STATE VOCATIONAL FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

Vocational Instructor

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

Volume MMXXVI Issue 5 November 2026

Counting What Counts: Finding Gratitude in Tough Times

by Makenzi Hurtado, SVFT President



The season of Thanksgiving couldn't come at a better time. As the days get shorter and darker, it gets easier to pull away and dwell on the negative. This has been an especially challenging year for our union and for education. We face new hurdles daily at work, alongside broader pressures involving affordability, technology, and political strife.

Thanksgiving brings us not only a much-needed break, but also a reminder to pause and reflect on what is going well and what we are grateful for. Looking back on the start of this year, as your president, I know I have a lot to be grateful for.

I am grateful for the growth our union has seen with the addition of paraeducators. Over the past few years, the need for specifically trained paraeducators in our classrooms has grown significantly. I am grateful that we were able to negotiate a fair and honorable contract for them, and proud to say that we have signed every paraeducator who has joined our system as a union member. At our General Membership meeting, we also passed an amendment allowing paraeducators to become full, dues-paying members—an update we worked hard to ensure was fair and respectful of the vital work they do.

I am also grateful for every member who made the journey to Cheney for our General Membership meeting. You showed up because you care about the health of our union and want to see us grow stronger. These meetings are a vital opportunity to share concerns and ideas with officers, building representatives, and one another, and they sparked some great discussions and debates.

During that meeting, we also passed an amendment to create a Substitute Teacher Committee and add a substitute teacher representative to the Executive Council. Substitute teachers drove all the way from Wright Tech to speak on why this change was so important. For too long, our substitutes have felt like second-class members without a voice. By establishing this committee and representation, we will be much better positioned to address their needs and bring more of them into our union.

Lastly, and most importantly, I am grateful for the opportunity to represent you all. On my most challenging and frustrating days, I am grounded by the knowledge that I am fighting for good people who want to do right by our students,our system, and our communities. While we certainly handle pay and process issues, the vast majority of the calls and emails I receive are rooted in genuine concern for our students and programming. We want our students to receive the education they deserve, and we want the resources and support required to deliver it.

Thank you all for the work you do, for reaching out when you need support, and for trusting me to represent you. I wish you a wonderful and restful Thanksgiving break.

Understanding the Grievance Process: Part 1 of a 3-Part Series

by Melanie Perry, SVFT Executive Union Representative

What Is a Grievance?

Fans of Seinfeld may remember Frank Costanza's celebration of Festivus, an alternative to Christmas "for the rest of us." Festivus commenced with the traditional "Airing of Grievances," when everyone gathered around to share all the ways they had been disappointed by each other throughout the year. In everyday conversation, we might use the word grievance to describe a complaint, frustration, or perceived wrongdoing.

In labor terms, however, a grievance is more specifically defined. It is a formal complaint brought by an employee, a group of employees, or a union against an employer concerning an alleged violation of contractual rights or other workplace protections enforceable by the collective bargaining agreement.



Image credit: Seinfeld, "The Strike" (Season 9, Episode 10), NBC, 1997.

What Constitutes a Contractual Grievance?

Article 21, Section One establishes two grounds for a grievance:

1. A violation, misinterpretation, or improper application of a specific provision of our Collective Bargaining Agreement.
2. Unfair or inequitable treatment resulting from an act or condition contrary to established policy or practice governing or affecting employees.

The second provision requires more than simply believing a decision was unfair. One common misconception is that different treatment automatically constitutes inequitable treatment. However, equity does not mean equality. To the contrary, it acknowledges that differences in circumstances, responsibilities, and needs may justify different treatment. Additionally, Article 2, Board Prerogatives, reserves considerable management authority to CTECS, including decisions concerning educational programs, staffing, teaching assignments, instructional materials, and school operations.

However, management rights are not unlimited. Article 2 also prohibits CTECS from exercising those rights in a manner that nullifies, abrogates, or circumvents our contractual protections. For example, administrators have the authority to establish teaching schedules, but those schedules must still comply with contractual requirements concerning pupil loads, preparation periods, and other negotiated protections.

When Should You Contact Your Building Representative?

If you believe your contractual rights have been violated, your first point of contact should be your building representative. Many workplace issues can be resolved through communication at the building level without the need for a formal grievance. Our building representatives can help assess the concern, review the relevant contract language, and work directly with building administration toward a resolution. In fact, the first step in the informal process is a that the employee and a union representative are encouraged to meet with the principal to resolve the complaint.

If those efforts are unsuccessful, the Executive Union Representative will review the matter, determine whether it meets the contractual definition of a grievance, and—if so—SVFT will file on your behalf or pursue other appropriate action to address your complaint. Just remember: Article 21 establishes a filing deadline of 30 school days from when you knew or reasonably should have known of the issue. Attempts to resolve a concern informally do not automatically extend that deadline, so contact your building representative promptly.

The Big Picture

Our grievance process exists to enforce the rights we have negotiated collectively, not simply to challenge decisions we dislike. Understanding that distinction helps us advocate effectively and protect the working conditions that support both our members and our students. That said, we have other avenues to address non-contractual concerns with management; please continue to bring those to your building representatives and union officers.

So, think of our grievance process as our own version of another Festivus tradition: the "Feats of Strength," in which the celebration would not conclude until someone successfully wrestled Frank Costanza to the ground. Of course, the purpose of a grievance isn't to wrestle management to the ground. Rather, the grievance process represents a different kind of strength: the collective power of our members to challenge violations, hold management accountable to our contract, and enforce the rights we've negotiated together.

Coming Next Month: What Happens When You File a Grievance?

Our Union Is Only as Strong as Our Participation

by Bob Riccitelli, SVFT Vice President

Our union's strength comes from its members. Officers and building reps have responsibilities, but every member has a role in helping us move forward together.

Participation does not mean you have to join a committee or hold a union position. Attend a meeting, vote, ask a question, or help a colleague. These things matter and help guide the work we do. When more members take part, we get a better understanding of what matters across our schools.

Our regional get-togethers are another way to get involved. They give us time to relax and meet members from other schools. We work in different buildings, but many of our concerns and experiences are the same. Its easier to stand together when we know one another.

These gatherings are also a chance to enjoy each other's company without an agenda or a problem to solve. Sometimes a conversation over food or a drink is how a new friendship starts. Those connections help us feel like one union, even when we work miles apart.

I know everyone is busy. Members told us weekday gatherings were difficult to attend, so we moved them to Fridays. I hope that makes it easier for more of you to join us. Come out, bring a colleague, and introduce yourself to someone new. You do not need to stay all evening to be part of it.

Building reps, please talk these events up. A personal invitation goes a long way. Not everyone sees the flyer next to the copier or catches every email. Take a few minutes to remind members and encourage someone who has never attended to come along.

Thank you to everyone who has attended a meeting, joined a gathering, or helped another member. Your participation makes our union stronger. I look forward to seeing more of you at our next get together.

SVFT REGIONAL GET TOGETHERS



More information is available on the Union App!

Friday, February 26, 2027
3:30PM
Two Roads Brewing Company
Stratford CT

Friday, March 12, 2027
3:30PM
Kinsmen Brewing
Milldale CT

Friday, April 23, 2027
3:30PM
Thomas Hooker Brewery
Bloomfield CT

Friday, May 21, 2027
3:30PM
These Guys Brewing
Norwich CT

STATE VOCATIONAL
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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.

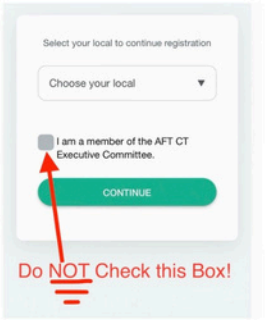
SCAN TO

DOWNLOAD THE APP

APP YOU'RE LOOKING FOR:



WHEN SIGNING UP DO NOT CLICK THIS BOX

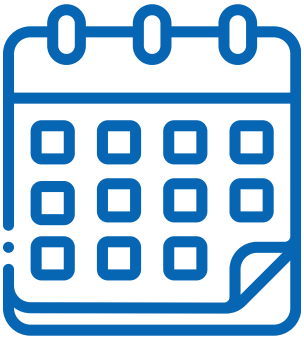


SCAN HERE FOR
VIDEO DIRECTIONS
ON HOW TO

SIGN UP



Calendar



11/16 PSRP Appreciation Week

11/23 Prince FT Officer Visit

11/25 Shortened Day
11/26 Thanksgiving
11/27 No School

11/30 Bullard FT Officer Visit

12/2 Executive Council Meeting

12/3 Ellis Health & Safety Visit

12/7 Kaynor FT Officer Visit

12/9 UTAC Meeting

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

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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.