



PFT UPDATE

PITTSBURGH FEDERATION OF TEACHERS
AFT PA, AFT, AFL-CIO



December 24, 2007

Negotiations Update

As this annual PFT mailing is being prepared to be sent on December 24th, the union and district continue in negotiations for successor contracts for our Teachers and Other Professionals, Paraprofessionals, and Technical-Clerical units. These talks continue to be most challenging, but the PFT negotiating team members – Rufus Jordan, Mary VanHorn, George Gensure, Nina Esposito-Visgitis, Sylvia Wilson, Attorney Steve Jordan, and I – are determined to attain resolutions that can be recommended to the membership for ratification.

As of this writing, the schedule of upcoming negotiation sessions includes Friday, December 21, Wednesday, December 26, and, tentatively, Friday, December 28.

Ed Wintermyer and Joe Lamenza of the PA Bureau of Mediation continue in their efforts to have both parties reduce and resolve areas of dispute. They have participated in virtually all recent negotiations sessions, including those held on Monday, December 17 and Wednesday, December 19. PFT members should know that Mr. Wintermyer and Mr. Lamenza are persistent in their efforts to have the parties continue the negotiations process, even as the economic and noneconomic issues in dispute remain significant. The PFT negotiators have continued to value the mediators' efforts, but more progress needs to be made in these negotiations.

As was indicated in the December 7th mailing, PFT members are urged to view any and all speculation about the ongoing negotiations as just that – conjecture. The PFT will keep our membership apprised as to the schedule of negotiations and other activities.

On behalf of the PFT Executive Board, I extend best wishes to all over this winter break and for the coming year. We have had a challenging 2007, but the exceptional work of our members has benefitted the District's children and young adults tremendously. Furthermore, the support of PFT members for their colleagues and our union as an organization is proving to be invaluable. We face a challenging 2008, to be sure, but through those challenges we will stand together – for the betterment of our students and our union.

John Tarka
PFT President

District Attorney Zappala Calls for Improved Safety

On Friday, December 14, Allegheny County District Attorney Stephen Zappala convened a meeting in his County Courthouse office. The meeting focused on issues of safety and security in Pittsburgh's schools and communities.

The session was a continuation of ongoing discussion between Mr. Zappala and the PFT. It followed presentations by representatives of the District Attorney's office at the August 25th PFT Building Representatives Meeting and the participation by Mr. Zappala at a PFT Building Representatives Workshop on October 22nd, where PFT representatives were candid about their concerns related to learning environment and district-wide discipline.

Mr. Zappala conducted the December 14 session, which involved representatives of Mayor Ravenstahl's office, the City Police, School District Central Administration, School Police, as well as several officials from County offices. John Tarka represented the PFT at the meeting.

Discussion was frank about PFT concerns regarding the impact of poor learning environment on both student achievement and the morale of students and adults. The impact of reduced security was discussed, and participants at the meeting agreed that efforts must be increased to improve conditions which negatively affect teaching and learning. Specific strategies for improving student attendance and conduct are being developed.

The PFT appreciates Mr. Zappala's continued interest in the security of our schools and communities. PFT members are well aware of the challenges many communities face and the work that must be done to assure safety for all who attend and work in every school. Students' health, welfare, and achievement are obviously impacted by the learning environment of the schools they attend.

Member Activities Ongoing

Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers members have been exceptionally busy outside of their classrooms with many activities that are of benefit to our union and community.

PFT Members sit on several Grass Roots Committees which have brought labor and management together to discuss issues and to propose solutions specific to educational work sites. Currently, Grass Roots Committees for the following levels are functioning: High School, K-5 Elementary, K-8 Elementary, ALAs, Special Education, and Early Childhood.

Among the issues that have been addressed are assessments in general, the McMillan Reading Series and assessments, burdensome paperwork across all levels, school based discipline committees, school wide behavior plans and management systems, new certification requirements for Pre-K teachers, monitoring state regulations in regard to special education, special education concerns across all levels, and provision of related arts in the elementary schools. The work of these committees has proven to be invaluable as efforts continue to provide a safe and functional learning environment, which is needed to educate children fully.

The Political Action Committee's Annual Holiday Reception brought more than 50 area elected officials to meet and talk with PFT Executive Board Members and the PFT Political Action Committee's active members. Dialogue remains open with these officials and others as the PFT remains a voice for educators and our community and as a source for those seeking advice on any number of educational issues and concerns.

PFT members' generosity has helped others during this and past holiday seasons. Our members have made monetary and toy contributions that are provided first to area union members' families. Remaining items are given to shelters, orphanages, and for further distribution to various other organizations that help children in need. This year, not only were bags of toys donated, but there has also been over \$800.00 donated. The monetary gifts will be used to purchase items for older children and for safe items for younger children. The Allegheny County Labor Council's Community Services Committee and the PFT Executive Board thank you for your efforts and send best wishes to all for a peaceful and safe holiday.

Support the PAC that Supports Our Membership

The PFT's Political Action Committee continues to grow and expand its activities and advocacy. In recent years, PFT members have participated in voter registration drives, election campaigns at the local, state, and national level, and regular events designed to promote public education and our union membership.

The PFT's criteria for support of candidates are pretty straightforward. We support candidates and elected officials who support public schools, our students and their families, and our union's members. The PAC Fund has benefitted candidates from both political parties and will continue to do so.

Two factors are essential to the Political Action Committee's success. First, the volunteer work of our members is crucial to the efforts of PAC. If you have an interest in school and community improvement, consider joining the Political Action Committee. You will find the work challenging and invigorating, and you can help in educating public figures about the work of our union's membership.

A second factor vital to our political efforts' success is the financial support of our membership. Direct contributions to PAC are provided for by way of the PFT By-Laws. (This mailing provides the opportunity for those who wish not to contribute to do so.) However, additional support for our political action committee is welcomed and encouraged. With the start of the new year, the Political Action Committee will solicit additional financial support from our members. Watch your mail for further information about PAC, including information about how you can participate in political action work and how you can contribute financially to the Political Action Committee. Both actions can make your voice be clearly heard.

Important Information about Act 48 Continuing Professional Education

As of March, 2007, significant restrictions were added to Act 48 PA's Continuing Professional Development Law. These changes specify that activities, courses, and/or programs that are taken for professional development credit must be directly related to the educator's area of certification. Therefore, the Act now speaks to what is acceptable and unacceptable as professional development. Check the PFT website

at www.pft400.org and click on the Act 48 Update link to review the changes.

Act 48, which went into effect July 1, 2000, applies to all certified education professionals and requires 180 hours or 6 credits of continuing professional development work every five years. For an educator who holds an education certificate that was issued in 2003, the deadline to fulfill the Act 48 requirement is the end of this school year.

Educators can view their records and check on their compliance status by going to the Pennsylvania Department of Education's (PDE) Homepage at www.pde.state.pa.us and clicking the link "Act 48 Reporting System" on the left hand column of the page. Then, follow the appropriate instructions.

Many issues and concerns related to the Pittsburgh School District are addressed by the PFT/PPS Act 48 Steering Committee. However, individual educators can get the most common questions about Act 48 answered on the PDE's website at www.pde.state.pa.us and should check their Act 48 compliance status regularly.

Reminders to All Members

Keeping Your Beneficiary Current:

Have you had any major change in your life since you began your employment with the School District? Have you married, divorced, added a family member, or had a death in your family – anything along these lines that may make it necessary to change your beneficiary with the retirement system? If yes, please do so as soon as possible. Contact the Pittsburgh Public Schools Benefits Administration & Customer Service Division at hbenefits@pghboe.net or call 412-622-3692 or 412-622-3694.

Update Your Medical Coverage for a New Child:

Contact the Benefits office at the Board of Education to add a new child for medical coverage. Don't assume that, just because the maternity care and birth were covered by your insurance, there will be automatic coverage for the child. The employee must contact the District and arrange for appropriate coverage for the new child. If you adopt, the same is true; please contact the Board to add a new child to your plan. Contact the Pittsburgh Public Schools Benefits Administration & Customer Service Division at hbenefits@pghboe.net or call 412-622-3692 or 412-622-3694.

Level I to Level II Instructional Certificates:

Professionals who hold an Instructional I certificate with the State of Pennsylvania are reminded that they must complete 24 credits beyond their bachelor's degree in order to obtain a Level II Instructional Certificate. Reminders are given to new teachers during Induction, but the State does not provide additional reminders. PDE considers each certificate holder responsible for the status of his or her credential. A reference to this requirement is included on the back of your certificate, and educators can also refer to the PA Department of Education's website at www.pde.state.pa.us to see CSPG No. 7 information on achieving the Instructional Level II (Permanent) Certification.

Early Childhood Certification Revision

All early childhood teachers currently working in the Pittsburgh School District in the early childhood programs must be certified prior to the start of the 2008–2009 school year. The Pittsburgh School District applied for and received an Accountability Block Grant, a landmark investment launched by Governor Ed Rendell to enable school districts to invest in the educational programs that are proven to help children succeed.

Pennsylvania is committed to helping all students reach proficiency in reading and math so that they graduate from our high schools adequately prepared for college and the high-skills workforce of the 21st century. One of the four goals to achieve this outcome is "Early Success in School." This focus is for all students to experience success in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and the primary grades so that they have a strong learning foundation to support future achievement.

A requirement of all school districts that received this funding is that all teachers in school-based pre-kindergarten programs be certified in early childhood education (pre-kindergarten through third grade). That mandate was to be effective at the time that the grant was awarded. However, Pittsburgh was able to have the deadline moved for currently employed early childhood teachers to the end of this school year. The District arranged for local colleges to provide accelerated programs for those individuals who needed to meet the certification requirement. For additional information, the affected individuals should contact Carol Barone-Martin at the School District at 412-325-4294.

National Board Certified Teachers

The Pittsburgh School District ranks number 1 in the state with a cumulative total of 80 teachers who have attained National Board Certification. Pennsylvania gained 66 more Nationally Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) in 2007, which places our state as 25th in the number of newly certified teachers and 25th in the total number of teachers who have achieved certification over time. Pennsylvania has had to work harder to provide National Board certification because, while the Rendell administration has been supportive of National Board certification, the previous state administration was not supportive.

Pittsburgh has its own initiative to provide guidance and support for teachers as they go through the pre-candidacy phase and then through the actual process. If you would like to have additional information, please contact Rhonda Graham at rgraham1@pghboe.net. More detailed information can be found at www.nbpts.org or www.pft400.org.

Teachers who achieve national board certification go through a process to meet rigorous standards that involve intense study, research, self assessment, and peer review. The Teachers and Other Professionals Collective Bargaining Agreement provides additional compensation for those who attain National Board certification.

Congratulations are in order for Pittsburgh's newest certified teachers.

Special Alert to Special Education Teachers and Paraprofessionals

Substantive changes are proposed to Chapter 14 of the PA State Board of Education regulations covering Special Education.

A complete analysis of those changes is provided by PFT's Nina Esposito-Visgitis on the PFT website www.pft400.org. Special Education Teachers and Paraprofessionals are invited to view the proposed changes by visiting the website and clicking on the "Special Education Regulations" link.

If you have questions or concerns about the proposed changes, contact Nina at 412-431-5900.

At the November 19, 2007 Building Representatives Workshop, many of the Representatives offered their view of what "We Stand Together" means. These are some of the reflections shared. Go to www.pft400.org to read others that were submitted and/or to submit your own interpretation.

We Stand Together are three powerful words. The more difficult our struggles, the more we need to support one another. When we stand together, our union is stronger, our commitment to students is stronger, and our colleagues are stronger.

Lora B. Turner (MLK ALA)

In the course of my career as a teacher with Pittsburgh Public Schools, I have seen many programs, boards and administration come and go. What has remained a constant throughout my tenure is the rank and file of the PFT. Based on its commitment to the children of the city of Pittsburgh "We" as the rank and file of the PFT "stand together" in solidarity to provide the best for our students and ensure adequate compensation for staff to be able to deliver quality instruction.

Anthony Woods (MLK ALA)

"We Stand Together," to me, means that through all of our troubles, we are one. To me, it also means we are a "family." We disagree, but when we are faced with difficult situations, We Stand Together, as one, like a "family" should. I am proud to be a part of this organization!

Clevon M. Owens, Jr. (Brashear High School)

We, as educators and child advocates employed by the Pittsburgh Public Schools, are concerned with the delivery of the highest quality of education for all students as well as providing a safe and valuable work environment for our members. In that effort, we stand together.

Jobe Bennett (Program for Students with Exceptionalities)

The Pittsburgh Public Schools rely on a strong, competent teaching staff. Without our hard work and dedication, the district could not accomplish its goals.

Suzanne Berry (Frick)



WE STAND TOGETHER