

# Vocational Instructor

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



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

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## The Frustration with the Inexplicable

*By Ed Leavy, SVFT President*

The question we have heard the most often over the past few months is, "If my school is doing all-remote learning, why can't we teach from home?" In emails and discussions, we are then provided a list of reasons why working from home should be allowed: it's safer; it resolves childcare issues; it resolves elder care issues; internet access is often better at home than in school; it saves the time, expense, and ecological impact of driving - there are a dozen reasons listed why telework should be allowed. Inevitably, at some point there is the statement, "This doesn't make sense!"

No, it doesn't. The people sending the emails are completely correct.

We have been making this point multiple times a week both within the district and, when possible, to the SDE and the Governor's office. The most frustrating aspect of the argument is that in general the Superintendent is supportive of our position. One of the biggest misunderstandings we have is that the Superintendent in our system is the same as the Superintendent in other districts. They are completely different jobs despite having the same title. A Superintendent in an LEA operates as CEO, making all relevant decisions and overseen only by a Board of Education comprised of elected officials usually from outside the education profession. Their power is limited only by collective bargaining agreements with their employees and the political will of the Board. Our Superintendent oversees the system rather than running it unilaterally. There is an entire bureaucracy involved in decisions. People are tired of hearing this, but the truth is on many issues we have more in common with the Department of Transportation than we do with the local high school. When it comes to COVID policy, we are State workers more than we are teachers.

In many cases, that has been a benefit. The full COVID quarantine pay, workers' compensation presumption; many local districts do not have the "no lockout language" we have, so teachers have to use sick time when quarantined. In other cases, it has not helped at all. Local districts cannot designate essential workers, so there is one fewer barrier to being able to telework when students are remote. Questions about when to quarantine or anything else are simpler, because a local school district has a dozen or so people making decisions, not the scores of people we have. The biggest frustration we have is that we cannot identify where the holdup actually is in allowing teachers to work from home when their school is in Tier 3. It isn't the Superintendent; he agrees with us on the issue. It isn't the Governor; AFT CT President Jan Hochadel asked him directly about it, and he said the policy making teachers come in "seems silly." It seems to be the Commissioner listening to people both within and outside the system; it is both snarky and accurate to say that all those people advocating that teachers must be in school are primarily working from home.

We run for SVFT leadership positions because we want to improve the lives of the educators in our system. This issue affects all our members at some level. It is not even complicated - students who are at home are not affected if their teachers are at home, as dozens of districts throughout the state have shown. We have tried everything - we have filed a grievance, we have made the point both in writing and in person (or at least via Zoom), and we have made the argument to people up the chain of command all the way to the Governor. No one disagrees, but nothing happens. We have discussed actions, but what action? A sick out is both illegal and pointless - everyone calls out sick on a Monday and then returns Tuesday, but so what? What happens except untenured teachers are put at risk? We could go public, but how much understanding would we get? Most people are also at work, except clients and customers are there with them, instead of remote. To be clear, there is no doubt that students do better and learn more when they are safely in school. We hope that happens soon, but it is impossible now. But students at home and teachers in schools isn't a compromise; it's inexplicable. It's all incredibly frustrating.

# **The Master Awaiting the Apprentice**

*By Roxanne Montarro Amiot, BHY Automotive DH*

*The article below is from a letter sent to us by a member. The opinions expressed are her own.*

A little history first. This is a true story, but once upon a time there was place known as the Regional Vocational Technical School System that is still affectionately known as the “vo-tech system” by many (especially in our legislature). It has served the State of Connecticut for over 100 years. It was put together by a printer and an educator to build skilled workers to serve local industry.

Each school had a Director (not a Principal) who directed and oversaw the many businesses (shops) run by Department Heads who had earned the title of Master Craftsperson/Technician. This title of “Master Craftsman or Technician” is an earned, respected title from the skilled trade or craft area that is performed with great pride in their profession. They had eight years or more in accumulated work experience and training to achieve this title which is needed in many of our vocations, as well as licensing and certification in some. It was earned from years of logged hours, performance, competencies, and assessments as an apprentice and journeyman under a master craftsman/technician themselves.

The individual departments ran their trades as businesses as part of the RVTS, including budgeting, ordering, facilities, licensing, safety regulation, and all other things the state skilled trade facility would need to function as a business. The Department Head was a position all itself as the manager of the business. These shops were usually 3-4 “man” shops at the time because training apprentices on live work and machinery is inherently dangerous and the best way to teach was to show and then let the apprentice do it themselves in small, closely observed groups for safety. When I started working, I was the 4th “man” in my shop! Yes, it did exist!

The Master Craftsperson would work to train their apprentices until the advanced apprentice stage and then placed them in an outside business with work study hours for the apprentice growth in their vocation as a craftsperson. The apprentices were working in real businesses in the school on live work and punched in and out- what better way to build your skill and craft? The Department Head took care of the business so the craftsman instructors could teach. The Master Craftsperson/Technician/Mentor would determine by observation of the completion of the skill or craft competency by the apprentice. The Master Craftsperson/Technician observed student competency with a 4-level mark (rubric, before we called it that), and their grades in the R.V.T.S. provided book were enough and not questioned. This was the expert in the craft, so who would know better? It was a complete time saver and seemed to me to be fairly accurate when compared to grading in use now.

Adults, veterans, students with a vocation or calling for the craft would be able to start their training in these buildings as well as high school aged students that wanted to be a skilled trade person and also earn a high school diploma. They came from all towns in our region! There were enough to go around. The Craftspeople were happy to know that they were serving their community, industry and economy. There is nothing better or more fulfilling to a mentor than an apprentice in your craft, and to have that craft live on in them to build another day and pass it on. The many families, communities, and businesses built on these Master Craftsperson/Technicians and apprentices is immeasurable – at least by the ineffective data collection we use.

Trade-related math and science supported the apprentices in their vocation with the science and math skills needed to perform their highly skilled craft. They had technical drawing (aka blueprint reading that our community colleges now offer instead of them) and art that supported the design in the craft. They had economics so that they could account for their finances and run their future businesses.

Over time, the apprentices and those with the vocation for the crafts stopped coming. The industry was banging on doors saying, “My craftspeople are retiring! I need to fill their spots! Provide me with your advanced apprentices so we can build them to serve the people!” Their cries started being ignored, or so it seemed. Supposedly, there was no one out there interested in a vocation to build, design, repair, or create anything. Though college has become an integral part of many of the craft vocations and is a key part of success in many, it had now become the goal of the system. Instead of being a carpenter, plumber, chef, cosmetologist, graphic artist, welder, electrician, mason, machinist, baker, tailor, collision repair, automotive, computer, electronics or HVAC technician, the goal was to be a college student. The step to a goal had now become a goal. Somehow the future apprentices are supposedly not around.

But they are. Could we open our doors to them? The master is awaiting the apprentice. And I am optimistically awaiting the return of the R.V.T.S

*Roxanne Montarro Amiot, BHT Class of 1982*

## Teacher of the Year

*Like everything in 2020, our annual Teacher of the Year program is dramatically different and worse than we would have hoped. The May dinner is always a highlight of our year, but it was impossible to hold it in 2020. We have done our best to honor our recipients, and we should be especially proud of our honorees who represent our amazing educators in the most difficult year on memory. Below are the 2020 Teachers of the Year:*

### **Rob Ellis – Automotive, Bristol TEC**

Rob clearly makes a great first impression. Very few people are selected as Teacher of the Year in their first three years, let alone their first year in a new school. Rob managed to do both. It is not even Rob's first honor as a CTEC teacher; he was part of the great recognition of Bullard Havens THS Automotive Technology Program being named the Technical School of the Year. At Bristol, which is significantly different than our other sixteen schools, Rob's proud that he has shown "the initiative to take a one-year program and create an atmosphere and develop a rigorous learning environment not only in the classrooms but most certainly in the shop areas for a transition into a two-year program."

When not working, Rob enjoys spending time with his wife Marilyn – also an SVFT member – and his young daughters Ava and Joelle. He credits his wife with guiding him through his first years of teaching. Now, he loves his new career. "I am certainly proud that I have shaped the lives of many individuals in a way that makes them a better person for themselves and society. The bonus is I get to use automotive as the vessel to better each of them."

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### **Robert Kucharski, - Phys Ed, JM Wright**

Robert's path to being Wright's Teacher of the Year, or even a JMW teacher at all, was hardly direct. He went from being an engineering major and football player in college to education, then to being a long-term sub bouncing between buildings in his district, then to being laid off and taking a job as a paraeducator working with severely disabled students, until being hired at Wright in 2015. He has fully thrown into making the school his home. He has served as AD, been the Class of 2018 and 2020 Advisor (when he had to figure out "drive through graduations"), overseen the Activity Day programs, filled in as coach for a number of sports, and taken on countless other roles.

While doing all this, he has maintained a full teaching load and even helped while the school awaited a DH and co-teacher position to be filled. Most of Robert's hobbies involve sports; he and his wife, also a teacher, planned their last trip around seeing four MLB games in different stadiums. He volunteers at the Eric Mangini Football Camp in Hartford, which allows middle schoolers to meet local coaches and professional athletes. Given his circuitous route to being honored as JMW's Teacher of the Year, his message to his colleagues and students is fitting: "Perseverance... Playing football and other sports, I have never been in the spotlight, it has been my job to do 'the dirty work' and just keep moving forward. I have always set goals for myself and have worked tirelessly to achieve them; and then keep moving forward. Everyone should have goals that they can achieve. Being TOY was not a goal, it was an outcome. My goal is to be the best teacher I can be while helping people along the way. Perseverance is about the grind and putting in the work to achieve the goals, not chasing trophies." Rob clearly deserves the spotlight that comes with being chosen by his peers to be Teacher of the Year.

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### **Michael Levandowski – Math, Prince**

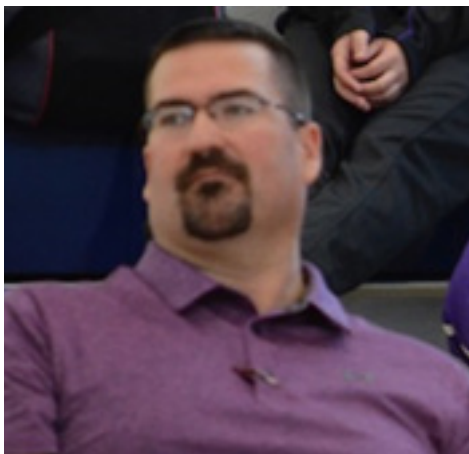
Michael has been teaching Mathematics for eight years at Prince. He changed careers to become a teacher, but he is now fully immersed in the Prince community. He is on multiple committees, including Prince Climate Committee, Professional Learning Committee, NEASC Steering Committee, Scheduling Committee, the Marzano Committee, and many others. He has also been Inducted into the National Society for Leadership and Success.

Much of his time is spent coaching both at the school and the community.

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He has taken his experiences as a college baseball player to help him coach travel baseball and being an instructor in baseball camps for children ages 13-18 for past 22 years. His baseball coaching has been highlighted by his team winning the Triple Crown Baseball National Tournament in 2015 with his 13 and under team and in 2018 with his 14 and under team. At Prince, he led the 2018 & 2019 Prince Tech Volleyball Team CTC Division Champions. As importantly, his 2018 Prince Tech Volleyball Team was Recognized with Team Academic Award by American Volleyball Coaches Association. In all his different roles, he is proud of the positive relationships he has built with his colleagues, students, and players.



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**Raymond Moran – IST DH, Emmett O'Brien**

Raymond says he was, “fortunate to have a successful IT professional career which allowed me to semi-retire early from corporate life. I had numerous achievements in the field of which I am very proud; some of which held a level of notoriety with patents and ‘first-ever’ technological developments.” It is obvious, though, that he has little desire to live a “semi-retired” life. He got his first taste of teaching when he participated in Junior Achievement and taught a course, “Career Success Skills,” at Bullard Havens for five years. He then was hired to be the IST DH at EOB three years ago, and any thoughts of retirement were gone.

Once at Emmett, he not only worked to perfect his craft as a teacher, but he brought his skills to the whole school community.

He helped orchestrate a fundraiser for Student Council - “Night of the Supernatural” in 2019. He helped improve communications by publishing the monthly Condor Flyer and creating the indoor and outdoor digital display. He developed a website for freshman orientation as well as the “Condor Spotlight” for graduating seniors. He even developed a YouTube channel for online streaming of Graduations and Sporting Events which should be running soon. On his rare breaks, he enjoys outdoor activities and summer vacations at the Cape.



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**Dominic Pellegrino – Math, Oliver Wolcott**

One notable feature of this year’s Teacher of the Year participants is how many teachers in the beginning of their career were nominated. Dominic is no exception. In only his fourth year, he has been named OW’s Teacher of the Year. Dominic currently teaches juniors and seniors, and says his proudest accomplishment is seeing all his seniors graduate every year. In addition to teaching, Dominic also participates in the school’s MBL Review and Revise Committee, SAT Committee, and NEASC Steering Committee.

Like many teachers, Dominic makes his personal interest part of his professional life. He loves to fish whenever he can, so he founded and advises the Wolcott Tech Fishing Club. Assumedly the only fishing club in the system, it gives Dominic the opportunity to teach and share the sport he loves with the students in the school.



## **Dan Quinn – Social Studies, Platt**

Dan has been teaching for 18 years full-time at Platt Technical High School. He has taught all four grades-Global Studies/Big History/World History, Civics, Honors Civics, US History, Honors US History, Economics, Honors Economics and Finance for Life. He also taught summer school at UB for Gear Up, Stratford High School, Bullard-Havens, and Eli Whitney.

Dan spends much of his personal time coordinating volunteers for the Beth El Soup Kitchen, a responsibility he took on seven years ago. He has made it a school-wide endeavor. He says, "I have over 30 years of restaurant experience, so I took up the challenge and volunteer every time we are there, which is twice a month. Duties are to coordinate with the kitchen manager to plan the meal, supervise and prepare the entrée while supervising all of the students and teacher volunteers as well as the clients. The emphasis of our mission is empathy and compassion to those we serve. We teach all aspects of the meal service to kids from a variety of backgrounds who always make me proud with their enthusiasm. I honor their service by naming a Volunteer of the Month and give them a little recognition with their peers on the morning announcements. I communicate with Staff and Administration regularly about Soup Kitchen meals and recruit volunteers as well as produce a quarterly newsletter called the Beth El Blast. This is a recruitment tool that talks about the mission statement, upcoming service nights, volunteer recognition, recipe ideas from successful dinners we've had at the Soup Kitchen." Dan's commitment to this project and Platt Tech make him a worthy Teacher of the Year.



## **Kathleen Rowsam – English, Grasso**

This year marks Kathleen's fourteenth year as an English teacher and her sixth in the CTECS, having worked at Danie Hand in Madison and Bennie Dover school in New London. In addition to teaching, she serves on the school's Marzano team and as an EDI coach and a Newsela Certified Educator. She is also on the district's curriculum writing team for the English department, runs an extracurricular book club, established a Drama Club last year with Kristine Ferrare, and coordinates and developed the one read program. She also is going to be training to be a TEAM mentor next month.

In pre- (and hopefully post-) COVID days, she volunteers as a Girl Scout leader and founded a youth drama club. When she finally gets some time off from her busy schedule, Kathleen enjoys reading, painting, gardening, and especially playing outside with her children. She says, "The accomplishments I am most proud of are my three children Luciana, Silvio, and Josephina. They inspire me to be a better teacher and to contribute to the community. Being a mom makes me a better teacher; being a teacher makes me a better mom."



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## **Loren Rozanski – Social Studies, Goodwin**

Loren has certainly worked her way up the ladder at Goodwin. She started right out of college as a clerk-typist in the summer school program, worked for over two years as a substitute in the school (with occasional days at Vinal),

*(Continued on Pg. 6)*

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and then was hired as a full-time social studies teacher in 2012. For the last eight years, in addition to her outstanding teaching she has also served as a TEAM Mentor/Reviewer, Student Council Advisor, Head Softball Coach, and Co-Chair of Goodwin Sunshine Club.

Outside of work, Loren enjoys spending time with friends, family, and her dog Reba. Her proudest accomplishment is “helping others within our school community. I try to help as many of my fellow teachers as possible- especially with all the technological challenges that have arisen over the last year. I am proud that by helping with questions and providing training, I am helping others to become stronger teachers as well.”



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### **Brian Stasaitis – Special Education, Kaynor**

Brian has been teaching special education at Kaynor for a little over a year, but his involvement in the school community extends far before then. "I have been an active member of the Kaynor Tech community since 2004 when I was hired as the JV Girls' Basketball Coach." He has been the Head Varsity Girls' Basketball Coach at Kaynor for fourteen years. He has also been the Boys' Cross-Country Coach for the past three years. His involvement has gone beyond sports – he has volunteered for field trips, dances, and other school activities.

Brian is most proud of changing careers. “My proudest accomplishment was when I returned to Grad School to pursue my Masters’ Degree in Special Education.

I had the opportunity to work in the Special Education Department at Kaynor for a year and a half before I began my coursework. I received a 4.0 GPA in my graduate coursework while teaching and coaching full-time. It was my proudest accomplishment because my family attended my graduation ceremony from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia in May 2019.” The accomplishment is especially poignant for Brian because his mother, whom he calls his “role model” passed away not long after graduation, right before he was named Teacher of the Year.



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### **Laura Vega-Velez – MME, Norwich**

Laura started in Norwich Tech in 2007. She came straight from industry to help launch the new shop Marketing, Management, and Entrepreneurship. She is now in her 14th year. She is a co-adviser of DECA, an organization that prepares emerging leaders in marketing, finance, hospitality and management in high schools and colleges around the globe. In collaboration with then-Department Head, Kirsten Nicholas, Norwich’s School-Based Enterprise, The Emporium at Norwich Tech, earned the DECA gold-level certification standard for ten consecutive years.

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She also serves as the Skills USA co- adviser. Fundraising for these organizations takes up a great deal of time; when she is not busy fundraising, she enjoys crafting and event planning.

Laura stays in close contact with her past graduating classes. Like all the educators we are honoring, the sacrifices of time and energy for students requires a strong support network. She says, “Lots of late nights and long commutes would not have been possible had it not been possible without the help and support of my #1 Mr. Mom, my husband Jorge Velez who took care of our children and brought them to me to any of my student’s events every time he had the opportunity, so they would get a sense of how much fun high school could be.”

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### **Mallory Walsh - Special Education, Cheney**

Mallory has been working at Cheney Tech for five years and eleven as a special education teacher. She is a graduate from the University of Hartford and the University of St. Joseph's. She is Co-chair of Cheney’s Family Engagement Committee and has been a member of the School Climate Committee since 2018. Mallory just recently celebrated her first-year wedding anniversary with her husband, Jake, who also teaches at Cheney.

Mallory has never had any doubt what her professional calling is. “I am most proud of fulfilling my goal that I made when I was in 6th grade of becoming a teacher. When I was in high school and volunteered for Unified Sports/Special Olympics, I knew then that I wanted to become a special education teacher as I enjoyed working with students who needed a little more help/support. I am a hard worker who is dedicated to doing a good job and being there for my students. I enjoy helping them to do their best and achieve their own personal successes.” Her drive and commitment make her an outstanding choice to be Cheney’s Teacher of the Year.



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### **George Wruck -Electronics DH, Wilcox**

George is a 31-year veteran at Wilcox Tech as well as a graduate of the school; he was inducted into the school’s National Honor Society in 1978. He is a fixture in both Wilcox and the Meriden community. At school he is a Skills USA chaperone, Student Council Advisor, and fittingly on the NHS advisory board; that list is far from complete. In Meriden, he spent thirteen years renovating a 1931 ladder truck for the South Meriden Volunteer Firemen. The truck is used in parades and for private functions. After completing it in 2018, he was named the honorary captain of Truck Fifteen for his tireless work on its restoration. George is most proud of his positive relationships with students, whether they are in his shop or not. At a student meeting three years ago, a large number of students identified him as the adult in the building they would most likely go to with a problem. George says, “I had good teachers who took the time to get to know their students and really made a difference in my life and career. I have tried to emulate their fine example. Make sure you pay it forward and your life will be rewarding - far more than a 3.5% raise or another day off. I have had the pleasure of making a difference and I have made it a personal goal to get better at it every day.”



Please also join us in congratulating  
the other Teachers of the year:

- Ryan Barnes – Culinary DH, Vinal
- Steve Bova – Manufacturing Technology, Abbott
- Pete Dzailo – Social Studies, Whitney
- Cassandra Green – Reading, Ellis
- Patricia Long – English, Windham
- David Witter – Culinary Arts, Bullard-Havens



## 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

