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Dear Colleague,

Welcome to the Lake County Federation of Teachers, Local 504, your Union.

Your Union is here to provide support and service as you perform your duties as a teacher, an adjunct, an instructor or as an educational support staff professional.

• Your Union provides professional assistance on your behalf to help you attain the best possible working conditions and benefits in addition to defending your rights on the job.

• Your Union provides many opportunities to help you grow professionally and meet certification requirements while offering strategies designed to help you perform your various duties with greater confidence and ease.

• Your Union will ensure that lawmakers hear your concerns as they draft legislation that will affect you on the job.

You are joined by over 103,000 members statewide as a member of the Illinois Federation of Teachers and over 1.5 million members nationwide as a part of the American Federation of Teachers. While our size gives us clout, our ability to provide individual service to every member is what makes me proud to be a part of our Union.

I encourage you to take the time to examine the information enclosed in your new member packet. The material will more thoroughly explain the benefits of membership in your Union.

Finally, please phone or e-mail your local Union with your questions, suggestions or concerns. I have enclosed my business card in your new member packet. I look forward to meeting you soon!

In unity,

Michael T. McGue, President
Lake County Federation of Teachers

Greetings from LCFT President Mike McGue

504 Word

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LCFT Officers
Michael T. McGue, LCFT President
Mike McGue has served the LCFT for many years as president. He came to the LCFT from the Zion-Benton Council, where he also served as president. Mike has also served as an IFT Vice-President.

Deborah Lawson, LCFT Vice-President
Deborah Lawson is currently the LCFT Vice-President. She comes from the North Chicago Council, where she also serves as Council president. Deborah has also served as an IFT Vice-President.

Carolyn Scaccia, LCFT Secretary
Carolyn Scaccia serves as the LCFT Secretary. She is retired from the North Chicago Council, and is the President of the Retirees Council. She also serves as the banquet facilities co-ordinator for the Lake County Banquet Hall.

Susan Greene, LCFT Treasurer
Susan Greene has served the LCFT as treasurer for many years. She comes to us from the Waukegan Council, where she has also served her council by being active in many Union activities.

What advice can you offer me in my first year(s) of being in the education profession?

This is undoubtedly the question we get most from our new members. There are a lot of good answers to this question. As a Union, we respond to this question from our own point of view. Newer members of the profession bring with them a passion and forthright attitude that is often a refreshing and welcome contribution to the schools in which they work. Our advice to you is this: there is a time and a place to speak your opinions, particularly if they are not in accordance with your immediate supervisor. Learn the politics at play in your building before you speak up. If you have serious concerns, bring them up to your Union leadership or your mentor and ask that person to help, rather than exposing yourself to possible “negative press” by a building administrator who has the power to replace you at the end of the year.

[Image of LCFT Officers]

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The Who’s Who Guide to the Lake

Membership in your council is only a small portion of the benefits of joining your Union. One of the best things about your membership in the Lake County Federation of Teachers is the knowledge that you have access to professionals trained to handle all sorts of contractual discrepancies. These people are your IFT Field Staff Representatives and LCFT Business Agents.

IFT Field Staff Representatives and LCFT Business Agents are provided by the Illinois Federation of Teachers (our state affiliate) and the Lake County Federation of Teachers (your local affiliate). Field Staff and Business Agents are trained in all areas of Union activity, from contract negotiations to grievance administration. They are available to help Union members in a number of ways, such as when contractual issues become more than the council leadership can handle. While your council leaders are trained to deal with day to day issues regarding contract discrepancies, there are times when a supervisor, superintendent or school board becomes “dug in” on an issue, and refuses to progress toward a resolution. It is at this point that it is time to call your Field Service Representative or Business Agent.

Your Field Staff or Business Agent is also often utilized at contract negotiations time. These Union professionals have vast amounts of training on legal issues such as retirement caps and recertification. They also have a great deal of knowledge regarding local trends in contracts, and will be able to help council negotiators secure benefits commensurate with neighboring districts. The Field Staff and Business Agents spend a great deal of time in training, helping them attain the best benefits for Union members.

LCFT is fortunate to have two Field Staff and two Business Agents who often work together for the benefit of the Union members they represent. Our Field Staff and Business Agents each serve a number of councils, as follows:

- IFT Field Staff Director Matt Beverly serves as the staffer for Diamond Lake, Lake Villa, Libertyville/Vernon Hills Tech Campus, Warren, Waukegan Professional Support Staff, Waukegan Psychologists, and Woodland. Matt is formerly a member of the Grant Council.
- IFT Field Staff Director Michelle Standridge serves as the staffer for Big Hollow, Grant, Millburn, Prairie Crossing, Retirees, Waukegan Teachers, Waukegan PSRP’s, and Zion-Benton. Michelle is formerly a member of the Zion-Benton Council.
- LCFT Business Agent Jim Pergander serves as the staffer for Emmons, Grayslake Teachers, Grayslake PSRP, and Gurnee. Jim is formerly a member of the Gurnee Council.
- LCFT Business Agent Matthew LaPierre serves Beach Park PSW, Beach Park Staff, CLC Adjacents, CLC Faculty, CLC Staff, North Chicago, SEDOL and Winthrop Harbor. Matt came to us from AFSCME.
- All staff professionals may be contacted by phoning the LCFT Union Hall at 847-623-7725 or via their email addresses, which can be accessed on our website, www.lcft.org.

Keep Up to Date with LCFT on the Web

You can find your contract (and a whole lot of other information as well) on our website: www.lcft.org. We keep you updated with what’s happening in our local as well as important news for our state affiliate, the Illinois Federation of Teachers, and our national affiliate, the American Federation of Teachers. We also keep several important forms on the website, including ER&D information and registration forms, political endorsement information, and contact information for all of the LCFT staff and officers. You can also LIKE us on Facebook for up to date news. Keep up with events happening in the world of education by visiting our website often. Register as a member today, and use your website to unlock all that your Union membership can offer you!

Social Media

While social media such as Facebook and Twitter may provide you with the ability to connect with friends from across the globe, education professionals still need to be careful with these technologies. That being said, it is inadvisable for you to allow anyone under the age of 18 to access your personal pages, like your Facebook page. Please note that social media sites can also be monitored by employers, so you should also be careful what you post to your pages. For example, do NOT post photos of you at a social event when you are supposed to be at school. Whether it is fair or not, society often expects more of those in education, even in their actions as private citizens, so be wary what you put on the internet for everyone to see.

Degrees of Violations

There are several degrees of violations of policy, much like there are degrees of almost any violation. Receiving an email from your spouse not to forget your dental appointment after school may be a violation, but probably not one that will result in discipline. Quickly checking the latest baseball scores after working hours is another type of violation that, while considered improper, will usually not cause much of a fuss. In fact, if these types of violations resulted in dismissal, almost no one would still be working in the schools, including administrators.

The stakes go up from there, however. Some measure that increase the likelihood of discipline and its severity are:

- The questionable nature of the content of the message or internet site;
- The illegality of the action taken;
- The degree that it interferes with working duties and working hours;
- The frequency and the duration of the violations; and
- The awareness of the individual concerning the violation.

In the school setting, by far the most objectionable material will deal with so-called pornographic, obscene, or other sexually related material. In any disciplinary proceeding one of the factors that is considered is the nexus, or link, to the job. When an employee is entrusted to take care of minor children as part of one’s job or is otherwise in close proximity to children, an arbitrator, hearing officer, or judge will most likely rule hastily against an employee experiencing this type of material during the workday. The School Code allows for dismissal of teachers for “immorality,” and it may be more broadly interpreted for school workers than for others.

Actions taken which violate law will also likely be dealt with severely. This is not only referring to violations such as transmitting child pornography, but also includes downloading or installing unlicensed or unauthorized software.

While personal use of the District’s computers may be outlawed outright, whether the violation occurs during the workday or after hours is often a significant distinction. Even within working hours, a teacher who surfs the web during lunchtime may be risking far less than the teacher who surfs while students are present. Remember, the district can track the time to the second in most cases. And to your detriment, they cannot tell if you are actively engaged in the computer. Your defense may be that you left the internet on the travel site while you taught the class, but they may not believe you. An important precaution is to take seriously the confidentiality of your password. You may be held responsible for the violations of others using your computer and password. If you believe someone else has acquired it, report it immediately and get a new one.

How often and for how long policy breeches occur will also be considered. Daily hour long website visits for personal use or receiving hundreds of personal emails will be treated more seriously than a five minute visit every couple of days, or an occasional message from a family member.

Of course, all of these factors are particular to each individual case.

The bottom line advice is to conduct yourself above board when using school computers, networks, and email. If you have electronic personal matters to take care of, you are well advised to use your own computer and own email address at home. The job you save may be your own!

Richard M. Stanton of the law firm of Jacobs, Burns, Orlove, Stanton & Hernandez also contributed to this article.
Let the User Beware!
Don’t Count on Privacy in the Electric Workplace

Original Article Written by Bob Shaevel, IFT Field Service Director

This article originally appeared in the 504 Word in 2001. Since that time issues surrounding the use of the internet and computer networks in the workplace have increased. Case law has evolved. Despite prior warnings, each year the Field Staff and Business Agents becomes involved in disciplinary cases arising out of improper use of the internet and district computers. Discipline has been imposed ranging from letters in the employee’s personnel file to dismissal. In short, this is serious business and failure to use the evolving technology in a prudent manner can end your career. Please take some time to carefully read this important article.

It wasn’t too long ago that the only ways for teachers and other educational workers to communicate other than talking were via intercom, telephone or paper. Now, almost universally included in the mix is the use of internal and/or external email. In addition, internet access has been provided to many of these workers; with the internet comes social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter.

In recent years, there have been an increasing number of disciplinary issues arising out of allegedly inappropriate use of email and the internet. The help minimize these instances; professionals in the education workplace should be aware of the following information.

School Policy

The first thing an employee should consult before using school email/internet is the official school district policy on such use, unique to each district. Nowadays almost every district has such a policy, and a copy of this policy as a precondition of use. Many districts have this as a condition of signing in to a district computer. Employees should take this matter seriously and not sign (or sign in) without bothering to study the text, even though it is sometimes the tendency of people when presented with boilerplate legalese on a generic form. Read it. Understand what the policy says is allowable use and not allowable use. Most policies forbid personal use, but some allow it “off duty.” Know what your district’s policy says, because it is likely you will be held accountable for its terms.

Tracking Capability

The next thing to keep in mind that “Big Brother” may be watching. Whether it is specifically stated in policy or not, the technology necessary to monitor everything you are doing electronically is standard in school districts. Your employer may have the capability to read your incoming and outgoing emails, plus most attachments to those emails. They may have the capability to track exactly which websites you are visiting and what time of day, to the second, that you are visiting each one. They may have the capability to do this even months after you have “permanently deleted” these items from your machine. And in most cases, the district, per the aforementioned district policy, will have the right to do so. So, whenever you surf the web, or exchange emails, treat those activities like you would writing a memo that very well may end up on the Superintendent’s desk with your name and a time stamp on it. In addition to this, remember that if your personal computer, tablet or even cell phone is using your school’s WiFi or network, you should remember that the district can access your information as well.

Union Communications

The Union may have a right to use email on the same basis it can use mailboxes, depending on your contract, practice and policy. Therefore, content of those messages may very well be contractually protected. Nevertheless, keep in mind that this means of communication is not necessarily as private as you think. We STRONGLY URGED you to provide your Union with a non-school email address for communication. Your council (school district), your local (LCFT), and IFT may all ask for this information.
Undoubtedly, you are in the middle of a whirl of new activity. Whether you are new to the world of the education profession or you have been a school employee before, the beginning of the year is a busy time.

No matter what your situation is, please try to make time to become involved in your Union. Each council has monthly Union meetings where you can bring concerns, and hear updates on state-wide issues. Each council is represented on our LCFT Executive Board, and your representatives will bring back important information to your individual meetings.

In addition to this, LCFT offers professional development in the form of our ER&D program. Information on courses offered each semester is located on our website, www.lcft.org, and in our newsletter, the 504 Word.

The IFT offers professional development aimed specifically at those who wish to increase their knowledge of the Union itself, through classes called ULIs (Union Leadership Institutes). These courses are offered to members wishing to be active in Union leadership, and offer a fabulous way to meet Union members from around Illinois. Watch the website and 504 Word for more information about these classes.

You can be connected to all of the happenings around the state by signing up for the IFT’s electronic newsletter, IFT Update. Visit www.ift-aft.org to sign up now.

There are also many exciting opportunities to become involved in the Union through events held by your Council, LCFT, IFT, and AFT. Attending these events is a good way to meet new people and learn more about our Union.

As our President says, “the Union begins with YOU!” Get involved with your local!