



# PUBLIC EMPLOYEE Advocate

THE NATIONAL PUBLICATION OF AFT PUBLIC EMPLOYEES

RECLAIMING THE PROMISE of

# MEMBERSHIP

Taking member engagement to new heights in Connecticut

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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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# Shining a light on the cost of certain tax breaks

New rule gives taxpayers and policymakers a leg up

FOR YEARS, taxpayers were in the dark about how much money their state and local governments lost by giving economic development tax breaks to businesses. But the Governmental Accounting Standards Board has issued new rules that will shine a light on the situation. Under GASB 77, as the rule is called, states and localities will be required to report the annual cost of subsidies such as corporate income tax credits, property tax reductions and sales tax exemptions.

“This is a victory for the thousands of taxpayers, grass-roots groups and public officials who have for so long demanded these tax breaks be more transparent and accountable,” said Good Jobs First executive director Greg LeRoy, who spoke with members of the AFT Public Employees program and policy council at its October meeting in Washington, D.C. “States and cities spend an estimated \$70 billion a year for economic development, most of it through tax expen-

ditures. But we could only estimate because GASB has never before called for standardized reporting,” explained LeRoy. “That’s the historic value of this new standard: Taxpayers and policymakers will finally see the true price tag for economic development.”

“Given that states already publish tax expenditure budgets that often include this data, the new standard will have the greatest impact on local bodies of government: cities, counties, townships and school boards,” said LeRoy. “We are especially pleased that GASB is calling for public bodies that lose revenue passively due to the actions of other bodies to report such losses. This means school boards will finally have to own up to the huge costs they suffer when cities and counties abate or divert property and sales taxes.”

The AFT provided written comments on the rule. The final version applies to budgets that begin after Dec. 15. The new data will be available in 2017.



**aft** 1916-2016  
**100TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION**  
HONORING OUR PAST AND INSPIRING OUR FUTURE

**1969**  
AFT CONVENTION DELEGATES  
STAND UP FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

Be a part of history! [www.aft.org/100years](http://www.aft.org/100years)

THE AFT HELD its biennial convention in New Orleans in August 1969. When convention participants learned that several black delegates were refused service in a downtown bar, they responded by setting up an around-the-clock picket. Their actions led to the New Orleans City Council passing a public accommodation law.  
2016 marks the AFT’s 100th anniversary. Share your history and the amazing work of your AFT affiliate over the years at [www.aft.org/100years](http://www.aft.org/100years).



## We are our union

RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT President

AS WE REFLECT ON 100 years as the American Federation of Teachers, there is one expression that I keep coming back to: We are our union.

Our union was founded a century ago to establish a voice for teachers so they could combat factory-like conditions in public schools, advocate for fair pay and better working conditions, promote the needs of their students, and stand up for greater autonomy as professionals. Our union's heart, our soul, our courage and our power lie with our members and our communities. They always have.

Today, 1.6 million members strong, our identity grows out of the proud history built by AFT members, who, through the tumult and change of the past century, stood up for the principles that ground us. Those who came before us built the AFT into 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. This has been our century-long journey. As we continue this journey, we have many reminders that we are our union.

We are Norma Becker, a public school teacher from New York City and the mother of two young children, who, along with 35 other teachers, boarded a bus in 1963 and headed to Farmville, Va., to open Freedom Schools, where she and others taught black children who had been shut out of their public schools.

We are Margaret Cotter and other female teachers in Boston, who first joined the AFT in 1920 to achieve equal pay, and were supported by then-AFT President Charles Stillman, who said: "Sex discrimination in salary and working conditions belongs to the old order."

We are Cecily Hodges and other members of the Alaska Public Employees Association who successfully mobilized to fight a budget impasse in the state Legislature that would have shut down public services in Alaskan communities.

We have a proud history. As we celebrate 100 years, we need to look at who we are today and who we will be in the future.

I don't have to tell you that the principles we stand on are under attack. Unions are squarely in the crosshairs of those who want to preserve a status quo that benefits an ever-smaller advantaged class. During a time when income inequality is at its worst since before the Great Depression, corporate-backed politicians have launched an all-out assault on unions—from statehouses to court houses—and thereby on the communities our members serve.

wage gap than their counterparts in non-union workplaces. A report from the Institute for Women's Policy Research found that female union members earn 89 cents for every dollar a male worker earns, compared with 77 cents on the dollar for their nonunion peers.

Let me put it simply: Unions built the middle class, and we can rebuild it. Though our numbers have diminished, our determination to create a better life for everyday Americans has not.

This reality is the driving force behind our efforts to reach out and speak to 100 percent of our members during our 100th year. Be-

Our union's heart, our soul, our **courage** and our **power** lie with our **members** and our **communities**. They always have.



CHARLES B. SCHULTZ

Cecily Hodges, at left, and Norma Becker, above.

Despite these attacks, the tide is turning—support for unions is the highest it has been in years. According to a recent Gallup poll, support for unions went up by 5 percentage points in the last year. Today, nearly six in 10 Americans approve of unions.

In places where union membership is higher, children are better off. A new study by researchers at Harvard University, Wellesley College and the Center for American Progress found that "low-income children rise higher in the income rankings when they grow up in areas with high union membership." And union women experience a smaller gender

cause if we can connect with our members, engage with our members—exchange values, aspirations and challenges—then we will actually have the power to change things.

What it means to be a union is to have each other's backs, to walk in each other's shoes and to make progress together. Our power comes from all of us raising our collective voice—and that is only possible when we connect to all of our members in personal and compelling ways. I hope you will join me as we work toward a future that builds on our past—by creating a present defined by all of our voices, speaking out, together.

# RECLAIMING THE PROMISE OF MEMBERSHIP

Connecticut A&R blitz brings members unity and strength

AT 3,000 MEMBERS STRONG, the Administrative and Residual Employees Union in Connecticut is the largest AFT local in the state. Unfortunately, internal challenges were preventing the local from rising to the full measure of its strength—and many members and leaders knew it. A&R President John DiSette was one of them.

DiSette says that internal political battles had divided members. Many had become disconnected from their union, and the local's relationships with the AFT state federation and other unions were not as close as they could have been. All of this was happening at a time when A&R members needed every ounce of strength they could muster. They're entering contract negotiations facing very tough demands for concessions from leaders of a state government rocked by major budget deficits.

## Addressing internal challenges

The challenges were plain to see. The solutions were harder to bring into focus. Enter AFT Connecticut President Jan Hochadel, who told DiSette about her experiences during a member blitz in another state. "It sounded like it pretty much changed her life," DiSette says. So, he decided to give it a whirl.

Left to right: Stuart Savelkoul, Christine Alvarado Judd, Mike Blue, Nickimmy Hayes and Rich Benham.



Hochadel reached out to AFT national leaders to request their help in developing a pilot program aimed at strengthening members' connections within their union. AFT leaders responded by sending staff and providing resources. Together with AFT Connecticut, they also helped coordinate volunteers from other unions who wanted to help A&R achieve its goals and to return home with new ideas and abilities to strengthen their own unions. The turnout was impressive, with volunteers from four AFT locals in Connecticut, six other AFT locals throughout the nation, the state AFL-CIO, and a Connecticut-based SEIU local.

## Reclaiming the promise of membership

Chuck Morrell, an experienced organizer and union leader who has participated in many member mobilizations, agreed to help develop and lead the A&R blitz that was conducted over six days in mid-October. The theme: Reclaiming the Promise of Membership.

The blitz began with two days of interactive, hands-on workshops that helped participants develop the skills and confidence to conduct effective one-on-one conversations with members during home or work-site visits. They learned the importance of ensuring every conversation included "asks" that provide specific invitations to participate

in union events and actions so that members who are interested have an opportunity to become more connected and engaged.

One of the 34 people who volunteered to work on the A&R blitz was Francesca Ford, a member of the State Vocational Federation of Teachers in Con-

CAN WE GET YOUR AUTOGRAPH?  
**STAR**  
CARD

179 A&R MEMBERS SIGNED  
UP TO TAKE MEMBER  
ENGAGEMENT TO NEW HEIGHTS

"I am ready to join together with my co-workers to form the [Stand Together A&R \(STAR\)](#) Team to have a voice in our workplace and to ensure equity and respect for state workers represented by A&R Employees Union of AFT Connecticut. I believe by working together, we can collaborate with union leadership to identify and resolve workplace issues. Only by joining our voices together can we advocate for the needs of our members and our profession."

necticut. Ford, an English teacher, has been an AFT member for 12 years, but this was her first member blitz. “Most of the members we met were very happy to see the union reaching out to them,” Ford says, noting that the experience afforded her a great opportunity to see all the different parts of the union. “I enjoyed it. I would do it again. I think a lot of people should do it so they can see the union is more than the guy sitting in the office.”

It was also Karen Romero’s first time working on a member blitz. She is an associate insurance examiner for the Connecticut Department of Insurance and has been an A&R member for 22 years. Romero chairs the local’s Committee on Political Education (COPE). She volunteered for the mobilization because she desired to learn techniques to “help bring the union to a better place.” However, A&R activists, staff and leaders had not gone to members’ homes before, Romero says, and she worried that members might not want them knocking on their doors.

She soon learned her concern was unnecessary. “We had a lot of good feedback. People in my own agency were pleasantly surprised to have union members come to their door,” Romero says. One of her most memorable moments came when “one gentleman answered the door, looked right at me, saw my button and said, ‘You’re from my union! You’re welcome to come to my house. Come right in.’” Her partner that day was from another union, and both were ushered into the man’s kitchen, where he offered them food and expressed how “genuinely happy he was to talk to us over his kitchen table.”

### The outcomes

The other participants in the blitz reported similarly warm receptions from members, who were very willing to talk—in their homes or at their work sites—about their union and the issues they were facing. The results:

- 405 one-on-one conversations (181 via house visits and 224 via work-site visits);
- 355 completed surveys (to gather contract priorities, contact information, communications preferences and other useful information); and
- 179 members signed up to join the STAR (Stand Together A&R) Team; these new activists will continue the work begun by the membership blitz to strengthen member connections and to unite members in actions that will help them win a good contract.



**Top left:** Connecticut State Vocational Federation of Teachers member Francesca Ford, left, and Illinois Federation of Teachers Field Services Director Deneen Kveton-Pajeau.



**Top right:** A&R member Karen Romero, left, makes a presentation during a training.



**Bottom:** Participants of a rousing solidarity action to protest A&R layoffs.

Participants concluded the blitz with a high-energy solidarity action at the Connecticut Department of Labor to support eight A&R members who had received lay-off notices. A&R helped ensure that all were placed in other jobs with the state.

Perhaps the most important outcome of the A&R blitz is the shared belief on the part of the AFT leaders and members that this was not the conclusion of their work to engage members but, rather, a big step forward in ongoing member engagement work—in their union and others—that will continue well into the future.

“Members are waiting for you to knock on their doors. Don’t be afraid to do it.”

— KAREN ROMERO,  
Administrative and Residual Employees Union

Summing up her experience, Romero says, “My union has become more unified and stronger.” Her advice to other members who are considering participating in a member blitz: “Members are waiting for you to knock on their doors. Don’t be afraid to do it.”

## REACHING OUT

A&R activists proved that reaching out to fellow union members is effective. Their efforts help bring the AFT closer to our nationwide member engagement goals of:

### Holding 1.6 million

ONE-ON-ONE CONVERSATIONS  
(SPEAKING TO 100% OF MEMBERS).

### Tripling

THE NUMBER OF MEMBERS  
ENGAGED TO 70%.

### Doubling

THE NUMBER OF MEMBER  
ACTIVISTS TO 10%.

### Encouraging

ALL AGENCY FEE PAYERS TO  
CHOOSE TO HAVE THEIR VOICES  
HEARD AS UNION MEMBERS.

**Get engaged!** Want to be more involved in your union? Contact your local representative and check out our conversation on Twitter at [#aftALLin](#).

# Our fight for professional voice

AFT public employees help advance work of task force on professionalism



AFT Executive Vice President Mary Cathryn Ricker, left, frames the discussion on professionalism with public employee task force members, researchers and staff.

Above: Lisa Ochs, left.

THE AFT Task Force on Professionalism continues refining what it means to be a professional, identifying our members' needs and considering what actions unions must take to eliminate barriers against professionalism. The task force met in October after a series of listening sessions in which it gathered members' ideas, all toward drafting a resolution to present to our union.

Task force chair and AFT Executive Vice President Mary Cathryn Ricker welcomed members, who discussed aspects of professionalism, including continuing education, autonomy and respect. The meeting Oct. 1-2 in New Orleans immediately preceded the AFT's annual Civil, Human and Women's Rights Conference.

The task force is committed to "lifelong learning and continually dedicating ourselves to advancing in our fields of expertise."

## Valuing social capital

Members heard from researcher Carrie Leana, a professor of organizations and management at the University of Pittsburgh who studies what makes groups function. Leana shared empirical evidence measuring both human and social capital; human capital reflects individual knowledge and skills, while social capital is new knowledge generated when peers interact and share.

One thing that makes workplaces better is social capital, which unlike human capital has received little attention, whether in government agencies, healthcare centers or other public facilities.

For example, in nursing, empathetic care is a combination of behaviors, Leana said, including going the extra mile, cultivating relationships with patients and colleagues, and engaging emotionally. However, even empa-

thy can be lost under unfavorable working conditions like high patient load.

What's more, she added, heavy workloads and financial hardship have a taxing effect on the brain, taking a cognitive and emotional toll. Research shows a relationship between burnout and turnover. If workers feel high empathy but low efficacy, they're likely to leave.

Public employees, educators and healthcare professionals already know that collaboration is key, Ricker pointed out: "Human capital versus social capital describes virtually every negotiating table I've sat at."

## Being heard

Lisa Ochs, president of AFT Kansas, and Joseph Dompier, a regional representative with the Montana Federation of Probation and Parole, described how public employees' work lives at times can be dictated by the whims of state legislators. Task force members urged fellow members not to lose heart even in the face of heartbreaking setbacks and powerful opponents.

The task force will recommend actions the AFT can take that will enable our union to be considered a champion of dignity and respect in the workplace, as well as the gatekeeper of professionalism.

The task force continues to gather ideas from AFT members through their program and policy councils, and is reviewing a draft of its work. This will lead to a resolution that will be put before the union's executive council next May, in advance of the AFT national convention in July.

In the meantime, you can follow and contribute to the conversation on Twitter at #AFTpro.

## WORKING 'ON THE INSIDE'

WHEN YOU THINK of prison, it's easy to picture only the people who are charged with or convicted of a crime. But workers in the justice system—including AFT members employed as corrections, probation and parole officers, as well as teachers, support staff and healthcare professionals—go to work every day knowing they are exposed to a high degree of work-related stress.

What's more, employees' time on the inside is usually much longer than the prisoners' sentences.

AFT members working in corrections live in two worlds: prison life and life over the wall. In the next issue of *Public Employee Advocate*, we will explore the impact of this working environment on the lives of corrections staff—how working in a hyperviolent atmosphere can have serious repercussions on their sleep, their nerves, their health and the strength of their families.

Don't miss the chance to see how these AFT members meet their responsibilities to safeguard their prisoners, their communities and themselves.

Watch video about #AFTpro public employees: [go.aft.org/testimonial](http://go.aft.org/testimonial).

# AFT issues groundbreaking report on racial equity

LEADERS AND MEMBERS OF the AFT have spent the past year having blunt, tough, uncomfortable, courageous conversations about how to address the lingering effects of racism and inequity in our nation—especially related to black males. As a result of those conversations, the AFT on Oct. 9 became the first public sector union in modern history to issue a substantive, action-oriented report on achieving racial equity in America.

The report, “Reclaiming the Promise of Racial Equity: In Education, Economics and Our Criminal Justice System,” provides a framework for the development of policy in national and state legisla-

tion, at the school board level and inside the AFT itself. As the AFT approaches its 100th year, this report serves as a capstone to a legacy of fighting for democracy and championing fairness and economic opportunity for all.

“I have been humbled and heartened by the overwhelming response from leaders and members around the country who participated in these courageous conversations,” said AFT Secretary-Treasurer Lorretta Johnson, who chairs the AFT’s Racial Equity Task Force. “I am proud that the AFT is the first union in the labor movement to address the crisis facing black males in a significant way. And for this work to continue, it will take the effort of all our members, including our white brothers and sisters, and the entire labor movement coming together.”

Members of the task force shared their experience hammering out the report with the AFT executive council just before the council unanimously approved it—with a standing ovation. They described the raw emotion they felt as disheartening statistics about discrimination became deeply personal, and member after member described instances of indignity and discrimination—being followed in a store simply because they were black, or watching as worried white women crossed the street to avoid them.

Many white task force members had never imagined the reality of discrimination in quite so much detail, or heard about it in such a relatable, personal way. And many were uncomfortable confronting the truth.

“It is not easy, I’m sure, for a white person to sit among black folks and hear about the indignities to which we have been subjected,” said Keith Johnson, an executive board member of the Detroit Federation of Teachers, an AFT vice president and a member of the task force. “It is not easy to hear that people that look like you were the ones responsible for perpetrating some of those injustices.”

Jeff Grider, executive vice president of the Portland (Ore.) Community College Federation of Classified Employees, a campus security officer and a white man, embraced that struggle. Just as the sexual assault prevention movement focuses not just on women taking action to stay safe but on men taking action to stop assaulting them in the first place, the racial equity movement must both help victims and stop perpetrators, he said. “My challenge as a white person is to teach other white people how not to be racist,” said Grider.

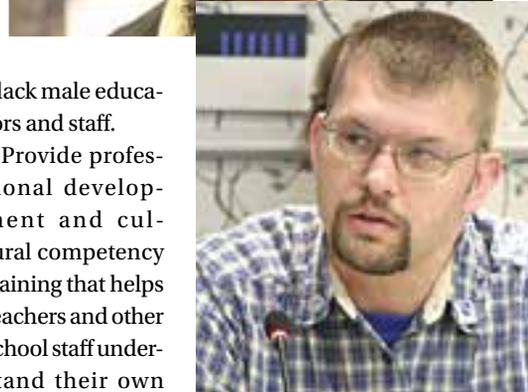
Shelvy Abrams, also an AFT vice president, an executive committee member of the United Federation of Teachers and a task force member, described seeing members of the Ku Klux Klan parade through her town when she was four or five years old, targeting her family and others. Her mother told her “never to hate,” so she suppressed her anger for years, pushing aside the everyday slights she would experience as a black woman. The AFT changed that. “When we had that task force, I was able to say, ‘OK, let it go,’” she said. “Now is the time to speak up for my rights.”

AFT President Randi Weingarten said, “We must do everything in our power to make sure that black lives matter in every classroom, on every street and in every court in America. This report is a step in transforming our country for the better and in using this moment to start transforming ourselves.”

The report highlights a number of recommendations that the AFT plans to implement in partnership with its state and local affiliates, including to:

- Fund programs that provide alternatives to out-of-school suspensions and offer meaningful educational opportunities for black male students.
- Ensure that all schools are safe and welcoming spaces for students and educators by replacing zero-tolerance policies with restorative justice and fairer enforcement.
- Develop and implement programs to intentionally help identify, recruit, support and retain

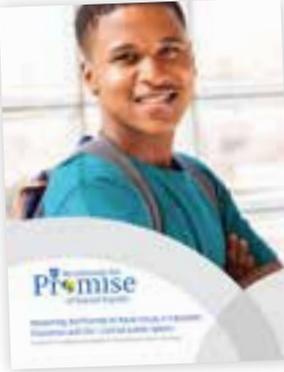
Racial Equity Task Force members Keith Johnson, top; Shelvy Abrams, center; and Jeff Grider, bottom.



black male educators and staff.

- Provide professional development and cultural competency training that helps teachers and other school staff understand their own personal biases.
- Create review processes in schools to ensure that black male students are treated fairly.
- Develop funding strategies, mentoring and counseling to create greater opportunity for black males to attend college.
- Establish partnerships with trade unions to develop apprenticeship programs that provide job training and placement in trade careers that can open the door to economic opportunity and independence for black men.
- Continue and expand its work with the Conferences of Chief Justices to help establish engagement strategies to bridge the gap between minority and low-income communities and court leadership through collaborative efforts that will increase public trust and confidence in the states’ courts.

The report will be discussed at regional meetings this fall. To get involved and learn what you can do to move the issue forward, contact Regena Thomas in the AFT’s human rights and community relations department at [rthomas@aft.org](mailto:rthomas@aft.org).



# ROAD WARRIOR

Matt Emigholz drove 1,000 miles to sign up union members



RANDY SQUIRES

AFT public employee Matt Emigholz says the anti-worker actions of Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner motivated him to get his members more involved in the union.

MATT EMIGHOLZ wasn't always an activist, but he's glad that he's one now. "This whole union thing wasn't new to me; I was in a union before, but I wasn't active," says Emigholz, a mechanic for the Illinois Department of Transportation and area vice president of the Illinois Federation of Public Employees. His activism began with AFT mobilization training. "It pushed me to get involved," he says. The anti-union actions of Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner drove Emigholz to go even further. "I started paying attention when the new governor began making moves to harm union members, like supporting right-to-work legislation. I knew there was no one to help our members understand what fair share and 'right to work' are doing to union membership, so I had to do something."

And he did. Emigholz pulled out a map of Illinois and plotted out the locations of each of the 26 facilities throughout the state where his local had members. Then he hit the road with the intention to speak to every one of them. That was in the spring; since then, Emigholz says he's put at least 1,000 miles on his car and used most of his personal and vacation time to conduct this outreach to members.

Emigholz spent his days driving to facilities and talking with members on their

lunch breaks. Some allowed him to make home visits. "I did whatever I needed to do to get the job done."

The effort has been more than successful, says Emigholz. He notes that at least 50 of his 180 members didn't have full union membership, but the one-on-one conversations persuaded most of them to sign up as full members. "Many of the people I spoke with thought they were members already," he says, adding that "a lot of people have become stewards and activists based on the face-to-face meetings."

"I don't talk to people, I work on trucks. That's why I know if I can do this, anyone can."



Not all of these personal encounters were a success, Emigholz concedes. "My very first one-on-one conversation didn't pan out. The member just wouldn't sign the card," he says. In spite of that, Emigholz found that each member visit got a little easier. "I don't talk to people, I work on trucks. That's why I know if I can do this, anyone can."



## We are moving!

Public Employee Advocate has outgrown its print home and is moving to an **all-digital platform**.

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- More timely news
- More room for member voices

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