



# Union Messenger

August/September 2007

## AFL-CIO Presidential Candidates Forum

Early August heat didn't sap enthusiasm for over 40 Local 571 members representing the Local's Councils at the AFL-CIO sponsored Presidential Candidates Forum at Chicago's Soldier Field. Seven Democratic presidential candidates answered questions asked by MSNBC's "Countdown" host Keith Olbermann.

Originally planned for several thousand participants at McCormick Place West, the forum was relocated to Soldier Field to accommodate a crowd of 17,000. MSNBC broadcast the August 7 event live, and it was reported in local and national media later that evening and on August 8.

Candidates appearing included Senator Joe Biden, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, Senator Christopher Dodd, former Senator John Edwards, Representative Dennis Kucinich, Senator Barack Obama, and New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson. In addition to Olbermann's scripted questions, members of the live and on-line audiences were provided opportunity to present their concerns.



*Illinois Senator Barack Obama emphasizes points regarding Iraq. Obama was well received by an audience largely from the Chicago metropolitan area.*

IFT Field Representatives Mike Linder and Tom Smith accompanied 571's delegation. Linder later commented, "When

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## IFT PSRP Conference

The 2007 IFT Paraprofessional and School-Related Personnel (PSRP) Conference will offer PSRPs in every job category a great opportunity to learn more about their professions and share ideas and techniques with other PSRPs from across the state.

This year's event will be held November 2-3, 2007, at the Wyndham Drake Hotel in Oak Brook, Illinois. Workshops will address managing student behavior, preventing school violence, and paraprofessional-teacher team collaboration. Ten workshop choices are planned.

The 2007 IFT PSRP Conference will kick off Friday evening with a brief general session and reception and end on Saturday afternoon with a luncheon. IFT President Ed Geppert is expected to address members Saturday morning.

The registration deadline for this year's conference is Monday, October 1, but register early to ensure your place at this event. Additional information is available from Council presidents and on the IFT web site.

# New Game Program – “The Illinois Budget Show” Winners or Losers?

Summer television programming was not the best. But, did you see the new reality game show, “Winners or Losers?” hosted by none other than Governor Blagojevich? Just like the other TV game shows, contestant behavior was outrageous.

Who won the state “contest”? There were some significant increases for PreK-12 education funding, but these increases are based on a *one-time* revenue source. The foundation level increased \$400 to \$5,734 per pupil. \$12 million is allocated for a statewide teacher mentoring and induction program. \$14 million is available for the textbook loan program. There is a \$20 million increase for early childhood education programs. A reinstatement of \$5 million goes back to gifted education.

And, the state pension systems’ normal cost will be funded at the FY 2008 certified levels.

Higher education received a two percent increase, but you will recall higher education has not had significant increases in several years.

Contest losers included the “host” (Governor) using his amendatory veto to remove \$67.6 million that impacts PreK-12 education and youth programs funded through the Illinois State Board of Education. The community college budget funding base had \$7 million vetoed from its budget. And \$28 million was cut from the ISBE budget.

The best part of the “budget show” included a bill on third-party subcontracting signed by the Governor on August 17. House Bill 1347 sponsored by Senator Don

Harmon (D 39<sup>th</sup> LD) and Representative Gary Hannig (D 98<sup>th</sup> LD) helps to insure that public school services are performed by a high quality, reasonably compensated workforce. It promotes and protects the safety of students and requires standard bidding processes assuring account-

ability when school districts consider outsourcing work currently performed by district educational support staff. Others supporting this bill included the IEA, SEIU, AFSCME, and other labor groups.

The “game show” isn’t over. More “episodes” are being prepared for our viewing and lis-

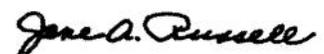
tening pleasure. To keep abreast of how “contestants” (local legislators) are performing, the West Suburban Teachers Union will hold its third annual Legislative Breakfast on Saturday, October 20.

Remember, we asked for a state budget with reassurances for education and educators. We will be asking representatives and senators why legislation providing predictable and sustainable funding sources for Illinois education failed to pass. “Don’t leave Springfield without it” was not just sloganeering.

Stay tuned for the fall sequel, “Whealers and Dealers,” where the show host (Governor) forces contestants (General Assembly) into a worse funding crisis for next year.

Have a great 2007-2008 school year!

In unity,



Local 571 President



“Who won the state contest?”

## AFL-CIO Presidential Candidates Forum

(Continued from page 1)



White shirts with blue WSTU patches identified a group of Local 571 members mixed with other AFL-CIO participants. Airline pilots came in uniform, sheet metal workers sported orange t-shirts.

Shirley Forpe's question about NCLB was asked, the noise from the crowd made it apparent that this issue is important to a much larger segment of working America than just teachers. Every union in the house was cheering and applauding."

Several candidates made themselves available one-on-one with participants after the program.

Additional comments by 571 and IFT members are at:  
[http://www.aft.org/youdecide/townhall\\_aflcio.htm](http://www.aft.org/youdecide/townhall_aflcio.htm).

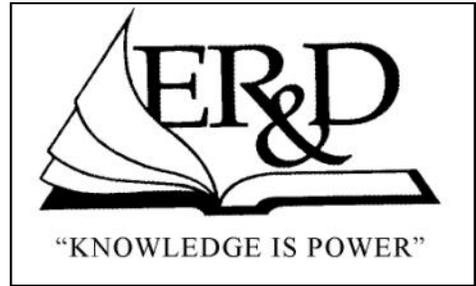
The 2008 political campaign, including candidates and issues important to education is reported at:  
<http://aft.org/youdecide/index.cfm>.

The AFL-CIO's positions can be found at:  
<http://www.aflcio.org/issues/politics/>.



The response of over 17,000 union members to each candidate's words may not have been clear to the MSNBC audience; however, the candidates could not miss what is important to rank-and-file American labor.

— Mike Dale, Local 571 Retirees Council



## Background Knowledge and Advanced Reading Comprehension

By Bonnie Saracco, Local ER&D Instructor

Daniel Willingham, a professor at the University of Virginia who writes *American Educator's* "Ask the Cognitive Scientist" feature, delivered a plenary session at last summer's 2007 AFT QuEST Conference in Washington, D.C. Dr. Willingham spoke about the importance of background knowledge to reading comprehension. He explained that while decoding is a transferable skill, reading comprehension is a nontransferable skill that depends on the background knowledge needed for a particular text. Research has found that decoding skill is less important than specific background knowledge for the comprehension of any given passage.

Writing is filled with "holes" that require the reader to "fill in the blanks." Otherwise, it would be impossibly long and tedious. It is background knowledge that enables the reader to fill in these gaps and to understand a text's vocabulary and ambiguities. Background knowledge also enables the reader to direct attention and chunk information. Without background knowledge one can neither generalize nor draw conclusions.

This has significant consequences. It may explain "fourth grade slump", when the crippling effects of a lack of background knowledge start to become pervasive. It may also explain the loss of reading ability over time in adults who do not continue to develop background knowledge.

Finally, Dr. Willingham summarized the studies on how to instill background knowledge. The research says to start early and that the best way to build background knowledge is by reading or being read to. Some materials, such as newspapers and nonfiction books, are much more helpful than others. Conversely, passively watching television builds very little knowledge. Strategy practice is also of limited benefit and should be done sparingly and never with "vapid" reading materials.

Putting knowledge in the curriculum is most important. It *is* teaching reading.

## QuEST Conference

Four Local 571 officers and members took part in this summer's AFT QuEST (Quality Educational Standards in Teaching) Conference. President Jane Russell, Cathy Pope (Rosemont), and Bonnie Saracco (Rosemont) also attended workshops related to ER&D coursework. QuEST is a biennial event devoted to professional issues.

More than a hundred workshops designed to meet the need and interest of classroom teachers ranged from the best research on how to improve reading and math achievement to using proven strategies for teaching students of differing backgrounds and abilities.

An Education Expo provided opportunity to review and purchase publications and books, visit online resources, and send faxes to members of Congress on pressing legislative issues.

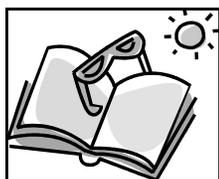
For AFT leaders and education policymakers, QuEST is a place for practical guidance on meeting today's educational challenges, such as:

- Working with administrators to raise achievement and foster labor-management cooperation around teacher quality;
- Responding to the assessment and accountability challenges presented by the No Child Left Behind Act and IDEA;
- Raising educational standards for all students through professional development and technology; and
- Learning about ways to raise achievement for all students.

More than anything, QuEST is a means of sharing ideas and practices with committed AFT colleagues from across the country.

## What did you do this summer?

"Three months off" is still a popular (mis)perception of what teachers do between the mid-June release and resuming classroom duties in mid-August. Whether it's coursework, workshops, or a second job to make ends meet – share your summer involvements. A selection of the most interesting, or extraordinary will be posted on 571's website to answer an age-old question: "What do teachers do during the summer?" Reply to Mike Dale c/o West Suburban Teachers Union, 500 Oakmont Lane, Westmont, IL 60559.



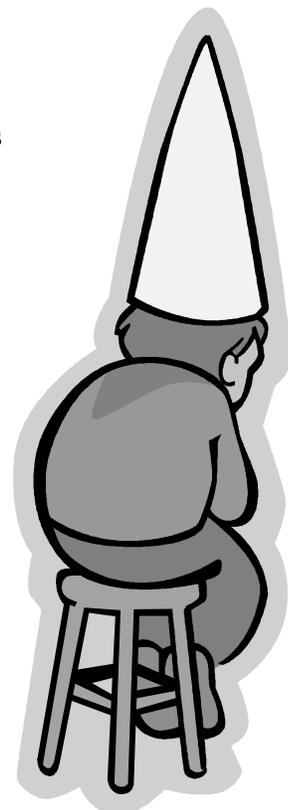
## School Safety and Discipline

In poll after poll, parents, teachers, and school staff say that school safety and order are their highest school priorities. Educators know that other efforts to improve schools will not be effective without an orderly and safe learning environment.

Fortunately, public schools are one of the safest places for children. Studies show that of all the violent crimes involving children, only a very small fraction of them occur in school. We must never feel comfortable, however, resting on the knowledge that schools are relatively safe environments for students. We must constantly strive to make the school the safest environment possible; the students we have been charged to educate deserve nothing less.

Based on this research and the experiences of school staffs across the country, the AFT supports seven essential elements to assure that our schools are safe and orderly:

- Enact district-wide discipline codes;
- Teach students how to follow the discipline code and ensure that the code is rigorously and fairly enforced;
- Implement effective classroom management practices;
- Implement programs to modify student misbehavior;
- Establish alternative placements that should include "wrap-around" supports for chronically disruptive and violent students;
- Develop school safety plans; and
- Support the work of families, religious institutions and communities in developing sound character in children.



# 2007-2008 IFT Union Leadership North

## Single Weekend Courses

BARGAINING SALARY SCHEDULES	October 27-28, 2007
BARGAINING FOR HEALTH INSURANCE BENEFITS	February 2-3, 2008
TRS – INSIDE AND OUT FOR LEADERSHIP	April 26-27, 2008
EFFECTIVE UNION COMMUNICATION	October 2007, February, and April 2008 dates

## Three-Weekend Courses

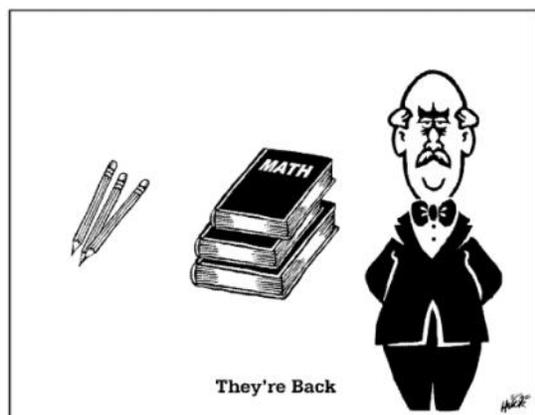
UNION LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT	Each course is presented as three weekend sessions in October, February and April. Participants MUST attend all three sessions to complete the courses.
INTRODUCTION TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING	
POSITIVE NEGOTIATIONS	
GRIEVANCE ADMINISTRATION	

Contact your Council president for information about Council needs and course reimbursement.

See: <http://ift-aft.org/index.php?tray=contentsuppressed&doc=1266&tid=top171> or go to the IFT main page at <http://ift-aft.org> and use the Union Professional Development button to find the link to Union Leadership Institute (ULI) for additional information and registration forms (PDF).

## Local 571 Job Opening for Union Messenger Editor/Webmaster

The West Suburban Teachers Union, Local 571, has job openings for the positions of editor of the *Union Messenger* and Local 571 website Webmaster. The two positions can be combined. Excellent writing skills as well as communication skills are needed. Familiarity with websites design and management is preferred. Compensation is in the form of a yearly stipend for each position. Resumes are due no later than October 12, 2007, to the West Suburban Teachers Union, Local 571. Applicants may be interviewed the week of October 15, 2007. For further information, please contact Local 571 President Jane Russell by phone at 630-468-4043 or by e-mail at [jrussell@ift-aft.org](mailto:jrussell@ift-aft.org).



## Midwest School for Women Workers

Leyden Council's Rose Janas attended the Midwest School for Women Workers between July 29 and August 2 at the University of Iowa. Comprehensive classes on arbitration, collective bargaining, and local union leadership centered the program. Additional workshops included holding elected officials accountable, the right to organize, the Employee Free Choice Act, labor law, the political economy of immigration, and the health care crisis.

Rose reports exceptional instructors from the Iowa Labor Center, University of Missouri, University of North Carolina, Michigan State University, University of Arkansas, University of Wisconsin, and the University of Illinois at Chicago. Iowa's lieutenant governor addressed attendees, along with officials from the AFL-CIO, FASCME, and IBEW.

Seventy-five union members and supporters, including Rose, rallied in support of the Employee Free Choice Act. Betty Ahrens, executive director of the Iowa Citizen Action Network and Midge Slater of the Communications Workers of America were among VIPs addressing the rally.

It wasn't all work; an afternoon at the Amana Colonies for dinner and shopping provided relaxation from the activities that otherwise "lasted from sunrise to well past sundown."

## Presidents' & Treasurers' Workshop

When you notice it's getting dark a bit earlier, the savings account is low, and the NFL pre-season is about to start – it's time for 571's annual Presidents' & Treasurers' Workshop. New and returning Council officers joined 571 and IFT staff mid-August to get a head start on the 2007-2008 school year.



Nancy Calkins (Indian Springs Teachers Council President) and Brett Blair (DuPage 88 Teachers Council President) work alongside IFT Field Representatives Mike Linder and Tom Smith and other presidents not pictured.



Kelly Walters (Cicero) and Louise Sundwall (Cicero) examine forms in this year's workshop binder. In the back are Jean Frisoni (Elmhurst PSRP Council Treasurer) and Caroline Weaver (Elmhurst Teachers Council Treasurer).

Dinner together provided a social transition to the more serious business of getting 571's Councils off to the best possible start. A review of membership forms and deadlines included updates on local and national policies and procedures.

## WSTU Calendar

### September

- 9/10—571 EB Mtg.-Westmont - 5:30 p.m.
- 9/10 —571 HOR Mtg.-Westmont - 6:45 p.m.
- 9/21—Deadline for submission of names of attendees to the 571 Legislative Breakfast
- 9/21—Deadline for submission of names of attendees to the 571 Building Rep. Workshop
- 9/29—571 ER&D (Instructional Strategies) - Westmont - 8:30 a.m.

### October

- 10/4—571 Building Rep. Workshop - Westmont - 5:00 p.m.
- 10/15—571 EB Mtg. - Westmont - 5:30 p.m.
- 10/15—571 HOR Mtg.-Westmont - 6:45 p.m.
- 10/20—571 Legislative Breakfast - Drury Lane - Oakbrook Terrace
- 10/27-28—IFT ULI - Westmont

### November

- 11/2-3—IFT PSRP Conference - Oakbrook
- 11/5—571 EB Mtg.-Westmont - 5:30 p.m.
- 11/5—571 HOR Mtg.-Westmont - 6:45 p.m.

### Useful Links

AFT website: [www.aft.org](http://www.aft.org)  
 IFT website: [www.ift-aft.org](http://www.ift-aft.org)  
 Local 571 website: [www.wstu571.org](http://www.wstu571.org)

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West Suburban Teachers Union  
 Local 571  
 500 Oakmont Lane  
 P.O. Box 390  
 Westmont, IL 60559-0390



Phone: 630-468-4098  
 Fax: 630-468-4088  
 E-mail: [jjennings@ift-aft.org](mailto:jjennings@ift-aft.org)  
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