

# Vocational Instructor

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



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

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## The Rule of Unintended Consequences

*By Ed Leavy, SVFT President*

Here's something I don't write very often: I have sympathy for the situation our Superintendent is currently in. Before the school year started, we met with Superintendent Jeff Wihbey. He told us that the CT Department of Education had released their annual report, and one fact it revealed is that the CTECS had among the worst teacher attendance records in the state. The Department indicated its concern to him – unlike all but one other school system in the state, the CTECS reports directly to the Department of Education. What's he to do? He can only really control how often he goes to work himself; now he's being held responsible for the attendance of 1200+ teachers.

The plan he presented basically followed the Department of Administrative Service protocols. After three absences, an administrator would "check in" with the teacher just to make sure everything is ok; the purpose would be to show compassion and concern. After five absences, there would be another meeting to discuss attendance concerns. From there, the interactions could become more disciplinary in nature. If the member had a doctor's note or was covered by FMLA, obviously that would be taken into consideration. Mr. Wihbey pointed out that the purpose was to gradually begin reducing teacher absences. He also stressed that he wanted teachers who are legitimately sick to stay home, rather than infecting half the school. What he seemed to want to reduce were the number of days that are euphemistically referred to as "mental health days," but are in fact just paid days off for no real reason. It's understandable.

This plan was unveiled differently in different schools, of course. We got several calls from teachers asking if we had "approved" this plan. Mr. Wihbey hadn't sought our approval; he was informing us of what was going to happen, and we appreciated being told. This was not a non-negotiated change in working conditions; the DAS policy has existed for years, but it had never been consistently followed in our system. The SVFT had used the policy as a defense several times: we'd get called in to a school in May to represent someone who had been late to work 125 times or more, and we'd argue that administration couldn't discipline the person because they had never taken the appropriate steps. It would be bad faith for us to then argue the administration shouldn't now take those steps. Also, there isn't much to say if we have one of the worst attendance records in the state.

Some of the consequences of the policy we predicted and have addressed – eager Assistant Principals who figured if they demanded a note for every sick day, the school's attendance would really improve (that's a contract violation, and we stopped it); administrators who either ignored the directive to show "compassion and concern" or are personally incapable of demonstrating it (we complained, and got some minor changes in approach). For an administrator or two, this policy has exacerbated the blurring of the line between being professional and being personally intrusive. Administrators unsurprisingly aren't dropping into classrooms to have informal chats about attendance, but instead set up a series of meetings in their office to discuss it, which feels disciplinary.

The biggest issue for teachers is that it seems like one more way the system is being disrespectful to the professionalism of the teachers. It is the problem with any "one size fits all" solution; one size rarely fits everyone comfortably. A person texted me this week after he was called into one of these meetings. He has had physical issues this year but had used like seven total sick days over the previous decade. No one ever said anything to him about that, but now on his fourth day out this year – for unavoidable, legitimate reasons – he's meeting with the AP. It's similar to why people react so strongly to even a letter of counseling; while our contract states, "Administrators shall be encouraged to place in the employees [personnel] file information of a positive nature..." that literally never happens (I used to make FOI requests for all positive letters placed in members' files for that school year. After three years of having HR sending me an email informing me that no such letters existed, I was asked to stop making the request). So teachers understandably bristle that they may get a letter of concern about missing seven days this year, but their file has no mention of years of excellent attendance, or even if they were teacher of the year. The unintended consequence of this policy is that it becomes just one more stick to hit us with, like the evaluation system or the parent phone log or any of the dozens of other ways our job performance is demeaned. It's exhausting and discouraging. The teacher who texted me said that the meeting made up his mind for him; he was retiring at the end of the year. Chances are, there won't be a new teacher hired for the start of next year. His student's may well start the year with a sub. Luckily, those days won't count on the DoE's teacher attendance report, so I guess we can call it progress.

## Who Was Oliver Wolcott THS Named For?

*By Ed Leavy, SVFT President*

*Lisa Cascione sent me an email in October asking whether the Bullard who was the inventor of the hard hat was the same person for whom Bullard-Havens was named (he wasn't). It made me realize I know almost nothing about the origins of our schools' names (except Norwich and Windham, obviously). Here is the first article in a series:*

Connecticut has two Oliver Wolcotts. Neither has anything to do with industry or technical education, but they are two of the most important people in the history of Western Connecticut. Oliver Wolcott Sr. was not born in Torrington where the school is, but in Windsor (John Brown from Harper's Ferry fame was actually born in Torrington, but his legacy might be a little complicated to name a school for him). He later settled in Litchfield, which abuts Torrington. He was one of 14 children – people had much larger families then – and graduated first in his class at Yale. After graduating, he was granted a commission to raise a militia for the French and Indian War. His experience there led him to be named Commissioner of Indian Affairs at the start of the Revolutionary War; his goal was to keep the tribes neutral in the war. He then became a largely unsuccessful brigadier general before being named a delegate to the Continental Congress. There, he became an early voice for independence. In February of 1776, before many members of the Congress were ready to consider true independence, he said, "Our difference with Great Britain has become very great.... What matters will issue in, I cannot say, but perhaps in a total dis severance from Great Britain." He became quite sick during the Continental Congress and did not sign the Declaration of Independence until October of 1776. Nevertheless, there was still great risk when he did sign it, and he joined Lyman Hall, Samuel Huntington, Roger Sherman, and William Williams as the signers from Connecticut. After independence, Wolcott was elected as Lieutenant Governor in 1786, and became Governor upon the death of Samuel Huntington in January 1796. He served as Governor until his own death in December 1797 at the age of 71.

His son, Oliver Wolcott Jr., was born in 1760 and served in the Continental Army from 1777-1779.

After graduating from Yale in 1781, he worked in finance.

His career culminated as serving as Comptroller for the Treasury under Presidents Washington and Adams. His work there is why he is primarily remembered, but it's not why he should be. The best OWJR moment occurred in 1796, when one of Martha Washington's slaves, 20-year-old Oney Judge, escaped from the President's House which was then in Philadelphia. Wolcott Jr. was tasked with recovering the slave and returning her to the First Lady (the term was not used for another 50 years). Wolcott Jr. hired the Collector of Customs in New Hampshire Joseph Whipple to find and capture Ms. Judge. Ms. Judge unsurprisingly told Whipple that she had no interest in returning to be a slave, and Whipple then refused to move her against her will. Wolcott then helped convince President Washington that it would be better to let Ms. Judge go free rather than to stir up controversy with the abolitionist in Philadelphia. Though President Washington had himself signed an early fugitive slave law just three years earlier, he acquiesced to Wolcott's request and did not insist on Ms. Judge's return. Though she remained legally a fugitive, she lived in New Hampshire with her family until her death in 1848. On February 25, 2008, the site of the President's House from which she escaped celebrated Oney Judge Day. Two years later, the President's House celebrated the 214th anniversary of her escape. I recognize this incident is only tangentially related to Oliver Wolcott, but there's only so much one can write about the only father and son to both serve as CT Lieutenant Governors.

Connecticut tends to lump both Wolcotts together when honoring them, either in naming the city of Wolcott or the technical high school. They both lived long lives for the time, and they both accomplished quite a bit. I'd rather have an Oney Judge THS, but that's just me.



## Retirement Changes in 2020

All the changes listed below are for people in State Retirement only. There are no similar changes for people in Teachers' Retirement.

- **Retiree healthcare cost:** Anyone retiring on or before 7/1/22 will pay 3% of medical insurance plan. For a plan covering employee and spouse, that cost is approximately \$72 a month today, significantly less than what active employees pay. The plan itself is more expensive, of course – a universe of people who are 60+ will raise the cost – but the percentage being paid is much lower.

For anyone retiring after 7/1/22, the cost is 5% of the plan. The difference would be an additional \$48 a month. The cost, though, disappears at age 65. Once the retiree is Medicare eligible, there is no cost share for the plan.

- **Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA):** Anyone retiring on or before 7/1/22 will have a COLA based on a formula which uses the annual increase of the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W) for the twelve-month period prior to the effective date of the COLA. If that increase is less than 2% (it often is), the COLA will be 2%

For anyone retiring after 7/1/22, there is no 2% minimum COLA. The actuaries estimate that change will reduce the annual COLA from approximately 2.3% per year to approximately 1.9%, but it's of course impossible to know.

Additionally, there is a delay in the COLA after retirement. Currently, the first COLA is received approximately 12-18 months after retirement. After 2022, there is no COLA for the first three years of retirement. after 2022, not all of it; and given the thresholds to identify "high wage retirees," very few members will be affected.

- **Medicare Part B premium:** For anyone retiring on or before 7/1/22, the State will continue reimbursing the full standard Medicare Part B Premium for all Medicare-covered-retirees.

For anyone retiring after 7/1/22, the State will reduce its reimbursement to half of the additional charges imposed by Medicare beyond the standard premium on high earners. "High earners" are people who earn over \$87,000 a year or more while receiving a pension. It primarily affects people who continue to work after retirement (no one in our system has a \$87,000 pension). The estimated monthly cost for the Part B premium for single individuals who earn between \$87,000 - \$109,000 (double for married couples) is \$202 per month; for individuals making between \$109,000 and \$136,000 (again, double for married couples) is \$289. Those premiums do go up – it is going up 7% from 2019 to 2020. Remember, though: the affected retiree will have to pay half of that amount after 2022, not all of it; and given the thresholds to identify "high wage retirees," very few members will be affected.

Those are the meaningful changes that occur for people in SERS who retire after 7/1/22. It is extremely doubtful that those changes make it worth retiring early, or even before the employee wants to retire. Someone who leaves two years early to avoid the 2021 changes would save over the next decade roughly \$600 a year on the insurance until the age of 65, get the COLA two years earlier, and be guaranteed a minimum of 2% on the COLA. With an average salary of \$90,000 (to make the math easier), 20 years of service and assuming the retiree hits Medicare age after five years, that savings would be approximately \$22,000 for the decade (compared to a 0% COLA, which isn't happening for a whole decade). That's real money, but the cost of that plan would be about \$193,000 once we figure in the difference between pension and salary for two years, early retirement penalties, and the loss of two years toward the pension. That's more.

## What Your Retirement Tier Means

We get many, many questions about retirement and pension. Below is a chart that provides some basic information for people with questions about the six retirement plans that SVFT members may have.

Tier	Years Offered	Normal Retirement	Early Retirement	Multiplier	Retiree Medical	Contributions
Tier 1	Hired before 1984	55	N/A	2 %	10 years to vest	4%
Tier 2	Hired between 7/1/84 and 7/1/97	60 with 25 62 with 10*	Age 55 with 10 6% penalty per year	1.4% to breakpoint (currently \$89,400); 1;83% on all money after breakpoint	10 years to vest	2%
Tier 2A	Hired between 7/1/97 and 7/1/11	60 with 25 62 with 10*	Age 55 with 10 6% penalty per year	1.4% to breakpoint (currently \$89,400); 1;83% on all money after breakpoint	10 years to vest	4%
Tier 3	Hired between 7/1/11 and 7/1/17	63 with 25 65 with 10	Age 58 with 10 6% penalty per year	1.4% to breakpoint (currently \$89,400); 1;83% on all money after breakpoint	10 years to vest	4%
Tier 4	Hired after 7/1/17	63 with 25 65 with 10	Age 58 with 10 6% penalty per year	1.3%, no breakpoint; 1% match to defined contribution plan	15 years to vest	5%
TRS	All years	60 with 20 Any age with 35+	55 with 20 Any age with 25 Penalty on sliding scale	2% for normal retirement; less for early retirement	10 years to vest (15 if hired after 7/1/17)	8% (includes 1.25% to retiree medical which lapses after OPEB is completed)

## Years of Service Recognized

The SVFT Leadership would like to thank the following teachers who in 2019 are starting at least their 25th year in the system

Years	Name	School
38	Trevor Jones	H C Wilcox THS
36	Gail Houlihan	W F Kaynor THS
	Deirdre Shaw	A I Prince THS
35	Joseph Hanlon	Bristol Tech Education Ctr
	Robert Janiga	H C Wilcox THS
	Ed Leavy	Bullard Havens THS
	Daniel Nemergut	Henry Abbott THS
	Kathryn Patrick	W F Kaynor THS
	Louis Pecoraro	Norwich THS
	Christopher Sansone	Emmett O'Brien THS
	Regina Wrenn	W F Kaynor THS
34	Thomas Dunlap	Bullard Havens THS
	Peter Dzialo	Eli Whitney THS
	Andrew Giannettino	Platt THS
	Kathleen McGirr	Howell Cheney THS
33	Patrick Burke	H C Wilcox THS
	Patrice Hanko	Bullard Havens THS
	Fred Huhn	Howell Cheney THS
	Deborah Krodell	Norwich THS
	Michael Lorusso	Oliver Wolcott THS
	William Weidner	Vinal THS
32	Roxanne Amiot	Bullard Havens THS
	Vincent Distasio	W F Kaynor THS
	Richard Dulac	Bristol Tech Education Ctr
	Debra Fengler	H C Wilcox THS
	Daryl Meninsky	Eli Whitney THS
	Mary-Paul Monks	Windham THS
	Biagio Montanaro	Bullard Havens THS
	David Morello	Howell Chaney THS
	Raymond Royals	Oliver Wolcott THS
	Gina Sabo	Eli Whitney THS
	Margaret Sonntag	Eli Whitney THS
	George Stowell	Henry Abbott THS
31	Gregory Beyer	Oliver Wolcott THS
	Cathy Burnside	Norwich THS
	Virginia Cann	H C Wilcox THS
	Reuben Charles	E C Goodwin THS
	Roger Giori	Eli Whitney THS
	David Grenier	Windham THS
	Judith Leonard	Norwich THS
	Susan Manning	Ella T Grasso THS
	Susan Murphy	Platt THS

<b>Years</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>School</b>
31	Elizabeth Neubelt	E C Goodwin THS
	Paula Paccadolmi	W F Kaynor THS
	Mary Sheehan	H C Wilcox THS
	John Welch	Eli Whitney THS
	George Wruck	H C Wilcox THS
30	Debra Anderson	Emmett O'Brian THS
	Gary Baier	Howell Cheney THS
	George Ballard, Sr	Henry Abbott THS
	William Barbarito	W F Kaynor THS
	Ellen Card	Howell Cheney THS
	William Clark	Henry Abbott THS
	David Felker	H H Ellis THS
	Charles Hilton	Hartford Aviation Maint Tech
	Robert Hipp	W F Kaynor THS
	Brian Kelleher	Bristol Tech Education Ctr
	Deborah Luster	Vinal THS
	Deborah Mills	Platt THS
	Roger Phillips	Hartford Aviation Maint Tech
	Eric Sawyer	Vinal THS
	Daniel Thibault	H C Wilcox THS
29	Maria Carpanzano	Henry Abbott THS
	Nancy Janeczek	H C Wilcox THS
	Krystin Konow	Norwich THS
	Henry McMillan	A I Prince THS
	Jack Smith	J M Wright THS
	Keith Stadler	Bullard Havens THS
28	Todd Belcourt	H C Wilcox THS
	David Bellinghiri	Norwich THS
	Roger Degray	H H Ellis THS
	Thomas Jones	Norwich THS
	Robert Mitchell	E C Goodwin THS
	David Parillo	W F Kaynor THS
	Lee Pelletier	W F Kaynor THS
	Jean Recchia	Howell Chaney THS
	Robert Riccitelli	Platt THS
	Audrey Smith	Oliver Wolcott THS
	Paul Tema	W F Kaynor THS
27	Susan Cribari	Henry Abbott THS
	Pamela Hill	Oliver Wolcott THS
	Timothy Krodell	Norwich THS
	Gilda Puccio	Norwich THS
	Cecilia Sheppard	Emmett O'Brien THS
	Andrew Taddei	H C Wilcox THS
	Clifton Thomas	A I Prince THS
	Angelo Velez	Henry Abbott THS
26	Kevin Arpin	Windham THS
	David Bauchiero	Bristol Tech Education Ctr

<b>Years</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>School</b>
26	Lynne Gannon	W F Kaynor THS
	Cynthia Kisner	H C Wilcox THS
	Edward Knoeckel	Howell Cheney THS
	David Miguel	Ella T Grasso THS
	Corinne Muckell	Henry Abbott THS
	Lynn Seiser	Oliver Wolcott THS
25	Ralph Demasi	Platt THS
	Mark Langlais	Henry Abbott THS
	William Morin	H H Ellis THS
	John Sylvestre	Ella T Grasso THS
	Joseph Tomaselli	A I Prince THS

### Recognition of Service

Each year we recognize those teachers who have taught 25 years or more in the system. To be honest, it's a pain in the neck to do; we inevitably miss someone because of part-time years or a break in service, so we end up insulting people we meant to celebrate. We always consider just jettisoning the idea, but ultimately Lindsay puts in the hours to get the list together.

Teaching is hard and getting harder. Every year we get older, but the students never do; they're between 14 and 18 years old with the energy appropriate for those ages. It requires commitment to come to school day after day, year after year, for a quarter century or more. We want to honor the teachers who have dedicated themselves to this profession and this system. We need to recognize the students they have taught, the new teachers they have mentored, and the lives they have changed. Congratulations to the people above on their careers, and may they continue to work their way up the list for as long as they want to work.



## Medical Benefits

With 2022 approaching, we've been talking about pensions quite a bit, including in this newsletter. Rather than our traditional school visits, we're currently going to schools to have pension seminars so people can be more informed when making retirement decisions. We should not ignore, however, an equally important benefit – our health insurance. Here's a couple statistics to show the risks of losing or reducing our benefit:

- Almost half of all people facing medical issue who have insurance say the cost is having a big impact on their family
- One in ten Americans report that they have delayed important medical procedures because of cost
- The number of people reporting difficulty in paying deductibles and premiums has risen sharply

These statistics and dozens more show the crisis in healthcare and its cost that people face. CT State workers are largely protected from those concerns because we have negotiated good healthcare benefits,

benefits everyone should have. We have been able to negotiate that healthcare because SEBAC represents nearly 40,000 employees, and the overwhelming of those employees are members. If we lost member density, we would also lose our ability to negotiate the healthcare we need.



## Vocational Instructor

*is the monthly newsletter of the  
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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