

Vocational Instructor

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



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

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Turning a Corner

By Paul Angelucci

I'm not sure where to start with the number of things going on. First, I hope you understand your safety and well-being is always our top priority. Lately it seems it's one thing after another that gets communicated one way and carried out another, from protocols, to contact tracing, to testing, the list goes on and on. The mask issue was divisive from day one, and I think it always will be. Local districts may risk funding and go against the Governor, but we are State employees on State property and must follow directives. As of this writing there were 711 members that answered Makenzi's survey and 59% answered that they are comfortable having the mask mandate lifted in school. The Governor just announced that districts will make their own decision on whether to require masks. We do not know what will be decided for us. Either way our members will show up and continue to do an outstanding job with far less than perfect circumstances. We will continue to advocate for our members' safety.

We hope to have a language and a wage package for you to review and vote on by the first full week of March! Both are wrapping up in the coming weeks and neither are signed so I can't discuss specifics yet. We are planning on a ZOOM presentation and a separate Q&A the next night. Voting will open after the presentation and will remain open for 48 hours. Once the voting is done it must move on and be voted on by the Legislature to become legally binding. All information will be sent in an email and shared with your building reps.

I'm encouraged that the district is 55% ahead of last year as of January 1st in filling positions. That being said, it was so bad that there's still room for a ton of improvement. Dr. Solek has acknowledged this and has made improvements, and with the number of retirements to come, improvements to the hiring process couldn't have come at a better time!

We're looking forward to having this pandemic behind us as well a settled contract and we are so close on both! Negotiations started on November 6th, 2019, with the first committee meeting followed by nine of our schools closing on March 12th of 2020, followed by the rest the next day on Friday the 13th. These past 23 months have been hands-down the toughest stretch to be in the teaching profession. From my viewpoint our members have done an outstanding job and I am proud to keep fighting for you.

See you soon,
Paul Angelucci

Member Spotlight: Virginia DeLong – Norwich Tech

If you are looking for some peace in this crazy world, I highly recommend Virginia DeLong's office. Not only is the office calming and quiet, but also Virginia conveys a calm strength that immediately makes you feel like you are in the right place. As Virginia talks about her work and passion, it is clear why she is beloved by her team, teachers, and students.

When Virginia joined Norwich Tech as Director of Student Services in the fall of 2020, she had already been nominated for School Counselor of the Year. She was nominated by a coworker in Lebanon. Virginia was nominated for both her work as a school counselor and her advocacy for school counselors at the state level. Virginia served as the Government Relations and Advocacy Chair for Connecticut School Counselors Association. She calls her advocacy her passion. She uses her free time to testify in Hartford and meet with representatives.

Why is advocating for school counselors so important? Virginia explains that she believes that she is advocating for students through her advocacy of school counselors. We need more school counselors to meet the mental health needs of kids. School counselors are the front lines in identifying kids that need support. Despite the clear need for more support for kids, there are still many schools that do not even have school counselors.



One reason why is the antiquated idea and name "guidance counselor". There was a shift in certification almost 20 years ago that changed "guidance counselors" to "school counselors". Interestingly, our contract will only catch up with this change this year! Many people do not understand the difference in name or the importance of differentiating. However, take a moment to think back on your guidance counselor. Most of us can remember taking a career survey and getting some advice for post-secondary. If you were lucky, your guidance counselor is the reason you are in the career you are in. Now think about what your school counselors do in your building today. They have evolved to covering three domains: academic plans, social-emotional, and career. As Virginia explains, "We are the face of the school. We are the go-to for everything."

Last week, Virginia traveled to Washington DC to be recognized as the 2021 Connecticut School Counselor of the Year. She was able to meet with school counselors from around the country and meet First Lady, Dr. Jill Biden. We are lucky and proud to have gained Virginia as a member and colleague.

This week is also National School Counseling Week. This week does not just focus on appreciating our school counselors. School counselors also use this week to educate school staff and the public on their contributions to public education. Take a moment this week to learn a little more about what your school counselors do. Take a moment to thank them.



Committee Spotlights

SVFT has 10 standing committees and several special committees. These committees are made up of members throughout our union. Members serve on committees for two-year terms. This term is May 2021 – April 2023. Throughout the year we will be spotlighting different committees to give you an idea of what they do, and the commitment needed to serve. Joining a committee is a great way to have your voice heard and make change.


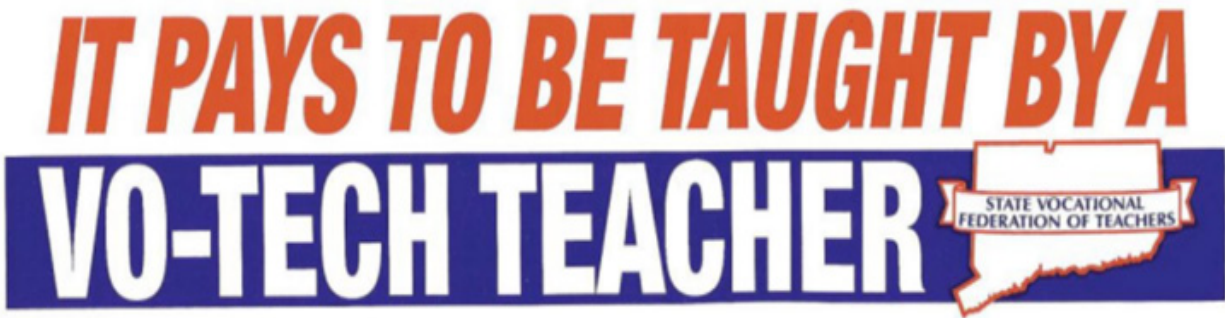
Minority Teacher Committee

Minority Teacher Committee is our newest committee. MTC was voted in as a standing committee in May 2021. Because this committee is so young, it meets about once a month, in the evening. The vision of the MTC is working to promote and retain a diverse and equitable teaching and learning community in CTECS that works to mitigate the impact of systemic racism and fosters support for our black, brown, and indigenous teachers. Members are working on ways to recruit, retain, and support teachers of color.

Budget Committee

The Budget Committee reviews and makes recommendations to a proposed budget prepared by the President and/or a designee. This committee usually meets once a year, in February. The Budget Committee may suggest such changes as are necessary for approval by the Executive Council and/or membership. Once approved by the Executive Council, the proposed budget shall be made available to the membership five days prior to the May General Membership meeting for adoption by the membership.

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Best Practices for Ourselves and Our Students

By Makenzi Hurtado

When my niece was four she sternly told me “You gotta do what you can with what you got.”. My family jokingly uses this phrase whenever someone is complaining. I have realized that as a teacher and department head, that has always been my mantra. And it is so unhealthy. In the past it led to me doing other people’s work. I wanted my students to have the best and what I was given was not that great. I did what I could with what I got. And when I showed that I could get it done, I had to keep doing it. I see teachers around me do this every day. It is exhausting and it never ends.

One issue that is affecting members across disciplines is the Central Office’s practice of starting new initiatives and introducing new curriculums that are not fully developed or appropriately staffed. We have brought this issue up in several different places. Monica Rogers, from Wilcox, presented this issue in our Labor Management meeting. I also have brought this to the attention of the superintendent in our weekly meetings. It is unacceptable to push curriculums that are incomplete. This is not a best practice and is indefensible. It is my goal to ensure that this does not happen next year or beyond. I absolutely believe in improving our curriculums and offering our students the best education possible. However, I do not believe this occurs when new programs, initiatives, and curriculums are pushed before they are ready and without proper staffing.

I am grateful to teachers and department heads who have stepped up to share their experiences and concerns. Even though I was a teacher at the beginning of this school year, it is much more powerful to hear from teachers who are struggling now. It is not always comfortable or easy to share our concerns with Central Office. Paul, Bob, and I have been very honest about the fear of retaliation that exists in our district. We are being proactive and open in our communication with the superintendent to ensure that does not happen anymore. Every teacher that voices a concern does so with the best interest of their students in mind. They should be commended for speaking up and trying to improve.

Another area that we have been working on is pushing for Central Office to provide more supports when we have vacant positions in our schools.

There is no reason why 34 different DHs are creating lesson plans when across the district there should be common lesson plans and grading plans for long term vacancies. Through our meetings with Dr. Solek and Rafael Palacio, we were able to create a stipulated agreement that took this burden off our academic DHs. We know that this agreement is not without flaws and that there is no answer on who will provide the lesson plans. Now comes the hardest part for teachers: saying no. We struggle to say no when we know that our students will suffer. We struggle to say no when we know something is not our job, but it is not getting done. But we have to say no. Changes will not happen if the work is still getting done. Changes will not happen until there is discomfort. The end goal is for our students to have qualified teachers in every class. Positions will only get filled when Central Office sees an immediate need to fill them. If we want what is best for our students in the long term, we have to say no.

Mandated Reporting

By Bob Riccitelli

Recently Makenzi and I were called to represent members in multiple DCF investigations. We called our attorney’s office and James Demetriades met with each of the teachers the night before for a briefing. Our members were completely stressed out. None of us ever want to put a child in harm’s way. All CTECS procedures were followed including phone calls to State Police and informing school and Central Office administration. No one thought to contact DCF. However, DCF runs a parallel track to any internal investigation.

We found out that the same standards for reporting an adult to child incident also apply to child-to-child incidents. Below are excerpts from the state statutes sent to us from our attorney. He also offered to hold a zoom seminar with our membership. We are in the process of setting this up.

Mandated reporters are required to report or cause a report to be made when, in the ordinary course of their employment or profession, they have reasonable cause to suspect or believe that a child under the age of 18 has been abused, neglected, or is placed in imminent risk of serious harm. (Connecticut General Statutes §17a-101a)

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Child abuse occurs where a child has had physical injury inflicted upon him or her other than by accidental means, has injuries at variance with history given of them, or is in a condition resulting in maltreatment, such as, but not limited to, malnutrition, sexual molestation or exploitation, deprivation of necessities, emotional maltreatment, or cruel punishment. (Connecticut General Statutes §46b-120)

Child neglect occurs where a child has been abandoned, is being denied proper care and attention physically, emotionally, or morally, or is being permitted to live under conditions, circumstances, or associations injurious to his well-being. (Connecticut General Statutes §46b-120)

Our attorney explained, “None of these statutes specify who the abuser/ neglectful actor needs to be. For example, abuse occurs where a child has had physical injury inflicted upon him or her other than by accidental means. I think a fight would qualify.”

We will be in touch soon for anyone that would like more information and training on Mandated Reporting.

The process when accused of failure to report is extremely stressful and the consequences are horrible. Consequences can include up to a \$2,000 fine, 1 year prison, mandatory retraining, and potential a Class D felony. Always protect yourself and call DCF. If they feel it is not at a level that needs to be investigated, they will not take the case. That is their call.

Labor/Management Minutes:

The December Labor/Management was rescheduled and took place on January 18th, 2022.

In Attendance:

CTECS: Dr. Ellen Solek, Dr. Nikitoula Menounos, Jenna Fusco, Rafael Palacio

SVFT: Monica Rogers, Charles Rolle, Krista Miller, Makenzi Hurtado, Paul Angelucci, Bob Riccitelli

1. SVFT

a. Curriculum Concerns: Monica spoke on incomplete curriculums that are being rolled out for teachers and courses, like Enrichment, that are being assigned to teachers with no curriculum at all. Teachers are unable to plan in advance and do not know the full scope of the curriculum.

Teachers need professional development time to delve into curriculums prior to implementation. Dr. Menounos shared that the math curriculum should be done in February and then the curriculum team will begin writing the curriculums for next year. Makenzi argued that these responses were not good enough. It is unacceptable for teachers to have to work off of incomplete curriculums, especially when they are not receiving answers and feedback.

Monical also shared that there is no central location for curriculums and there is not easy access to these curriculums. Dr. Menounos answered that IT is working on cleaning up the intranet and all teachers should have access to their curriculums on Google. Monica also shared that it is challenging for teachers who are being assigned Enrichment because they are given no guidance or curriculum.

Dr. Menounos answered that it was their intention that teachers have “flexibility” to write their own curriculum and teach what interests them.

Makenzi countered that while it is a nice idea to give teachers flexibility, in actuality, teachers are just being given more work with no time to do it. Teachers do not have the time or energy to develop new courses on the fly. This is especially true when Enrichment groups are constantly changing based on different schools’ intervention programs. Krista also shared the struggle for Special Education teachers when they don’t have access to curriculum. Not all consultants or supervisors think to share these curriculums with support teachers. Special education teachers can’t write goals when they do not know the end of curriculums.

b. Shop Credentials: Charles shared that shop teachers have come forward because principals are asking them to supply more credentials. There are only so many credentials. Some principals are more aggressive than others.

Mark Hussey is overseeing credentials. Principal should not be applying pressure. Menounos agreed.

c. Issues Arising from Absent DH: Makenzi shared that there are several issues when a DH position is vacant, or a DH is absent for an extended period of time. If there is no instructor with the proper certification, there is no one who can take over the responsibilities and be compensated for it.

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This most often happens in trades, but we have also seen it happen in several Special Education departments. Instructors are asked to do the work and promised pay, even when this cannot happen. Some instructors know they cannot be paid but do the work anyway because it is in the best interest of the children or the department.

Jenna Fusco suggested that we have a list of who has the certification for the district, so that we can find appropriate people to support vacancies.

Dr. Solek shared there is a promise from DAS that there will be five other HR people coming to CTECS. This should help with the hiring process. She is also working on national recruitment – online recruitment platform – this is not going to happen immediately, but it is moving forward.

Makenzi also requested that principals be educated in the rules of HR.

d. Lack of administrative intervention to student behavior, including but not limited to students' ignoring COVID protocol: Krista spoke on the issues that arise with mask wearing, phone use, social media. The back and forth between teachers and students takes up a substantial amount of time. Most of the time when students are sent out, they are sent back with no consequence and no change in behavior. Teachers are tired. In some schools, three out of the four main teachers that students have are substitutes and this affects the consistency in the building. In some schools, teachers are receiving negative comments on their informal evaluations for students' not wearing masks properly, even when there are no consequences when the students are sent to administration.

e. Role of managers/chain of command: Monica and Makenzi both shared that there is a need for clear protocol when managers/consultants are visiting schools and visiting classes. Monica shared examples of supervisors coming into classrooms without introducing themselves or stating their reason for being there. It is unnerving for teachers and uncomfortable for students. This was especially true when students and staff were on high alert due to safety threats. Menounos said that they talked about this in December. Consultants consult and advise. Supervisors are more like APs. Supervisors will do observations and take data but without putting names.

The principal is the sole authority in the building. But you will see them more because it is their job to be in the building.

Makenzi shared that there needs to be a protocol for them coming in the buildings because there are times when they are in the building and giving directions and the admin team in the building has no idea. There are constantly mixed messages between building admin and consultants/supervisors. This causes stress for teachers. Dr. Menounos answered that there is a protocol for them coming in the building. Makenzi responded "Then they are not following it."

Dr. Solek shared that it is her belief that the teacher is the person in charge of their classroom. When someone enters that they do not know, be assertive and nice, but ask "Would you please introduce yourself?"

f. Dual employment: Bob explained that there are forms for dual employment. Because these are State forms, they do not make sense with teaching positions. Teachers are not comfortable signing a form that may not have accurate information. Jenna Fusco: HR policy is looking at the form now

2. CTECS

Solek shared that for an awful lot of what we are all dealing with, no one has an answer. We are stuck in a two-fold dynamic: a health dynamic and an education dynamic. We need to make sure that schools are safe and students and staff can stay healthy, and we know that children need to be in school.

It is important to remember "There are things that I can control and things I cannot control." work with your building reps and building administrators to put a little levity into the day. If you have student councils, intervention teams, find ways to add levity. It is the one way you can grab a little bit of control of your world.

"We've recognized that there is a lot of need that has not been addressed, not just over the short term, but also the long term. What I've noticed is a lot of wringing hands, but we need plans and protocols." Solek clarified the difference between policy and protocols. Policy has more to do with statute. Plans and protocols are practice based.

"We have found positions not being filled, certification not being tracked, lack of communication, we are in the process of working on this. It is slower than we want it to be, but we are working on it.

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(Continued from Pg. 6)

Everything takes longer than we want it to take. I recognize that these are all big issues that need to be addressed and we will fix them.”

3. Follow Up

Special Education Concerns: Krista shared that members are still concerned that they are non-compliant. She recommended that we need to look at the hours and not just the number of students. We cannot cover the number of hours that are needed.

Solek answered “Special education protocol has been ignored for years in this district. I don’t know why. We know where we are and what we need to do. That is one of the reasons I want to go national. We need more special education teachers.”

An Important Reminder About April Vacation:

Per our contract (Article 6, Section 1.d), we only have 5 makeup days built into the calendar. After which Central Office can remove days from the April break. These are work-days so PLEASE do not book a vacation during the break. You cannot use sick time and only the first 5 people requesting a PL will be granted. By contract, the only time that Central Office cannot schedule us to work is July 1st - August 25th.



Vocational Instructor

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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

Future Articles

We would like to have a “School Shout Out” article and a “Member Spotlight” article in each newsletter. Invite us to attend an event or share something from your school that makes you proud. Please email Makenzi at mhurtado@svft.org if you have something great to share.

What else do you want to see in the Vocational Instructor? Please let us know!
Email Makenzi at mhurtado@svft.org.