

Vocational Instructor

Local 4200A ~ AFT, AFTCT, & AFL-CIO



**"It Pays
To Be Taught
By a Vo-Tech
Teacher"**

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Standing in Sand

By Ed Leavy, SVFT President

I began 23 different school years at Bullard-Havens as a teacher and never slept well the night before the first student day. It got easier over time, of course, but there were still nerves. It was important to start with the right tone, especially in the years I had freshmen. I wanted to be welcoming without coming across as weak, set high expectations without making anyone anxious. I did not want to embarrass myself, as I had early in my career when I became frustrated because something I needed had not been delivered and the students were getting a little loud; I slammed my desk drawer shut, went to stand up, and only realized I had shut my tie in the drawer when my head banged against the desk. My glasses cut me, so I stood in front of the class bleeding and dazed while they sat staring at me, aghast. They were certainly quiet in the moment, but for four years every time someone in the class walked past my classroom, he or she would remind me not to shut my tie in my desk. It was not the first impression I had wanted.

That memory has been with me often this year, as we all seem to feel dazed and not quite sure of what is happening as we start the year. There has never been a year so filled with uncertainty as this one. We are confused about everything from delivery of instruction to who exactly is in shop when the 10th and 11th graders are there. Are the CDC guidelines 6', or are they at "least 3"? When will the PPEs "on order" arrive? How is anyone supposed to teach ten students in the classroom and twelve students at home at the same time, especially when we know that even making a cellphone call from most schools is like dialing from the bottom of a mine shaft? We add all that professional anxiety to the fact that we are in a pandemic, that everyone is wearing masks, and that every time someone coughs a sense of panic sets in. What has been most frustrating, not just now but all year, is that at a time when we want to hang on to every piece of stability we can find, stability is in short supply.

As a participant on AFT CT's preK-12 calls, it's clear these issues are everywhere, not just with the CTECS. Teachers from every district are concerned about the lack of PPEs, the cleanliness of the building, and how the hybrid is supposed to work. Teachers everywhere are concerned about the safety and health of their students and themselves. While Connecticut has among the fewest cases in the country, Abbott Tech could not even start the year with any students because of a surge in Danbury; Valley districts that started with 100% of the students in school have already had outbreaks, and we're seeing a slight uptick in cases since school has started. Teachers have to plan for lessons not knowing if any students will be in the class if they switch to all-remote, even for just a few days. Planning cohesive lessons over a week is impossible.

What can we do as a union in these troubling and troubled times? We have tried to get written agreements when possible, so the rules are clear; with schools separated by 125 miles or more, it is easy for every administration to begin instituting different standards. As union members in the schools, we can do the things necessary to help everyone feel safe – follow the guidelines, hold students accountable for safety, call out if there is any concern about being sick. We can try to get facts rather than spread rumors; with so much still left to be determined, speculation about what happens next is both rampant and unhelpful. We have to prioritize; I have had to make a rule for myself that I will read every email from a member before I read anything from a non-member. That means that sometimes the Superintendent's emails or AFT's emails go unread until every member has received a reply. Nothing really works though; we still stand dazed and unsteady, as though we are in sand that keeps shifting beneath us. Long-term planning is impossible – what will the world even look like next spring? What if this is the new normal – that we fear each other because someone could be sick, that 24 students in a class is unthinkable, that we can only address what is directly in front of us? What we truly need to do is watch out for each other and be kind. The care teachers show for each other and our students has been the spine of this system for my 35 years in it. In times when there is almost nothing we can count on, let us make sure that we can depend on being in this together. It's what we have.

Core Principles Regarding the Safe Re-opening of School Buildings

AFT CT – in conjunction with AFSCME, CSEA, CEUI, UAW, and CEA – released its 13 Core Principles for reopening. We are now being asked how we would grade the district A-F in terms of following the principles. Since every school is different, please let us know how you believe your school is doing.

We, as teachers and school staff, recognize the obligation to educate our students. For districts unable to open buildings in a safe manner, we believe distance learning should be followed until such time physical re-entry is safe for the entire school community. No school shall operate at a capacity that does not allow it to meet the standards below. Connecticut state officials shall assure that every district, regardless of economic status, has all the resources necessary to comply with these requirements, and with all additional requirements set forth in current Department of Education (SDE) policy.

1. No school may open unless the district has a joint labor/management committee (specific to the COVID-19 crisis), including representatives appointed by each labor organization in the district. All bargaining units shall be consulted any time the reopening plan will be modified.
2. Masks will be required of all students regardless of grade level. If a mask cannot be worn, full and appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and additional distancing will be required for and provided to all staff and students who will be in contact with the unmasked student. - Face shields and other medical grade PPE will be worn by staff/students who are unable to practice physical distancing where close contact is highly likely, such as those students and staff who provide or receive services like OT/PT and speech. - Gloves (non-latex) and gowns will be worn when contact with bodily fluids or other potentially infectious material can be reasonably anticipated.
3. Students and staff must maintain a distance of six feet at all times except where impossible due to specific individual student needs. In all cases where six feet cannot be maintained because of these exclu-

sions, appropriate medical grade PPE must be provided.

4. All Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Department of Labor Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) and Department of Public Health (DPH) guidelines must be followed at all times by all schools, including, but not limited to, cleaning and disinfecting supplies and protocols and PPE. COVID-effective hand sanitizers must be available in all common areas.
5. There shall be no reprisals taken by district administrators or any vendor against anyone who raises a health and safety concern or makes a complaint to their supervisor or any outside agency regarding workplace safety.
6. Fire code-compliant partitions shall be required in common work areas and between secretarial/administrative staff and students or parents.
7. In addition to strict social distancing, and following all CDC and DPH guidelines, all food service must comply with restaurant COVID-19 protocols.
8. Schools must utilize the recommended air filters and/or ultraviolet light technology. Schools are recommended to utilize outdoor settings to the extent possible. Safe minimum and maximum heat index standards must be maintained. - HVAC and air quality report and/or progress should be shared with labor organizations at a minimum each month or as defined in the joint labor/management committee.
9. In-person learning shall not commence until there has been proper training for all staff, including permanent, temporary and substitutes on safety protocols related to COVID-19.
10. Parents and union leaders shall be informed in any instance of a student or staff member testing positive for COVID-19. Aggressive contact tracing measures shall be implemented. Anyone deemed to have been possibly exposed must quarantine for 14 days.

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11. School facilities shall not be used by outside organizations and job classifications that require movement between school buildings shall be kept to a minimum and a topic of discussion for the joint labor/management committee.

12. Only trained healthcare workers may be required to administer COVID-related healthcare to students or to medically assess a student.

13. The school district shall require by contract the following from any student transportation provider or if providing bus transportation directly, shall assure: - In addition to the bus driver, every bus must be occupied by an employee, such as a bus monitor, who will enforce all health and safety requirements. - Student seating must adhere to the following restrictions: - No more than one student may be seated in a single row, unless they reside in the same household. - Students will be seated in a diagonal formation, in which students alternate sitting on the right and left side of the bus.

Secretaries, Future and Current

By Ed Leavy

The results of election for secretary were completed at 3:00 on Wednesday, September 9. The results were as follows: Tamara Connors 99 votes; Dan Delpiano 95 votes; Makenzi Hurtado 89 votes; and Eric Klotz 54 votes. It was the closest election in memory. By Constitution, since no candidate received a majority of the votes cast, the top two candidates will be in a run-off election. Voting will again be done on-line through EZvote. Voting will take place starting at 8:00 on Monday, October 5 and ending at 3:00 Wednesday, October 7.

While the vote was very close, fewer than 1/3 of our members voted. Part of that was that EZvote ended up in the junk, spam, or merchandise files in many members' emails. Part of that was holding the vote over a holiday weekend, which is why we moved the run-off election and Executive Committee meeting. Most of it was we held the election the first week of school in the middle of the pandemic through online voting, which was just one more unusual thing

people had to deal with. This election is important, however. Our leadership team talks through most decisions, so the Secretary's opinions are important – especially since he or she is teaching every day. It's also that of the last seven people who had been elected to part-time office – Treasurer and Secretary – six later became full-time officers. Members may notice that at least one of the full-time officers is getting close to retirement age. Please make sure to vote October 5-7.

Let us take a moment though to congratulate our current Secretary, Greg Beyer, on his retirement and thank him for his service to the SVFT. Though I'm sure we had been in the same English steering committee meetings over the years, I got to know Greg when he took over for me as Treasurer in 2008. In the chaos that was the 2011 SEBAC negotiations, Greg provided an invaluable perspective; we were spending 16 hours a day in negotiations, and we needed someone with a different outlook to bounce concerns off. He later served as Vice-President, and his knowledge of the system, impatience with bureaucratic nonsense, and unique mixture of steady calm punctuated with outbursts of profane anger were incredibly important to how we functioned as a team during those years. He decided to return to Oliver Wolcott as their Library/Media Specialist, but he ran for the Secretary position when Linda DeSousa retired. He transformed the position, taking responsibility for the website, proofreading the newsletter, and running our Twitter account. Greg has agreed help both candidates in the run-off, Tamara and Dan, get trained on the duties of the position.

In the midst of COVID, when we never gather in large groups, it is impossible to appropriately mark the retirement of our colleagues, our sisters and brothers, who have dedicated decades of their life to the system. All retirees deserve to be recognized for their contributions. Greg has spent over 30 years in multiple positions in multiple schools and has served in three SVFT positions. He deserves to have his career celebrated as well. Let me take this time to thank him for his hard work, his friendship, his trips with me to see old guy bands like The Fleshtones and Willie Nile, and the hundreds of hours he has contributed to the SVFT. Best of luck in Arkansas; you'll be missed.

Teacher of the Year

Among the dozens of important events lost during COVID, our annual spring Teacher of the Year banquet was one we regret the most. It is always a great time honoring the year's outstanding teachers for all they do for their students and school community. We could not have it on its scheduled day in May, of course, but – in what now sees touchingly naïve – we decided to have the banquet in October. We now have given up planning a banquet, since eating indoors in a crowd that size may need to wait until 2026.

Being chosen as the teacher of the year for your school is an incredible honor, and we will make sure that we will honor them both personally and publicly. For the first time in memory, the group ToY picture will not be on our website, but we will make sure each person's biography is shared. We will also reach out with the gift we traditionally purchase for the recipients. So many important traditions – the end of year celebration for our reps, the prom, football games, the list is endless – have been lost to COVID. We will make sure that though we cannot have the banquet this year, our teachers of the year are not overlooked. The SVFT has kept the tradition of Teacher of the Year alive, and we will continue to do so.



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SVFT Mission Statement

The SVFT is an organization of professional educators that promotes excellence through the mutual adherence to policies, documents, and procedures negotiated with the CTEC. We work to guarantee that the contract is followed and positive working conditions are maintained. This organization shall be to provide a safe and positive teaching environment for all by:

1. Maintaining the integrity of the contract, the Vocational Technical High School System, and the solidarity of the union
2. Ensuring all members are protected by the contract and equipped with the tools and knowledge necessary to make them successful
3. Protecting the jobs of our members and strengthening our system
4. Providing members opportunities to further their education and receive quality professional development
5. Responding quickly to the emerging changes to the workplace and technological challenges
6. Handling all interactions with fairness and integrity
7. Striving for productive, open communication between the SVFT leadership and our membership
8. Building and improving relationships with our union affiliates and local labor councils