



PSRP Reporter

THE NATIONAL PUBLICATION OF AFT PARAPROFESSIONALS AND SCHOOL-RELATED PERSONNEL

second² chances

In-school suspension helps students get back in the game

WHEN IT'S DONE RIGHT, in-school suspension gives kids a second chance. As an alternative to suspending students from school, often leaving them to their own devices, ISS gives these students a chance to reflect on their behavior, catch up with schoolwork and get back in the game.

But in-school suspension—which also goes by other names, such as modified or alternative learning—is a

fairly new concept. It can be rough going at first. And when educators try to operate ISS in an alternative school or one that's understaffed or overcrowded, problems can multiply.

Here's a quick summary of what ISS looks like. If students pile up demerits or suddenly act out, they land in ISS. There, they may be asked to fill out a sheet prompting them to reflect on their behavior. When students are angry or upset, they may be counseled before they get down to their schoolwork. The atmosphere is summed up in one word: quiet.

Terrence Wooten, a paraprofessional member of the Cleve-

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Paraprofessional Terrence Wooten is a firm believer in the value of in-school suspension.



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Supporting at-risk high school students

RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT President

AS EDUCATORS, WE HAVE a responsibility to help all children succeed. And we have a special responsibility to students at the greatest risk of failure—students for whom the school setting offers the most stability and opportunity in their daily lives.

Many such students are concentrated in so-called dropout factories, which have a disproportionate share of potential high school dropouts. More than 40 percent of the students enrolled in these schools as freshmen will have dropped out by their senior year.

Yet, many former “dropout factories” have been transformed into high-functioning, nurturing schools that equip today’s students with the academic and life skills they need for the 21st century.

WE’D LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU! Are you an educator struggling to stem a tide of student dropouts? Are you familiar with approaches, programs or schools that have successfully increased high school completion rates for at-risk students? We’d like to benefit from your experience and expertise. Visit www.aft.org/voices to share your ideas.

What turned these schools around? And what must we do to ensure that all students are prepared for college, work and life? As a former inner-city high school teacher, let me share six concrete steps that can dramatically increase high school attainment:

- First, we must provide every student with a rigorous, engaging and relevant high school education. That means—in addition to high academic standards and good curricular materials—giving educators the tools, time and trust they need to help students;
- Develop “early warning” systems to identify at-risk students as early as sixth grade;

- Create individualized learning plans to address students’ academic, social and emotional needs;
- Offer multiple pathways to graduation, from International Baccalaureate programs to career and technical schools to extended time for graduation;
- Increase opportunities for service learning, a proven success; and
- Increase the number of nontraditional high-quality models like community high schools with wraparound services, small theme-based schools and magnets.

These steps are best accomplished through collaborative labor-management relationships. The AFT is working to foster such partnerships and, with our members, we are identifying the best programs to carry out these goals.

Take a program called Say Yes to Education (www.sayyestoeducation.org), which is at work in cities in four states. It is a dropout prevention program that offers a successful blend

of incentives and supports to boost achievement, starting when a child enters prekindergarten and continuing through high school and beyond.

Like the Say Yes model, all dropout prevention strategies should start years before students enter high school. But we can’t lose a minute in the effort to maximize the prospects for students at risk of dropping out of high school—*right now*.

Luckily, numerous programs clearly demonstrate the life-changing potential of intensive support for high school students. In Rhode Island, every student has an individual

learning program, in large part to bolster high school attainment—especially for at-risk students. In Florida, a program called Take Stock in Children (www.takestockinchildren.org) has established mentoring and case management systems that keep at-risk high school kids on track.

I’ve recently visited high schools that, despite great obstacles, are successfully preparing students for further education—and for fulfilling lives. As unique as these schools are, they have certain common characteristics. They offer a robust education program and at the same time reduce student anonymity, spark student interests, offer incentives for achievement and provide time for educators to work together—toward professional growth and on their students’ behalf.

The AFT will focus our efforts to dramatically increase high school attainment in several specific ways. First, we will work to identify schools and programs for middle and high school students that are successful and replicable. Second, we will zero in on students who are above the high school graduation age yet lack enough credits to graduate. An immediate, intense focus on these students can profoundly improve their lifetime prospects. And we will work with other groups that make educational attainment—especially for at-risk students—a top priority.

A high school degree is not sufficient to guarantee a good job in today’s competitive economy, and the lack of a diploma practically guarantees a future of diminished job prospects. Ensuring that every child graduates from high school prepared for life and for college or career is an economic and moral imperative.



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JANET CENTURY



A new path forward

AFT president proposes an action plan for stronger public education

PRESIDENT RANDI WEINGARTEN issued an invitation to education leaders in January: Cut through the mistrust, the long-standing animosities, the old growth that keeps schools rooted in bygone times and chokes the path forward. Take those risks in good faith, and you'll find willing partners in educators and their unions.

Weingarten made her remarks at Washington, D.C.'s National Press Club in a major policy address, offering proposals in four areas: evaluation, due process, classroom tools and labor-management relationships.

"We can create a path to a stronger public education system that is defined by excellence, fairness, shared responsibility and mutual trust," she said. The result will be "focused squarely on serving the needs of our children and preparing them to reach their full potential."

Weingarten drew from real-life examples of how educators, schools and districts are taking risks together. She spoke of teachers in Detroit who, at considerable personal sacrifice, negotiated a settlement that brought a school system

back from the edge of economic collapse and kept progress on track. She highlighted groundbreaking agreements in Hartford, Conn., new

trator sits in the classroom for a few minutes, a few times in the first few years of teaching, and the teacher is "rated" at year's end. AFT affli-

Educators, administrators, parents and elected officials are **working side by side to help their students reach greater heights.**

— RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT president

models for professional growth in Pittsburgh and Hillsborough, Fla., and one West Philadelphia high school where teachers are helping students put together engineering projects that smoke competitors from Cornell and MIT.

These are the places where educators, administrators, parents and elected officials are working side by side to help their students reach greater heights, Weingarten said.

Real change demands that schools improve teacher development and evaluation, she added. For too long, schools have been saddled with an outmoded system where an adminis-

ates already are working to make such rating systems a thing of the past. Now, the union is redoubling its push by gathering AFT leaders to work with leading researchers on the issue.

The union stands ready to do its part—the groundwork must be in place, the AFT president said. Schools and school systems must be held accountable, too, for providing "an environment that sets everyone up for success." It would feature "small classes, safe schools, a solid curriculum, healthy and adequate facilities," Weingarten explained, "and opportunities for parent involvement"

A wealth of cost-saving ideas

Detroit's school office employees offer alternatives to privatization

IF THE DETROIT public schools could reduce student absenteeism by just 1 percent annually, the district could bring in an additional \$92 million over five years, according to a new report about the many

ways Detroit schools can generate revenue by reducing waste and improving operations.

"A Stronger Detroit for Our Kids: A Proposal for Stronger Detroit Public Schools" was prepared by the Detroit Association of Educational Office Employees (DAEOE). It calls for union-management collaboration to reduce student absenteeism; centralized record keeping; and other efforts to improve service, lower costs and raise revenue for the schools. If implemented, these proposals could add about \$130 million to the school system's bottom line.

The report was prepared after extensive consultation—including one-on-one conversations, group meetings and surveys—with Detroit school office employees, who already have been making improvements in their schools.

"I wasn't surprised our members came up with some great ideas," says Ruby Newbold, president of DAEOE and an AFT vice president. "They work in the schools every day—they know what works and what doesn't. Our proposal paints management a clear picture of what is possible through teamwork."

The report, presented to the school system's emergency financial manager, calls for new labor-management committees to further explore the ideas presented by the office workers' union.

AFT executive vice president Lorretta Johnson underscores the need for union-management cooperation. "School office employees and support staff, teachers, principals, administrators, elected officials, parents—we all need to be talking about how we're going to make our schools work in tough economic times."

"Our proposal paints a clear picture of what is possible through teamwork," says Ruby Newbold, president of the Detroit Association of Educational Office Employees.



Tyrone R. Mebane Sr. "It's unreasonable to think that if one is to outsource the tasks performed by office workers, money will be saved. Taking a few spokes out of the wheel won't produce a better wheel—might produce a wobble, though."

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secondnd chances

“These students are just as important to us as the rest of our students.”

—SANDIE CARNER-SHAFRAN, Saratoga, N.Y.

Continued from page 1

land Teachers Union, is helping improve suspension procedures and outcomes. Wooten is a firm believer in ISS. “It’s an opportunity for kids to stay and get work done instead of dumping it off in the trash because they’re upset about being suspended,” he says. “It also keeps them out of trouble because more than likely they would have no supervision outside of school.”

One of the best things that’s come out of ISS, Wooten says, is tighter communication among the staff at Anton Grdina K-8 School, where he supervises the ISS classroom. Since his school started using in-school suspension three years ago, the process of getting folders of schoolwork from teachers has been refined to include notes, for example, on whether a student has a special education plan. What’s more, close communication prevents students from shirking assignments, and the school’s security officers do a good job of getting kids to calm down.

To minimize distractions, Wooten keeps his surroundings spartan. He turns students’ desks away from the door so they won’t see classmates strolling by pointing fingers or joking, and he keeps a desk right next to the door for non-suspension students who pop in to make up a test.

He feels lucky to work with teachers and administrators who listen and have helped to make ISS better—and he doesn’t hesitate to ask for the tools he needs. At the top of Wooten’s wish list are library-style study carrels to help students work without distractions.

Betty Mohs does have study carrels in her modified learning center/ISS classroom at the Kelliher Public School in northern Minnesota, about 50 miles from Canada. Like Wooten, she keeps distractions to a minimum. “The rules are quite strict,” says the member of Education Minnesota Kelliher Support Staff. “I don’t set the rules [the school does], and I tell students that. Number 1, they don’t talk, put heads down, play music or even have earphones.”

Often, Mohs has to talk down angry or frustrated students at the preK-12 school with a total enrollment of about 220. She’s tried using worksheets asking students to reflect on their

behavior, but found that her repeat customers just say “I’ve done this before” and throw them away. “It isn’t the answer,” she says. Talking with them is her answer.

A paraprofessional with a background in career and technical education, Mohs also runs the school’s career center out of her ISS room. Some students go there to study just because it’s so quiet.

System still needs work

Despite many successes, in-school suspension programs aren’t always smooth sailing. Sometimes, processes and procedures don’t

exist or aren’t carried out. Alternative schools may run out of options short of law enforcement, and many schools are simply understaffed or overcrowded, cutting ISS students adrift to fend for themselves.

Sandie Carner-Shafran is a teaching assistant in Saratoga, N.Y. Most of the misbehaving students who come to her ISS classroom do their work and jump right back into regular classes. Carner-Shafran agrees that these children don’t need to be removed from school. On the other hand, a small percentage of students who normally would draw the line at verbal abuse now feel that they have



JANET CENTURY



COURTESY OF SANDIE CARNER-SHAFRAN



Clockwise from top: paraprofessional Donna Thomas; school office employee Lydia Rivera; and teaching assistant Sandie Carner-Shafran, above right, with a colleague.



to become physical to get attention. She says these kids ask themselves, “What the blank do I have to do to get suspended now?” As a result, students who threaten or hit someone are allowed to stay in school when, in fact, educators should be calling the police.

“In my opinion, the new plan of keeping kids in school and not suspending them is the latest concept to make schools *look* safer,” Carner-Shafran says. “No one wants to hear that their schools are experiencing violence. But children need to learn what is acceptable in society. I believe that we fail them in not teaching that there are consequences.”

For students exhibiting chronic disruptive or antisocial behavior, she says, suspension should be to an alternative school-like environment that has a cadre of highly trained educators and social workers providing the therapeutic help the kids need. “These students are just as important to us as the rest of our students,” she says.

Students as nomads

And then there are the schools that are understaffed or overcrowded. Terrence Wooten has heard stories about other schools in Cleveland with no room to house ISS students, so they’re forced to sit on the school stage. Lydia Rivera, a school office worker in DeLand, Fla., says ISS students have to study in the cafeteria. When everybody comes in for lunch, ISS is moved to a “back room” or the front office. “The more interruptions and distractions, the harder it is for them to get back on task,” she says.

Short staffing also leads to ad hoc situations for secretaries and clerical workers, says Rivera, a member of the AFT-affiliated Volusia Educational Support Association. “We’re trying to watch these students and answer phones and greet parents coming into the school.” If ISS were properly housed and staffed, “things would be a lot smoother and the students more successful.”

Work was the only thing students were allowed to do in Elizabeth Bahn’s ISS classroom in Torrance, Calif. A former biology teacher, Bahn has been working at various schools while she finishes her credentials as a school counselor. She liked the system at Torrance because ISS students arrived at school earlier than the others and were isolated. They were not allowed to talk, ate separately, had to work on their assignments and found it “quite boring,” she says. “I thought it was very effective.”

Another key to success, says Bahn, a member of the California Federation of Teachers and former member of United Teachers



JANET CENTURY

Los Angeles, is having no more than 10 kids in the ISS room.

Sandra Bennett: “We have a better opportunity to talk to the children than some of the teachers do.”

Small groups and firm rules are two things on which all ISS educators can agree. “I have a tight grip on my students,” says Donna Thomas, a longtime paraprofessional in Cleveland whose kids think she has eyes in the back of her head because she can tell by their body language if they’re texting or otherwise breaking the rules, even when they try to hide it. Thomas has a remarkable record of achievement in turning young lives around. Over the past few years, only 16 of her high school ISS students have transferred or dropped out.

Like Thomas, Sandra Bennett is a member of the Cleveland Teachers Union and a trainer in the AFT’s Educational Research & Dissemination program. Both paras offer encouragement to students and colleagues alike, and both enjoy a collaborative relationship with all the adults who affect their students’ lives.

“We have a better opportunity to talk to the children than some of the teachers do,” says Bennett, explaining that an advantage of working one-to-one is persuading students to think ahead to the consequences of their actions.

She also lets them know that success means not being sent back to her room—although they’re welcome to stop by. “The fewer times I see you, the better I feel about it,” Bennett tells them. “It works as long as they understand that you care.”

How do you see in-school suspension as a way to get kids back on track?

“It keeps them in school where they should be, not at home playing their Game Boys, etc. It also gives them time to reflect on how they should behave. They learn that others expect them to have higher expectations for themselves.”

JULIA CHEUNG
Wylie, Texas

“I work in the in-school suspension room. There are no iPods, cell phones, sleeping or talking! A laptop computer is there for schoolwork only and is closely monitored. Most students feel good about themselves and how much they have accomplished at the end of the school day.”

JANICE VOGT
Dansville, N.Y.

“Some school systems use a mandate called ‘positive behavior support’ in lieu of in-school suspension. You reward students for good behavior, hoping that they won’t misbehave. It’s a way for the administration not to have to deal with chronic behavior problems. In my state, it’s used to increase achievement scores because attendance is one criterion of measurement.”

MONICA ICAMINA
Hammond, La.

“In my one experience with in-school suspension, kids hated it. They were isolated from their friends, did not attend specialists’ classes, were accompanied to the bathroom, and were still learning. Because kids don’t like to be away from their friends, they will think twice before they break a rule.”

MARIA DIBENEDETTO
Philadelphia

“The object should not be punitive but humanitarian. Schools should not be viewed as punishment centers.”

EARL SCOTT
Winston-Salem, N.C.

Have wholesome foods replaced unhealthy meals or snacks in your school? If so, how was it done?

IT’S YOUR VOICE We want to hear from you! Visit www.aft.org/voices to respond to this question and to others throughout the year.



Save the dates!

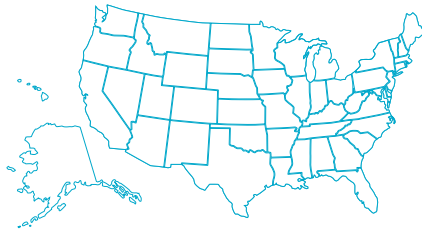
Mark your calendar for three upcoming events

Be part of **Earth Hour**. On Saturday, **March 27**, at 8:30 p.m. local time, the AFT and the World Wildlife Fund are asking you—and people around the world—to turn off your lights for one hour. You will be joining millions in the commitment to fight climate change. Visit www.EarthHour.org to download free classroom activities for the days leading up to the event.

We're going to Disney World! The **AFT PSRP (Paraprofessionals and School-Related Personnel) Conference** will be held **April 8-11** at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Fla. Highlights include state-of-the-art training on green cleaning; sessions on a variety of professional issues; and the ever-popular health fair. Go to www.aft.org/yourwork/psrp and look for the 2010 PSRP Conference.

The **Good Jobs, Green Jobs National Conference** **May 4-6** in Washington, D.C., will bring together thousands of union members, environmentalists and others for three days dedicated to building a green economy that creates good jobs, reduces global warming and preserves America's economic and environmental security. For more information, visit www.greenjobsconference.org.

STATE LINES



MI The Dearborn Federation of School Employees (DFSE), negotiating for a new contract since last May, has gone back to the bargaining table after voting down a contract that included hefty concessions. In the meantime, the school district has lost nearly \$10 million in state funding and has laid off about 130 paraprofessionals and school-related personnel this school year, mainly in December.

Like the support staff, Dearborn teachers received about 150 layoff notices in December, but partly because Michigan's governor restored some funding in January, the teachers had positions restored. The support staff are working toward a new tentative agreement. "That's our goal," says DFSE president Tim Kearney.

MT AFT president Randi Weingarten spent two January days in Montana, where she met more than 50 public employees. The visit highlighted "Work That Matters," MEA-MFT's campaign about the work public employees do.

The tour began in Bozeman, where Weingarten met with the Associated Faculty of Montana State University. The next stop was Boulder, where she toured facilities including the courthouse and the treasurer's office. There is no substitute for going to the work site and seeing the work our members do, Weingarten told members of the Jefferson County Public Employees union.

The next stop was Helena, where Weingarten met with the governor and state school superintendent, an AFT member. On the final day, Weingarten visited the state's public health lab.

25 years and going strong

Classified employees at East Los Angeles College celebrated the AFT College Staff Guild's 25th birthday last fall. The guild represents 1,000 clerical and technical employees who keep California's largest community college district running.

OK School support workers in Tulsa took their contract agreement door to door on New Year's Eve, visiting the homes of every school board member. AFT 6049 Oklahoma had voted in December to ratify a new contract providing a 28-cent hourly pay increase. Afterward, the school superintendent claimed he never struck a deal on the contract that applies to 3,000 school custodians, bus drivers and mechanics represented by AFT 6049. The average school support staffer in Tulsa makes less than \$18,000 per year.

"Maybe it's buyer's remorse," says local president Kelly Simon, "but the superintendent now wants to deny there ever was an agreement and wants to shortchange these low-wage workers."

Candace Atchison, a special education bus driver for the Tulsa Public Schools for 25 years, understands that the city is facing hard times. But even though "28 cents is not a lot of money to some people," she says, "to us, it's a lot."

OR In a special election in January, Oregon voters said "yes" to two tax measures that will raise \$727 million for vital public services. The vote affirmed tax fairness in a state where progressive support is not always a given.

Turnout was high for a special election, says David Rives, AFT-Oregon president. It shows two things, adds Merlene Martin, president of the Oregon School Employees Association and an AFT vice president: "The public supports critical funding for schools and higher education, healthcare and public safety. Plus, we showed the effectiveness of a broad coalition that spoke with one voice."

The measures raise the corporate minimum tax from \$10 to \$150 for the first time since 1931.

"We rolled up our sleeves and got out there to make a difference in this election," Martin says. "Our members worked the phones, walked the neighborhoods and turned out to vote."



CALIFORNIA TEACHER

AFT offers scholarships and grants

APPLICATIONS FOR the 2010 Robert G. Porter Scholars Program are available online. AFT members and their children are eligible to participate in the program, which awards four \$8,000 scholarships to graduating high school seniors and \$1,000 grants to AFT members continuing their education.

TO APPLY:

- Download the application from the AFT Web site at www.aft.org/benefits/scholarships.cfm; or
- E-mail an application request to: porterscholars@aft.org.

APPLICATION DEADLINE IS MARCH 31, 2010



HAITI

Helping hands

AFT MEMBERS rushed to Haiti in January to help care for earthquake victims there. Among them were these AFT-affiliated nurses, paramedics and EMTs from Vermont. You can help the relief efforts at one of these sites: www.redcross.org or <https://give.liveunited.org/page/contribute/haiti> or www.savethechildren.org.

VFNHP PHOTO

AFT activism leading to safer motor coaches, field trips

Members weigh in on what new standards should apply to charter buses

DRIVEN IN PART BY AFT briefings and other awareness-raising efforts, the federal government has released a plan to improve the safety of motor coaches, often used as an alternative to yellow school buses in transporting students to and from sports, band events and field trips.

The government's action plan, released late last year, found that driver fatigue, rollovers and inadequate maintenance contribute to most motor coach crashes. The plan identifies seven issues it intends to address through new rules.

"Considering that more than 750 million passengers are transported each year by motor coach, and that motor coaches are here to stay, we need to give passengers a fighting chance when it comes to accidents and rollovers," says George Williams, president of the American Association of Classified School Employees, a partner with the AFT in pushing for safer motor coaches, also known as charter buses.

Donna Signs, a school bus driver instructor and president of the Owego (N.Y.) Apalachin Employees Association, says her goal for motor coach safety is pretty simple. "If motor coaches were to follow the standards for school buses and school bus drivers, any accidents involving a motor coach would have fewer injuries and deaths. School buses are built like tanks, and drivers are tested very vigorously."

The actions the government plans to take include setting minimum knowledge requirements for motor coach drivers. "There is a

problem with allowing anyone to drive motor coaches without the certifications that school bus operators have to go through," says Elaine Prickett, a driver in Morgantown, W.Va., and member of the West Virginia School Service Personnel Association. "We are not hauling a cargo that can be replaced."

- Other planned steps:
- Ban texting and limit drivers' use of phones and other electronic devices on all motor coaches.
 - Propose rules requiring seat belts.
 - Evaluate and develop roof-crush performance requirements.
 - Improve oversight of carriers that dodge rules or act unsafely.

Karen Barnes, a school bus driver/trainer from Austin, Texas, who spoke during a safety briefing on Capitol Hill a year ago, also hopes the government will impose tougher standards on commercial buses. In particular, she wants better regulation of the huge picture windows that tend to pop out. She also suggests more exits and safer placement of fuel tanks.

Because parents and the public expect charter buses used for school activities to be as safe as school buses and driven by trained professionals, the AFT has passed a resolution calling for federal legislation that requires motor coaches and their drivers to meet the same standards as school buses and their drivers.

The AFT's position on student transportation is that children always should be transported in appropriate vehicles—and the safest

vehicles on the road are yellow school buses. That said, the law does allow other vehicles to be used for extracurricular activities, so these vehicles must also meet the highest standards possible, and must be driven by operators who meet the same high standards as school bus drivers.

Johnson recognized as 'heroine of education'

REFLECTING ON THE IMPORTANCE of education to "lift us up," U.S. Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-Md.) in the *Baltimore Afro-American* praises AFT executive vice president Lorretta Johnson.



JOHNSON

The congressman called on African-Americans during Black History Month in February to applaud those who give others "the power to succeed," adding his own thanks for Johnson, "a woman who exemplifies much of

what we should be learning from our history."

In the newspaper, Cummings reviews the highlights of Johnson's career, from teacher's assistant to leadership of the Baltimore Teachers Union's paraprofessional chapter to her current post as one of the AFT's top national officers.

"Dr. Johnson never stops reminding us that the education of our children is the single most important force in building our future," he writes.

Bus driver stays cool despite intruder

Parents assured that 'we care about the kids'

SAFETY WAS THE FIRST thing on Cindy Fulwood's mind one morning in January when a man ran toward her bus filled with middle-schoolers and demanded to be let in. He tried to stick his hand through the window before she slammed it shut. Then he jumped up on the hood, climbed to the roof, opened the hatch and dropped into the bus.



FULWOOD

Although scared, Fulwood, a 16-year driver and AFT member, remained calm by remembering her training: "Safety for the children. Safety for you."

With just a glance from their driver, all 44 students left from the rear exit while she tried to keep the intruder's attention. They walked through a ditch away from the bus and the busy Florida highway near Tampa.

"My kids were awesome," Fulwood says. "I'm so proud of them."

She tried calling for help over the bus radio and finally had to dial 911. Meanwhile, the intruder kicked open her front door and ran to a second full school bus behind hers, where he forced his way in.

Nobody was hurt. Once the children were safely at school, Fulwood, a member of the Hillsborough School Employees Federation, sat on the steps of a colleague's bus and cried. Later, she reassured the students' parents, saying, "Trust the bus drivers. We care about the kids."

Since passing a resolution in 1987 on school bus safety, the AFT has actively supported bus safety education, including regular evacuation drills for students and safety training for drivers. Fulwood's students, in riding her bus for three years, have practiced bus evacuation twice a year.



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