

Vocational Instructor

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



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

Volume MMXXII Issue 10

March 2023



Attack on Public Education

by Paul Angelucci, President

The attack on public education comes in many forms: book banning, politicizing educational issues, etc but for us, in Middletown, it's a charter school approval. I want to explain what took place over the past month. If you remember back six years Vinal was due for a remodel but was told by the state that the area did not have the school aged census to go forward at that time and was put on hold. We are continuing to advocate for Vinal moving forward. There are plans in the works to have it rebuilt and add a 9th-12th grade aero program and become a

feeder school to Pratt as Electric Boat is to Grasso. Capitol Preparatory School, a charter school, applied to open a Middletown location for 1150 students. The site was proposed to be the CJTS building, a former youth detention center for 120 kids. The State granted a board meeting to hear from stake holders in the community regarding the approval of the charter on February 15th at Vinal at 6PM. Sign-ups for giving testimony were supposed to be from 5:30-7PM. I showed up at 5:05PM and Capitol Prep employees were manning the table and the sign-up sheet started with the number 51. There were three board members listening to speakers which consisted of four busloads of Capitol prep students and staff, and pastors from Bridgeport, Brooklyn, and Hartford. I complained about the sign-up process and was given time to talk at the 90-minute mark but before I could speak the owner of the charter, Dr. Steve Perry, approached the table to complain that we were breaking protocol. On March 1st the State Board of Education held their meeting, Makenzi gave testimony against diluting funds for Middletown by adding a new school

continued on page 5



CALENDAR

- 4/3 Kaynor Health & Safety Visit
- 4/5 Executive Council
- 4/28 Deadline to Announce Interest in Running for Building Rep
- 5/8 - 5/12 Building Rep Elections
- 5/10 General Membership Meeting
- 5/11 Deadline to Submit SVFT Scholarships and Mini-Grants
- 5/12 Deadline to Notify Makenzi to be a Delegate or Committee Member
- 6/7 Executive Council Vote on Committee Members & Delegates

May General Membership

May 10, 2023 - 5PM

A. I. Prince Technical High School

Executive Council will be in person. General Membership is encouraged to attend in person.

All participation will be in person.

We will live-stream for members that cannot attend, but we will not interact virtually.

A link will be sent to RSVP (for planning purposes).

Interested in Joining a Committee or Being a Delegate?

email Makenzi
mhurtado@svft.org by 5/12

Delegate Requirements:

- on two or more committees, or
- member of executive council

Committee Requirements:

- current or past building rep, or
- current or past committee member(of any committee), or
- provides necessary expertise, or
- balances representation

Updates on Tuition Reimbursement

by Makenzi Hurtado, Vice President

On February 16th, Bob and I attended our scheduled arbitration on tuition reimbursement. We wanted to share what we have been doing and where we are in the process. As you may know, many members have been waiting for tuition reimbursement since our funds ran out in February 2021. When our contract was ratified we agreed to \$550,000 for the 21-22SY and \$600,000 for the 22-23SY. This meant that over a million dollars was placed in our tuition reimbursement fund in July 2022. We were aware that there were 37 contracts with retro payments that needed to be made and that there was a staffing issue at HR. It was our expectation that our members would be reimbursed over the next few months.

We did realize immediately that our members were not being reimbursed in semester order. We tried to rectify this problem, but could not get the Office of the State Comptroller (OSC) to do this. In September 2022, it became clear that our members would not be paid in a timely manner and we were not getting any communication from OSC. This is when we filed our grievance. We then followed the grievance to arbitration process and filed for arbitration on October 24, 2022. From that point until now, we continued to track who was receiving tuition reimbursement and tried to compile a list of who was still owed. At the beginning of January we reached out to members with a survey to find out who was still owed tuition reimbursement. We also worked with the district attorney to try to compile information on who was paid and for which semesters. This was extremely difficult because we could not get complete information from OSC. At the end of January, OSC sent a list of who they say they paid and who was left to be paid. We cross referenced their data with Lillian Rivera-Hicks' data and our survey data from members. We were able to find about 40 people who were not accounted for. We shared this list with them. Before our arbitration started on February 16th, OSC stated that they had paid every person except about eight or nine people. We completely disagreed with this statement. We could not move forward with the arbitration at that point without collecting more information. We agreed to sign a stipulated agreement stating that we will put our arbitration into abeyance. On February 27th, we met with representatives from CO, HR, and OSC to go through each individual member that is claiming they are still owed payment. We demanded documentation or explanation for anyone that they say is completely reimbursed that we disagree on. We also requested that they contact all teachers who submitted applications that Lillian approved and OSC believes are incomplete. We have seen this happening since this meeting.

We believe at this point that the majority of older (Fall 2020 - Spring 22) have been paid. If you believe you are still owed from this time, please reach out to Makenzi.

We know that this has been a very long and frustrating process for everyone that is still owed reimbursement. We are also looking into how we can change our contract language during the next negotiations to better protect our members and ensure they are paid in a fair and timely manner. We hope that this helps you understand what we have been doing and our process in representing you.

Understanding Administrative Leave

by Bob Riccitelli, Executive Union Rep

Imagine you're sitting at your desk preparing to teach your 3rd period class. There is a knock on your door, and your building rep asks to speak to you in the hall. They tell you to get the belongings you came in with today. Obviously, you are nervous and want to know what is going on. Unfortunately, the building rep probably has no idea. As you walk down to the principal's office, the rep tells you that you're being placed on Administrative Leave. You meet with the principal, and they take your ID, keys and issue you a very vague letter from CTECS Leadership. As you leave the building, the rep walks you to the door and tells you not to speak to anyone except union leadership and to call Bob as soon as you get home. Wow, what a horrible day! Or is it?

While Administrative Leave feels like a punishment, it is not a punishment. The purpose is to protect the investigation and protect the accuser and accused. If you are in the building, you will probably talk about it or people will be asking you questions. The other reason is so either side cannot claim harassment or tampering. You are much safer at home.

Out of respect for people on Administrative Leave, don't assume the teacher is guilty. Most of the time, there is nothing or it is much less severe than initially thought. If you see the teacher outside of the school, please feel free to talk to them, but not about any issues or school related business. The person on leave cannot initiate a conversation with anyone in CTECS. Don't make light of it by saying it is a vacation. While on administrative leave, the member is paid and expected to be available for phone calls or meetings. The member must be prepared to come back to work immediately. However, most of the time is spent waiting for information and news. Many teachers on administrative leave call EAP for assistance to deal with the stress. The length of the Administrative Leave depends on many factors. Was DCF called? Did DCF take the case? Were the state police involved? Was this a discrimination issue? Was it a workplace violence issue or a policy violation?

DCF has 45 days to complete their investigation (and can extend another 45 days if needed). Affirmative Action has 90 days. The state police do not have a time limit and labor relations have as long as required. The length of administrative leave depends on how many agencies are involved and how backlogged labor relations is. Teachers have returned to work in a few days or as long as eight months. The length of time does not determine guilt or innocence.

NOTE: Lillian Rivera-Hicks does usually respond to applications when she receives them. If you have not received a response from her, please check the email address to which you have sent your application.

Correct Email Address: lillian.rivera-hicks@ct.gov

Incorrect Email Address:
lillian.rivera-hicks@cthss.onmicrosoft.com

TO: Frontline Essential SEBAC Members
FROM: SEBAC Locals
SUBJECT: IMPORTANT: Arbitrator Rules on Pandemic Pay Award for SEBAC Members
MESSAGE:



Since the very first day of Governor Lamont's "Stay Home, Stay Safe" emergency declaration, essential onsite state workers have risked their and their families' lives and physical and mental health to keep our core state services operating and available to the residents of Connecticut. In the beginning, we worked with the State to try to keep workplaces as safe as humanly possible during the height of the pandemic. The parties have in recent months turned to providing a formal recognition through pandemic pay of the dedication and sacrifices essential onsite workers made during the height of the pandemic.

After months of negotiations, and an arbitration hearing, we have now learned that the neutral arbitrator, Susan Meredith, has awarded SEBAC our last best offer for both the Lower-Risk and Higher-Risk employees at issue - **WE WON!** Below are a few excerpts from the arbitration:

"At the time covered by this arbitration, there was no vaccine for Covid-19 and no effective treatment. There was no clear understanding of the way the disease was transmitted or how to limit transmission as much as possible. There was confusion about what personal protective equipment (PPE) was effective in limiting the spread, and there were great shortages of PPE. Meanwhile, the news was full of reports of the large number of people sick and dying all over the world, increasing the uncertainty and fear of people who had to be interacting in person with other people.

"The work itself was a source of stress and distress. In each of the congregate setting where these employees worked, the people for whom they cared were becoming sick and dying. In the hospitals, employees were overwhelmed and frustrated at their inability to help patients. In prisons, inmates were becoming sick and dying. Employees testified to talking with prisoners about their fears and expressing the fact that they shared those fears for themselves and their families. The isolation of the disease increased the suffering that these employees witnessed every day during the long months when no vaccinations or new treatments offered hope.

"The State, with help and prompting from the federal government, provided help as it could. There were great efforts to obtain and provide PPE. A program provided hotel rooms for employees who needed to isolate from their families. Sick leave was extended, testing and health care coverage were provided, and vaccination was offered when available.

"In spite of these measures, the impact on the employees was great. Many are still feeling the physical and psychological effects of working in this dangerous and stressful time. Accordingly, the State and the Coalition have come together to provide additional pay for these essential employees."

The Arbitrator recognized that *"while the additional pay cannot compensate for the months of stress and danger, both parties recognize that there is an obligation and a will to show some appreciation of the considerable sacrifices these employees endured for the people of Connecticut."*

We understand that, in addition to celebrating this victory, you are probably also wondering what this means for you - we will be providing you with a FAQ document shortly that should address these questions.

This award is nearly \$15 million higher than what was allocated in the budget but in order for it to be finalized, a vote must be taken within 30 days of it being filed to the General Assembly and is only voted down if two-thirds majority vote it down in either chamber.

We can never fully thank you and your fellow frontline essential workers, but we are grateful that this arbitration award will at least recognize all the sacrifices frontline essential workers in the state workforce have made.

Q: How much pandemic pay will I receive from this award?

A: The amount of pandemic pay you will receive depends on (1) whether you are classified as "higher risk" or "lower risk" and (2) the number of hours actually worked on-site during the period of March 20, 2020 through March 27, 2021 ("the relevant time period"). Members of SVFT are considered "lower risk" in this arbitration.

Lower Risk Employees Pandemic Pay Amount

- Regular hours: \$125 for 180 hours, plus \$68 for each additional 100 hours worked onsite.
- Overtime: \$135 for 200 hours, plus \$68 for each additional 100 overtime hours worked onsite.
 - Approximately \$.68 an hour.

SVFT 2023 Scholarship Program

The State Vocational Federation of Teachers Local 4200A is pleased to notify you of eight (8) \$1,000 scholarships available to members' children who are currently high school seniors and planning to further their education in the fall of 2023.

Please note: The 2023 scholarships will be awarded on the basis of vocational or academic promise. In order to apply, each candidate must submit the following:

1. A completed application form
2. A letter of intent in 250 words or fewer describing why you are applying for a scholarship and how the funds will be used
3. An official school transcript
4. One letter of recommendation from a teacher or community leader who knows you well enough to attest to your achievements and/or potential
5. A resume listing accomplishments, contributions and achievements in school, your community, and any other extra-curricular activities that are indicative of future success
6. An essay of 250 words or fewer describing what you believe the role of labor unions should be in our state and country today



SVFT 2023 Mini-Grant Program

The SVFT is also pleased to announce that up to \$1,000 in scholarship funds are available in the form of mini-grants to SVFT members for the purpose of professional growth. To apply, send a typed essay fully explaining how the funds will be used. Make sure to include your name, your school, the amount you are requesting, and any information from the program.

Successful grant recipients will be required to submit a newsletter or website article explaining how the investment was used for professional growth. The purpose of this grant is to enable members to grow professionally, outside of the activities funded by CTS-43 or the tuition reimbursement program.

Applications for scholarships or mini-grants must arrive at the SVFT office
no later than Thursday, May 11, 2023 at 3pm.

439 Main St
Wallingford CT 06492

Announcement of awards will be made on or about June 2, 2023.

Applications are available on our web site, svft.ct.aft.org
Questions may be addressed to SVFT Vice President, Makenzi Hurtado
860-371-9382 or mhurtado@svft.org.

continued from page 1: Attack on Public Education
 when Vinal needs a new building, and I gave testimony on the need to review the census in the Middletown area before adding another school. What took place next shocked me, Dr. Perry accused the Commissioner of breaking laws to which the Commissioner went on record asking Dr. Perry to state the wrongdoings to which he had no reply. The Commissioner asked the SBOE to postpone the vote so a proper town meeting could take place, after they received numerous e mails from Middletown residents who voices were not heard. She was overruled, the vote took place, and the charter was approved. In all my years here, it was the biggest injustice I've witnessed.

At the same time as the State Board of Education meeting there was the first Education Committee Hearing happening. After testifying for the SBOE, Makenzi and I both testified on bills affecting our district. Makenzi gave testimony on the high-stakes testing issue. As a trade school we waste valuable time prepping and administering these tests and it disproportionately affects our schools with diverse learners. I gave testimony on Senate Bill 1096 which would create a fund to fast track monies to charter schools once they're approved. As we saw earlier in the day oversight is needed!

If you're interested in giving testimony, this session goes on until June 6th. Just let Makenzi or me know. The hearings are hybrid and testimony can be done by ZOOM or in person. We will guide you through the process and can help you with your testimony.

As the April vacation fast approaches, I want to personally thank you for showing up and doing the job you do. I really hope you use the time off to check in on your mental health and do what you need to do to relax, reset, and prepare to finish this school year.



Vocational Instructor

*is the monthly newsletter of the
 State Vocational Federation of Teachers*

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svft.ct.aft.org

Any information you need is on our website!
 Do you have suggestions for additions to our website?

Email our Secretary, Jamie Lamitie
 jlamitie@svft.org

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.