

together



Our union continues to grow – and so does our power

At the 2022 AFT Convention, the IFT was celebrated for our leadership in organizing. Our accomplishments saturated the “Wall of Fame” that recognized the previous two years of organizing wins across the field. We vowed to keep going, and we did.

Since our own convention in October 2022, **the IFT has organized more than 2,500 new members in 20 units across the state.** These new members come

in the form of new locals and councils, or by adding new positions to a bargaining unit. Whether hundreds of members or a few at a time, all of them chose IFT as their partner at work, at the bargaining table, and in Springfield to advocate for their professions.

To all our new members – we are glad that you’ve joined us, and **we look forward to working together to win the future we all deserve.**

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Illinois Federation of Teachers
A Union of Professionals

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Members fighting powerfully for a **strong union and the future we all deserve.**

STARTING THE NEW YEAR STRONG



IFT PRESIDENT & COO
DAN MONTGOMERY

2023 was quite a year! Thanks to you, our union has so much to be proud of – and so much to build upon in the year ahead.

Last year, we experienced incredible growth. Workers clearly saw the benefits of joining the IFT to protect and improve our professions, workplace rights, and the services and programs available to students and Illinoisans. We organized more than 2,500 new members in 20 units (see cover). Incredibly, that is 25 percent of our national union's total membership growth for the year – all right here in Illinois. Amazing!

That's just the beginning. Thanks to the efforts of our members, leaders, and staff, IFT worked with lawmakers to eliminate a longstanding voucher scheme instituted during the Rauner administration. (See page 3.) Disguised as a scholarship program for needy students, "Invest in Kids" actually gave wealthy donors massive state tax credits for contributions to discriminatory private and religious schools. At a time when Illinois must direct its resources to the public schools that serve ALL kids, this was a huge victory for public education and taxpayers.

Our work to negotiate outstanding collective bargaining agreements was also powerful in 2023. Locals and chapters statewide worked with IFT staff to make important contract gains. Among them were those secured after **historic, concurrent multi-day strikes last spring at Eastern Illinois, Chicago State, and Governors State Universities.** We commend our brave members in the University Professionals of Illinois (Local 4100) for their determined actions that resonated with higher education faculty, staff, and students across the state and nation.

The Columbia College Faculty Union (CFAC Local 6602) also made history with the longest-ever adjunct strike in the U.S. These heroic members demanded that their college do better for students and the most marginalized faculty, and they won. (See page 3.)

Our efforts to elect a teacher, organizer, and IFT member to lead Chicago for the first time were widely recognized in 2023. **It was one of the proudest days of my professional life when Chicago Teachers Union (Local 1) member and past IFT Vice President Brandon Johnson was sworn in as mayor.** This historic victory happened thanks to the hard work of IFT members, the Chicago Teachers Union, and our union allies across Chicago. We're already seeing the fruits of our labors in the mayor's strong leadership, and we know his progressive vision will continue to benefit students, workers, and businesses.

Speaking of Mayor Johnson, we were proud to welcome him as a speaker last fall for the in-person return of the IFT PSRP/Public Employees Conference. It was wonderful to be together again in Springfield to host this event for some of our most dedicated and fast-growing membership groups. (See page 7.)

Looking ahead, there is so much to look forward to in the new year.

This spring, we'll be convening in person for the IFT Presidents' Conference (See back).

Our important work in Springfield will continue. Among our top priorities this year are to make significant improvements to the unfair and insufficient Tier 2 pension system and continue the fight against vouchers.

Members will soon be engaging in 2024 Election work, with statewide IFT Political Action Committee (PAC) meetings beginning later this month. We urge you to get involved in our union's democratic PAC process to determine which candidates deserve the IFT's support this year. (It's not too soon to set a reminder that early voting for the Primary Election begins on Feb. 8!)

2024 is going to be busy, but I know that we will continue to be successful and keep growing stronger – **TOGETHER.**

Fall session legislative update: Progress continues in Springfield

The fall veto session wrapped up in November, and IFT members have much to celebrate with the end of the unfair Invest in Kids program that diverted public funds to private and religious schools. Aside from that win, significant progress was made on issues impacting our members, from less standardized testing to increased funding.

**YOU SAID
NO TO VOUCHERS!**

VOUCHER SCHEME IS DEFEATED

This November, **the Illinois General Assembly made history by being the first state in the nation to eliminate a school voucher program** with its decision to end the tax credit scholarship/voucher program known as "Invest in Kids."

Ending the Invest in Kids program is not just a win against a flawed voucher scheme, it is a significant stride in giving top priority to the needs of our public education system and guaranteeing equal opportunities for every student, particularly those from Black, Brown, special education, and LGBTQ+ communities.

HIGH-STAKES TESTING

Senate Bill 1993 will take effect over the summer and determines that any district seeking an increase in standardized testing must hold public discussion and a vote. Knowing the need to limit excessive standardized testing, we are grateful for this requirement to involve educators, school staff, and parents when new assessments are proposed in districts across the state.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

After passing significant updates to the sustainable community schools (SCS) law last session, the work continued in Springfield to strengthen and expand the school code regarding SCS. The IFT will continue to advocate for this model of education that prioritizes comprehensive wraparound services and support as an approach to ensuring educational justice and equity.

ADDRESSING THE TEACHER SHORTAGE

Several bills were introduced and passed this session that combat the teacher shortage in Illinois, including a law that shortens the time it takes to attain tenure, a \$4,000 bonus for National Board Certified Teachers (NBCT) who work in hard-to-staff schools for more than two years, and incentives for NBCT teachers who mentor other teachers or counselors. In addition, the budget allots \$45 million for the first year of a three-year pilot program to fill teacher vacancies.

TIER 2 PENSION TALKS

Conversations are picking up about addressing inequities for Tier 2 pension recipients. State Rep. Stephanie Kifowit (D-Aurora) convened hearings over the summer to further explore long-term improvements that can be made to achieve a sustainable pension system. The IFT's legislative team will continue to advocate for changes to the system that make it more equitable for workers who choose public service as their career.

HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING

Because of increases to the Monetary Award Program (MAP), virtually all community college students from households at or below median income levels will have their tuition and fees fully covered. Legislators also increased funds for Grow Your Own Teachers to \$6 million. As multiple higher education strikes earlier in the year signified, the work continues to demand more robust support for higher education students at our public colleges and universities.

A LOOK AHEAD

Legislators will return to Springfield in mid-January. Watch ift-aft.org/underthedome for updates.

▶ CTU BRINGS IN RESIDENT TEACHERS

Chicago Teachers Union (CTU, Local 1) **welcomed a slew of new members** by negotiating with CPS to recognize resident teachers as part of the union’s

bargaining unit. This achievement brings **more than 200 new members to CTU**, and the resident teachers are now on a path to becoming certified.

▶ “HOT LABOR FALL” ON CAMPUS

More than half of our 2,500 new members join us from our higher education locals. Faculty at ISU kicked off the trend in Illinois when their group of **650 filed cards in October, joining the University Professionals of Illinois** (UPI, Local 4100). ISU assistant professor Xiaoying Zhao stated, “Today we have taken the necessary steps to formalize our union and send a clear message that the faculty at ISU want a strong voice to advocate for the needs of our students, this institution, and our colleagues who are dedicated to them both.”

Another **35 non-tenure-track full-time faculty at University of Illinois in Springfield** will join UPI. They formed a union to gain more transparent working conditions, equitable wages, and fair paths to promotion and job security.

In November, **1,000 research assistants petitioned the labor board to join the UIC Graduate Employees Organization** (UIC GEO, Local 6297). Unreasonable workloads combined with low stipends and no representation made the choice to unionize clear and urgent. This organizing victory is a first step towards making real improvements for research assistants at UIC and further advances the growing graduate employee union movement.

Organizers at the Cook County College Teachers Union (CCCTU, Local 1600) have been busy in the south suburbs. **Eighty professional staff workers at Moraine Valley Community College have filed to join CCCTU** as a new chapter there, where faculty, adjuncts, and classified staff have chapters as well. And north of the city at the College of Lake County, another **45 IT specialists will become a new council in the Lake County Federation of Teachers** (LCFT, Local 504).

“We know that the way to improve our campuses and give our students the best education possible is by joining collectively in one voice and advocating for better working and learning conditions.”

John Miller
UPI President

▶ BUT WAIT, THERE’S MORE IN 504!

LCFT Local 504 continues to grow. Since last fall, we organized the mechanics, maintenance, and grounds staff in Zion-Benton District 126, and in January 2023, the education support professionals in Libertyville-Vernon Hills District 128 joined our ranks. Following the passing of a district funding referendum, Warren Township’s council expanded services to students with 33 new union positions in the spring.

Support staff at Prairie Crossing Charter School in Grayslake also joined IFT Local 504. Seeking a stronger voice at work and more collaboration with their administration, the staff saw a union as the way to meet that goal. **“We are dedicated to this school, our students, and the community. Being in a union will give us a greater ability to advocate for them all,”** said **Prairie Crossing Instructional Assistant Kristen Zimmerman.**

▶ PSRP’S SAY “UNION YES!”

During IFT’s 2022 Convention, delegates resolved to bring more PSRP’s into our union to give them the support they need and compensation they deserve.

That goal has already been achieved! Local 604 has welcomed occupational therapists to its Park Forest Council and a group of 90 bus drivers to its council in Kankakee. Another 23 bus drivers will be joining Farmington Support Staff and Teachers (Local 3764). And many other PSRPs have joined our ranks,

including teachers’ aides in Hillsboro and Century school districts, service workers in O’Fallon, support staff in Elmwood and Lebanon, and an attendance clerk at Patton in Riverdale.

We are inspired to see that education and public service workers across Illinois understand that, **by joining together in a union, we can advance our profession and have a positive impact on the communities where we live and work. Onward!**

WHERE IN THE WORLD WILL SALLY BE NEXT ?

The IFT's newest member – Sally Darity – has had a busy few months visiting members and labor allies around the state! Keep an eye out for Sally at the next picket line or member event. She stands tall as a symbol of IFT solidarity and member strength!

1. IFT Headquarters, Robert M. Healey Center, ULI 2. Southwest Suburban Federation of Teachers, Local 943, Legislative Picnic 3. West Suburban Teachers Union, Local 571, Legislative Breakfast 4. UAW Strike 5. Illinois State University Faculty, Union Filing 6. Joliet Township High School Paraprofessionals, Local 604, Rally 7. IFT PSRP/PE Conference 8. Columbia College Faculty Union, Local 6602, Strike



Columbia College Chicago faculty prevail after longest adjunct strike in U.S. history

After 49 days on the picket line in a strike that garnered national attention, nearly 600 part time adjunct faculty who are members of the **Columbia College Faculty Union (CFAC, IFT Local 6602)** secured and ratified four-year agreement that makes critical improvements for students and the most marginalized faculty at Chicago’s renowned fine arts college.

“This agreement makes important progress towards ensuring that Columbia puts students’ educational needs and faculty equity above profits,” said Diana Vallera, CFAC president and photography professor. “The contract provisions will ensure transparency and provide paths for collaboration with the administration moving forward so that we can work together to help Columbia do better.”

The faculty were forced to walk out on October 30 after the administration unilaterally cancelled more than 350 enrolled classes and refused to bargain an equitable agreement for the part time adjuncts, who teach nearly 70 percent of Columbia’s courses.

Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson, city officials, the American Federation of Teachers and labor allies across the state and nation stood with CFAC throughout their heroic fight. Students also played a critical role in the strike, demonstrating their overwhelming support for faculty and calling on the administration to do the right thing.

“Our members said all along that we would do whatever was necessary to stand up for what our students and fellow adjuncts needed, and we proved it. The strike brought faculty and students together in a powerful way. We are more resolved and unified than ever before. We are truly CFAC strong.”

Diana Vallera
CFAC President

“PSRP for Life!”

It was a big year for paraprofessionals. In addition to huge organizing gains (see cover), in April, school and college support staff gathered in Baltimore to attend AFT’s PSRP Conference, where **Christel Williams, PSRP leader of the Chicago Teachers Union and IFT Vice President**, received the highest PSRP honor, the Albert Shanker Pioneer Award.



In accepting the award, Williams expressed gratitude for CTU President and IFT Executive Vice President Stacy Davis Gates, for the late CTU President Karen Lewis, and for retired council member June Davis. “I am forever grateful,” she said. “Union work is a legacy of my life.”

In October, IFT PSRPs headed to Springfield to attend IFT’s PSRP Conference, “Together, We

Are IFT Strong”. Brandon Johnson greeted the crowd and thanked them for their support.

“Our strength is in our solidarity. All of you contribute to making our working conditions better and our living conditions better.”

Brandon Johnson
Chicago Mayor, IFT Member

Finally, on November 15, we celebrated **PSRP Day in Illinois!** A day dedicated to showing our gratitude and appreciation to the more than 100,000 dedicated paraprofessionals, administrative assistants, and other school-related personnel who provide critical services in our classrooms, school and campus offices, cafeterias, school buses, and more.

AFT President Randi Weingarten said it best. “You’re the infrastructure. You’re the glue. Without you, communities lose out big time. You make schools better.”

I am very proud to be a **PSRP FOR LIFE!**

View IFT’s PSRP appreciation video on our YouTube Channel.

Michelle Mitchell
Decatur Federation of Teaching Assistants, Local 4324

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

[IFT-AFT.ORG/PROFESSIONALDEVELOPMENT](https://ift-aft.org/professionaldevelopment)

- **ADMINISTRATOR ACADEMY INITIAL TEACHERS EVALUATION TRAINING (virtual)**
JANUARY 20-21, 2024
- **UNION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE (SOUTH)**
FEBRUARY 2 - 3 2024
- **UNION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE (QUINCY)**
FEBRUARY 10, 2024
- **UNION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE - COLLECTIVE BARGAINING**
MARCH 1-2, 2024



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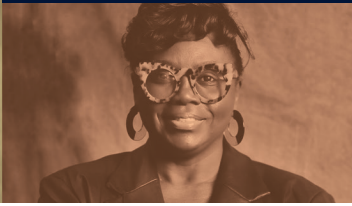
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we lead