

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

# Union Messenger

## "A Union of Professionals"

### WSTU October Calendar

10/17- 571 EB Mtg.-Westmont - 5:30 p.m.  
 10/17- 571 HOR Mtg.-Westmont - 6:45 p.m.  
 10/18- Reg. Deadline (571 Legal Limits for New Teachers Workshop on 10/25)  
 10/21-22- IFT PSRP Conf.- Springfield  
 10/22- 571 Legislative Breakfast  
 DoubleTree Hotel - Oakbrook  
 10/23- Reg. deadline for Local 571 Building Representative Workshop  
 10/29- Local 571 Building Representative Workshop -Westmont

### Union Messenger

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## Making a Difference the Issacson Way

by Patti Vendegna

"The main goal of educators should be to get our students to aspire to BE," says Andy Isaacson a member of DuPage District 88 Council and Willowbrook High School teacher. "Whatever that is, is up to each individual."



Doing his part, Isaacson, on Tuesday, April 12, sponsored Willowbrook's Fourth Annual Gold Coin Assembly which provides each of the high school's 500 juniors with an uncirculated gold coin. The assembly is timed to correspond with the preparation for our state required ACT/PSAE testing. During the assembly, Isaacson shared his personal story hoping to instill that no matter the obstacles, all students can succeed.

Isaacson and his family work together throughout the year to raise money to purchase and donate the gold coins as a symbol that students should strive to "shine each day."

Isaacson openly shares his personal story of challenges and triumphs. He struggled as a child living in poverty with no strong educational role models. He was not interested in school and didn't understand the need to work hard while there. He credits his gymnastics coach with throwing him a lifeline. Coach Schulte's encouragement helped turn Isaacson's life around. He became interested in sports and then, in turn, in his own education.

His story over the past four years has been a beacon of inspiration to many students. Isaacson received many thank you letters from students and their parents after the assembly. A Willowbrook parent wrote, "thank you for continuing to believe in them and letting them know that you do." Isaacson's main goal for educators is for them to see themselves as life coaches to students and as gatekeepers for future educators.

In his 31<sup>st</sup> year at Willowbrook, Isaacson continues to "pay it forward" to both his students and his colleagues. He believes that educators must support each other. He teaches Social/Emotional Learning (SEL) courses throughout the state with the basic message that all – students and teachers alike – are valuable and valued and that all can and should support each other and throw a lifeline as necessary.

Andy Isaacson has now taken on a new role as an advocate for the teaching profession. He is a member of District 41's Advisory Committee to State Representative Chris Nybo. Isaacson speaks at all of the advisory committee meetings on behalf of the teaching profession regarding the need to provide our communities with resources necessary for a quality education, which includes the protection of our pension.

How can we help others if we don't first support ourselves? Andy Isaacson steadfastly states that we must hold each other up and start working together.

## Being Slapped in the Face Hurts!

Wisconsin's "union busting legislation" pushed through by Governor Scott Walker and the legislature early in 2011 is taking its toll, probably in the grand scheme hatched by the wealthy corporations that fund Walker campaigns and other legislators like him.

Traveling north on I-94 a few miles into Wisconsin's Waukesha County, you reach New Berlin with a population of just over 38,000. The town website describes New Berlin as "city living with a touch of country." So much for the serene community. On August 29, 2011, the New Berlin board of education meeting attracted hundreds in the audience. Police vehicles with lights flashing greeted participants who poured into the Performing Arts Center of the New Berlin West Middle/High School. The venue was moved to accommodate the crowd. Why the clamor? In a unanimous vote and without teachers' collaboration, the board approved the new employee "handbook" which replaces the collective bargaining agreement. Note there were both "cheers" and "boos" from the audience.

The *Journal Sentinel Online* August 29 and *Daily Kos Labor* August 30 articles, describe the imposition of punitive rules on teachers. New provisions include:

- ◆ Cutting sick leave accrual from 60 to 45 days, and reducing the number of sick days per year;
- ◆ Elimination of sick day bank;
- ◆ No pay for substitute teaching during prep time;
- ◆ Working additional hours (up to

205 hours for elementary and 95 hours for secondary) without added pay;

- ◆ A requirement that staff is available to students before and after student schedules for at least 30 minutes;
- ◆ Twice yearly evaluations without notice;
- ◆ A dress code of skirts below the knee, no sweatshirts, no jeans, no logos, no open shirt, etc.; and
- ◆ The loss of microwaves, refrigerators and coffee makers.



Heard and read enough? The *Journal Sentinel* article reports that this handbook adoption has been happening in Wisconsin districts where collective bargaining agreements have ended. The new handbooks spell out wages, work rules and benefits, many approved without much rancor or discussion. The *Daily Kos Labor* points

out that a little over 20 miles away in another Wisconsin town, the school board rejected the grievance procedure because "it wasn't collaborative enough," taking the needed time to finalize policies rather than using the forceful approach on its teachers.

So what are the New Berlin teachers to do? With a \$15,000 payout and age 55 retirement eliminated, it was suggested that teachers who have the option will leave the district. But where will they go? The Wisconsin environment seems to have shifted from a union environment to the elected representatives having the dominant voice.

The fallout continues as the Wisconsin Education Association Council, which represents 98,000 teachers and support staff, issued layoff notices to 40% of its staff or 42 employees. Dues paying members have declined due to extra retirements last year and limited hiring of new employees this year. As WEAC union recertification elections occur by December 1, membership could be further eroded. Milwaukee area WEAC members, who are operating under an extended contract, continue to pay about \$1,000 a year in dues.

Scott Walker's Wisconsin has the teachers and educational workers

held hostage, at the mercy of their school boards, with only as much input as the boards will allow. Do you wonder if the school districts in northern Illinois will be seeing an influx of more than just some Wisconsin senators in the near future?

The next question to be asked is "Can

**Being Slapped in the Face Hurts! continued from page 2...**

this happen in Illinois?" The erosion of collective bargaining agreements has already begun. Just check with the Illinois governor who told the state employees that there will be no raise as previously negotiated. Or what about the Chicago Teachers Union which has declared that the Chicago board of education shorted their pension and retirement funds by \$32.5 million. A law suit was filed by trustees of the pension fund because this is the second year in a row the board has not met its obligations.

*If anyone asks you, "Why join the*

*union?" or "What has the union done for me lately?", suggest possible naysayers travel north on I-94 into Wisconsin and chat with teachers and support staff who no longer have unions or their mutually negotiated collective bargaining agreements.*

The Illinois legislature is set to begin its override session on October 25, 2011. Around the Illinois capitol you will find the omnipresent, highly paid lobbyists from those same wealthy corporations, working to crush our unions too. When your union, the

Illinois Federation of Teachers, sends out the call, please respond. Be vigilant. Be forceful. Let your voice be heard. Participate. Solidarity is the key. Remember, together, WE ARE ONE!

In unity,

*Jane A. Russell*

Local 571 President

## **The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts**

*by Bonnie Saracco*

The AFT Teach 2011 Conference in Washington presented a plenary session during which David Coleman, co-founder of Student Achievement Partners, reported that the most frequent intermediate grade level state standard in the English language arts (ELA) is to differentiate between a fable, a myth, a legend, and a folktale. He went on to state the problem with this standard – no one actually knows the difference, and no one really cares.

Maybe his characterization was somewhat exaggerated, but this standard illustrates that lack of importance is one of the problems with many of our current ELA state standards.

Many current ELA state standards lack crucial skills. For example, because employers routinely cite the ability to write a clear summary as an extremely important career skill, summarizing should be stressed in every set of state ELA standards, but it is not.

Also, many ELA state standards are not useful because they are too general and not designated for specific grade levels, making it impossible to know what will be assessed each year.

The new Common Core State Standards for ELA address these problems. They were developed with significant input from the AFT, including that of IFT staff and members who participated in the gap analysis between current Illi-

nois standards and the Common Core State Standards, as well as the general review of the new standards.

These new standards emphasize the development of critical background knowledge in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects, without which students cannot read informational texts.

They are organized as a "staircase" of increasingly complex skills, so that students will be ready to succeed in college and career training by the end of high school. They mandate certain types of texts for students, including classic stories from around the world, primary source U. S. documents, and major works of literature. They do not require a specific reading list, but they do help teachers by offering an array of sample texts. They leave decisions about how to teach to the schools and the states.

In writing instruction, the new standards generally steer away from relating personal opinion and experiences, focusing instead on the ability to write logical arguments based on evidence. Personal narrative writing will not be emphasized to the extent that it is now. Speaking, listening, research, and technical skills are also contained in the new standards.

As summarized by the Illinois State Board of Education, the new standards are "fewer, clearer, higher." Visit their website, [www.isbe.net](http://www.isbe.net), for the latest updates on the standards and their implementation in Illinois.

## Are Illinois Students Prepared for College and Career?

By Jane Russell

The ACT test was given in the spring of 2011, along with the Prairie State Achievement Exam, to all high school students with junior status. *The Condition of College and Career Readiness, Class of 2011*, reports that 100% of Illinois high school graduates, 144,469 students to be exact, were tested. ACT, an independent, not-for-profit organization, provides data which includes college readiness benchmarks for all tests, and that includes EXPLORE, PLAN, and ACT. These tests are given to first-, second-, and third-year high school students, respectively, and covers testing in English, reading, mathematics and science, to present a typical set of benchmarks or expectations for college readiness.

Looking at the percent of 2007-2011 ACT tested high school graduates, Illinois students reaching the college readiness benchmarks remained flat during that five-year period for all four subjects tested. It would be expected, Illinois being one of eight states that tests 100% of its high school graduates, that the college benchmarks by subject for Illinois students are lower than those for the nation by one to four percentage points. Only 24% of Illinois high school grads met all four benchmarks (one for each of the subject areas tested), 14% met three benchmarks, 17% met two benchmarks, 16% met one benchmark and nearly a third, 30%, met NO benchmarks. Over the same five-year period, the amount of students taking the ACT test in all race/ethnic categories has increased by 2.8%. The number of high school graduates increased by a lesser amount, 1.2%. However, African American and Hispanic students fall behind their White and Asian contemporaries, often by 20+ percentage points in reaching the benchmarks.

How can this cycle of underachievement be changed? How can all Illinois students succeed in college and career readiness? The ACT survey provides some insight. First, ACT “has consistently found that students who take the recom-

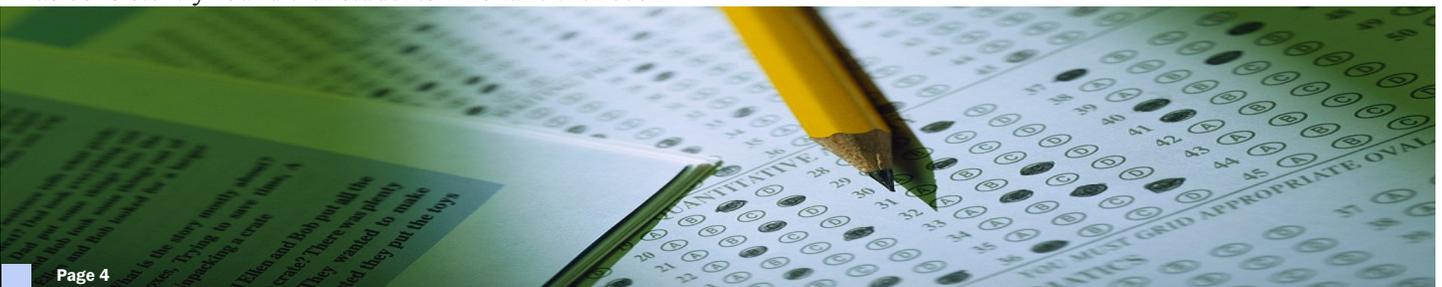
mended core curriculum are more likely to be ready for college or career than those who do not.” The core curriculum includes four years of English and three years of mathematics, social studies, and science. Also, early preparation appears to help. Younger students taking rigorous curricula are better prepared for college and career. Included in the report is recent research showing that the level of academic achievement for eighth-grade students has a considerable impact on their college and career readiness by the time they graduate from high school as compared to what happens in high school. Other factors enhancing college and career readiness include career and educational planning and the academic behavior of students.

**Only 24% of Illinois high school grads met all four benchmarks...**

In the high growth career fields of education, management, computer/information specialties, marketing/sales, and community services, many students interested in these careers actually fall short of meeting the ACT college and

career readiness benchmarks by not being on the right path. So it seems clear that the combination of academic achievement and academic behaviors as measured by the EXPLORE and PLAN tests provide the strongest prediction for high school academic performance and success.

ACT supports the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, which align college and career readiness to a rigorous core curriculum for all high school students. ACT defines “college readiness” as students having a 50% chance of earning a grade of “B” or higher or about 75% chance of earning a grade of “C” or better in the first year college English composition, college algebra, biology or either history, psychology, sociology, political science or economics. Rigorous high school courses, early mentoring and intervention, and systems that provide for data-driven decisions (IL Longitudinal Data System) appear to provide the best way to help all Illinois students be successful. The full report can be found at [www.act.org/readiness/2011](http://www.act.org/readiness/2011).



## Senate Bill 7 Overview

by IFT Field Service Directors, Tom Smith & Arnavaz Mistry-Mujhaba

Senate Bill 7 was signed into law on June 13, 2011. This bill and its accompanying trailer bills are collectively referred to as Public Act 97-0008 and 97-0007.

The new law modifies the Illinois School Code, as well as the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Act. The changes include:

1. Establishes performance as a primary criterion for the layoffs and recalls of certified employees;
2. Connects tenure and certification to performance;
3. Provides for greater transparency during the collective bargaining process;
4. Streamlines the dismissal process for tenured teachers;
5. Conducts teacher and student surveys which would provide an overview of learning conditions in a school district;
6. Requires training for elected school board members.

Of these modifications, perhaps the one requiring the most immediate attention is the change to layoffs and recalls for certified employees.

Layoffs, often referred to as reductions-in-force, were formerly based on seniority. Previously, non-tenured certified employees were laid off first followed by tenured certified employees, in accordance with seniority. Starting with layoff notices issued in the 2011-2012 school term, honorable dismissals will be based first on qualifications, certification and performance, and then seniority. Collective bargaining agreements which were entered into on or before January 1, 2011, are grandfathered. These collective bargaining agreements lose grandfathered status upon

their expiration or June 30, 2013, whichever occurs first.

Certified employees will be: (1) categorized into one or more positions for which they are legally qualified, and (2) categorized into four groups (Groups 1, 2, 3, and 4) based on performance. The union and the district, even those with a grandparented contract, **must** establish a joint committee composed of an equal number of representatives for the district and the union who will meet for the first time on or before December 1, 2011. If nothing else, this joint committee will be responsible for ensuring that any language in a grandparented collective bargaining agreement is implemented properly. Otherwise, the district and union joint committee will be responsible for completing their work by February 1 of each school year. The joint committee's work will include applying a sequence of dismissal in the case of layoffs. The joint committee will also oversee any trends in a district's manipulation of certified staff evaluations which could result in layoffs of more senior certified staff employees.

Certified staff employees, whether tenured or non-tenured, who receive layoff notices must receive them no later than 45 days prior to the end of the school term.

Certified staff will be recalled in a specific order with those in Group 4 receiving recall notices first. Certified staff in Groups 1 and 2 have no recall rights.

The IFT will offer a one day workshop on Saturday, November 5, in Westmont for leaders and bargaining team members to learn more about this aspect of the law.

## Retiree Corner



Kathy Greenawalt (second from right), Local 571 Area Trustee & retiree, received the 2011 UChicago Argonne, LLC Pinnacle of Education Award, from Argonne Laboratory on July 14.



At the June House of Representatives meeting Local 571 & IFT retirees were recognized for their service. Pictured (l-r): Mike Linder, (IFT Field Service Director), Gary Tolman (Cicero), Marge Wunschel (Cicero), Julie Phillips (Franklin Park Teachers).

**Union Leadership Institute  
Details Available**

The 2010-2011 Union Leadership Institute course schedule and registration information are now available on the [IFT Web site](#). ULI courses are held at the IFT Robert M. Healey Center in Westmont, IL. Most courses are held over three weekend-long sessions and participants must attend all three sessions to complete the course. A special one-day session will be offered on Senate Bill 7 as it relates to layoffs for certified employees. The workshop will also provide an overview of the Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA). Instructors will present issues that local and council leaders should consider as they work with district administration to develop/adapt teacher evaluation systems to meet the requirements of the law.

The ULI training sessions will be held on the following dates:

Fall Session: November 5-6  
Winter Session: February 4-5  
Spring Session: April 28-29

*In order to register, you must have the signature of your council president on the registration form. The registration deadline is October 2, 2011.*

**What's Missing from  
the Messenger?**



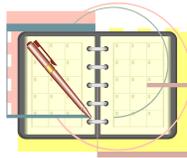
Please e-mail comments and suggestions to Angel Holmes at [angelholmes@sbcglobal.net](mailto:angelholmes@sbcglobal.net).

**Website of the Month**

National Hispanic Heritage Month begins September 15 and runs through October 15. On the site listed below, you will find various classroom resources that include information about Hispanic countries, as well as key events in Hispanic-American History. Students even have the opportunity to meet the new Supreme Court Justice, Sonia Sotomayor. The free professional development website, AFT's Colorin Colorado, is a great resource for educators of English Language Learners. To locate all of this information log on to: <http://www.aft.org/yourwork/tools4teachers/hispanic/index.cfm>.

**Mark Your Calendars for the Legal Limits for New Teachers Seminar**

Members who are non-tenured teachers, especially first-and second-year teachers, are invited to attend the Legal Limits for New Teachers Seminar sponsored by the West Suburban Teachers Union Local 571 on October 25, 2011, at our conference center in Westmont. One of Local 571's attorneys will present information focusing on professional conduct, DCFS obligations, adhering to district policies, confidentiality issues, internet and technology issues, student discipline, suspensions, certification, special education, tenure, free speech, leaves of absence, etc. See your Council President or Building Representative for registration information.



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