STATE VOCATIONAL FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

Vocational Instructor

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

Volume MMXXVI Issue 4 October 2026

THE Union

by Makenzi Hurtado, SVFT President

We hear it all the time: “What does THE Union think?”, “What is THE Union doing?”, “THE Union needs to fix this!”.

In September, I had the opportunity to participate in an organizing blitz through AFT for UConn Health Professionals. I decided to participate for many different reasons. First, UHP is one of our union siblings through AFTCT, and they needed help. When another union needs help, it is important to give support in any way that we can. Another reason was that this was a great opportunity for me to learn about the work that goes into organizing and strengthening a union. I am incredibly proud of our union and the work we do and the strength that we have. I also know that we can be better, and stronger.

We have incredible union density. We have a great process for signing up new members and retaining the members that we do have. The officers, building representatives, and committee members work hard to provide resources and services that go beyond contract protections. I would describe myself and the other officers as “service leaders”. We ran for these positions to serve our members and we do that every day and we will continue to do that.

For our union to be stronger, we need to move beyond this service model. Our long-term goal is to move our union from a service model to an organizing or activist model. A service model is more of an insurance-like system. Members pay their dues and when they have a problem, union leadership resolves the problem. An organizing model requires members to be active members of THE union. First, we will begin looking at our members and identifying local leaders in buildings, departments, etc. We will need to create leadership opportunities within our union structure, outside of officers and building representatives. We will need to find new ways to encourage participation. Our goal is a 10:1 ratio. This means for every 10 members, we have one leader or activist. For our union, that is 130 members that are consistently involved and participating in union work.

We have been developing plans and trying new things. We have changed the way we visit schools. We have started Regional Get-Togethers. We have diversified our committees and added some. But we would also love to hear from you! If you have ideas about how you would like to be involved or see members involved, please reach out to me and share. Come see me when we visit your school or we can set up a time to talk.

We are excited to hear from members and work with you to strengthen our union.



YOUR VOICE MATTERS!

Election Day is 11/3

Early Voting in CT is 10/19-11/1

Go to

MyVote.CT.gov

to find your polling place, early voting location, or to learn about absentee voting.

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Please join us on 11/4/at 5pm!

Cheney Technical High School

Participation will be in person. We will livestream for you to listen in.

Please register if you are attending in person.

STATE VOCATIONAL
FEDERATION OF TEACHERS
LOCAL 4200A

The SVFT now has a Mobile App!

We are excited to launch the official SVFT app—your new digital hub for staying informed, connected, and empowered. Designed specifically for our members, this app puts the power of your union right in your pocket.

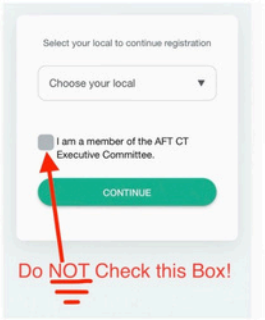
SCAN TO

DOWNLOAD THE APP

APP YOU'RE LOOKING FOR:



WHEN SIGNING UP DO NOT CLICK THIS BOX



SCAN HERE FOR
VIDEO DIRECTIONS
ON HOW TO

SIGN UP



The Importance of Professional Boundaries

by Melanie Perry, SVFT Executive Union Representative

Recently, a viral TikTok featured a teacher twerking in her classroom, with her elementary school students dancing behind her. The clip spawned dozens of reaction videos, with the consensus among educators, parents, and pretty much everyone else that this was wildly inappropriate and unprofessional.

While this example is fairly obvious, teachers sometimes find themselves facing serious professional consequences for conduct toward students that may have begun innocently.

Consider the teacher at a Manitoba school who was caught on security video giving a distraught student a hug. The teacher maintained that she was simply offering comfort to a student in distress, but the investigation uncovered additional concerns about the relationship, including personal online communications. The teacher lost her job, and her teaching certificate was subsequently cancelled.

Or consider a Chicago teacher who gave students small amounts of money and food, treated them to meals from restaurants, used affectionate nicknames, and exchanged text messages. His conduct was investigated for possible grooming. Although investigators found insufficient evidence of that, they concluded that his actions violated Chicago Public Schools' professional-boundary guidelines. The teacher subsequently resigned.

In Texas, a science teacher exchanged text messages with a student who was president of a club he advised. What began as communication about school activities became increasingly personal. Investigators documented 166 messages, some exchanged in the middle of the night. Although the student maintained that these texts were harmless, the teacher resigned, and the state revoked his teaching certificate.

Building relationships, encouraging and supporting them through difficult moments, and even having a little fun along the way are some of the most rewarding parts of teaching. However, in our efforts to connect with students, we must remember that we are their teachers, not their friends or peers. We enter this profession because we care about students, but good intentions are no substitute for sound professional judgment.

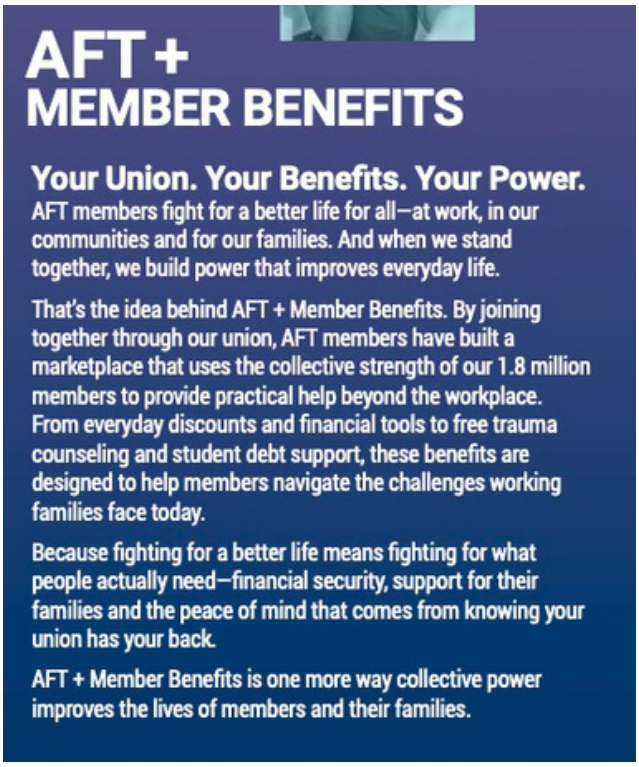
Teachers today face intense scrutiny, and what begins ordinarily enough can quickly become the subject of a professional misconduct investigation. Since stepping into the Executive Union Representative role in March, I've been sharing a growing list of teacher dos and don'ts with our Building Reps, and I hope they've been passing that advice along to you. What started as a mnemonic of three Ts (now four, since twerk has officially been added) has become a virtual alphabet soup of reminders.

So when the inevitable Module 5 training on Connecticut's Code of Professional Responsibility for Teachers comes around every year, please take the scenarios seriously and engage in meaningful discussions with your colleagues. Those conversations just might save someone's career.

Know Your Benefits!

AFT offers many services and benefits from professional development to lessons for students to discounts on travel and purchases.

Visit aft.org and see for yourself!



aft | sharemy lesson

Share My Lesson is a free platform that gives access to high-quality, user-generated, standards-aligned preK-12 lesson plans, educational resources and professional development webinars to support teachers, school-related personnel, specialized instructional support personnel, parents and caregivers in their work with students.

ALPHABET SOUP FOR THE TEACHER'S SOUL:

A FEW BEST PRACTICES

FOR PROFESSIONALISM IN THE CLASSROOM



Practical reminders to help you protect your students, your profession, and yourself. A-Z guidance that keeps good educators out of hot water.

T — Do not TALK unprofessionally.

Do not use profanity or other language that could be perceived as discriminatory, offensive, or inappropriate. Be aware of who is around you when talking to colleagues, especially when discussing students. Do not discuss student grades, IEPs, 504 plans, or other personal information in public settings or around other students. Remember that emails and other written communications should always be professional and respectful.

T — Do not TOUCH students.

Beyond the occasional consensual fist bump or professional handshake, avoid physical contact with students or encroaching upon their personal space. Physical contact should be limited to situations where it is necessary to protect a student from immediate physical harm or respond to an emergency.

T — Do not TEXT students.

Do not exchange personal phone numbers with students or communicate with them through text messages, social media, or other unoffical platforms. Use only district-approved communication systems, keep all communications strictly professional, and avoid contacting students outside of working hours except when necessary for approved school activities.

T — Do not TWERK around students.

A recent viral video that cost a teacher her job is a reminder that we may not use students for clicks or content. If you have professional, appropriate news to share about students, reach out to your school's Website Coordinator or Social Media Coordinator. Keep your personal social media private and do not accept friend requests from current students or recent graduates. (We recommend a five-year rule.)

E — Report EQUITY concerns.

If you hear or see something, say something. Discriminatory behavior, harassment, –ist or –phobic language, or other conduct that may violate CTECS' nondiscrimination policy must be reported promptly to your building-level Equity Coordinator and school administration.

M — Fulfill your MANDATED REPORTER responsibilities.

If you have reasonable cause to suspect child abuse, neglect, or imminent risk of serious harm, you must report it directly to DCF or law enforcement as soon as possible, but no later than 12 hours. If you report orally, follow the required written or electronic reporting procedures within 48 hours. Reporting concerns to an administrator or other school employee does NOT satisfy your legal obligation as a mandated reporter.

W — Know your WEINGARTEN rights.

You have the right to union representation in meetings that you reasonably believe could lead to discipline. If you are called to a meeting and are unsure of its purpose, ask for clarification and request union representation if necessary. If a meeting unexpectedly becomes investigative or potentially disciplinary, stop answering questions and request union representation before proceeding.

D — DOCUMENT EVERYTHING.

Keep thorough records of student incidents, parent contact, professional conversations, directives, and other important occurrences—including dates, times, and people involved. Follow up with the professionals with email to confirm in writing what was discussed.
Save relevant communications for future reference. Good documentation is always your best defense!

Understanding Your Pay Stub

Below are examples of SERS Tier IV deductions and TRB deductions. Look in the bottom left corner of your paystub to see your own. The amounts below are an example.
Retirement deductions are a percentage of your pay, so they are different for everyone. If you do not see deductions, please reach out to Bob immediately.

BEFORE-TAX DEDUCTIONS		
Description	Current	YTD
SERS Tier 4 Shortfall	70.77	424.62
SERS Tier 4	176.92	1,061.52
Ret Health Fund 2017	106.15	636.90
Expanded Access	219.90	1,319.40
Dental Enhanced	9.53	57.18
Sr4/HyDCEE	35.38	212.28

BEFORE-TAX DEDUCTIONS		
Description	Current	YTD
TRSRegPay	414.77	6,793.24
TRSRetHF17	67.42	1,646.37
Primary Care Access	144.46	3,336.78
Dental Basic	11.28	269.68

Making Time to Listen

by Bob Riccitelli, SVFT Vice President

By this point in the school year, the pace has picked up. Our calendars are full, our days move quickly, and there always seems to be one more thing that needs our attention. In the middle of all that activity, it can be easy to miss something important: the opportunity to stop and listen to one another.

As we visit our schools, those conversations are the most valuable part of our day. They give Makenzi, Mel, and me a better understanding of what our members are experiencing, what is working, and where support is needed. Every building has its own challenges, and every member brings a perspective worth hearing.

We have heard about difficulties with time records, new payroll issues, concerns about student discipline, 180 curriculum, and the enormous stress these problems are causing. These concerns deserve our attention, and we appreciate the members who have taken the time to share their experiences with us.

Sometimes a conversation raises a concern that needs follow-up. Sometimes it offers an idea we should explore. Other times, it is simply a chance to acknowledge the work someone is doing and the demands they are carrying. Each of those conversations matters.

Listening also comes with a responsibility. When a member shares a concern, we need to ask questions, understand the circumstances, and be clear about what happens next. We may not have an immediate answer, but we can follow through and keep that member informed.

That is how we build trust. Our members should feel comfortable reaching out, asking a question, or raising an issue before it becomes a larger problem. You do not need to have everything figured out before starting the conversation.

As the year continues, we look forward to spending more time in our schools and hearing directly from you. What is going well? What is making your work harder? What would you like your union to understand?

Thank you for the work you do each day and for making time to talk with us. Those conversations help guide our work and keep our union connected to the people we serve.

Important Reminders

Sick Bank Enrollment is open from September 1st to November 1st every year. The enrollment form is available on our website. You must be a full time employee for three years or a part time employee for three years and 66 days to enroll. If you have enrolled in the past, you do not need to enroll again. If you are unsure if you are in Sick Bank, please reach out to Damaris Hernandez.
Submit to your building representative or Bob Riccitelli at vp@svft.org.

Tuition Reimbursement is still being paid. Lillian Rivera Hick's email address is tuition.reimbursements@cttech.org. If Lillian does not respond that your email is received, please check that you used the correct address.

This is your reminder to check your certification!

You are solely responsible for maintaining your teaching certification. Know the expiration date, ensure you have all requirements to renew, and submit your renewal at least six months in advance. If you are a DH, you may have two dates to maintain.

Understanding Your Dues

by Emily DelPiano

Emily is the SVFT Treasurer, a math teacher, and the Related Department Head at Kaynor Tech,

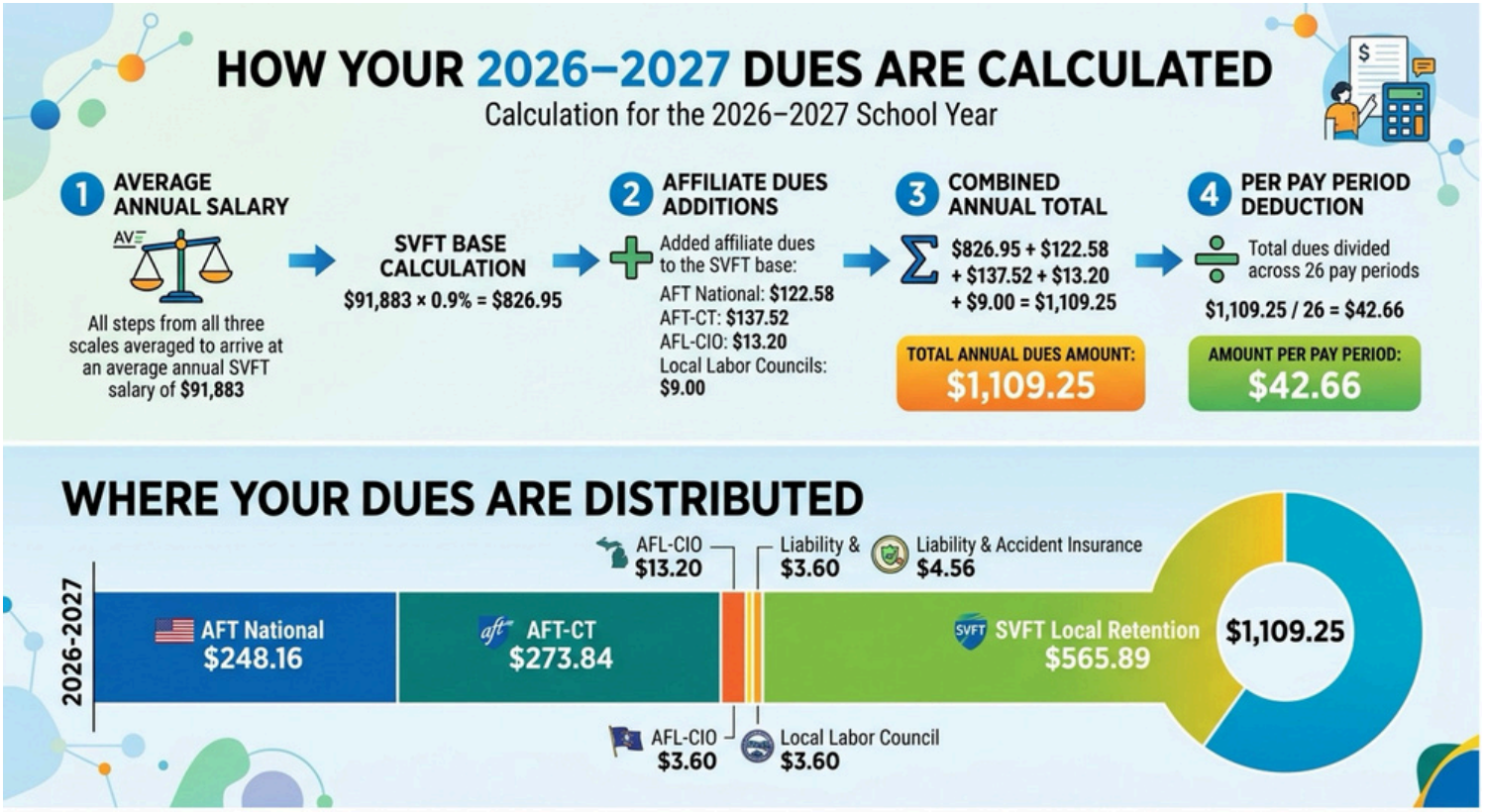
Starting with your October 16 paycheck, you'll notice an increase in your union dues deductions to $42.66 per pay period. We wanted to break down what's behind this change, so everything is completely transparent:

- SVFT Base Salary Increase: Thanks to our contract negotiations, we secured 2.5% pay raises for both the 2025–2026 and 2026–2027 school years. Based on our Bylaws, SVFT dues are calculated as 0.9% of our average member salary across all three scales; higher overall salaries naturally mean a slight adjustment to the base dues.
- Affiliate Dues Adjustments: There were also small monthly increases passed down by our national and state affiliates—AFT National went up by $0.25 per month, and AFT-CT went up by $0.10 per month.

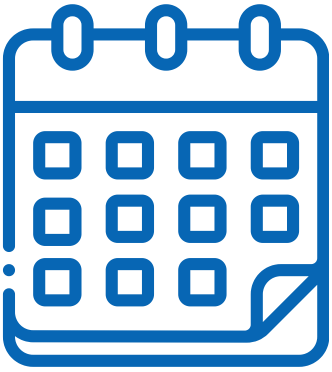
The graphic below shows the exact calculations for our dues as well as the distribution of those dues. Your SVFT dues are used to fund the day-to-day operations of our union ensuring our collective bargaining power and protecting our contractual rights. Our dues work to ensure strong representation, legal defense, and advocacy for all members across our schools.

Each month, I report our income and expenses to the Executive Council. At General Membership, you can hear directly from me on our budget and how our funds are being spent.

If you are interested in being part of this process, volunteer to join the Budget Committee in the spring!



Calendar



10/19 Norwich FT Officer Visit
10/22 Labor Management Meeting
10/26 Windham FT Officer Visit
11/2 Abbott FT Officer Visit
11/3 ELECTION DAY
11/4 General Membership Meeting
11/9 SSAMT FT Officer Visit
11/11 No School
11/16 Bullard FT Officer Visit
11/23 Prince FT Officer Visit
11/25 Early Dismissal
11/26 Thanksgiving - No School
11/27 No School

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:
secretary@svft.org





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

Vocational Instructor

is the newsletter of the
State Vocational Federation of Teachers

President ..... Makenzi Hurtado
Vice President ..... Bob Riccitelli
Executive Union Rep ..... Melanie Perry
Treasurer ..... Emily DelPiano
Secretary ..... Jamie Lamitie

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Wallingford Connecticut 06492

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.