IFT passes resolution on school safety and gun violence prevention

The tragic mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, was only the most recent gun-related tragedy to take the lives of students and the adults who teach them. Many hoped the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012 would finally provide the impetus for lawmakers to address the critical issues of school safety, gun violence, and mental health programs in the U.S. Yet, nothing changed. There have been an average of 1.4 school shootings each week already this year, and the number seems to be on the rise.

But thanks to the activism of the incredible young adults who survived the Parkland shooting, communities across the country are standing up and demanding action.

They’ve organized massive rallies, inspired school walkouts, lobbied in Washington D.C., gone viral on social media, and taken their powerful message to the national news. What they are asking for is simple: safe schools, reasonable gun safety measures, and improved access to treatment for the mentally ill. They are not backing down on these commonsense demands.

Neither will our union. The IFT is committed to advocating for our students and members on these important issues and rejecting dangerous “solutions” like arming teachers and school staff. Towards that end, the IFT Executive Board recently passed a special resolution to make our union’s position and goals clear.

Read the resolution on page 11.
The March 20 Primary Election showed that Illinois voters are ready to stand up for working families and defeat Governor Rauner. With turnout approaching a 20-year high, the majority of IFT-endorsed candidates won important victories to set the stage for the positive changes we can make together in November.

Among the biggest winners were JB Pritzker and running mate Juliana Stratton, who earned the Democratic nomination for governor and lieutenant governor. Their plans to fund public education, an elected school board in Chicago, and working people. We’re also celebrating key wins in Congressional races, including progressive champion Jesus “Chuy” Garcia, who will now run to replace retiring U.S. Representative Luis Gutierrez in the 4th District, and Brendan Kelly, who will run in November to represent the 12th District.

There were big victories for our endorsed candidates in the Illinois General Assembly as well. Ram Villivalam soundly defeated incumbent Ira Silverstein to win the Democratic nomination in the 8th Senate District, while Ann Gillespie (SD 27) also won an overwhelming victory. On the House side, Jennifer Gong-Gershowitz (HD 17) prevailed in a tough but important Democratic race, along with Delia Ramirez (HD 4), Lamont Robinson, Jr. (HD 5), and a host of other IFT-backed candidates.

And in a terrific victory for the IFT and Chicago Teachers Union, IFT Vice President and Local 1 member Brandon Johnson scored a win in his bid for Cook County Commissioner in the 1st District. Johnson is one of several IFT members who stepped up to run for office. Others include Rep. Laura Fine (Local 4100, SD 9), Aaron Ortiz (Local 1, HD 1), Shirley Bell (Local 4100, HD 110), John Curtis (Local 4100, HD 93), David Seiler (Local 2296, HD 107), and Paul Stoddard (Local 4100, HD 70). Every IFT member won, and we’re proud of their commitment to fight for the future we all deserve!

These are fantastic results, due in part to the IFT members who volunteered to help in these important campaigns.

Now we must use this momentum and turn our focus to the General Election and defeating Governor Rauner and his supporters. We have seen firsthand the harm they cause to our public schools, universities, and communities – and it’s time to turn the page.

This election has shown that there is a powerful will to put Illinois back on the right path after more than three years of failed leadership under Governor Rauner. I am confident that by working together to elect JB Pritzker, Kwame Raoul, and the many other IFT-endorsed candidates in November, we can do just that.

In solidarity,

Dan

Happy Anniversary to IFT locals and councils!
The IFT is made up of almost 200 local unions and councils that are the source of our collective strength across the state. We want to recognize and honor the following local unions and councils for their long-term dedication and commitment to the labor movement and the members we serve.

The following locals and councils are celebrating milestone anniversaries this year:

75 YEARS
• Granite City Federation of Teachers, Local 743
• Madison Federation of Teachers, Local 763
• Peoria Federation of Teachers, Local 780

50 YEARS
• Blackburn Community College Federation of Teachers, Local 1836

25 YEARS
• Edwardsville Federation of Secretarial Employees, Local 4855
• Germantown Teachers Organization, Local 4817
• Thompsonville Grade Federation of Teachers, Local 4854
• Tonica Association of Teachers, Local 4674

10 YEARS
• Pleasant Valley Federation of Teachers, Local 6423

Congratulations!
Union solutions to Illinois’ teacher shortage

State lawmakers and media outlets are proclaiming Illinois’ teacher shortage a crisis, and they aren’t wrong. This inability to fill teaching positions in our state is not new, but it’s been exacerbated over the last two decades by a myriad of policies and “reforms.” An overemphasis on standardized testing, biased teacher evaluation systems, ballooning class sizes, loss of teacher autonomy, loss of teachers of color in hard-to-staff schools, and reduced funding for professional development and mentoring programs for new teachers have contributed to current educators leaving the profession—and potential ones from entering it.

Systemic inequity has also contributed to the shortage. Under Governor Rauner, MAP grants for needy students have suffered, reducing the overall number of students who are pursuing higher education in Illinois. Combined with an implicit cultural bias in the edTPA and the Basic Skills tests, which affects the number of minorities able to enter or complete teacher preparation programs, the education workforce in our state is dwindling. Rural, high-minority, and high-poverty districts with fewer resources are particularly affected.

Elaine Barlos, president of Southwest Suburban Teachers Union, testified about the state’s teacher shortage before a House committee in March. She emphasized the importance of teacher input in policy decisions, revisions, and implementation. She also suggested that education legislation must pass a litmus test.

Lawmakers are considering legislation this spring to address the shortage, and some progress is being made. State Sen. Andy Manar (D-Bunker Hill) has introduced Senate Bill 2892 and Rep. Jay Hoffman (D-Belleville) has introduced HB 5175 in the House. Both bills could help recruit new teachers into the profession by requiring districts to pay them no less than $40,000 per year. Shockingly, current state law requires a minimum annual salary of just $10,000. At press time, both bills were still being considered but had not been called for a vote in either the Senate or House floor.

As our union prepares for the challenges ahead, building and maintaining strong local unions through member engagement is critical. The LEAD program is one way the IFT works directly with members to support them in their efforts to increase involvement and build a stronger union,” said IFT President Dan Montgomery.

2016 LEAD participants include:

- East Aurora Council (AFT Local 604)
- Granite City Federation of Teachers (Local 743)
- Belleville Grade Teachers Council (SWIFT, Local 6600)

Each union sends a team of members and leaders to participate. At the first session, the teams learn how to assess where their locals and councils stand so they can better establish goals and develop 12-18 month campaigns to achieve them.

“Participating in LEAD is already bringing our council more focus and a sense of renewal,” said Lee Ann Gemminger, co-President, Local 6600. “The whole process of evaluating our council from the different points of view of our LEAD team members has helped us to see that, while we are overall a high-functioning council, we still have room to build capacity and improve what we are already doing.”

LEAD participants receive support and resources from IFT and AFT as they strive to meet their goals. Additional meetings will be held throughout the year to check-in on LEAD teams’ progress and plan next steps.

The 2018 teams are working to have a powerful impact too. They have each committed to a set of specific goals, including more effectively organizing members, developing future leaders, and creating a stronger sense of member ownership in their unions.

The Belleville Grade Federation of Teachers Council is already hard at work on their LEAD campaign based on the vision and goals the team established. To inform and engage members, students, administration, and the community, the council’s team is creating a campaign logo and Facebook page to increase their “digital footprint” and has planned a full year of charitable programs, community events, and union activities to connect with their diverse audiences.

“The training we are receiving is helping us to plan, strategize, and implement our ideas,” said Gemminger. “We are excited to move forward with LEAD and our vision of building partnerships to educate, empower, and evolve.”
IFT Ambassadors learn skills to help their unions thrive

John Jackson, Cook County College Teachers Union (Local 1600)

Mindy Jackson, Quincy Federation of Teachers (Local 1099)

Andrea Kaichtbrenner, Southwest Suburban Federation of Teachers (Local 943)

Grady Lee, University of Chicago Graduate Students United (organizing campaign)

Brandi Many, Quincy Federation of Teachers (Local 809)

Margo Murray, Chicago Teachers Union (Local 1)

Kelly Swindler, West Suburban Teachers Union (Local 571)

Elizabeth Villarreal, University Professionals of Illinois (Local 4100)

Mary Beth Westin, Harlem Federation of Teachers (Local 540)

Charitianne Williams, UIC United Faculty (Local 6456)

Staff from the IFT Department of Communications provided participants with two days of in-depth instruction about effective messaging, media interviews, social media best practices, digital communications, and much more.

Since the first class of Ambassadors graduated in 2015, they have used their skills to:

• Write op-eds and letters to the editor, which have appeared in local newspapers and major media outlets; a recent survey showed that nearly half of IFT Ambassadors have had articles published.

• Hold press conferences on education funding and other key issues

• Author powerful web posts

• Organize rallies, walk-ins, and community events to speak out for public schools and services

• Post union news and other articles on local or council websites and social media accounts; more than 60 percent of Ambassadors say they post regularly online.

Armed with knowledge, the new 2018 IFT Ambassadors have joined a powerful team to strengthen their local unions and councils. Participants have already spoken at a rally, led communications on a contract action team, and more.

Right after completing the program, teacher and new IFT ambassador Brandi Many used the training in her community.

“I was recently interviewed by my local newspaper, the Quincy Herald-Whig,” Mary said. “I felt prepared because of the training I received through the IFT Member Ambassadors Program. I would recommend this program to any of my fellow IFT members.”

GEO-UIUC strike saves tuition waivers

After walking the picket lines for 10 days in late February, the 2,500 members of the Graduate Employees Organization (GEO-Local 6300) at the University of Illinois - Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) successfully secured an agreement that protects graduate workers at UIUC – and across the country.

“We were so inspired by the graduate workers at University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and their fight to make graduate studies accessible to all,” said Dan Montgomery, IFT president. “Going on strike is never an easy decision, and we know that GEO had exhausted every possible avenue before taking that step. Ultimately, it was their courage that pushed the administration to do what is right for all students.”

During 11 months of bargaining, university officials demanded the elimination of guaranteed tuition waivers, which student graduate workers rely on in exchange for their labor. Not only would eliminating the waivers have devastated GEO members, institutions across the country would have followed suit and all graduate workers would have suffered.

Graduate workers would have been forced to essentially pay the university to work there!

So GEO members raised their voices - and their picket signs. Through strike lines, savvy social media efforts, campus rallies, and critical one-on-one conversations across campus, GEO members spread the message about their fight for fairness and successfully pressured the university to bargain a fair agreement that maintained the critical waivers.

“Because of the dedication of the members in this union, we have a contract,” said GEO Co-President Gus Wood. “We held the lines, we stayed positive, and we remained hopeful that we’d get the contract we deserve. I thank all of the GEO members and allies for their support through what is now the longest strike in University of Illinois history.”

The new agreement also included salary increases, reduced insurance costs, flexible parental leave, and protections against discrimination and harassment.

GEO-UIUC’s unified voice is just what the powerful forces behind the anti-union Janus case are working so hard to silence. And proof that we won’t let them.

“Something is changing in this country because of you,” AFT President Randi Weingarten told GEO members. “Because of your solidarity, you proved that when we are unified, we are not afraid to take the risk to fight for ourselves, our families and our communities. A union makes possible what is impossible for individuals to do by themselves. You are proving that we can have a world that is fairer and that actually respects the work that working-class people do.”
Program trains members to help students cope with trauma

Research shows that more than half of all students have been affected by at least one adverse childhood experience. The pervasiveness of poverty, violence, neglect, and abuse in society is traumatizing students and hurting their learning, behavior, and relationships.

To help members support their students, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) partnered with other organizations to develop “The Union Response to Students’ Stress and Trauma,” a train-the-trainer program that instructs teachers, PSRPs, social workers, coaches, principals, and others in how to respond to the effects of trauma and foster healing.

The IFT Union Professional Issues Department (UPID) has taken that training to the next level by customizing it for Illinois. In February, our union piloted the program in Fairview Heights with an intensive three-day training for 10, four-member union-district teams from the East St. Louis Federation of Teachers (Local 1220).

“Local 1220 has always had the way in calling for meaningful professional learning opportunities for its members to improve their practice and ensure schools are safe, healthy places to teach and learn,” said Amy Alsepp, IFT director of union professional issues. “The union and District 189 share concerns about the serious impact that trauma is having on our students, so this program was the perfect way for them to partner and address their students’ needs.”

The IFT training:

• Explains what trauma is and how it impacts brain development and learning;
• Emphasizes why educators and other stakeholders need to acknowledge trauma and its impacts; and
• Helps participants build trauma-informed and responsive schools and communities.

With additional financial support from a local community group, educators, administrators, and school staff representing all East St. Louis schools participated on the union-district teams. Over the course of three days, they learned about the latest research on trauma’s impact and developed a plan to deliver the curriculum to their colleagues. Armed with knowledge and a plan, the teams began training all District 189 staff about trauma-informed practices in April.

“This training gave us a better understanding of how to build resiliency in our students to help them overcome adversities and become successful members of our community,” said Barb Outten, team member, teacher and Local 1220 corresponding secretary. “I am very grateful the IFT provided this important training because it brought all stakeholders in our district together with a common purpose that will benefit our students and community.”

After overcoming significant anti-union efforts from their administrations, teachers and staff at the Chicago High School for the Arts (ChiArts) and Namaste Charter School officially joined the IFT in March. Both groups will now be part of CTU-ACTS, the newly merged charter school division of the Chicago Teachers Union (Local 1).

“We are proud to welcome the 81 educators and staff from ChiArts and Namaste into the Illinois Federation of Teachers,” said Dan Montgomery, IFT president. “Despite the attacks on collective bargaining from Governor Rauner and President Trump, we continue to see educators and other workers join the labor movement because they know that unions are good for workers and our communities. The dedicated professionals at Namaste and ChiArts are leading the charge and inspiring others.”

The new members at both schools were frustrated with a lack of voice and transparency, high teacher turnover, and unstable learning environments for their students. Educators and staff organized to improve these conditions and more effectively advocate for their students and professions.

“Our union will help us create a learning environment in which students and teachers can flourish,” said Maia Golley, kindergarten teacher at Namaste. “During my 13 years at Namaste, I have come to love my students and their families, and I believe they deserve the very best. Now with a union, we will have voice at the table in creating policies that will be responsive to the changing needs of our amazing students.”

“ChiArts has the potential to be an international model for public arts education, but in order for us to get there, it is absolutely essential that the teachers of ChiArts have a say in the

Teachers and staff at two more charter schools join IFT

“Teachers do even more for students when they have the power to participate in decisions and advocate for students without fear of reprisal,” said CTU-ACTS Chair Chris Baehrend. “That is why there is a nationwide movement of charter school professionals to come together in strong unions.

“ChiArts and Namaste teachers and staff are the latest part of a massive movement of charter school professionals to come together in strong unions.”

StayInformed
Would our trauma training benefit your students and community? Contact your local leader or IFT field service director.

Members of the East St. Louis Federation of Teachers partnered with administrators and community groups to bring IFT’s trauma training to all 189 schools.

CTU Vice President Jesse Sharkey (holding sign) and members show solidarity with Namaste educators.

Members of the East St. Louis Federation of Teachers partnered with administrators and community groups to bring IFT’s trauma training to all 189 schools.

CTU SUPPORTS NAMASTE TEACHERS & STAFF!

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On February 24, thousands of working women and men gathered in Chicago and cities across the country to raise a collective voice on the Working People’s Day of Action.

The massive nationwide event marked the 50th anniversary of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who was killed in Memphis while supporting striking sanitation workers as they demanded the right to join together in a strong union.

The rally and march brought working people together again in a similar fight — and at a critical time; a decision is expected soon in the Janus case — we will thrive right through it.

Meanwhile, each of us can help ensure Governor Rauner and his allies don’t gain any more power. Here’s how:

- **Recommit to your union.** Ask your local president or worksite leader about signing a new union card and other ways you can strengthen your local or council.
- **VOTE in the General Election on November 6.**

By ousting Rauner and his supporters in Springfield and recommitting to our unions, we will do more than survive a negative decision in the Janus case – we will thrive right through it.

The rally and march brought working people together again in a similar fight — and at a critical time; a decision is expected soon in the Janus case currently being considered by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Make no mistake - the Janus case is the latest attempt by Governor Rauner, President Trump, the Koch Brothers, Betsy DeVos, and others to silence our voices by taking away our freedom to have strong unions.

Governor Rauner first brought the case as part of his anti-union agenda and ongoing contract dispute with AFSCME members in Illinois. He and his powerful allies feel threatened, so they are working to rig the system even more against everyday men and women by taking away our freedom to have strong unions – one of the last checks on their control.

WHEREAS, governors, President Trump and national Republicans have also ignored this crisis, offering, at best, rhetorical gestures and, at worst, blatant hypocrisy—from singularly focusing on mental health interventions (and ignoring gun restrictions) while simultaneously slashing funding for and access to mental health care for everyone from school-age children to adults, to Betsy DeVos’s and others’ misguided suggestions that we arm teachers and staff and militarize our schools; and

WHEREAS, the National Rifle Association has stood in our way, using money and threats and influence to oppose every commonsense reform of gun laws as an assault on the Second Amendment rather than a means to ensure the safety of Americans, while also shielding gun manufacturers from all legal liability related to the sale or use of their products; and

WHEREAS, Governor Bruce Rauner has failed to protect the citizens of Illinois from this scourge of violence, recently vetoing bipartisan legislation that would reasonably regulate gun dealers while he has also slashed funding for social services and mental health providers and held up new money for our most needy schools and districts, money that could be used to provide more school counselors, social workers, psychologists, all on the front line protecting our students; and

WHEREAS, like Rauner, President Trump and national Republicans have also ignored this crisis, offering, at best, rhetorical gestures and, at worst, blatant hypocrisy—from singularly focusing on mental health interventions (and ignoring gun restrictions) while simultaneously slashing funding for and access to mental health care for everyone from school-age children to adults, to Betsy DeVos’s and others’ misguided suggestions that we arm teachers and staff and militarize our schools; and

WHEREAS, Illinois and American students—led by the courageous young people of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School—are now leading the charge to prevent further tragedy:

RESOLVED, that the Illinois Federation of Teachers will support commonsense measures to stop gun violence in schools and institutions of higher education, including further school safety efforts, reforms such as bans on both assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines, background checks and other vetting processes, and regulation of gun dealers; and

RESOLVED, that the IFT opposes counter-productive ideas like arming faculty and staff; and

RESOLVED, that the IFT will continue to fight for expansion of mental health care for all, including: defending and fully funding the Affordable Care Act, expanding access to public mental health facilities and services for all Illinoisans, and fully staffing every school in Illinois with qualified mental health counselors and student support services to identify and intervene before students reach a crisis point; and

RESOLVED, that the IFT will be a conduit for listening to members and students, encouraging our locals to amplify their voices and experience in the public sphere to more effectively fight this scourge; and

RESOLVED, that the IFT will reduce its efforts to defeat Gov. Bruce Rauner and elect a governor who will sign reasonable and needed gun control measures into law; and

RESOLVED, that the IFT will work to find ways to confront the state and federal leaders that cut off gun violence; and

RESOLVED, that the IFT will work to support the courageous efforts of all survivors of gun violence—from Marjory Stoneman Douglas to Sandy Hook, from Northern Illinois to the streets of Chicago—and all those who fight for schools that are free from gun violence, by adding our locals’ voices to actions around the country to fight the scourge of gun deaths; including on the April 20 day of action on the anniversary of the Columbine massacre, and others that may occur in the ensuing weeks and months.
UPCOMING EVENTS

IFT/AFT GREAT LAKES ULI
June 24-28, 2018
Delavan, WI

AFT CONVENTION
July 13-18, 2018
Pittsburgh, PA

WORKSITE LEADER TRAINING
Visit IFT-AFT.ORG/WSL to view course dates by region.