Creating the Freedom for All to Thrive
Our Mission

The American Federation of Teachers is a union of professionals that champions fairness, democracy, economic opportunity, and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

Together—by caring, fighting, showing up, teaching and voting—we can accomplish what is impossible to do alone.
It feels like we’ve been to hell and back.” I heard that sentiment throughout the seemingly endless months of the COVID-19 pandemic. One grim milestone has passed another; as I write this, nearly 600,000 Americans have lost their lives to COVID-19. The pandemic magnified the health, economic and racial inequities that already existed in America. Some 8 million more people, including children, fell into poverty. Work changed for everyone, requiring deep wells of ingenuity, energy and, many, bravery. I heard from nurses, government workers and other frontline AFT members who lacked personal protective equipment on the job, prompting the AFT to source, purchase and deliver $3 million in PPE for our members. Thankfully, vaccines have been a game-changer and we are finally returning to a kind of normalcy; but we are forever changed.

Every step of the way, AFT members like you have been remarkable—healthcare workers, public employees, higher education faculty and staff, and teachers and school employees. Healthcare professionals have kept their patients as safe as humanly possible in a pandemic, too often while jeopardizing their own health. Teachers and school staff have kept students engaged and kept them from going hungry. College faculty and staff have given their all to continue high-level teaching and learning. Public employees have kept our communities going—from public health to public safety.

Your union has had your back—fighting for safe and healthy workplaces; offering member benefits, including a new mental health benefit; and calling for rescue funds that are now flowing to communities throughout the country.

It is clear how important public schools are to the well-being of our students, our families, our communities and our economy. Our kids need in-person learning, and our country will not be fully back until we are fully back in school. That’s why the AFT fought for our schools to be safe as we tried to get our students back in person, and why we will continue to insist on good ventilation, testing and mitigation measures recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to prevent the spread of disease. And it’s why the AFT launched our “Back to School for Everyone” campaign. In addition to engaging with members, we are also reaching out to families and communities about the value of children returning to school in person. Some of our locals are going door to door, visiting students’ homes to talk about the health and safety, academic and enrichment programs in place. Others are holding school open houses for parents, to show them health safeguards, answer questions and build trust. Creating safe conditions in schools during a public health crisis is not an obstacle to reopening classrooms; it is the pathway to going back, staying back and creating trust throughout the school community.

As we emerge from the pandemic, we must provide the help students need to recover academically, socially and emotionally. And we must seize the opportunity to reimagine public education to center on equity and excellence so all our public schools are places where parents want to send their children, teachers and staff want to work because they are supported and respected, and students have a well-rounded curriculum and necessary supports so every young person has the opportunity to thrive.

Through all these challenges, our union has stood together—1.7 million members strong—to uphold and defend safety, fairness and dignity in the workplace. Even in the midst of a global health crisis, our union has continued to grow, welcoming working people around the country who voted to join the AFT.

AFT members throughout the country are standing up against grievous attacks on truth and democracy. We have made our voices heard at the ballot box, and we have seen the power of winning elections. While the margins are tight, we now have allies in Congress who are working with the Biden-Harris administration to move legislation that actually helps working people. President Biden has been called the most pro-worker, pro-labor president since Franklin Roosevelt—and rightly so.

The Biden administration is proposing bold plans equal to the challenges and opportunities before us. The $1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act provides direct relief to working families. Its provisions will cut child poverty in America in half, extend aid to the unemployed, help families put food on the table and keep a roof over their heads, and help states and local communities maintain schools and protect the jobs of people who provide essential services. Biden’s American Jobs Plan will put millions of Americans to work in well-paying jobs and invest not only in traditional infrastructure, like roads and bridges, but also in safe drinking water and reliable broadband access. The American Families Plan will provide direct support to children and families, including child tax credits and expanding affordable, high-quality child care; it will invest in early childhood programs, and make college more affordable. And the Protecting the Right to Organize Act will make it easier for workers to organize, creating opportunities to rebalance economic and power inequities that have disadvantaged working people. And the budget, if enacted, will double Title I funds and start making these investments permanent. Is there more to be done? Of course, like addressing burdensome student debt and health care, but the Biden agenda is transformative for working families. It will help create the freedom for every American to thrive.

I am deeply grateful for the work you do every day to make a difference in our communities and in the lives of the people you educate, heal, serve and support.

In unity,

Randi Weingarten
AFT President
The Freedom for All to Thrive

America is a growing multiracial and multiethnic society, and all of us deserve the freedom to thrive, a freedom that is fueled by opportunity, justice and a voice in our democracy. Unions are an essential tool for achieving that freedom. Through the power of collective action, workers can move from aspiring to attaining dignity and opportunity for themselves and their communities. That’s the essence of bargaining for the common good—and the essence of the AFT.

In 2021, the freedom to thrive requires not only addressing the immediate crises affecting us—COVID-19 and its economic fallout, racial injustice, the climate crisis and threats to our democracy—but creating the just and equitable conditions necessary to ensure economic and educational opportunity for all.

That starts with reopening our schools for in-person learning five days a week so young people can recover emotionally, socially and academically. It will also help America get back to work and build back the economy. But we must do more than return to life as we knew it pre-COVID-19. We must help our students recover and help our frontline workers—especially in healthcare and public health—heal from the stress and trauma they have endured while striving to keep their patients and communities safe. And it calls on each of us, to fight for counselors and nurses in all schools, safe staffing levels in all hospitals and clinics, reduction of student debt, worthy wages for all higher education professionals, robust investments in local and state governments, and so much more.

This year, back to school in person is for everyone. Back to work, back to high fives and back to handshakes. But not back to business as usual. This is our once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reimagine our work and to spark an American renaissance centered on public schools and working families.

Public education is a building block of a strong democracy and a thriving society. Public school systems are the foundations of their communities. For some, it took a pandemic to realize what’s happening in our public schools has a direct impact on:

- Mental health, giving young people access to safe spaces and caring adults, as well as professionals like school psychologists.
- Social and emotional development, building children’s skills and helping them learn to interact with people of different beliefs and backgrounds.
- Scientific and critical thinking, developing young people’s abilities to discern fact from fiction, which could not be more important as we tackle vaccine hesitancy and global warming.
- The economy, enabling today’s parents to go to work and preparing tomorrow’s workforce.

Great public schools are essential for all of us. And as confidence in how to safely have in-person learning grows, our attention can turn more and more to the society we aspire to be.

Our society, and especially our schools and colleges, should be welcoming for all. This last year compelled us to confront the impact of racism and hate—from George Floyd’s murder as a police officer’s knee pressed into his neck, to the surge in anti-Asian hate spurred by the Trump administration, to the antisemitism flaring up in the spring of 2021. But in response, instead of asking how the nation’s educators could help reduce hatred, conservative lawmakers in several states have been propounding narratives about race and to be responsive to their students’ questions about our national reckoning with racism. And they must be free to affirm students’ identities, ensuring students feel safe, secure and valued.

Doing all this requires trust, collaboration and resources.

We worked so hard to help pass the critical American Rescue Plan, which, in addition to direct payments to individuals, provided billions in state and local aid to protect vital services, saving the jobs of thousands of public employees, nurses, teachers, school staff and higher education professionals. Altogether, the American Rescue Plan will cut child poverty in half. But we’re not stopping there.

President Biden’s American Jobs Plan and American Families Plan detail forward-looking investments in our schools, our hospitals, our colleges and our public institutions. And Biden’s proposed 2022 budget, which includes the Jobs and Families plans, also makes a major down payment on his campaign promise to triple funding for schools serving the neediest students. Adding $20 billion on top of the current $16.5 billion for Title I, Biden’s budget would enable competitive teacher pay, increased access to rigorous coursework, and preschool for children from underserved families. We’ll continue to be strong advocates for these crucial investments.

We’re also working directly with the administration on creating safety standards for healthcare workers, to make sure hospitals do what they need to do to keep everyone safe during this pandemic and to address the long-standing problem of workplace violence. And we’re fighting hard for the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, so more of us have access to unions. And that’s just the beginning.

The economy, enabling today’s parents to go to work and preparing tomorrow’s workforce.

Those lawmakers know that you cannot change practices that have a racist impact if you are not well-grounded in what they are, what types of changes are needed, and how to make those changes. This is racial literacy, and we need more of it to combat racism and workplace violence. And we’re fighting hard for the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, so more of us have access to unions. And that’s just the beginning.

The economy, enabling today’s parents to go to work and preparing tomorrow’s workforce.
SEEDING A RENAISSANCE IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

Great public schools not only enable our students and families to thrive but also nourish our economy, democracy and civil society. That’s why we’re determined to seed a renaissance in American public education. As AFT President Randi Weingarten announced in May, we’re:

• Launching a $5 million “Back to School for Everyone” national campaign to communicate the importance of in-school learning and build families’ trust and confidence in children fully returning to school.
• Highlighting recovery programs that provide academic support, help students get back into routines and offer lots of ways for kids to have fun.
• Designating “office hours” and clinics for AFT affiliates and others to call in, discuss ideas and get technical support.
• Guiding the formation of school-based committees of staff, parents and, where appropriate, students to plan for and respond to safety issues and to conduct safety “walk-throughs” in school buildings.
• Promoting community schools to build trust and remove obstacles to getting kids and families the support and services they need.
• Calling for the alignment of health and pedagogical best practices by reducing class sizes and eliminating simultaneous in-person and remote instruction.
• Increasing the emphasis on civics, science and project-based learning, to nurture critical thinking and bring learning to life.
• Advocating for funds from the American Rescue Plan to fill shortages of school teachers, counselors, psychologists and nurses.
• Encouraging Education Secretary Miguel Cardona to form a task force to rethink how we assess student learning and how to measure what really counts.
• Engaging stakeholders—families, educators and community partners—to ensure funds in the American Rescue Plan and other federal funds for schools are spent equitably and effectively.

An Economy for All

The AFT’s “freedom to thrive” agenda requires bold action to promote an economy that works for all, including healthcare as a right, middle-class wages and retirement security, the ability to form and join a union, and great public schools and affordable, world-class higher education.

This moment offers us the chance to reimagine how we invest the country’s economic resources and rebuild our nation’s infrastructure to improve people’s lives and grow the economy—to make the American people healthier, better educated and more secure. No one should work a full-time job yet struggle to feed their family and live one paycheck from catastrophe. Everyone should have access to child care, unemployment insurance (including for adjunct, gig or contingent workers), paid sick and family leave benefits, and equal pay for equal work. And no one should go without healthcare, affordable prescription drugs and needed therapies, and hospitals and clinics in their communities.

Strong unions—fighting side by side—will help build that safety net for all. And those strong unions will help serve as a vehicle to build real economic opportunity, both for our members and for the communities we serve.

For the AFT, this starts with fully funding the nation’s public schools and strengthening their role as the center of communities. That’s why community schools are high on our list of priorities. Hubs of well-being and support for children, families and communities, community schools partner with nonprofits, local government and businesses to help meet a host of needs. They solve a problem educators have long encountered: a student who is hungry, in distress or cannot see the board will struggle to learn. By integrating academics, enrichment, nutrition, and medical and mental health services, community schools truly meet the needs of the whole child. And by anchoring the school in the daily life of the community and connecting families with services, community schools build trust and remove obstacles to getting kids and families the support they need.
To date, our [Connected Community Schools] marketplace has distributed more than 300,000 pounds of food to thousands of students, families and community members.... We implemented a delivery service for people unable to get to the pantry due to health conditions, lack of transportation or other circumstance beyond their control.

Melissa Roys, Executive Director, Rome (N.Y.) Alliance for Education

Building opportunity for all also includes creating a “New Deal for Higher Education.” This new deal means ending the reliance on student debt to pay for college and correcting the over-reliance on contingent faculty, who now make up 75 percent of higher education’s teaching workforce. It means creating a sustainable, well-compensated instructional workforce, with the job security that enables excellent teaching, and ultimately making public higher education as close to free as possible for students and families. Our fight for higher education to be truly accessible means tackling the skyrocketing student debt that has become a major drag on the economy—and on far too many people’s dreams. It inhibits consumer spending and denies millions of Americans the chance to become homeowners and build financial stability, particularly among Black, Hispanic and Latinx borrowers. Even as the AFT advocates for government-led debt relief, we also continue to work with Summer (an online resource that helps borrowers find the best repayment options) and to expand student debt clinics that have saved AFT members millions of dollars.

And, as the pandemic has tragically proven, opportunity for all depends on healthcare for all. Healthcare is a human right. From high costs and lack of access to inadequate staffing and substandard patient care outcomes, it’s clear that we must advance a system centered on the health and well-being of all people, including patients, providers and other health professionals. As we recover from the pandemic, we have an opportunity to transition to a model of healthcare driven by high-value care, universal access, sustainable costs, accountability for outcomes and choice. We also have an opportunity to reimagine rural healthcare and reopen rural hospitals. Hospitals are important centers of rural communities, often being the largest employer and the only source of care for communities.

“In the last decade or more, there’s been a rise of for-profit hospitals, and of a profit-driven mentality among many nonprofit hospitals; their mission has turned to caring more about money than patients. This has put a strain on the staff, leading to moral injury.... Take care of yourself and work with the union. There is power in numbers to make the changes you want to see.”

—Barbara Rosen, Vice President, Health Professionals and Allied Employees (N.J.)
A Democracy for All

Democracy is a core value of who we are as unions and activists. Because it is our voice, AFT members vote at a higher rate than the general electorate, and we also volunteer to help register voters, provide voter education, get out the vote and protect elections as poll workers. We are fighting efforts to undermine American democracy such as the presence of unlimited “dark money” in the U.S. political process, extreme gerrymandering, voter suppression and union suppression.

“I want my two daughters to grow up knowing that I am participating in the electoral process of this country to ensure that they have a more just America tomorrow.”

—Cesia Osorio, Third-Grade Teacher, Northeast Houston AFT

But we can’t just fight back: we have to fight forward. To build a vibrant democracy, we must champion civil rights and be actively anti-racist in all aspects of our lives. This means protecting unfettered access to voting and creating safe, welcoming and healthy environments and communities for all—regardless of who you are, who you love, your gender identity, your immigration status, how you worship or where you live.

In 2020, the AFT’s members helped bring caring and competence to the White House. Still, to overcome the worst crisis of American democracy since the Civil War—the war on truth, Trump’s big lie about the presidential election, the insurrection on Jan. 6 and an alarming surge in voter suppression efforts—we must renew our commitment to civics education and building active and engaged citizens.

“We can move forward from the last four years of divisiveness that has spread through this country like wildfire. It is up to us to change the hundreds of years of systemic racism that has marginalized so many communities.”

—Evelyn DeJesus, AFT Executive Vice President

Civic participation has declined over the last half-century, and that decline has not been evenly distributed. Research points to civic “deserts,” where the drop is much steeper and people have many fewer opportunities for civic participation. Not surprisingly, these civic deserts are in the same communities—largely poor and working class, immigrant and people of color—that experience the lack of services and opportunities.

Civic education can help change this.

“It was thrilling to see my students, who were mostly Black and brown immigrants and poor and working-class families, flex their civic muscles…. Students shouldn’t have to wait for an AP government class to debate the Bill of Rights and the Constitution. That should begin in elementary school and grow deeper in middle school and high school.”

—Randi Weingarten, AFT President

Young people learn how to be citizens in a democracy by actually engaging in the work of citizenship—examining an issue that is important in their own lives, studying what different parts of government and civil society can do to address it, and advocating for policies to make change. This isn’t about politics; this is about patriotism.

And with our renewed civic activism, we can help our democracy and our economy work better for all by tackling the climate crisis. In both our public policies and our transition to green energy, we must ensure that communities are respected, no worker is left behind, fundamental protections are guaranteed for workers and communities affected by health and environmental damage caused by the fossil fuel industry, and full rights to unionization and collective bargaining are afforded to all jobs created in the new sustainable energy economy. As labor markets shift and industries respond to the climate emergency, the labor movement is partnering with government on worker training programs and green infrastructure planning. This is democracy working for workers.

Caring for All

Our country is reeling from multiple crises—the pandemic, economic inequality, racial injustice, the climate crisis and threats to our democracy. This turbulence touches all of us.

Young people have been deeply affected by these crises. Schools must be supported and well-reourced—with school nurses, psychologists and counselors, as well as instructional staff to allow for smaller class sizes and individualized attention for students—to address students’ trauma and meet their social and emotional needs, to ensure their developmental and academic recovery.

After so many schools had to close for in-person teaching and learning, there has been a new appreciation for public school teachers and staff—who have worked past the point of exhaustion—and how urgent it is for schools to be open in person five days a week. We know that’s how kids learn best and that prolonged isolation is harmful. School is where children learn. It’s where they work together and play together. It’s where they form relationships and learn resilience. It’s where many children, who otherwise might go hungry, eat breakfast and lunch. Parents rely on schools, not only to educate their kids, but so they can work.

But we don’t just need school buildings to be open. The United States must do what we have never done in our wonderfully diverse society: fully enable all students to reach their heights; meet their emotional, social and academic needs with culturally responsive practices; believe in their potential, no matter their current challenges; and prepare them for college, career, civic participation and life—with the necessary resources, pedagogy, programs and personnel in every public school in every community. Every public school should be a place where parents want to send their children, educators and staff want to work and students thrive.

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“Every student deserves the freedom to learn, the healthy and safe schools and communities that practice trauma-informed care. This requires not only addressing COVID-19 and the racial inequities it has exposed, but also creating just and equitable conditions across all systems impacting our students and educators.”

—Fareeha Wahed, Vice President, Baltimore Teachers Union
frontline roles or to have lost their job during the pandemic. Black and brown Americans too often are unsafe from the very people who are supposed to keep them safe. And now anti-Asian hate incidents have surged after ugly vestiges of anti-Asian racism were stoked by the last administration. All of this is traumatizing.

“As I heard the verdict in George Floyd Square with a delegation of AFT staff and members, I was overcome with emotion.... As a union, we will continue to show up for this community, for our members across the country and for our students—not just for single convictions of police brutality but for an entire reckoning of racial justice and equity in this country, happening in our classrooms, our communities and beyond.”

—Fedrick C. Ingram, AFT Secretary-Treasurer

Educators, healthcare professionals and public employees play a key role in building culturally affirming and actively anti-racist communities for our own families, our neighbors and everyone we serve. Let’s seize this moment of opportunity to reimage and transform our thinking, practices and systems.

We are a nation made stronger by our diversity, and we are all better off when we create conditions for everyone to thrive. Deeply entrenched structural inequities have both hurt our fellow Americans and limited what we can achieve as a nation. The AFT is committed to ending systemic racism in America, particularly in the criminal justice system, in our schools, in the healthcare system, in our communities and at our borders. We must be a nation that ensures fair and equitable treatment of all people of color as well as members of other systemically marginalized communities.

With President Joe Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris and many in Congress, we now have partners as we work to achieve this agenda. We will do our part through our work in education, healthcare, public service and the labor movement.

Organized labor has the infrastructure needed to foster worker and citizen empowerment. We are literally “organized,” and we know how to engage and mobilize communities for their own advancement. Unions press the political system to deliver public goods—such as a higher minimum wage and more education funding—that benefit society more broadly. And that is exactly what the AFT is doing in our campaign for the freedom to thrive.

AFT members, through their work, are the first respondents to society’s problems. This is why the AFT fights for healthcare as a right, to cancel student debt, to protect retirement security, to expand voting rights and to ensure every public school is well resourced and safe, so all children are empowered to achieve their dreams. These are all things that contribute to a civilized society and that everyone, whether rich or poor, deserves.

This is your union—and our fight. The AFT is fighting for the freedom to thrive for our members, our families and our diverse communities. Join us! Together, we can accomplish what is impossible to do alone.

ORGANIZING FOR THE COMMON GOOD
Building Power during a Global Health Crisis

The many challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic heightened the need for collective action and union organizing for workers across the country. And through it all, our union continued to organize and grow, building power for more workers. We added some 27 new bargaining units with almost 2,000 workers in all of our constituencies. These workers chose to join with the AFT because they understand that by working together, we amplify our voice and create the freedom to thrive.

Alliance Charter Schools Teachers (California)
Educators at three Alliance College-Ready Public Schools were certified by the Public Employment Relations Board, with two additional schools pending certification. The educators’ goal is to organize all 25 schools and to bargain for basic rights, including due process, grievance and arbitration procedures, improved compensation, class-size caps and ongoing voice in the workplace.

Calle Ocho Campus/ Mundo Verde Charter Staff (Washington, D.C.)
Mundo Verde, a bilingual school with a staff union affiliated with the District of Columbia Alliance of Charter Teachers and Staff, added a new campus nicknamed “Calle Ocho” that became the first DC charter school to organize its own union in the midst of the pandemic.

District 73.5 (Skokie) PSRPs (Illinois)
30 support staff organized with the North Suburban Teachers Union, Local 1274, which represents the teachers in the district.

Epichar School Teachers and Support Staff (Illinois)
About 45 teachers and school staff organized to advocate for more student supports and to have their voices heard to ensure every worker would have a seat at the table.

Fusion Academy Brooklyn (New York)
24 employees of a private school successfully organized for representation by the United Federation of Teachers.

Hastings Paraprofessionals (Minnesota)
Education Minnesota, the AFT’s state affiliate, organized an independent unit of 80 paraprofessionals into the Hastings Educational Support Professionals. This victory is part of a statewide effort to organize support staff so that we have unified membership in school districts.

Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy
Math and science educators with the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy joined the Illinois Federation of Teachers. A respected public school, IMSA serves more than 600 students in grades 10-12 from 44 Illinois counties. Later, a group of resident counselors at IMSA also joined as part of an overall strategy to organize all units at the school, one by one.

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As a union of educators at the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy, we will help ensure we attract and retain the best and brightest professionals to design and implement the challenging educational programs we offer to talented mathematics and science students.

Brooke Schmidt, Science Teacher

“I am excited to win a union at UArts to give faculty a meaningful voice in university governance and a central role in defining the culture of the institution.”

Laura Frazure, Assistant Professor
The pandemic proved that unions matter. We cared, fought, showed up, taught and voted. Now we’re recovering and reimagining, embarking on a renaissance together.

FEB. 4, 2020

MARCH 2020

MARCH 27, 2020

APRIL 2020

APRIL 6, 2020

APRIL 23, 2020

APRIL 29, 2020

MAY 2020

JUNE 10, 2020

JUNE 22, 2020

JULY 2020

MARCH 14, 2020

The AFT launches a virtual town hall series to provide reliable information throughout the pandemic. By May 21, 2021, we had offered 38 town halls, engaging nearly 1 million participants across our social media platforms. Guests included Dr. Anthony Fauci, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, Dr. Irwin Redlener and others fighting for science, safety and common sense.

APRIL 29, 2020

The AFT launches a petition demanding funding for personal protective equipment for healthcare and frontline workers, gathering over 160,000 signatures.

MARCH 2020

The AFT holds its first press conference calling for national coronavirus safety guidelines.

Nurses and community members picket to protest the lack of progress in bargaining a new contract with Hackensack Meridian Health in New Jersey. They call for better pandemic preparedness, restrictions on nurses being assigned outside their skill levels, limits on non-nursing duties that may put patients at higher risk of exposure, and fair wages.

The AFT releases its second guide on how to safely reopen school buildings and continues calling on the Trump administration and Congress to provide necessary funding for critical mitigation strategies.

The AFT invests $3 million to purchase 500,000 N95 masks, 50,000 face shields and 1 million surgical masks for frontline workers.

The AFT releases a study, “Reopening Schools during a Time of Triple Crisis: Financial Implications,” spelling out the level of investment required to reopen schools in the fall.

The AFT releases its first road map to safely reopen schools, summarizing the best available science and taking into account schools’ and communities’ differing circumstances.

West Warwick Teachers’ Alliance members and their students, through their project-based learning career and technical education program, make hundreds of face shields for healthcare and frontline workers, one of many efforts among union members to provide PPE to those who need them most.

School nurses from the Visiting Nurse Association of Southeastern Connecticut/AFT Connecticut, like other school nurses across the country, volunteer at coronavirus testing sites.

The New York State United Teachers establishes a disaster relief fund to purchase PPE for healthcare professionals in New York.

The AFT, working with First Book, donates 10,000 books to more than 2,100 children living in New York City family shelters and supportive housing.

The $2 trillion CARES Act becomes law after union-driven campaigning for this crucial COVID-19 relief bill.

The AFT food service workers in locals across the country create distribution centers and deliver food to families missing school lunches and experiencing economic distress (continues throughout pandemic).

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Members of the Public Employees Federation in New York help develop a new COVID-19 test, and others begin administering COVID-19 tests door to door.

AFT Connecticut Photo by Ann Ryan

AFT Connecticut

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15 Creating the Freedom for All to Thrive

AFT | 2021

AFT | 2021

Creating the Freedom for All to Thrive
The AFT releases a nationwide survey showing that 76 percent of educators, paraprofessionals and higher education faculty and staff would be comfortable returning to school with key safety precautions in place.

Union members nationwide protest the Senate’s decision to go on vacation without passing the HEROES Act, a COVID-19 relief package that would help the thousands of communities struggling to fund basic essential services like public schools, colleges and hospitals. Additional actions, including car caravans and calls to Senate Republicans, are taken throughout the summer and fall.

Florida educators announce they’ve filed a lawsuit against state officials to stop reckless, unsafe reopening of public schools.

An AFT resolution, “Safely Reopening Schools,” supports “safety strikes” as a last resort to ensure a safe return to schools.

The Chicago Teachers Union holds a rally to protest returning to school before safety measures are in place. In many cities, decades of austerity make reopening school buildings extremely difficult because of dilapidated HVAC systems, inoperable windows and sinks, overcrowding and other hazards.

The AFT and NAACP release a poll showing that 68 percent of parents and 77 percent of teachers prioritize student and school staff health and safety in weighing when and how schools should reopen.

The AFT publishes updated reopening guidance, including case studies on how AFT affiliates have laid the groundwork for reopening schools safely.

The AFT releases its blueprint to safely reopen schools.

The AFT releases a nationwide survey showing that 76 percent of educators, paraprofessionals and higher education faculty and staff would be comfortable returning to school with key safety precautions in place.

The AFT affiliates have laid out a plan to safely reopen schools, focusing efforts on these essential pillars, we can overcome people’s fears, build trust and safely reopen schools for our children.

Reopening plans in Boston, Chicago, New York City, San Francisco and elsewhere offer proof that by following the AFT’s blueprint, schools can safely reopen.

The road map to safely reopen schools for in-person learning is forged by ensuring transparency and accountability, with an advisory council that includes school administrators, teachers, parents and students.

The AFT has proposed a package that would help the thousands of educators, paraprofessionals and higher education faculty and staff who are working hard—since April 2020, when we issued our first road map to safely reopen our schools—to get them back in classrooms.

In-person schooling has always been foundational. It’s what makes great public schools central to every community, including educators and their unions, and they must be based on scientific standards that are implemented, necessary accommodations, vaccinations and more.

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19 Creating the Freedom for All to Thrive

19: A Vision for Thriving

Learning Beyond COVID-
academic recovery in

The AFT and the National
Education Association
outline steps needed for
social, emotional and
academic recovery in
Learning Beyond COVID-
19: A Vision for Thriving

in Public Education.

The $1.9 trillion American
Rescue Plan, which will
-cut child poverty in half
-with relief funds for
-individuals, schools and
-public services, goes
-into effect after the AFT
campaigned hard for its

After becoming fully
vaccinated, AFT President
Randi Weingarten visits
with AFT healthcare
workers in Alaska, Oregon
and Washington to thank
them for their selfless
dedication throughout the
pandemic and to hear their
priorities, such as safe
staffing levels.

The Biden administration's first
100 days are a triumph; key
accomplishments include shattering the
200 million vaccine goal, getting the majority
of schools reopened for safe in-person
learning, securing the landmark American
Rescue Plan and laying the groundwork for
comprehensive, sustainable efforts to
rebuild our economy, make our schools and
communities safe, and meet the needs of people
who go to work and care

for families.

The Montana legislative
session ends, showing
the power of union
mobilization. Several anti-
union bills being pushed
by bad actors from out of
state are defeated through
months of calling, emailing
and meeting with legislators
to share their stories of
how unionization
supports workers and
communities.

AFT President Randi
Weingarten gives a
major speech that
answers the question,
"How can we help
students not only recover,
but thrive?" To watch the
speech and learn more
about Weingarten’s vision
to seed a renaissance in
public education, visit
aft.org/renaissance

Stay in Touch
You do important work and have great ideas. We
want to hear from you! Here’s how to get started:

Be informed and active
Need tools to help you do your job better? Want to
keep up with the latest and greatest from the AFT?
Subscribe to our e-newsletters at aft.org/ene.
Then, join hundreds of thousands of member
activists just like you. Be part of the AFT e-activist
network and receive alerts on current issues
and ways you can use your voice for justice. Visit
aft.org/action.

Get the full picture at AFT.org
Find out information on the issues that matter to
you. Access reports and research to inform your
work. Gain access to workplace tips and profes-
sional development resources. Visit aft.org.

Share your story with AFT Voices
Your voice is important. The AFT shares stories
and perspectives in blog format from members like
you who care, fight and show up for the students,
patients, colleagues and communities they serve.
Read their stories at aftvoices.org and prepare to
be amazed.

Dig deeper with the AFT’s journals
American Educator, available at aft.org/ae, is a
quarterly journal for educators and policymakers
from early childhood through higher education.
AFT Health Care, available at aft.org/hc, is a
biannual journal with articles of interest to pro-
essionals in healthcare, public health and health

policy.

Stay connected!
Follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to
hear and be heard by the AFT community.

Facebook.com/AFTunion
YouTube.com/AFThq
Instagram.com/AFTunion
Twitter.com/AFTunion

Chat with Randi Weingarten on Twitter:
@rweingarten

President Randi Weingarten
@rweingarten
Secretary-Treasurer Fedrick C. Ingram
@fedigram
Executive Vice President Evelyn DeJesus
@AFT EVP DeJesus

Thanks to widespread
union mobilization
throughout Florida, bills
proposed by Republican
state legislators that
would have limited
freedom to join a union
and maintain union
membership are defeated.
Union activism also stops
a bill that would have
taken away retirement
security for educators
entering the profession.

MARCH 9, 2021

MARCH 11, 2021

APRIL 2021

APRIL 28, 2021

MAY 6, 2021

MAY 13, 2021

APRIL 9, 2021

APRIL 30, 2021

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Membership Has Serious Benefits
Visit aft.org/benefits to explore how you can save today.

EDUCATION
Summer: Simplifying Student Debt
Summer is a trusted online platform that can help you simplify and navigate your student loan situation. Members have free access to this company, which specializes in enrolling borrowers in income-driven repayment plans and keeping them on track for Public Service Loan Forgiveness and other federal, state and private loan assistance programs. Summer’s online tool is supplemented by a trusted team of student loan advisers who ensure members are supported step by step through the repayment process.

Free College
Members and family members can earn an online associate degree from a public, accredited nonprofit community college with no out-of-pocket costs for tuition, fees or e-texts.

Bachelor’s Completion
AFT members and their families can complete a bachelor’s degree online, for free. Classes are offered through a public, accredited university.

AFT Robert G. Porter Scholars Program
Members and their dependents are eligible to apply for union-sponsored scholarships toward postsecondary education.

Union Plus Scholarship Program
This program has awarded more than $4.5 million to members and their families who want to begin or continue their postsecondary education.

Student Debt Clinics
Use this resource to learn about the landscape of free and underused federal programs that help many student loan borrowers lower their monthly payments.

Share My Lesson
Educators can exchange lesson plans, ideas and best practices; join free professional development webinars; and access thousands of standards-aligned lesson plans and activities for early childhood through grade 12.

FINANCE AND LEGAL
Identity Theft Protection
Identity theft can happen to anyone, anywhere, at any time. The AFT provides all active and retired members with free identity protection services, including credit restoration and recovery support. You can also upgrade, at a competitive rate, to a 24/7 credit and identity monitoring service.

Personal Loans
Credit-qualified members can consolidate their high-interest credit cards and debts with a personal loan that has no hidden fees and one monthly payment.

Credit and Budget Counseling
Certified nonprofit credit counselors are available 24 hours a day to help AFT members with confidential financial guidance and credit counseling services.

Credit Cards
The AFT + credit card program has three card options that AFT members can apply for. All have no annual fee and include special safety net features in the event of a layoff, strike or natural disaster.

Prepaid Debit Card
The Union Plus prepaid debit card can help AFT members realize their financial goals and offers exclusive benefits.

Legal Services*
Members choose from two levels of legal savings: a prepaid legal plan with full coverage on a wide range of services or free access to a discount legal plan that includes a half-hour consultation.

Money Transfer
Get a 10 percent discount on the transfer fees when sending money online.

STAYING HEALTHY
Dental Services and Discounts
Save 20 to 50 percent on everything from routine visits to major dental procedures with one of the largest national dental networks. Save on routine care, including exams, cleanings and fillings, as well as major work, including root canals, crowns and dentures.

Vision Services and Discounts
Save on eye care with your choice of two levels of insurance plans that provide vision coverage for lower out-of-pocket costs, plus a free discount vision plan.

Discounted Hearing Services
Save over 40 percent on premium hearing aids at providers near you. Plus free hearing exams, free follow-up care and free batteries.

Prescription Discount Card
Download a free discount RX card and save up to 65 percent on the retail price for brand name and generic drugs.

DISCOUNTS AND SHOPPING
LifeStation*
Members receive discounts on emergency monitoring services, whether for yourself or to care for a loved one.

AT&T Wireless
Save 15 percent on the monthly service charge on qualified AT&T wireless plans and save up to $10 per line on Unlimited Elite plans.

Dansko Footwear
Dansko, a brand known for quality, comfort and style, offers AFT members a 25 percent discount through a special members-only link.

DinnerTime
Members can save money and make healthy, customized meal planning easy. Members get a free month trial and 40 percent discount.

Dell Computers
AFT members receive 10 percent off computers and monitors through a special members-only link.

Everyday Discounts
Union members receive discounts on movie, theme park and theater tickets, as well as online restaurant savings, across the country.

Magazine Subscriptions
AFT members receive special discounts on a huge selection of popular magazines. Renew the magazines you enjoy today, or treat a family member to a gift subscription you know they will love!

Office Depot/Office Max
Members get special savings on classroom and home office supplies.

Powell’s Bookstore
Powell’s Bookstore in Portland, Ore., is the largest independent, unionized bookstore in the country (ILWU Local 5).

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Office Depot/Office Max
Members get special savings on classroom and home office supplies.

Powell’s Bookstore
Powell’s Bookstore in Portland, Ore., is the largest independent, unionized bookstore in the country (ILWU Local 5).
Teleflora Flowers and Gift Baskets
Save up to 30 percent on flowers, gift baskets and plants through Teleflora and have them delivered anywhere in the world by local florists—100 percent satisfaction guaranteed.

INSURANCE
Accidental Death and Dismemberment Insurance
All active, working AFT members have a $5,000 Accidental Death and Dismemberment policy.

No-Cost Term Life Insurance for New Members
New AFT members can obtain $5,000 of term life insurance coverage for one year with no premium payment.

Auto and Home Insurance
As a member, you will have access to special group discounts on auto and home insurance.

Renters Insurance
Savings for renters from MetLife Auto & Home, and save even more when you bundle auto and renters policies together.

Term Life
Members have access to group rates on voluntary term life insurance to provide financial protection for your loved ones in the event of a premature death.

Senior Term Life
Help pay final expenses and ensure peace of mind.

Disability Income
As an AFT member, you can purchase group voluntary insurance protection to provide income if you are unable to work due to an accident or extended illness.

Free Trauma Counseling
AFT members have access to specialized trauma counseling—free of charge—in the one-year aftermath of a covered traumatic incident. Covered traumas can occur in a member’s personal or professional life.

Voluntary Trauma Coverage
This member-paid benefit provides expanded insurance coverage and is available for members to purchase for themselves or their family at a discounted rate.

Pet Health Insurance
Get up to a 10 percent discount off premiums from a plan that lets your pet receive care from any licensed veterinarian, emergency vet or specialist.

TRAVEL
Hotels
Special member savings at both the Hilton and Wyndham hotel chains.

Car Rental
Save up to 25 percent with car rental discounts for AFT members.

Southwest Airlines
AFT members are eligible for discounted travel on Southwest Airlines.

Vacation Tours
Save on travel destinations around the world when you experience guided travel with Collette Vacations using your member discount.

Professional Moving Discounts
Members get discounts on interstate moving, packing and in-transit storage.

Budget Truck Rentals
Get 20 percent off do-it-yourself moves when you reserve in advance.

Hertz Vans and Truck Rentals
Get up to 25 percent off do-it-yourself moves.

Auto Buying
Receive pre-negotiated, upfront best-market pricing on new and used cars and trucks without having to negotiate with the dealer. Union Plus provides a $100 rebate for the purchase of a new union-assembled vehicle.

*New York State United Teachers members have similar programs through NYSUT Member Benefits Trust. To obtain more information about these plans, members can call 800-626-8101.

Southwest’s “Wanna Get Away” fares are discounted only on select routes.

Theme Parks
We’ve got savings for the kids and the kid in all of us at theme parks across the country.

MORTGAGES AND HOME SERVICES
Amalgamated Bank Mortgage
Save with competitive interest rates, exclusive discounts, refinancing solutions and a program to help first-time buyers.

Union Plus Mortgage Company
Find competitive rates on a wide range of mortgage options, plus special benefits, including hardship assistance for union members. This program is available to active and retired union members and their parents and children.

Real Estate Program
By working with pre-screened real estate agents, members can earn $500 for every $100,000 in home value after closing.

Save My Home Hotline
Members facing foreclosure or mortgage issues can make a free call to a hotline staffed by HUD-trained counselors.

Pet Health Insurance
Get up to a 10 percent discount off premiums from a plan that lets your pet receive care from any licensed veterinarian, emergency vet or specialist.

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