AFT Hosts Leadership Meeting

By Kelly Regnier,
504 Word Editor

On November 14 and 15, 2015, the AFT hosted a leadership meeting for all local and council presidents in the Great Lakes Region in Westmont, Illinois. The meeting was voluntary, and leaders from across Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and West Virginia were in attendance.

The function of the meeting was to promote leadership skills for AFT leaders at all levels. Attendees were introduced to a variety of AFT initiatives ranging from Reclaiming the Promise of Racial Equity in Education, Economics, and Our Criminal Justice System to an intensive question and answer session in which AFT President Randi Weingarten answered tough questions regarding the AFT’s endorsement of Hillary Clinton for the Democratic Presidential Primary in early 2016.

The meeting also included workshops that gave leaders tips and tools to use that will help them have conversations with members about the potential for anti-union legislation and any other looming threat that may change the way that Unions can represent their members in the state of Illinois.

One of the highlights of the meeting was the debate watch party, where members from the Great Lakes Region joined together to watch the Democratic candidates for President offer their views and plans for the future of our nation. During commercial breaks, the AFT held a trivia game and gave out prizes for correct answers. Though groups did get a bit competitive, it was all in good fun.

AFT President Randi Weingarten and CTU President Karen GJ Lewis both spoke on the importance of internal organizing and preparing our members for the future of Unions. Both women were very passionate and compelling in their desire to invigorate the crowd.

Four members from LCFT attended; Sharon Anday from the Woodland Council, Deborah Lawson from North Chicago Unit Council, Eric Solomon from the CLC Staff Council and Kelly Regnier from the Zion-Benton High School Council.
As 2015 draws to a close, many of you may be feeling frustration over the outside forces responsible for increasing the levels of stress felt in our jobs and our profession over this past year. The stress I refer to is often a result of public or legislative action that comes across as increasingly punitive toward public employees’ welfare and is often counterproductive to our ultimate mission: student education.

When I was a young man, I remember what my father had to say when I informed him that my college major would be in education. As an automobile salesman, my father sometimes viewed the world through the lens of those who were potential car buyers and those who were not. He appreciated selling cars to local educators because, “they had a good job and weren’t going anywhere.” My father’s comment about my decision to become a teacher was, “Well, you’ll always have good credit and a pension.” My father has long since passed and like most children, I cherish and miss his advice. However, in the years since, I have witnessed endless attacks on our profession and observed a public that has become increasingly and sadly jealous of our pensions, the income that each one of us have deferred to our retirements.

Unfortunately, more and more of my friends and colleagues tell me that they would discourage their own children from becoming educators because of the frustrations that they have felt and experienced during their careers. Over this past year, we have experienced ever-increasing anxiety which stems from tenure threats issued through the voices of various “school reform” groups. Add to this the concerted attacks unfolding from the unfriendly landscape of our governors’ mansion and it is no wonder we feel frustration with the current state of our careers.

Yet I remain unusually optimistic. The reason I’m hopeful is because of you, our members. I know from experience that by working together we can achieve the needed changes in our workplace and obtain the solid financial security our families so deserve.

“Your collective willingness over this past year to stand for what is best for the children we teach as well as our family and community needs, will help to ensure that our profession remains attractive to future members.”

--LCFT President Mike McGue

Yours is a good fight. The struggle for professional respect and financial parity often put us at odds with those outside our profession. In spite of these difficulties I continue to be heartened by the resolve of our members. Thank you for demonstrating your unity by putting effort forward to strengthen all areas of our Local’s activities, including leadership in bargaining, enforcement of our rights, political action and professional development. Your collective willingness over this past year to stand for what is best for the children we teach as well as our family and community needs, will help to ensure that our profession remains attractive to future members.

Thank you for standing together this past year and for your collective achievements. We need not be pessimistic; our future is bright.

My best wishes to you and your families for a wonderful holiday season!

In unity and solidarity,

Michael T. McGue,
President, Lake County Federation of Teachers
Every two years, the American Federation of Teachers holds its biennial convention. The convention serves several purposes, but its primary purpose is to allow members from across every AFT local in the nation to have their voices heard.

Members who are elected delegates to the national conventions give up five days of their summer to attend to the business of the Union. Typically, the first day will commence with AFT president Randi Weingarten giving a “State of the Union” address, which will recap the history of where we’ve been as a Union since the last convention, and give her ideas for where we need to go in the next two years. Following this, resolutions are called and discussed. These resolutions are adopted by the convention body as guidelines for what the AFT will prioritize until the next convention. In addition to this, delegates will vote to elect (or re-elect) the next leadership of the AFT, including all three executive officers and the executive council of vice-presidents.

This may sound like a lot of work, but conventions also offer members the opportunity to attend various sessions on issues in education, and to meet members from around the country. There are typically many inspiring speakers as well, and oftentimes in election years like 2016, the AFT endorsed candidate will come and speak as well.

There are also fun evening events, including a charity fashion show, a social event for all of AFT, and often, an IFT only social event.

If you have ever wanted to be a part of the Union at the highest levels, or just want to get more information on our national Union and its goals, fill in the form below and become an elected delegate for the 2016 AFT Convention in Minneapolis, Minnesota!

All Convention Forms must be completely filled out and returned to the LCFT Office in Gurnee no later than January 30.
Hillary Clinton shares the values and priorities of AFT members and those we serve, and has consistently worked to reclaim the promise of America. This has been clear throughout her career—as a staff attorney for the Children’s Defense Fund, as first lady of both Arkansas and the United States, as a U.S. senator from New York (when she earned a 100 percent AFT voting record) and as U.S. secretary of state.

“Everyday Americans and their families need a champion, and I want to be that champion. I want families to do more than just get by—I want you to get ahead and stay ahead.”
—HILLARY CLINTON

Work collaboratively with educators:
• “When it comes to education, we have got to get beyond the toxic debates over education and refocus on what works. Nobody knows more about what works than you [the AFT] and your members.”
• “It is just dead wrong to make teachers the scapegoats for all of society’s problems. Where I come from, teachers are the solution.”
• “The most important and impactful thing we can do for our public schools is to recruit, support and retain the highest-quality educators.”

End fixation on high-stakes testing:
• “High-stakes testing has gotten out of hand.”
• “We need to find the right balance on testing. We need better and fewer tests. We need to bring parents and teachers back into the conversation.”

Hold charter schools accountable:
• Clinton believes charters should be held to the same standards as neighborhood public schools.
• This means applying the same accountability and transparency practices, including all civil rights requirements, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act and other nondiscrimination laws.

Provide universal pre-K:
• “Every child, regardless of parental income, deserves access to high-quality pre-K. I think any discussion of improving our public schools must include universal access to prekindergarten.”
• As president, Clinton would provide free preschool for all 4-year-olds and would double funding for Head Start, which studies show can raise lifetime income by 25 percent.

Build a stronger economy and protect the middle class:
• “We can’t create enough jobs and new businesses without more growth, and we can’t build strong families and support our consumer economy without more fairness. We need both.”
• Clinton’s plan for economic growth includes:
  • Establishing an infrastructure bank to invest in projects such as roads, bridges and renewable energy.
• Clinton’s plan for increasing wages includes:
  • Supporting and strengthening unions.
  “Evidence shows that the decline in unions may be responsible for a third of the increase in inequality among men, so if we want to get serious about raising incomes, we have to get serious about supporting union workers.”
  • Fighting for pay equity through familyfriendly
policies like paid family leave, paid sick days and affordable child care.
• Raising the minimum wage and implementing President Obama’s new rules on overtime.
• Encouraging company profit-sharing, boosting productivity and putting money in the pockets of the employees.
• Providing a $1,500 tax credit to companies for every worker they hire and train.
• Supporting the Buffett rule to ensure that the wealthy pay their fair share of taxes.

Promote college affordability and reduce student debt:
• Clinton’s plan will provide tuition-free community college, give grants to university systems that ensure no four-year college student must borrow to pay tuition, cut interest rates on student loans, protect the GI Bill’s education benefits, and make income-based repayment simple and broadly available.
• Clinton will also reduce student debt by enabling millions of borrowers to refinance their existing student loans, curbing predatory lenders and helping students discharge debt if they have been defrauded by for-profit schools like Corinthian Colleges.

Help nurses provide high-quality care:
• “I want more people to know that the single biggest correlation between your outcome in the hospital and the problem that brought you in is your nursing care.”
• Clinton would make a priority of addressing health and safety issues in the healthcare workplace, including nurse-patient ratios.

Keep public services public:
• Clinton opposes contracting-out and privatizing public services and school district jobs.
• Throughout her career, she has fought to ensure that public services are provided by public employees.

Safeguard retirement security:
• Throughout her career, Clinton has worked to protect Social Security and Medicare and ensure they are adequately funded.
• As senator, she voted to defend Social Security from attempts to cut or privatize it.

Stand up for democracy and voter protection:
• Clinton supports universal and automatic voter registration, which would register every American citizen at 18.
• She supports a constitutional amendment to overturn Citizens United, to protect the political voice of every American, not just the wealthy few.

Protect workers’ voices:
• She was an original co-sponsor of the Employee Free Choice Act to strengthen workers’ right to join a union.
• “We will ensure workers have the collective bargaining power they need to fight for the fair wages and benefits they have earned.”

For more information on Hillary Clinton’s priorities, go to www.aft.org/election2016. Sign up to join the Political Activist team and receive up-to-date election news. Text VOTE to 69238.
REGISTRATION FORM
LCFT LOCAL 504 – 2015 Winter/Spring
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSES

(Please Print Clearly)
NAME: ____________________________________  Home Phone: _____________________

Home Address: ________________________________________________________________
City: _________________________________________  State: _____  Zip: ______________

Personal E-mail: ____________________________  Your council (School District): ______________

PLEASE SIGN UP EARLY TO HELP ENSURE THE MINIMUM NUMBER OF 10 FOR THE CLASS.
TAKE A LOOK AT TWO NEW CLASSES
Select courses you will attend. All classes will be Tuesdays and Thursdays

ER&D CLASSES OFFERED

☐ MATHEMATICS (New 15 hour class)  ☐ MIDDLE SCHOOL MATHEMATICS
January 5 – January 19   4:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.  January 26 – February 25   4:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

☐ BEGINNING READING INSTRUCTIONS  ☐ STRATEGIES FOR STUDENT SUCCESS
March 1 – March 31   4:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.  April 12 – May 12   4:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

☐ ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (New 15 hour class)
May 17 – May 31   4:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

If you have an interest in a particular class, register as soon as possible.

Number of courses selected: x Cost per course: $50 = $ __________

CHECKS AND REGISTRATION FORM MUST BE IN THE UNION HALL TWO WEEKS PRIOR TO THE START OF THE CLASS. PLEASE DON’T JEOPARDIZE THE CLASS BY REGISTERING LATE. ALL CLASSES ARE HELD IN THE UNION HALL.

Enclose check or money order (no cash) made payable to: LCFT Local 504
Return form with non-refundable payment to: Lake County Federation of Teachers, Local 504
248 Ambrogio Drive
Gurnee, IL  60031

(Please visit our website for class descriptions www.lcft.org)
Union Professional Development Update

by Andrea Herbster, Professional Development Coordinator for LCFT

We are getting ready to begin winter classes. Currently the first fifteen hour class is in progress. It is full and hopefully the participants will get a great deal of valuable information. It will be offered again in the not-too-distant future.

As a reminder, teachers still receive credits for lane movement and recertification by taking the classes. Two hours of graduate credit for those districts that have approved this and thirty PDUs for recertification for the thirty hour classes and one hour of graduate credit and fifteen PDUs for the fifteen hour classes.

We are still diligently trying to get the word out about these classes so that more of you can take advantage of getting these credits for a very reasonable cost. If you have taken any of these classes, please share the information with your colleagues. Let them know that for a fee of $50, you can acquire a great deal of information as well as the credits. If your district does not award in-district credits, talk to your council president and have them get in touch with me to discuss how this can be accomplished. Currently we have four districts awarding in-district credits and I am hopeful that there will be more by next school year.

Any questions regarding our professional development program, please feel free to contact me through the union office or my personal email.

Member Benefit: Discount Movie Tickets

MARCUS MOVIE TICKETS ARE BACK

Movie tickets are back, provided by your Union. If you are interested please fill out the form below and send to the address listed.

NAME: _________________________________________ SCHOOL DISTRICT: __________
HOME ADDRESS: _________________________________________________________________
CITY/STATE/ZIP: _________________________________ HOME PHONE: __________________

PLEASE NOTE THE CHANGE IN PRICE

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<tr>
<th>Marcus Gurnee Cinema Tickets</th>
<th>Retail Cost</th>
<th>UNION Cost</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
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MOVIE TOTAL: _________
POSTAGE/HANDLING: + $ 0.75
GRAND TOTAL: _________

Check newspapers for restrictions regarding the usage of discounted movie tickets. Movie tickets mailed to members shall have a minimum of three months usage prior to expiration. Prices are subject to change when theaters increase their prices to us. NO EXCHANGES OR REFUNDS PERMITTED.

Please allow one week from receipt of order for processing. Orders are processed by mail only.

Mail Order Form and Check Payable to:
Lake County Federation of Teachers
ATTN: Marcus Cinema Gift Certificates
248 Ambrogio Drive
Gurnee, IL 60031

NO CASH OR CREDIT, PLEASE.
Editorial:
Why Do We Shout into the Wind?

By Kelly Regnier,
504 Word Editor

Every so often, I will see a new “story” on my Facebook page about a teacher who has written a fantastic “open letter” to his or her administration, parents, community, etc. This letter is often one that has been shared over and over by my teacher friends, and typically has thousands of comments that follow it from others nationwide; teachers, parents, even elected officials sound off about how “right” the teacher author of the letter is about the sad state of education today.

These letters document many of the things that most teachers are struggling with: changes to the teacher evaluation system, unsuccessful attempts at “reforms” by state governments, and most of all the rise in standardized testing. Most teachers would agree that these three issues are causing great consternation among teachers, students, and communities. Most people get riled up by these letters, because they are well written, having been written by educated professionals and longtime practitioners in the teaching field.

As a rule, I have quit reading these letters. I don’t share them with others, and I don’t comment on them, because they simply make me sad. You see, most of these letters come after the teacher has finally “had enough” and quit teaching. In essence, they mean nothing, because it is easy for disgruntled ex-workers to say negative things about their former employers. And these teachers are dismissed by the powers that be as such.

If I could, I would ask each letter author the same thing: where were you before you quit teaching? Did you call your elected officials when the reformers were pushing through legislation that you knew wasn’t going to work? Did you volunteer for the committee to revise your district’s evaluation tool? Did you weigh in on your state’s mandatory testing?

Or did you, like so many teachers out there, sit quietly and wait for this storm to blow over, like so many others have?

It seems that we, as a profession, have taken to sitting and waiting for someone else to take care of our issues. We are all brave enough to praise these ex-teachers who have given up the fight, but we take no stand for ourselves. We keep our heads down, do as we’re told, and pray for better days to return. We think, erroneously, that the less we are noticed, the better off we will be, professionally speaking. But this is just not true.

When you read those letters on Facebook, it is already too late for that person to make a difference. They have abandoned the system and the students, their colleagues and their communities. They have moved on, and what they have to say is really no longer relevant.

What is relevant is when you, as an education professional, stand up NOW and speak your mind. Whether your issue is state testing or teacher evaluation, there are ways to be heard, and many of them come from involvement with your Union. Attend your council meetings. Volunteer to help solve problems by learning more about how your Union works. Make a difference outside the classroom, too.

But whatever you do, don’t wait until you are so disgruntled that you have to quit the profession you love before you speak your mind, because you might as well shout into the wind.

Take a stand and make a difference now.

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December 2015

Lake County Federation of Teachers
AFT Local #504
IFT-AFT/AFL-CIO

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The 504 Word is devoted to the interests of the Education Workers’ Union movement and is published five times each year by the the Lake County Federation of Teachers