – Local 1274 of the IFT/AFT – will continue with its long tradition of rising to the occasion to meet the needs of its members. ■

From the President: Right to work.....for less

The Republican party's assault on the rights of workers hit close to home this month with Indiana becoming the first state in over a decade – and the first from the Midwest – to pass so-called "right to work" legislation..

Last year the minority Democrats in the Indiana legislature thwarted a Republican attempt to pass the bill by fleeing across state lines into Illinois, denying the Republicans the quorum needed to conduct business. In response, the state passed a law imposing a \$1,000 per day penalty on legislators who leave the state when the legislature is in session. So this year the Democrats were forced to back down and return to the capital.

At that point, the Republicans raced to pass the legislation in order to avoid facing a major protest at the Super Bowl – being played this year in Indianapolis – planned by labor leaders, including the NFL Players Association.

The purpose of the Indiana law and others like it is to weaken unions. They do that by making it more difficult for the union to collect dues from the workers that it serves, thus restricting its ability to organize and tipping the balance of power into the hands of management at the bargaining table.



Despite union protests, Indiana recently became the 23rd "right to work" state.

The grossly misleading label -- right to work, or RTW -- was attached to these laws long ago by anti-union forces. It reinforces the false perception that they improve the rights of workers to earn and keep jobs. They do not.

The history of RTW legislation goes back to the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, which included a provision that allowed states to eliminate the so-called security clause, which requires all workers who receive the benefits of a collective bargaining agreement to share the costs, even those that do not join the union.

Immediately following the enactment of Taft-Hartley, 12 states passed RTW laws. Others followed in the ensuing years, primarily southern and western states. Indiana is the 23rd RTW state.

One myth fueling support for RTW laws is that without them, unions have a right to compel workers to join as a condition of employment. That is not the case. Even without RTW, labor law has long forbidden a "closed shop." Any worker can decline to belong to a union.

Another myth is that without RTW laws, workers can be forced through union dues to make political and charitable donations against their will. The truth is that union dues can only be used for the direct work of a union and not for political purposes. All local, IFT and AFT political expenditures are taken from members' voluntary donations to COPE, not from member dues.

The "right to work" label promotes the false perception that these laws improve the rights of workers to earn and keep jobs. They do not.

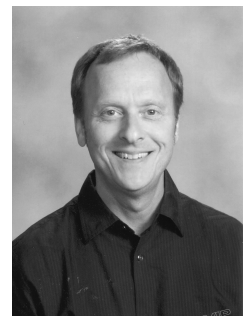
There is also no basis to the claim that RTW creates jobs. On the contrary, the main effect is to depress wages and working conditions. In the most recent and comprehensive study, the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) found wages in RTW states to be between 6 and 8% lower than in non-RTW states, with an average penalty of 6.5%. Even when they controlled for regional differences in cost of living, they still found wages to be 3.8% lower. RTW states also lagged in health and pension benefits.

So in reality, RTW states attempt to lure business and industry based on the prospect that by doing business in a state with weakened protections for unions they might be able to increase their profit margins at the expense of their workers. Rather than calling it right-to-work laws, a more accurate name would be race-to-the-bottom laws, because that is exactly what those laws are promoting.

The situation in Indiana is a reminder to all of us of the importance of increasing our vigilance against those seeking to weaken and destroy our rights as workers.

In Solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Steve", written in a cursive style.



Referenda, continued from page 1

education and computer labs; elimination of instructional assistants; outsourcing of some of the custodial staff; and elimination of services to the Korean and Spanish language communities at a time when need is growing.

Members of Citizens for District 31 have pointed out that District 31 has the lowest tax rate among school districts in Northfield Township, and approval of the referendum would raise taxes only to the rate in other neighboring districts.

Golf School District 67 faces similar challenges, with dilapidated buildings as a special concern. One referendum on the ballot would increase taxes to maintain current levels of programs and staffing. Programs at risk include full day kindergarten, STEM Lab, library services, reading and math support, art and music and extracurriculars. Class sizes could also increase.

The second referendum would allow the district to issue bonds to repair facilities, replace pipes, install new HVAC systems and add a multi-purpose room at Hynes School.

According to Council President Peggy Steadman, "We teach in spite of falling ceiling tiles, extreme indoor temperatures, leaky roofs, and rusty water."



Steadman also pointed out that the proposed multi-purpose room is far from frivolous. A state waiver is due to expire, which will result in an increase in the number of physical education classes each week; the gym at Hynes School is simply not big enough to accommodate this increase.

Hynes school needs a new multi-purpose room to accommodate spillover from the gym.

"We teach in spite of falling ceiling tiles, extreme indoor temperatures, leaky roofs and rusty water," said Peggy Steadman, District 67 Council President.

District 67 has not had a referendum since 1969, and revenue has simply not kept up with expenditures. The district has already cut staff, frozen some salaries and reduced expenses for supplies, and the Golf Teachers' Association has made concessions for two years.

In a time of great economic stress for many taxpayers, the prospect of passing school referendums seems especially daunting. However, the need for greater community support in Districts 31 and 67 cannot be overstated, and the teachers are working hard to insure that their schools have the funding necessary to provide a safe and stimulating environment for their students. Both councils would appreciate support in the form of donations or volunteers.



To help District 31, go to:
<http://www.savedistrict31.com>

For District 67, send donations to:
KIDS67-Supporting District 67 Referenda,
6702 Church Street, Morton Grove, IL 60053.
Volunteer at golfkids67@gmail.com,
k_otte@yahoo.com or call 847-410-9003

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**Produced and published by the North
Suburban Teachers Union Local 1274 –
IFT/AFT, AFL-CIO**

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