

ENGAGING MEMBERS THROUGH PROFESSIONAL ISSUES

AFT survey results tell us our members want and need information and training that can make their workday more successful, and the union has developed two resources to help address this need.

Tools for Teachers, formerly known as *t-source*, (www.aft.org/tools4teachers) is an AFT-produced Web site that provides members and potential members with research-based information about instructional strategies and classroom issues.

The AFT's *Teacher Tips* brochures include solid research-based information on a variety of topics, and direct teachers to the *Tools for Teachers* Web site for more information. Brochure topics include: Before the Year Begins, Behavior Management Techniques, Working with Cooperative Small Groups, Creating a Classroom Team, Building Parent-Teacher Partnerships, Assigning Effective Homework and Loan Forgiveness.

Given the diverse academic challenges teachers face daily, combined with increasing accountability measures and economic cutbacks, the union has an opportunity to strengthen professional relationships with members and to begin building those relationships with new members. The AFT's professional development materials and programs have been proven to help the union gain new members and increase current members' involvement in union activities.

This brochure highlights some of the materials available to work-site leaders and offers ideas for how to attract new members and engage current members.



Using **Tools for Teachers** to Strengthen Your Union



TIPS TO HELP WORK-SITE LEADERS ATTRACT NEW MEMBERS AND ENGAGE CURRENT MEMBERS



A Union of Professionals

American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO
555 New Jersey Ave. N.W.
Washington, DC 20001
202/879-4400
www.aft.org

USING THESE MATERIALS

After preliminary conversations with members or potential members, work-site leaders can identify areas of interest or concern, and customize how best to meet the needs of a particular member or potential member. In some cases, this may mean handing out a specific *Teacher Tips* brochure or recommending the AFT's *Tools for Teachers* Web site. It may also mean recommending other programs as well, such as pairing a new teacher with a mentor, discussing available district- and union-sponsored professional development, or all of the above. Ultimately, the work-site leader needs to know *who* needs help with *what*?

We've provided some ideas for how to use the *Tools for Teachers* Web site and the *Teacher Tips* brochures with current and potential members. These are meant for illustrative purposes only, and to assist work-site leaders with developing their own plans for disseminating these materials, if appropriate.



For beginning-of-the-school-year activities.

Before the school year officially starts for students, use the *Teacher Tips* to begin building relationships with members or potential members. Disseminate tips at home visits, union-sponsored new teacher meetings, union reps' first contacts, new teacher orientations, and in letters welcoming members and potential members. Plan to distribute the brochures one at a time, with at least a few days in between each distribution to increase the number of contacts you have with new teachers.

Consider distributing some or all of the following tips during this time:

- Before the Year Begins
- Creating a Classroom Team
- Loan Forgiveness Programs
- Behavior Management Techniques

Use these opportunities to engage and involve members and potential members:

- Ask them for feedback about the usefulness of the information in the brochures and on the *Tools for Teachers* Web site (www.aft.org/tools4teachers).
- Have them identify others who need the information (in cases where the union doesn't have lists).
- Have them attend small meetings and share their reflections about the materials.
- Ask them to join or lead a new teacher or new member committee that the union is organizing.
- Establish a group where members and potential members can list their own strategies (either on the union Web site or in the union newsletter) for the beginning of the year.
- Encourage them to be a first best friend to another colleague in the school building and to share information with that colleague from the *Tools for Teachers* Web site and the *Teacher Tips* brochures.



To build relationships throughout the year.

Continue your relationships with members and potential members by talking to them about upcoming school events and issues, such as parent conferences, report card distribution, etc. Disseminate *Teacher Tips* during work-site leader follow-up visits, in letters reaching out to members and potential members throughout the school year, or at union-sponsored workshops for parents.

Consider distributing some or all of the following tips during this time:

- Assigning Effective Homework
- Building Parent-Teacher Partnerships
- Working with Cooperative Small Groups

Use these opportunities to engage and involve members and potential members:

- Have them set up trainings for parents.
- Have them serve on a union committee that

addresses homework, professional development, curriculum, etc.

- Encourage them to speak with local elected officials about the need for more union voice in the school improvement process.

Union-sponsored professional issue activities can help build solidarity by bringing together education professionals around issues that directly affect the conditions of their practice. Working with young people often is an isolating and solitary enterprise. The union, through a responsive and inclusive professional issues program, which could include effective use of the *Tools for Teachers* Web site and the *Teacher Tips* brochures, can not only meet the information needs of education professionals, but provide a structure for helping individual teachers unite around common issues and concerns to improve their individual practice.