

West Suburban Teachers Union, Local 571, IFT, AFT, AFL-CIO

# Union Messenger

## "A Union of Professionals"

### WSTU Calendar

#### April

- 4/1-Registration Deadline - 571  
Social Security & TRS Seminar  
4/9-10 - IFT ULI - Westmont  
4/12-571 Social Security & TRS Seminar -  
Westmont - 4:30 p.m.  
4/18-EB Meeting - Westmont - 5:30 p.m.  
4/18-HOR Meeting -Westmont - 6:45 p.m.

### Union Messenger

Jane Russell, President  
Alice Kautsky, Vice President  
Sandra Erickson, Treasurer  
Cathleen Pope, Secretary  
Jonathan Pazol, Financial Secretary  
Ed Hohman, Legal Defense  
Secretary & COPE Chairperson  
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## Why Teachers Need an Effective Evaluation System

by Jane Russell

Few seats in the Robert Healey Conference Center in Westmont remained empty on February 8, 2011, when Rob Weil, AFT Director of Field Programs, and Sue Walter, IFT Union Professional Development Director, explored recent changes in teacher development, performance, and evaluation. Over 120 IFT members and staff from six area locals, as well as school district administrators, joined host Local 571 for the two-hour workshop.

The current state of teacher evaluations is not necessarily good; in other words, it doesn't help teachers to become better teachers. Understanding that there are deficiencies, the AFT has been working to improve evaluation. Rob Weil presented the AFT's Continuous Improvement Model for Teacher Development and Evaluation. An expert advisory panel including researchers helped to guide AFT's development of the model. The standards-based framework Weil explained must include the following five components for a comprehensive system:

1. Professional Teaching Standards—what teachers should know and be able to do
2. Standards for Assessing Teaching Practice—based on both good teaching practice and student learning
3. Implementation of standards—encompasses the purposes of evaluation
4. Standards for Professional Context—describes a school's teaching and learning conditions
5. Systems of Support—should be available throughout a teacher's career



Steve Fox (right back), Morton Council President, and other Morton Council officers in rapt attention of the AFT presentation.

One of the more difficult areas to assess in teacher evaluation is student growth. A piece of the framework dealing with student growth models is Value-added Methodology (VAM). VAM is a complicated statistical method which can help to predict student growth. Although it is a complex methodology, VAM includes high expectations, recognizes that both the school and teacher contribute to growth, and student achievement is also dependent on non-educational inputs. The VAM attempts to separate the educational inputs from those outside, such as poverty, background, family, etc. Therefore, not even the researchers are in agreement as to all of the student characteristics/data that should be included in the methodology. Considerable student data collected over time is essential for accuracy and reliability. Even with all of the perceived difficulties in the VAM, it is still one of the best estimations of student learning available today.

Continued on page 6...

## “If you don’t have a seat at the table, then you are on the menu.”

*from your president*

I have heard this statement repeated, most recently attributed to IFT past President Ed Geppert. This wasn’t about the union workers in Wisconsin, although you see how it is applicable. Instead Geppert was talking about the relationship between Illinois legislators and IFT members.

The proposed legislation, Performance Counts, created by the Advance Illinois “reform” group and the special interest group, Stand for Children and others, is at least as dangerous to Illinois teachers as the legislation coming out of Wisconsin.

Performance Counts, as it was written, changes the restrictions on certificates based on performance without being tied to the state law Performance Evaluation Reform Act implementation.

The filling of new and vacant positions would require changes in both the procedure and criteria to be developed by the district “in consultation with the union” and not through the collective bargaining process. Those criteria should include certifications, qualifications, and merit, with performance evaluation being the predomi-

nant factor in the filling of new or vacant positions. Only equivalent qualifications and merit are to be considered by the district rather than years of service among teachers for filling positions.

To attain tenure, a teacher would be required to receive four ratings of satisfactory, proficient, or excellent, possibly in a longer probationary period than the current four years.

Reductions in Force (RIF) procedures would again be developed in consultation with the union and not in collective bargaining.

In teacher dismissals using evaluations, the streamlined process would not be based on the current hearing officer model.

Proposed changes applying to Chicago include prohibited subjects of bargaining like alternative teacher compensation plans or length of the school or work day.

After a series of steps, school boards would have ultimate control in acceptance of a final bargaining offer if an impasse were to occur. If teachers were to strike, their union could be

decertified.

Currently, the Illinois Senate education reform committee chaired by Senator Kimberly Lightford is working with all of the stakeholders. Some common ground has been found. The proposed legislation, Accountability for All, developed by the IFT and CTU along with the IEA is also being considered. There is hope that education “reform” in Illinois will not go the route of the Wisconsin legislation. Although no bills have been introduced at this time, the expectation is an education reform bill could be filed in March.

We remain vigilant in this entire process. The IFT has demanded a seat at the table and we are there. Through your help, this will continue. Consult the IFT website, [www.ift-aft.org](http://www.ift-aft.org), or ask your council president for updates. Subscribe to RSS at the same website to get the latest news sent directly to you from the website.

In unity,

*Jane A. Russell*

Local 571 President

## MARCH FEATURE

# Our Fight in Wisconsin

by Bonnie Saracco



Leyden Council teacher and 571 Financial Secretary Jon Pazol and his children took part in the February 26 Chicago rally supporting Wisconsin workers.

The American people value fairness, and Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker's assault on the rights of public employees has motivated tens of thousands of protestors in Wisconsin and beyond and bolstered support for labor unions in national public opinion polls.

Like Illinois, Wisconsin has a fiscal shortfall. As in Illinois, the situation has not been created by the scapegoated public employees, who are paid comparably to, or less than, private employees. These circumstances are the result of years of legislative mismanagement, now exacerbated by the recession. Plenty of powerful people are getting off the hook.

Wisconsin public employees are more than reasonable, having already voluntarily agreed to accept reduced benefits. But, in the words of AFT President Randi Weingarten, Walker "will not take yes for an answer."

Not only does he refuse to speak to the nurses, teachers, prison guards, and others who work hard every day to keep life safe and livable, but he engineered a stealth 51-17 vote at 1 a.m. in the Wisconsin Assembly on February 26 which would strip these public employees of almost all their collective

bargaining rights. This legislation also allows for the granting of no bid contracts for goods and services of the kind provided by the businesses owned by his large contributors, the Koch brothers. And this "budget repair" bill would deprive Wisconsin of \$46.6 million of the federal transportation funds that are contingent on the state's maintaining collective bargaining rights.

Walker is admittedly out to destroy these rights, an extreme position on which he neither campaigned nor was elected. He has referred to Wisconsin as the "first domino" in this process.

As of the February 26 vote, the Republicans were one vote short in the Wisconsin Senate of the quorum needed for fiscal legislation, with Wisconsin's Democratic senators determined not to return until the governor is willing to negotiate.

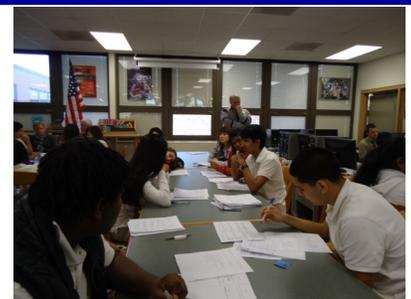
Preposterous statements have abounded in the media, including the assertion on *Morning Joe* that the average teacher in Milwaukee is compensated \$100,000 a year, and, perhaps most ridiculous of all, the allegation by the blog *Real Clear Politics* that Franklin Roosevelt, who was U.S. history's most effective champion of labor unions and has obviously been gone for 66 years, would weigh in against the public employees if only he could.

Apparently enough nonsense is enough, and Republican leaders in other states, sensing that voters do have common sense, are starting to moderate their rhetoric. Analysts have also pointed out the silver lining that this situation has made unions "cool again," energizing a new generation of young activists.

We will not give up the fight for our voice.

## Student Mock Bargaining

In early March, labor staff and leaders from the Illinois Federation of Teachers and other labor unions worked with social studies students at Morton West High School in Berwyn. This annual program is sponsored by DePaul University's Labor Education Center. The students were divided into groups—half representing labor's side and the other half representing management's side. Using a negotiation between hospital union employees and their management, students bargained the issues and created proposals in the mock bargaining sessions. Most groups reached agreement by the end of the three hours of bargaining.



Morton West students work with labor coaches in simulated bargaining.

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## WSTU Members Big Contributors to AFT

In 2009-2010, Local 571 members donated \$4332.42 to the AFT Disaster Relief Fund. These contributions made a difference in the lives of AFT members who have encountered major economic difficulties due to natural disasters. The officers of the American Federation of Teachers sent their gratitude and sincere appreciation to the members of the West Suburban Teachers Union. "You have put into action the principle of solidarity on which unionism is based."

....continued from page 1 – Why Teachers Need an Effective Evaluation System

The Illinois Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA) became law in January 2010 amid the state's application process in hopes of securing federal Race to the Top (RttT) funds. Recall that although this law touted great changes in teacher and principal performance evaluation, Illinois was not a winner in either round of the RttT funding. Sue Walter provided background about passage of the PERA describing the principal players and negotiations that produced Public Act 96-0861. Important in this law is the state supported phase-in. As early as September 1, 2012, those school districts applying for and awarded School Improvement Grants must be ready to implement their revised and negotiated teacher evaluation plans as long as state support is available which includes funding. Rules are being developed through a state Performance Advisory Council regarding the collection of education data, evaluation assessments and support systems. There are three IFT teachers, the only classroom teachers, on this council. Significant in this law is the requirement that districts shall "incorporate the use of data and indicators of student growth as a significant factor in rating teaching performance, into its evaluation plan for all teachers..."



Rob Weil introduced AFT's proposals on teacher development and evaluation.

Both presenters, Weil and Walter, emphasized the need for teachers to be involved in the process of review, revision and implementation of their school district teacher evaluation and performance plan and procedures. Many of the changes to be made may be difficult and time is needed to create a product that will be useful and fair. However, the timeline is set in the law with all districts in Illinois implementing their revised plans by 2016.

Why do teachers need an effective evaluation system? It should be apparent that if teachers do not participate in the development of a high quality evaluation system, they become the targets rather than the agents of change. Teaching can be a true profession when teachers have a key role in deciding who deserves to teach. Both the AFT and IFT are willing to help, and to provide assistance in this very important reform.

Planning has already begun for a second teacher development/performance/evaluation workshop to be offered in the fall of 2011. There is much to be learned and even more work to be done. Further resource materials are available at the AFT's Online Teacher Evaluation Community. Register for the site at: <http://go.aft.org/teacherevaluation>.