



# PSRP Reporter

THE NATIONAL PUBLICATION OF AFT PARAPROFESSIONALS AND SCHOOL-RELATED PERSONNEL

When elections are about working families and real-world issues, unionists come out to vote

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Paraprofessionals Yolanda Johnson, left, and Lillie Pettis keep their community informed and ready to vote.

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## 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.

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Cover photo: LORI KING

# White House listens to working families

## Members share their stories at summit focused on strengthening support for struggling workers

CLOSE TO 1,500 policymakers, labor leaders, government officials, family advocates and members of working families joined President Obama, first lady Michelle Obama, Vice President Joe Biden and Jill Biden at a White House Summit on Working Families this summer to highlight the struggles so many Americans face balancing home and work life, trying to survive in a system that does not do enough to support their efforts. The gathering focused on the current condition of working families and the sorts of policies—like better child care, equitable pay for women, maternity and paternity leave, and flexible work hours—that could improve their lives, issues already familiar to anyone who works in the labor movement.

The summit brought together a wide assortment of luminaries, from activist Gloria Steinem to BET CEO Debra Lee and AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Liz Shuler, to help make workplace improvement a priority so that earning a livable income and taking care of family do not have to be mutually exclusive. “It’s a false choice that we either grow the economy or we help our families,” said Secretary of Labor Tom Perez. “We can do both.”

Among the summit participants were six AFT members, representing so many stories of struggle. For example, Priscilla Smith, a teacher’s aide in Western New York, works three jobs in order to put her daughter through college. And Gloria Wright, a 20-year Detroit preschool paraprofessional/assistant teacher, is passionate about the work she does but struggles to get by on a paycheck that has not increased in more than five years.

Although she has come far since her own struggle to juggle work and family, Michelle Obama distinctly remembers those times, from the questionable sick days (“We all send ‘em off a little sniffling,” she said) to the day she brought her 4-month-old along to a job interview because the babysitter had quit. “That work-family balance is fragile,” she said, calling on other leaders in the room to change that. “We have to use our voices, our power and our leverage. More and more people are realizing this is an issue for everybody.”

“When women succeed, America succeeds,” said Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), ticking off the issues that command attention: equal pay for equal work, raising the minimum wage, paid sick leave, and high-quality

child care and early childhood learning.

Add to that, job security: AFT member Anna Neighbor, a single mother and adjunct art professor, works at several colleges to pay her bills, and she frequently doesn’t know until the last minute whether they’ll hire her for the new semester. Carmella Salinas, a New Mexico early childhood educator, is on food stamps, qualifies for Medicaid, and has had her electricity, gas and water disconnected for a week for nonpayment. She loves her job, she said, but “passion doesn’t pay the bills.”

These stories, illustrating the realities of working families, were told during a pre-conference gathering where labor leaders underscored the importance of collective bargaining in improving conditions for all workers. As Pelosi pointed out, “Nobody has done more for women’s equality” than unions.

“The bottom line is 21st-century families deserve 21st-century workplaces,” said President Obama. “Our economy demands them because it’s going to help us compete. And that means paid family leave, especially paid parental leave. ... There’s only one developing country in the world that does not offer paid maternity leave—and that is us.” He also called for improved job training, improved early childhood education and passage of the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act, among other things.

“Right now, too many folks are on the sidelines,” he said. “It is our job to make sure we are not leaving any of our nation’s talent behind. That’s what this summit is all about.”

Carmella Salinas, an early childhood educator, loves her job but struggles to get by on low wages.







## Connecting with our communities

RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT President

WHEN MARIE WOLFE, a special education classroom assistant, signed up for the AFT's public speaking training this past summer, she couldn't stand up in front of her fellow members of the Oregon School Employees Association without feeling sick to her stomach.

One month after completing the training, unspeakable tragedy struck a neighboring school district when a student opened fire in Reynolds High School, killing one student and injuring a teacher before turning the gun on himself. In the aftermath, Marie confidently stepped forward to offer herself as a volunteer to help students reunite with their parents.

"The strength that I did not have came from all I learned from you," Marie wrote to the AFT recently, sharing how her most challenging moment was when she was asked to support a distraught mother and her daughters. "I was only speaking to a mom and two girls, but at that moment in time, what I said would be more important than talking to 300 people."

For Marie, her union helped her to find her voice and, in turn, helped her to use her voice to play a vital role in her community.

As we said at our recent AFT convention in Los Angeles, connecting with our communities is how our union helps to reclaim the promise of America.

Marie and her fellow PSRP members are living that every day. Community is our new density.

It's not just Oregon's David Douglas School District. PSRPs are living it in New York's Guilderland Central School District, where they collected holiday toys for needy children, volunteered at the Thanksgiving community dinner and sent donations to our troops overseas.

They are living it in Delaware, where PSRP

members invited school board members to read to students while giving away books at AFT-First Book events—and adopted a high-poverty school for book giveaways.

They are living it in Hillsborough County, Fla., where PSRPs worked with management

This event enabled our union to touch all aspects of the local community—and leave something of ourselves behind.

All across the country, AFT PSRP members are doing the important work of being solution-driven, engaging our members and partnering with our communities.

As the austerity mongers, privatizers and deprofessionalizers throw everything they have at us, we need you to keep fighting back and fighting forward by doing the work you have been doing—and by voting in November.

Elections matter. They determine who nominates Supreme Court justices. We are one justice away from having a fairer court—or from losing more and more rights.

Elections matter. They decide whether we have allies in Congress who will fight against efforts to roll back the healthy nutrition standards in our National School Lunch Program, which help ensure that our kids get the nutritious food they need to learn, grow and thrive.

Elections matter. They mean the difference between state leaders—such as Gov. Rick Scott in Florida and Gov. Scott Walker in Wisconsin—who push for privatization and then the consequential layoffs of PSRPs who worked

in the services being contracted out, and those who believe—such as gubernatorial candidates Charlie Crist in Florida and Mary Burke in Wisconsin—in strengthening public education.

This election, we have a chance to fight back against those who demonize, demoralize and aim to destroy us, and fight forward with a vision for a nation in which we reclaim the promise of public education—not as it is today or as it was in the past, but as it can be—to fulfill our collective obligation to help all children succeed.



AFT volunteers prepare free books for children in Los Angeles.

**All across the country, AFT PSRP members are doing the important work of being solution-driven, engaging our members and partnering with our communities.**

to organize English-language classes for school support staff.

And PSRP members, together with other AFT members, lived it in Los Angeles at the AFT's 2014 convention, where they organized a community event at the All Peoples Community Center that aimed to lift up the whole child—with a mobile health clinic, healthy cooking demonstrations, First Book giveaways, a food bank with enough food to feed hundreds of local families for one month, and, of course, a moon bounce, face painting and other fun activities.



## PSRPs raise the volume at 2014 AFT convention

Passionate speakers demonstrate how they are reclaiming the promise of public education

PSRP MEMBERS RAISED THEIR VOICES at the AFT's 2014 convention in Los Angeles July 11-14, as paraprofessionals and support staff testified on several resolutions, contributed to numerous workshops and shared their stories about reclaiming the promise of public education.

Their litany of accomplishments, cited at a panel discussion during the PSRP divisional meeting, was impressive: Paula Phillips, president of the Berkeley Council of Classified Employees, described Healthy Kids, Healthy Minds, a program launched by the California Federation of Teachers to extend library services. At Local 762 in Claymont, Del., President Karen Kennedy invited the school board to read to children at First Book giveaway events, and she led the local in adopting a low-performing school for special attention. Malena Wirth, from the Oregon School Employees Association, partnered with the group Causa to march for immigration rights and distribute T-shirts with "We Are the Promise" on one side and "Somos la Promesa" on the other. The Hillsborough School Employees Federation in Florida fought for—and won—100 new buses for its deteriorating fleet.

Echoing their efforts was guest speaker Rosa Pavanelli, general secretary of Public Services International, who described how her global union has created a new sector for educational support personnel. "Defending public education means we do not defend only teachers but all the workers involved in public education," she said.

Ruby Newbold, chair of the PSRP program

and policy council, urged all PSRPs to tell their own stories. "We need to speak up and speak loudly," said Newbold, who is also an AFT vice president and the president of the Detroit Association of Educational Office Employees. "We're going to demand the respect for the work that we do."

That's exactly what they did on the convention floor, leading members to pass three important resolutions: one supporting the right to fair compensation for classified employees who teach adjunct assignments; another pledging collaboration and demanding

a voice for support staff as school breakfast and lunch programs expand; and a third calling for school nurses for every school and, in their absence, substantive training for support personnel who may volunteer to administer medication.

Convention delegates also passed a special order of business to fight the attacks on unions and teachers driving lawsuits such as *Vergara v. California* and *Harris v. Quinn*, which threaten school job security and union voice, and sustain the "deprofessionalization, privatization and test obsession" that plagues public education. A resolution to support the Common Core State Standards drew passionate debate, with many delegates protesting the roll out but defending the standards themselves: "You don't throw out the baby with the bath water," said LeRoy Barr, assistant secretary of the United Federation of Teachers. The resolution passed. Also passed: support for immigration reform, a special order of business regarding Central American children crossing into the United States to flee violence in their home countries, a resolution to increase locals' per capita dues by 45 cents, and a boost for the Solidarity Fund.

But the fireworks came through an agenda full of inspiring speakers. Activists and believers like the Rev. Dr. William Barber, California Gov. Jerry Brown and AFT President Randi Weingarten passionately declared their intentions to reclaim the promise of America.

Barber stirred the crowd with a urgent call to action. "We are in the midst of a moral crisis that demands we have a movement now," he said. "If we don't address systemic

**"We are in the midst of a moral crisis that demands we have a movement now. We will organize and fight for the soul of our democracy. ... When we get together, we win."**

—THE REV. DR. WILLIAM BARBER



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL CAMPBELL AND RUSS CURTIS

# GIVING BACK TO 'ALL PEOPLES'

## AFT MEMBERS HELP CREATE NEW PARTNERSHIPS AT CRUCIAL COMMUNITY CENTER

ON A SUNNY DAY in Los Angeles, nearly 100 AFT volunteers kicked off the union's 2014 convention by donning Reclaim the Promise T-shirts and heading downtown to the All Peoples Community Center. Inside, they organized six palettes of groceries—boxes and bags labeled "canned meat," "canned beans," "rice" and "bread," all being prepared for distribution to local families in need. The volunteers set up games for children—a "book" Olympics involving races from pile to pile of books that the children then got to take home, and an arts and crafts table where children would later make collages from cut-out photographs of healthy fruits and vegetables.

Outdoors, volunteers picked up long-handled paint rollers and put a new coat of paint on the concrete walls beside a community vegetable garden full of tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers and okra. They set up a table for a cooking demonstration, with fresh cherry tomatoes, lettuce and cabbage for healthy tostadas. And they made room for the portable wellness van, where community members could have their blood pressure taken, kids could get physicals and people could get advice on how to sign up for health insurance through the Affordable Care Act. In the courtyard, several volunteers sorted through thousands of children's books, calling out when they found their favorites (*"The Very Hungry Caterpillar!" "Tar Beach!" "Ramona!"*).

Two hours later, local residents began to arrive. The children lined up for the inflatable moon bounce; parents picked up free groceries; children chose books to take home; there were face painting and popcorn, and everyone enjoyed paletas, the Mexican popsicle that has become a signature treat in L.A.



Lorretta Johnson and friends

"Parents say they don't know what books to get for the kids, or they don't have enough money to get the books, so [the AFT] coming in and providing books for our kids is a very great opportunity," said Deisy Huerta, youth coordinator for All Peoples.

Sandra Bryant, the center's executive director, proudly showed visitors around the facility's classrooms, playground and gym, explaining the center's services in this low-income neighborhood. Standing near the First Book giveaway tables, she said that while the event itself was a success, she was just as thrilled with the connections the AFT helped her make over the course of the day. Among the partners that helped support the event were the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, the AFL-CIO, the Los Angeles Promise Neighborhood, St. John's Well Child and Family Center, the Uni-Health Foundation, and other labor and community allies. "The event brings the community together," said Bryant, but while the giveaways and festival fun were important, she noted that the partnerships will have a lasting impact on the continuing success and development of the center. "It's made a big difference," she said.

Like so many volunteer events, this one was uplifting and fun. But more important, it strengthened bonds among organizations that can help All Peoples continue to offer essential services to an otherwise neglected community that needs so much.

The All Peoples Community Center currently offers preschool and after-school programs, a summer camp, tutoring and parenting classes, violence prevention programs and job training.

racism and extremism and poverty, it costs us the soul of our nation." On a hopeful note, he declared, "We will organize and fight for the soul of our democracy. ... When we get together, we win."

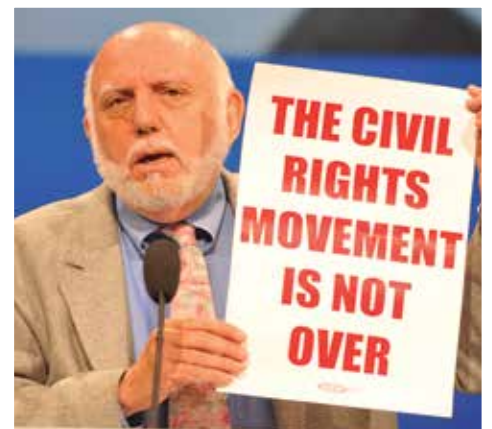
Brown, whose state has directed extra money to the school districts most in need, used the AFT's own language: "What's most important is reclaiming the promise of building the future, not stealing from it."

Weingarten noted that despite devastating challenges faced by labor unions, the AFT—at 1.6 million members strong—is larger than ever before. "Our union of professionals gives us the strength and solidarity to fight for what's right," she said, decrying the deep cuts in public services and education, the relentless criticism of public institutions, and the demonizing of workers and marginalization of those who fight to preserve respect and support for teachers, support staff, public employees and nurses. She urged delegates

to connect with their communities, pursue solution-driven unionism, and engage and empower their members.

Guest after guest joined the chorus to support public education, including actor and activist Cynthia Nixon, Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, and U.S. Reps. Mark Takano, Judy Chu and Mike Honda. Ten-year-old Asean Johnson, who has helped lead the fight for public schools in Chicago, joined teacher and union organizer Mark Levy, a veteran of the civil rights battles of the 1960s, to reclaim the promise of justice across generations. And Donna Brazile, a vice chair of the Democratic National Committee, announced the new, AFT-backed Democrats for Public Education, which she co-chairs.

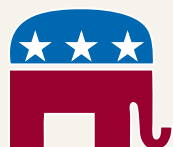
To give back to their host city, AFT volunteers visited the All Peoples Community Center to distribute free groceries and books, set up healthy cooking demonstrations and



Mark Levy continues to fight forward for civil rights.

direct local residents to health assessment services, helping community members connect with other social networks that will serve them well into the future. It was a perfect example of how the AFT is truly reclaiming the promise.





# STATE OF THE UNION

WHEN UNION MEMBERS and their families turn out on Election Day, candidates who are with us on issues of importance to working families usually win.

But when turnout is low among union members and households, the results can be ugly. Just look at 2010, when an anti-working-family majority—many of them supported by the tea party—seized control of the House of Representatives, drastically reduced a Democratic, pro-worker majority in the Senate, and won a number of key governors' races. The result was an avalanche of anti-union,

anti-worker legislation in states across the country and total gridlock on Capitol Hill.

The country can't afford a repeat of 2010. In a Labor Day message to members, AFT President Randi Weingarten outlined the union's vision to reclaim the promise of America. Our fight is about more than elections, but what happens on Nov. 4 can send a powerful message moving forward.

"As a union, we are fighting back against the relentless attacks on our jobs, our families and our communities," Weingarten wrote. "We are fighting back—whether it's against Campbell Brown's efforts to strip

teachers of their due process rights and pit teachers against parents; corporate hospital chains seeking to enrich themselves at the expense of patients and healthcare professionals; politicians like Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback, who never met a public school, public service or public employee he didn't want to eliminate; or those saddling students with debt, ripping them off and 'Wal-Martizing' the higher education workforce."

For working families and the issues we care about, the stakes are huge this year, so it's vital to elect candidates who support

## 2014 GOVERNOR RACES

**Dozens of high-stakes governor races are on tap in November. In addition to the races highlighted below, other states being closely watched include Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Texas.**

### CONNECTICUT

Democratic Gov. Dannel P. Malloy and Lt. Gov. Nancy Wyman treat public employees as partners, not impediments, and they have a solid record of progress to show for it. Malloy has negotiated job, benefit and pension protections with public employee unions. He won an increase in the state's minimum wage and enacted groundbreaking legislation to help fund decent retirements for private sector workers without strong pensions. Following the Sandy Hook school shootings, Malloy established an assistance fund to help teachers, first responders, forensic analysts and other government workers called to action.

### FLORIDA

Republican Gov. Rick Scott has made his mark on Florida in recent years—and it's one that Floridians won't soon forget or quickly forgive. During his term, Scott drained more than \$1 billion from public schools to bankroll new corporate tax breaks. The first law he signed established a punitive teacher evaluation system, and he inked a bill to create a statewide school voucher system. Teachers and public employees across the state are lining up in force to elect Charlie Crist as the next governor.

### ILLINOIS

Democratic Gov. Pat Quinn has fought for strong schools, high-quality public services and workers' fundamental right to speak with a collective voice—and AFT members are part of a broad coalition that is standing behind that record. The incumbent has drawn endorsements from labor, education and progressive groups. His billionaire opponent, Bruce Rauner, has demonized public employees and worked to dismantle unions; Rauner also has gone on record saying public employees are overpaid by nearly 25 percent.

### MICHIGAN

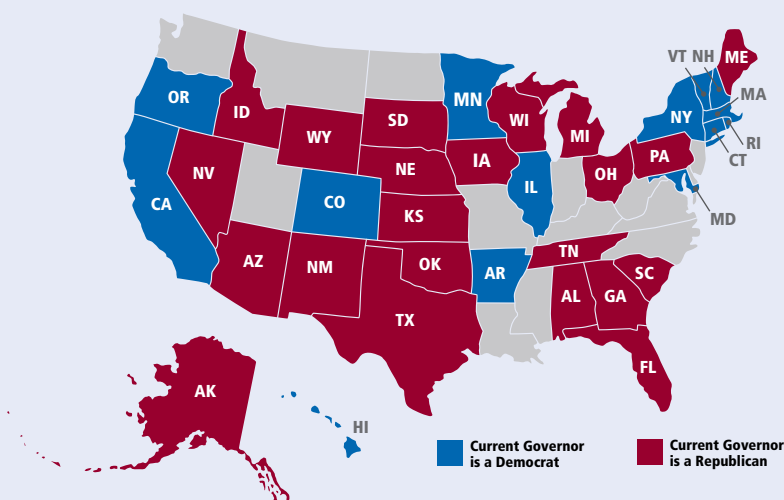
Voters in Michigan will have a clear choice when Mark Schauer seeks to unseat incumbent Republican Gov. Rick Snyder in the November election. Schauer has called for the state to do more when it comes to funding education at all levels. A former U.S. representative and the first to vote in Congress for the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, Schauer also has made women's economic and civil rights, as well as Snyder's support of "right to work," major issues in his campaign. Snyder has cut more than \$1 billion from education and signed legislation that limits women's access to healthcare.

### PENNSYLVANIA

At its heart, the Pennsylvania gubernatorial race is a referendum on public education. Incumbent Republican Gov. Tom Corbett has cut more than \$1 billion in education funding. He has tripled corporate tax breaks, while proposing cuts of as much as 40 percent to teachers' and public workers' retirement security. Democratic challenger Tom Wolf is mobilizing effectively across the state thanks in large part to his pledge to reinstate fair funding for public education.

### WISCONSIN

There's no doubt Republican Gov. Scott Walker's attacks on public employees have ushered in a climate of intimidation and fear in the public sector. Under Walker, Wisconsin job growth ranks at the bottom nationally. He cut more people from Medicaid than any other state while heaping tax breaks on corporations and the wealthy. Now, Walker faces a strong challenge from Democrat Mary Burke, a former business executive and Madison school board member.





# LOOK WHO'S VOTING

Elections are coming up. And contrary to what some may think, **ELECTIONS MATTER.**

FAR MORE THAN a hot-air fest of self-interested politicians, elections are also about whether your job as a bus driver will be there for you next year, and how many kids are in the classroom as you try desperately to reach that little boy who for some reason has given up on fourth-grade math. They're about what you're serving in the cafeteria, whether you'll be paid a living wage, and who gets to decide whether you have to share your classroom with a charter school competing for your resources.

These are the issues at the core of elections, politics and policy. Elections are an opportunity to protect the things we know to be essential to public education, and to democracy itself.

And here's the thing: Even though you may not be active in politics, guess who is? A whole host of people who are supporting candidates whose policies and programs could destroy public schools and workers' rights as we know them.

## What we're up against

Although the American political system is supposed to be equitable, it turns out there are gaping loopholes that give wealthy, profit-driven corporations enormous influence over lawmakers—and a big advantage over working folks like school staff.

ALEC pushes aggressively for expanded gun rights and voter-identification requirements, and works to weaken public employee unions and social welfare programs, reduce pensions and oppose the minimum wage.

Among the model bills proposed by ALEC's puppets: a proposal for voucher programs that drain resources from public schools by rerouting them to private schools, an Employee Rights Reform Act that would limit the ability of unions to collect dues, and a bill that would prohibit collective bargaining for release time and the hiring of nonunion contractors.

**"In ALEC's own words, corporations have 'A VOICE AND A VOTE' on specific changes to the law that are then proposed in your state. DO YOU?"**

—ALEC EXPOSED

One of the most notorious is the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC).

"ALEC is a pay-to-play operation where corporations buy a seat and a vote on 'task forces' to advance their legislative wish lists," writes ALEC Exposed, an organization working to reveal ALEC's influence. In addition, corporate leaders offer legislators luxurious vacations thinly disguised as meetings and, in exchange, expect legislation that will help them boost their profit margins.

As ALEC Exposed explains it, "In ALEC's own words, corporations have 'a voice and a vote' on specific changes to the law that are then proposed in your state. Do you?"

## Making a difference

Well, yes, we here at the AFT do have a voice, and each of our members has a vote. There are plenty of ways to both fight back against organizations like ALEC and fight forward for the causes we

know will best serve our public school families.

For example, in California, a tax cap had severely limited school funding for so many years that many school staff positions were eliminated and programs downsized. "There were so many cuts that many classified positions are still vacant," says Suleman Ishaque, an instructional assistant who uses technology to help students with disabilities at Pierce College in Los Angeles. Ishaque is also the political coordinator for the AFT College Staff Guild, Local 1521A.

The AFT College Staff Guild joined its state federation, the California Federation of Teach-

ers, to fight hard for Proposition 30, a proposal that would increase taxes for people making more than \$250,000 as single income earners. The so-called millionaire's tax would go to fund education.

The proposition passed this year.

"That brought a lot of relief," says Ishaque. Before the measure was passed, he says, "we were holding our breath [wondering] 'will I get a pink slip in my mailbox tomorrow?'"







AFT PSRP members, including Toledo Federation of Teachers President Kevin Dalton, teamed up with Ohio state Sen. Nina Turner to go door to door in Toledo.

LORI KING

CES Employees Association. Some districts try to provide career or tech training of their own, she adds, but they cannot offer the array of programs available through BOCES, such as welding, computer science, building trades and nursing.

And for special education students, the experience of BOCES staff far surpasses that of staff in nearby districts. “We’re the SWAT team of specialized students,” says Carner-Shafran. “When the child walks in, we can figure out what supports that child needs. We have the ability to interact with other veterans and work together as a giant team.”

The local has worked to educate its membership about the link between the tax cap and BOCES. One successful outreach involved going to the county fair, where members partnered with school administrators and the New York State United Teachers to distribute information as well as free children’s books from First Book.

“Not everybody wants to be political,” says Carner-Shafran, but “everyone can come around for free books for kids. It’s such a unifying thing.” She hopes that the interest sparked by First Book will translate into participation in VOTE-COPE, her local’s Committee on Political Education. And it has already engendered good will in the community: People who initially dismissed them at the county fair as “those union people who just want more money” did a double take when they saw the free books. “They see our union in a whole different light,” says Carner-Shafran.

Kristina Schwarzkopf, a paraprofessional and the political coordinator for the Toledo Federation of Teachers in Ohio, has had a similar experience, helping distribute \$5,000 worth of books for students in ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) classes. Members of her local run blood drives and conduct door-to-door walks around the community to check in with families whose children attend area public schools and to ensure they know what important issues are current in local education.

In Toledo, the big issue is a tax levy designed to fund schools. Union retirees have delivered dinners to school staff, with the price of the dinners paying to support an area levy foundation, and they’ve provided drinks and chips with palm cards of information at “grab-and-go” events at area schools. Members meet with teachers, community members and administrators to brainstorm ideas about how to generate support for the levy.

Why support the levy? To reinstate bus services, for one thing. Children in Toledo must live at least two miles from school to qualify for bus transportation, the result of cuts to the school transportation budget. Schwarzkopf hopes the

tax levy will also pay for more computers for students and the first salary increases for paraprofessionals since 2009.

The Toledo Federation of Teachers faces an uphill battle in a state headed by Gov. John Kasich, who is up for re-election in November. Kasich signed Senate Bill 5, a union-gutting measure that limited collective bargaining, and although labor proponents and others fought and succeeded in repealing the measure, Kasich is no friend to the union. He was involved with ALEC in its formative years.

“I fear for public education,” says Schwarzkopf, who wonders what happened to politicians like Kasich who villainize public workers such as school staff. How can they turn on the very people who were there for them when they were school children themselves? “Somewhere along the line, they have to thank a teacher, or a para, or both. Or a bus driver,” she says. “They say it takes a village, and it does.”

Similarly, it takes a village to vote for politicians who do understand the importance of public education—and to oppose those working against it.

Members of College Staff Guild Locals 1521 and 1521A influence California politics at a Labor Day parade, top, and at a rally for Proposition 30, bottom.



PHOTO COURTESY OF COLLEGE STAFF GUILD



BONNIE OSBORNE

Ishaque says much of the union’s political activism involves educating members. Many had never heard of Prop 30, as it is called, or if they had, their information came from the opposition. “They have got a lot of money, they flood the media, they flood the billboards, so people get a skewed image of what things are about,” says Ishaque. Until someone they can trust tells them otherwise.

Ishaque and his union colleagues build that trust through community activism: They donate shoes to low-income kids through their program Shoes That Fit, make an annual appearance in the Martin Luther King Jr. Day parade, and hand out free snow cones at the Labor Day parade. They are familiar faces in the community, contributing every day.

New York state is also struggling with the results of a tax cap. The loss of revenue prevents schools from sending students to programs that will meet their special learning needs. These programs, along with career and technical education, are collectively grouped under the Board of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES).

Denying students the opportunity to attend these special programs is a real loss for students, says Sandie Carner-Shafran, a veteran teaching assistant in special education and an executive board member of the Saratoga Adirondack BO-



# Everyday Heroes reclaim the promise every day

Members from each division honored for going above and beyond the call of duty



**KRYSTAL WOOLSTON**, an assistant director of service learning and community engagement from the Montclair State Faculty, Professional Staff and Librarians local in New Jersey, organizes volunteer opportunities for students, staff and unionists. She volunteered on the Jersey shore after Superstorm Sandy, worked on rebuilding projects in Haiti, and ran service trips to New Orleans and to Asheville, N.C.



**JIM CARDIN**, a member of the State Vocational Federation of Teachers in Connecticut, worked with students to create an inexpensive foot prosthetic for civil war amputee victims in Africa. He also covered the workload for a colleague who was battling cancer, and helped him with retirement papers when the illness forced him to leave work. When another colleague suffered a heart attack, Cardin worked with the union and the school system's HR department to secure his salary and benefits.



**LISA D'ABROSCA, STEPHANIE JOHNSON AND HARRY RODRIGUEZ**, the presidents of Locals 5049, 5051 and 5123, which represent nurses, technicians and healthcare workers at Lawrence + Memorial Hospital in New London, Conn., modeled cooperation as they fought together this winter through a strike, a lockout and, finally, successful contract negotiations.



**MARIA ALAMO**, a prekindergarten paraeducator from the Hempstead Teaching Assistants Association in New York, provides a crucial bridge for families whose native language is not English, not only by helping them learn the language but also by urging them to participate at school, creating a sense of family and tuning in to individual students' needs.

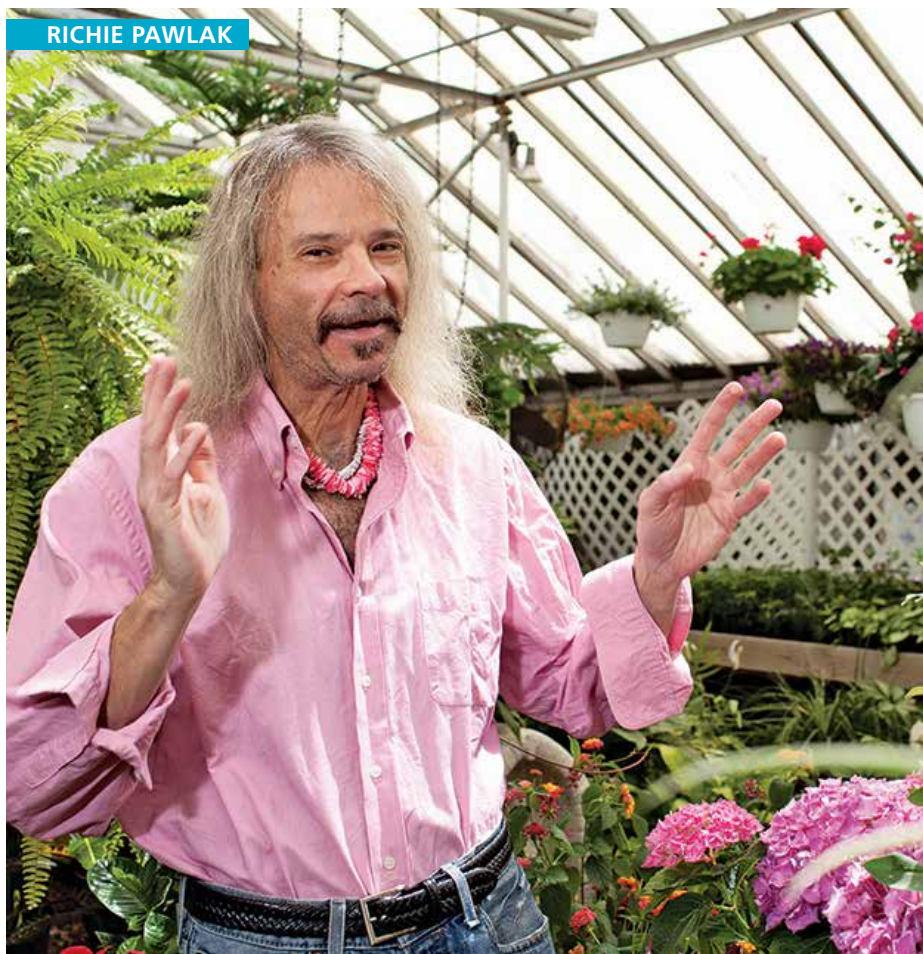


**CAROL KEISER**, a retired teacher from the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals, uses her 28 years of classroom experience to mentor new teachers and help grow the membership of her local's retiree chapter, which now has more than 2,000 members.



**JULIE AHERN**, a second-grade teacher from the Lake County Federation of Teachers in Waukegan, Ill., finds new resources and opportunities for her economically challenged school families, securing donations of classroom laptops and iPads, funds to restore her school's greenhouse, and school visits from children's literature superstars like "Captain Underpants" creator Dav Pilkey.

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL CAMPBELL AND RUSS CURTIS



**When it comes to playing for a good cause, Richie Pawlak—the AFT's 2014 PSRP Everyday Hero—will never say no.**

**RICHIE PAWLAK**, a computer programmer for Morton College in Cicero, Ill., and a member of the Cook County College Teachers Union, plays in three bands, and every October, one of them—the Mud Pie Band—is asked to participate in a Breast Cancer Awareness Day in his suburban Chicago neighborhood of Berwyn. So Pawlak grabs his bass guitar and joins his bandmates to play music from the 1990s to raise money.

Pawlak also solicits donations for a fundraising raffle and helps the firefighters union sell chocolate bars for the cause. To say he's deeply committed is an understatement: In the days preceding the event, he wears pink extensions in his long hair—pink for breast cancer awareness—to be sure everyone remembers to attend. Last year, the event raised more than \$10,000.

Pawlak also organizes coat drives and

food drives at Morton College, where he has worked for 30 years, and helps run the union's Toys for Tots program. To raise money for Alzheimer's research, he participates in a walkathon along the Chicago lakefront. He's contributed to scholarships for Native American high school students, and he handles correspondence for the union, keeping members informed of state and national union business as well as local events. "He's always the No. 1 guy," says Tim Visk, Pawlak's supervisor in the management information services department. "Whatever is needed, he helps out. People just love him."

"It's a rough time for some people," explains Pawlak. "I'm trying to make it a little easier for them."

Pawlak, along with his fellow AFT Everyday Heroes from the union's other divisions (at left), was honored in July at the AFT's 2014 national convention.

**PESTS OR NO PESTS** Legislators recently passed a measure to ensure that pesticides at California schools don't become a bigger concern than the pests they are meant to exterminate.

Under Senate Bill 1405, schools that use pesticides must designate someone to maintain a complete record of all pesticide use at the site and then submit it to the California Department of Pesticide Regulation at the end of each calendar year. Current law requires only professional exterminators to report their use.

The designee must also develop a long-term plan to prevent pest problems—with minimal hazard to people and the environment. The Center for Environmental Health, the California Federation of Teachers and the Teamsters are among the bill's supporters. "You need something to stop the creepy crawlies that come out, but you don't want to injure students," says Mike O'Connor, lead custodian at Anzar High School in the Aromas-San Juan district. "There are a lot of safe alternatives out there."

**SOUND THE ALARM** Nine months after the remains of Avonte Oquendo were found along the East River in Queens, N.Y., officials are still grappling with how to prevent students with a tendency to run off from leaving school buildings unattended. Oquendo, who fled P 277 in Queens, had autism.

One way to better protect vulnerable students would be to require alarms on all school exit doors. The United Federation of Teachers supports such a requirement but calls for more comprehensive, school-specific safety measures as well.

"By the time an alarm sounds, it's already too late," said Carmen Alvarez, the UFT's vice president for special education, during testimony before the New York City Council's education committee, which is considering a bill to require the alarms. Among the UFT recommendations: identifying students at risk of flight in their Individualized Education Programs; making the entire school staff aware of potential runners and their "triggers"; and, with parental permission, alerting local police precincts to likely runners.

"Teachers, paraprofessionals, guidance counselors, school safety supervisors and other UFT members ... devote their lives to caring for students," Alvarez told the committee. "We strongly believe that school safety is a fundamental right for every student and staff member."

**GREENING EDUCATION** Among the 48 institutions recently named 2014 U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools are eight affiliated with the AFT. The designa-

tion, created with support from the AFT, names schools that meet specific criteria in three categories related to environmental sustainability: environmental impact, improving health and wellness, and teaching sustainability.

"It is absolutely true that where you learn matters," said AFT Executive Vice President Mary Cathryn Ricker at a reception for award recipients and supporters.

Among AFT Green Ribbon Schools are those in the Broward County (Fla.) Public Schools system, with its 75 butterfly gardens and 38 "edible schoolyards." Award-winning Woodland Primary School in Gages Lake, Ill., received a LEED Silver rating, a prestigious recognition of green building principles like low-flush toilets and energy-efficient appliances. And at Five Hawks Elementary in Prior Lake, Minn., outdoor classroom learning has replaced indoor lessons in every subject, and Five Hawks staff conduct districtwide training courses for educators to learn how to incorporate environmental learning into their own classes.

**FOOD FIGHT** While some try to maintain a steady diet of fatty, processed foods in our school cafeterias, the AFT is joining hundreds of other child advocacy organizations to fight for more whole grains and fresh fruits and vegetables in student meals. Joining 209 groups, from the American Heart Association to Utahns Against Hunger, the AFT is urging Congress "to oppose efforts to intervene in science-based rules regarding the federal child nutrition programs."

These rules, part of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, have already made a positive difference in the lives of children, many of whom rely on school lunches as a primary source of food. But a group of congressional representatives wants to grant waivers for schools that say their kids don't like the healthier options or the nutritious food costs too much.

"Schools need support and technical assistance, not a free pass to serve junk to kids," says Margo Wootan, director of nutrition policy at the Center for Science in the Public Interest.

## Cooking Up Change on Capitol Hill

This summer's Healthy Schools Campaign contest Cooking Up Change highlighted 10 teams of student chefs who created nutritious, great-tasting lunches on a tight budget—something school food service professionals do every day. The students, who qualified for the contest by first winning their home state competitions, created recipes with no more than six steps (so the meals could be replicated on a large scale). The 10 teams then reproduced their menus for judges and guests at a reception at the Department of Education.

The judges, including celebrity chefs, educators and policymakers, awarded first prize to the Kickin' Taco, Zesta Fiesta Salad and Yummy Tummy Bananas from Valley High School in Orange County, Calif., but said the competition was stiff. After their showcase, students testified at congressional hearings to urge legislators to preserve policies that require more nutritious food in school cafeterias rather than return to less healthful choices, as some lawmakers have proposed. "Healthy food is more than doable," says Karen Duncan, wife of Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and one of the judges. Secretary Duncan and White House chef Sam Kass visited the students during their cooking session.



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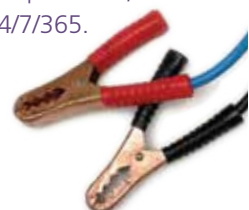
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