Fixing PERA

For more than a decade, Illinois teachers, students, and school districts have suffered from the consequences of reforms like No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA).

NCLB promised to improve learning, but instead resulted in over-testing, drastically reduced instructional time, and assessments used to rank, sort and punish schools. PERA promised to improve educational services by significantly changing teacher and principal evaluation.

Signed by President Obama in 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is our opportunity to change direction. ESSA opens the door to states to provide for flexibility, shared accountability, and more equitable funding, and takes the federal government out of the teacher evaluation process.

To fully realize the flexibility of ESSA, many Illinois laws will need to be changed – most notably PERA. While our union has provided feedback to ISBE on its draft plans to implement ESSA, we have also been educating lawmakers about the harm PERA has done. (See pages 6-7 to see the evolution of teacher evaluation and PERA’s impact.)

IFT members have provided the most important voice through this process. By participating in IFT-sponsored PERA focus groups and weighing in on ESSA during public comment periods, you’ve spoken out to ISBE and Governor Rauner about what must be done to support our schools and once again focus on teaching and learning, not testing and paperwork.

This spring, the IFT will continue to advocate for you as the state ESSA plan is finalized. We will also seek changes to PERA to decrease the stress teachers feel throughout the evaluation process while preserving systems that provide for meaningful evaluator feedback.

continued on page 6
Fighting forward through uncertain times

Daniel J. Montgomery
President

As I wrote a few days after the election, I know how many of you are feeling because I’m feeling it, too.

I felt it as results trickled in on election night and saw it reflected painfully in my 17-year-old daughter’s eyes the next morning.

Since then, many of you have shared stories of what’s happened in our schools and workplaces: Threats against students of color. Calls to “expose and report” professors for alleged bias. A five-year-old’s fear that her parents will be deported while she sleeps.

And, we have watched the President-elect nominate people who don’t even believe in the missions of the agencies they were picked to lead, let alone our values.*

For Health and Human Services, Trump selected someone who pledged to repeal the ACA and end Medicare as we know it. For Labor Secretary, we have a fast-food chain CEO who wants to lower the minimum wage and replace workers with robots. And perhaps worst of all, for Education Secretary, Trump nominated religious voucher advocate Betsy DeVos, a billionaire who destroyed public schools in Detroit in order to expand for-profit charters.

(You may be asking what difference a federal appointment could have on your school district. Let me give you one example: if Trump and DeVos make good on their promise to obliterate $20 billion in Title I funds for low-income students, all our communities will feel the pain.)

It’s easy to get overwhelmed and hard to know where to start. But I refuse to be despondent.

As a union, we are digging into the data, strategizing and organizing because that’s how we succeed. As you’ll read in the pages ahead, on November 8, you engaged voters across Illinois and secured some bright victories in an otherwise dark election year.

Moving forward, we already see areas ripe with opportunity, like in some downstate districts where Trump won “bigly,” but the IFT-endorsed Democratic candidate for the state legislature greatly outperformed him … thanks to your work!

And we’re already hearing about candidates considering a run against Governor Bruce Rauner who, by the way, recently gushed about one of his donors … Betsy DeVos.

But I’d encourage you not to wait for “the IFT” to act. You are the IFT. We all are.

As defenders of public education, services, and our democracy, we have an individual responsibility to talk to one another about the issues – not necessarily the candidates – that make us tick. It’s important to have these one-on-one conversations even with people we don’t agree with politically. Especially with people we don’t agree with.

It’s only then that we can begin to find common ground and move forward.

I recently read about an emerging phenomenon in the news industry about the “Trump bump.” It goes like this: a media outlet like the New York Times questions Trump. He insults them and their staff personally on Twitter. Subscriptions to the outlet spike.

Trump’s thin-skinned childishness – combined with a backlash against fake news and hunger for real, investigative journalism – has strengthened the very institution he has been trying to tear down.

I feel the same way about us. Trump and Rauner have unintentionally energized us as well. We are more organized, focused, and resolved than ever.

Let’s be the “happy warriors” to make sure Rauner doesn’t spend one more day holding our state hostage to his extreme political agenda, shorting our colleges, schools, and citizens.

In the days ahead, we’ll face some really hard times, but we’re up to the challenge. We are a union that fights for the right things. Let’s engage that fight smartly with joy and confidence that we can win. If we do that, we will.

*At the time of this writing, the presidential inauguration and Senate confirmation hearings of nominees had not yet taken place.

E-mail Dan
How can we support your local’s work to engage members? Send me an email at emaildan@ift-aft.org and let me know.
What’s more, the Rauner administration wants to apply those steep health costs to everyone else covered by the state insurance plan, including employees, retirees and their dependents under every constitutional officer and every state university!

AFSCME has repeatedly urged Governor Rauner to return to bargaining, making clear that we’ll discuss the administration’s proposals on any issue and modify our own. But Rauner still refuses, and in November, the Illinois Labor Relations Board (whose members he appoints) ruled that our negotiations are at an impasse. That gave legal cover to Rauner’s plan to impose his harsh terms.

Our union appealed the labor board’s ruling and asked the court to prevent the Rauner administration from making any unilateral changes during that process. But if no stay is issued, Rauner is sure to move quickly to impose.

At that point, I and other AFSCME members in state government will have to decide whether to live with the governor’s demands – or go out on strike. We don’t want to do that, because we know that Illinois residents rely on the public services we provide. But we also know that we can’t let a bully like Bruce Rauner strip our rights, cut our pay, and privatize our jobs.

State workers have a clear message for the governor: Don’t dictate, negotiate. But if Rauner keeps pushing conflict over compromise and we vote to authorize a strike, we’ll be counting on the support of fellow union members like you in our fight for fairness.

Governor’s AFSCME demands would impact some IFT members

More than 363,000 Illinoisans – including higher education faculty and staff and state workers who are IFT members – are covered by state health insurance plans. State law mandates that these employees receive insurance from the state and cannot bargain with their individual employer for different insurance. Under the labor board’s impasse ruling, Governor Rauner could impose his unfair proposals on all university and state workers, not just AFSCME members.

This fight is continuing in court, but if the Governor imposes his plan, some IFT members will be forced to pay as much as $10,000 more per year for health insurance. Employees with dependents will be hurt the most.

The IFT is working with local leaders, members, and other unions to stop Rauner from imposing his unfair proposals.

The impact could vary by person. Learn more at the link below, and talk with your local leader and colleagues today.
While Bruce Rauner invested historic amounts of money into legislative races during this election, IFT members were knocking on doors and calling friends to talk about our shared values: Strong public schools and services. Vibrant communities. Rights for working people. And an economy that works for all of us, not just those at the very top.

By engaging thousands of voters, IFT members made a difference. Together, we helped send a true hero, Tammy Duckworth, to the U.S. Senate. Together, we replaced the Governor’s hand-picked Comptroller with Susana Mendoza, who will be the independent fiscal watchdog we need in Springfield.

In the Illinois House, the Democratic majority will decrease by four seats when the next General Assembly convenes. And while Senate Democrats protected seats in the suburbs, the supermajority decreased by two in that chamber as well. (See the complete list of election results on the next page.)

Our union and our professions have weathered hardships before, and we will do it again. As Hillary Clinton urged young people in her inspiring concession speech: “Never stop believing that fighting for what’s right is worth it.” It is, and we’ll keep fighting – together.

The analysis of the election continues, and our union will use this data as we look ahead to our strategy for the critical 2018 election. But what we know for certain is this: We must find ways to bridge our differences in this country. It won’t happen on Facebook, and it won’t happen on cable news. It will happen in our homes, our schools and workplaces, in our communities and unions.

Despite the uncertainty in our nation’s capital, we made some important strides in Illinois thanks to the hard work of so many IFT members.

“Fighting for what’s right is worth it”

Election 2016 will go down in the history of American politics like none before it.

For many, Hillary Clinton’s loss to Donald Trump came with overwhelming shock and disappointment. After winning by nearly 3 million popular votes but losing in the electoral college, Clinton supporters and others who opposed the billionaire’s election have been taking to the streets and protesting the new President’s choices and statements since his win.

Trump immediately began assembling a White House staff that includes Steve Bannon, former chairman of Breitbart News which Bannon himself has called the platform for the “alt-right” white nationalist movement. He also nominated Betsy DeVos, a Republican mega-donor (and Rauner supporter) who has invested millions into for-profit charters at the expense of our public schools, with which she has no experience.

And for Secretary of Labor, he tapped Andrew Puzder, a fast-food chain CEO and outspoken critic of worker protections and raising the minimum wage.

Trump’s questionable nominations, his business conflicts of interest, and a penchant for misleading and impulsive tweets have many Americans frustrated and fearful for our country’s future.

“What we know for certain is this: We must find ways to bridge our differences in this country.”
THANK YOU

Your efforts during the months leading up to Election Day were unprecedented. Thousands of members and your families volunteered time to register voters, knock on doors, and make phone calls to spread the truth and get out the vote.

MAKE NO MISTAKE, YOU MADE A DIFFERENCE.

Thanks to you, we helped elect many IFT-endorsed candidates who will be strong advocates for public education and workers.

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**GENERAL ELECTION RESULTS OF IFT-ENDORSED CANDIDATES**

**BLUE = WIN**  **GRAY = LOSS**

### FEDERAL CANDIDATES

**PRESIDENT**  
Hillary Clinton (D)

**U.S. SENATE**  
Tammy Duckworth (D)

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

1. Bobby Rush  
2. Robin Kelly  
3. Daniel Lipinski  
4. Luis Gutierrez  
5. Mike Quigley  
6. Amanda Howland  
7. Danny Davis  
8. Raja Krishnamoorthi  
9. Jan Schakowsky  
10. Brad Schneider  
11. Bill Foster  
12. Charles Baricevic  
13. Mark Wicklund  
14. Jim Walz  
15. Cheri Bustos  
16. Junius Rodríguez

### STATE CANDIDATES

**STATE COMPTROLLER**  
Susana Mendoza

**STATE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

1. Antonio Munoz  
2. Omar Aquino  
3. Kimberly Lightford  
4. Patricia Van Pelt  
5. Ira Silverstein  
6. John Mulroe  
7. Martin Sandval  
8. Kwame Raoul  
9. Emil Jones III  
10. Jacqueline Collins  
11. Donne Trotter  
12. Michael Hastings  
13. Iris Martinez  
14. Christina Castro  
15. Tom Cullerton  
16. Corinne Pierog  
17. Laura Murphy  
18. Julie Morrison  
19. Melinda Bush  
20. Steve Stadelman  
21. Christine Benson  
22. Toi Hutchinson  
23. Pat McGuire  
24. David Koehler  
25. Jennifer Bertino-Tarrant  
26. Sam McCann  
27. Scott Bennett  
28. William Haine  
29. Gary Forby  
30. Sheila Simon  
31. Marcus Evans, Jr.  
32. Elgie Sims, Jr.  
33. Frances Hurley  
34. Kelly Burke  
35. Al Riley  
36. Will Guzzardi  
37. Jaime Andrade, Jr.  
38. LaShawn Ford  
39. John D’Amico  
40. Anna Moeller  
41. Fred Crespo  
42. Dorothy Conroy  
43. Steve Swanson  
44. Valerie Burd  
45. David Harris  
46. Marlin Moynihan  
47. Michelle Mussman  
48. Elaine Nekritz  
49. Scott Drury  
50. Carol Sente  
51. Rita Mayfield  
52. Nick Ciko  
53. Sam Yingling  
54. John Bartman  
55. Nancy Zettler  
56. Marie Wallace  
57. Tricia Sweeney  
58. Angelique Bodine  
59. Mike Smiddy  
60. Michael Halpin  
61. Bill Buttus  
62. Martha Shugart  
63. Andy Skoog  
64. Kathleen Willis  
65. Camille Lilly  
66. Katherine Cloonen  
67. Anthony DeLuca  
68. Greg Hose  
69. Linda Chapa LaVia  
70. Stephanie Kifowit  
71. Emily McAsey  
72. Larry Walsh  
73. Jehan Gordon-Booth  
74. John Curtis  
75. Bev Pritchett  
76. Mike Mathis  
77. Sue Scherer  
78. Natalie Manley  
79. Anthony DeGiorno  
80. Carol Ammons  
81. Dennis Malak  
82. Daniel Beiser  
83. Katie Stuart  
84. Jay Hoffman  
85. Lauren Cameron  
86. Marsha Griffin  
87. Jerry Costello II  
88. John Bradley  
89. Brandon Phelps  
90. Mary Flowers  
91. Cindy Schock  
92. Kathleen Wineman  
93. Jeffrey Ebert  
94. Anna Moeller  
95. Fred Crespo  
96. Steve Swanson  
97. Valerie Burd  
98. David Harris  
99. Marlin Moynihan  
100. Michelle Mussman  
101. Elaine Nekritz  
102. Scott Drury  
103. Carol Sente  
104. Rita Mayfield  
105. Nick Ciko  
106. Sam Yingling  
107. John Bartman  
108. Nancy Zettler  
109. Marie Wallace  
110. Tricia Sweeney  
111. Angelique Bodine  
112. Mike Smiddy  
113. Michael Halpin  
114. Bill Buttus  
115. Martha Shugart  
116. Andy Skoog  
117. Kathleen Willis

### APPPELLATE COURT

Eileen O’Neil Burke - 1st Appellate  
Eileen O’Neil Burke - 1st Appellate  
Eileen O’Neil Burke - 1st Appellate  
Eileen O’Neil Burke - 1st Appellate  
Eileen O’Neil Burke - 1st Appellate

This list reflects only districts in which the IFT endorsed a candidate.
TEACHER EVALUATION IN ILLINOIS
WHERE WE’VE BEEN, WHERE WE ARE NOW

DOCUMENT KEY
- **PERA**: Performance and Evaluation Reform Act
- **CCSS**: Common Core State Standards
- **ESSA**: Every Student Succeeds Act
- **PARCC**: Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers
- **RIF**: Reduction in Force
- **SB7**: Education Reform bill passed in 2011

**68%** of principals and **81%** of teachers report high levels of stress and anxiety related to PERA evaluations.

*University of Chicago Consortium on School Research

**BROKEN PERA PROMISES**

Before PERA, teacher evaluations were typically done in a simple, “drive by” style and provided minimal feedback to educators. PERA promised to improve teaching practice by changing evaluations, but it doesn’t provide the detailed feedback teachers need to improve.

**UNSATISFACTORY RATINGS**

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**TRENDS**

**RATINGS AND TRENDS REMAIN UNCHANGED**

**INCREASED**

- Testing & test preparation
- Cost
- Paperwork
- Stress
- Unfair dismissal of experienced teachers
- Rating outcomes prioritized over instructional improvement
- Culture of blame and dismissal

**UNION LINK | WINTER 2017**
PERA NEGATIVELY IMPACTS TEACHING AND LEARNING

(2010 - present)

- Testing & test preparation
- Cost
- Paperwork
- Stress
- Unfair dismissal of experienced teachers
- Rating outcomes prioritized over instructional improvement
- Culture of blame and dismissal

INCREASED 4 BENEFITS OF IMPROVING TEACHER EVALUATION

1. Evaluation of professional practice with peer and evaluator feedback
2. Collaborative learning
3. Feedback from trained evaluators helps improve instruction
4. Improved evaluator - teacher communication

In Chicago, studies show that ratings are significantly lower for teachers in low-income schools, black teachers, and male teachers, indicating possible bias.

88% of teachers agree that the new observation process has improved their teaching practice, but more than 60% of teachers report their ratings rely too heavily on student growth measures.

*University of Chicago Consortium on School Research
UNION LINK | WINTER 2017

LOCAL News

Duckworth talks higher education with teachers and students

With the cost of higher education and student debt at historic levels, U.S. Senator-elect Tammy Duckworth joined IFT President Dan Montgomery, AFT President Randi Weingarten, educators, and students to discuss solutions during a roundtable session hosted by the University Professionals of Illinois (UPI), Local 4100 in October.

Members from the UIC United Faculty Association, Local 6456, the UPI, Local 4100, and the Cook County College Teachers Union, Local 1600, as well as students from UIC and Western Illinois University, talked with Duckworth and union leaders about the challenges they face. Among them is the need to fully fund Monetary Assistance Program (MAP) grants that help low-income students pursue a higher education.

“This Governor has shown his priorities are not where mine are,” Duckworth said about Rauner. “He has shown through his actions, like vetoing critical MAP funding, that he doesn’t care about students on MAP, and that is not in the best interests of this state.”

“We need to reframe education so it is seen as a critical part of the infrastructure of our nation. We must put the same level of importance on education as we do the Department of Defense.”

- U.S. Senator-elect Tammy Duckworth

Duckworth said we must hold lawmakers accountable to ensure that the decisions made about funding recognize that education is the foundation of our country.

“You’re weakening our nation by not funding higher education programs. We need to reframe education so it is seen as a critical part of the infrastructure of our nation,” Duckworth insisted. “We must put the same level of importance on education as we do the Department of Defense.”

Weingarten added, “There is a way to solve these problems, but we have to work with our elected officials from top to bottom.”

In Illinois, our union will continue to work with lawmakers in both parties who seek fair and equitable funding for PreK-12 and higher education during the upcoming session of the General Assembly.
New wave of graduate workers vote to join IFT/AFT

Graduate employees at the University of Chicago (U of C) and Northwestern University (NU) are the latest to overwhelmingly demonstrate their desire to organize with the IFT and American Federation of Teachers. The recent votes are part of the growing national trend of graduate worker unionization.

Graduate Students United (GSU) members at U of C have been affiliated with the IFT/AFT and American Association of University Professors (AAUP) since 2011, but voted in October to proceed with a union-recognition campaign. In December, 80 percent of the graduate workers and research assistants who are members of the Northwestern University Graduate Workers (NUGW) voted to join IFT.

“We’re proud that these graduate employees have chosen to join IFT and the thousands of higher education faculty, staff, and other graduate employees we represent across the state.”

Graduate employees at Northwestern University celebrate joining their Prairie State peers at the University of Chicago by affiliating with IFT.

“We’re proud that these graduate employees have chosen to join IFT and the thousands of higher education faculty, staff, and other graduate employees we represent across the state,” said IFT President Dan Montgomery. “Through organizing, these important workers will be empowered to raise their collective voice and play an active role in the decisions that affect them, their students, and the universities they serve.”

When union members run for public office, working families win

The women and men who run for important local offices – from school board to city council – often have a more direct impact on our lives and communities than many state and federal lawmakers.

Running for office takes you from behind the curtain to center stage. And it’s a risk. It’s open season for anyone you may have locked horns with during your career. But, it’s also a chance for voters to see us as real people: neighbors, taxpayers, parents, educators, and friends who share common interests and challenges.

Even when a candidate does not earn enough votes to win, he or she often changes the dialogue and opens eyes to a new perspective.

That is why it is important to have more union member run for office. Our commitment starts with asking members to run and continues along their journey towards public office by demystifying the experience.

If you decide to run for office, we applaud your decision and offer our help. From providing voter information to communications materials or research, the IFT stands ready and willing to assist you in carrying out your campaign.

Learn More
Interested in running for office? Contact the IFT at 1.800.752.2175.
Tell your story!

IFT Ambassador Program

WHAT WILL I LEARN?

IFT Ambassadors become part of a team of members who are committed to sharing their personal perspectives to amplify the values we share.

During a one-weekend, hands-on training, you will learn a wide variety of communications skills, including:

- Developing a clear and persuasive message
- Working with leaders to present information at community or union meetings
- Using social media best practices
- Writing letters-to-the-editor or op-eds for print and online publication, and learning how to contribute to your local or IFT newsletter or website
- Working with the media, from sending press releases to doing on-camera interviews
- Testifying before a school board or legislative committee

The first class of Ambassadors has already put their new skills to use. Many of them have been interviewed or published in their local media and say they feel better prepared to effectively communicate to a broad audience.

Once you’ve been trained, you’re not forgotten! Ambassadors receive ongoing resources, guidance, and support from IFT Communications.

Become an IFT Member Ambassador

Oftentimes, the threats against our unions and our professions overshadow the great work our members do every day in classrooms, on campus, and at worksites throughout the state.

Now is the time to speak up and be heard by becoming an IFT Member Ambassador!

What is the IFT Ambassador Program?
The most compelling arguments to help us fight back against attacks and shine a light on the great work we do in Illinois’ classrooms and communities come from professionals on the front lines. That’s what the IFT Ambassador program is all about: you.

Launched in 2015 by the IFT Department of Communications, the Ambassador program helps IFT members in every job category learn how to better communicate with their neighbors, colleagues, and the media. By sharing your stories, struggles, and successes in your own voice, you can help speak on behalf of us all.

Ready to join the Ambassador team? Contact Jennifer Hill at jhill@ift-aft.org or 630-468-4080.
For 15 years, Pankaj Sharma, a social studies teacher and member of the North Suburban Teachers Union, Local 1274, has worked to instill a sense of community and civic responsibility in his students at Niles North High School in Skokie.

That’s why Sharma has made his classroom a platform for students to speak out and collectively solve societal problems.

“I think anyone who goes into education goes into it hoping to help empower students and make them believe that they have the ability to work on issues that are important to them, to make their communities better,” he said.

Using history and current events, Sharma provokes discussions and encourages students to identify issues they are passionate about. Promoting productive dialogue helps students foster a sense of identity and oneness with their communities, he said, while offering them the opportunity to contribute to something greater than themselves.

Sharma is involved in a number of projects that allow students to put their desire to make a positive impact into action.

“Our school started a civic engagement project where they get involved in an issue that is important to them, they do some research, they make a plan and then they take action. Then they sort of reflect on that action and see what kind of change they’re able to make,” he said. “So it forces them to get outside of the classroom to work on something they care about, and that’s been a very positive experience for the kids.”

Last spring, Sharma traveled to Springfield with students in We Help Others, a social justice club he co-sponsors. At the Governor’s mansion, the students protested the budget impasse and Rauner’s cuts to homeless youth programs. Through Dance Marathon (DM), a student-led organization that Sharma sponsors at NNHS, students selected the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless as their charity fundraising project in 2015. They raised an astounding $103,000 for the organization.

Sharma embodies the values he teaches his students. In January 2015, he stood on the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court with other educators to defend workers’ rights before the court considered the Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association case.

“When people attack unions, they’re attacking democracy in action,” he said. “I can’t just stand by and not speak out against that.”

Despite his activism, he shies away from the spotlight. Sharma was named a 2016 Golden Apple award recipient for teaching excellence. While he’s honored by such recognition, helping students is far more important to him than accolades.

“One of the most beautiful things about teaching is being able to connect with young people at a formative age, and to help them see the power they have to change their lives, their communities, and the world.”

Read “I am IFT” in every issue of Union Link to learn how your fellow members are shIFTing Into Action.

To learn more about how IFT members excel in the workplace and their communities, visit ift-aft.org/i-am-ift.
Thursday January 19th
We will stand together across the nation to tell incoming President Trump that:

- Our schools and campuses will be sanctuary spaces from the threat of deportation, racism, and bullying.
- We support public education. Vote no on DeVos!
- Invest in our public schools: make the billionaires and Wall Street pay their fair share and protect Title I funds.

More information: AFABELA@IFT-AFT.ORG