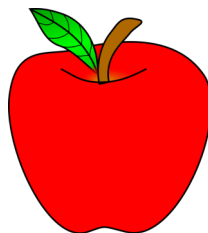


Vocational Instructor

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



IT PAYS TO BE TAUGHT BY A
VO-TECH TEACHER!

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September 2026

Back to School, Together

by Makenzi Hurtado

Makenzi Hurtado is SVFT's President. She is a Math Teacher and Related Department Head from Prince.

I cannot help but enter every school year with excitement and optimism. While, as officers, we technically do not work over the summer, we spend time preparing for the upcoming school year. This summer I worked with SEBAC 15 (the leaders of the 15 largest unions) to prepare for negotiations for pension and healthcare. We officially began those negotiations on August 1st.

Bob and Mel also spent time this summer working on their roles. This included developing structures for our office and committees, preparing for grievances and arbitrations, and talking with members who faced issues over the summer. I am grateful to have a team dedicated to improving our union.

This summer we also spent a week in Washington DC with our delegates at the AFT Business Convention. This is an opportunity for us to participate in the democratic process of deciding the focus for AFT National over the next two years. It is also an opportunity to network with and learn from locals all over the country. I left that convention very proud of our union and energized with ideas on how to improve it. We will continue working with AFT Connecticut on how to move SVFT from good to great!

Despite my eternal optimism, the start of the school year always comes as a culture shock and a reality check. This year was no different. We started the year facing many new processes and procedures. For years we have been asking the district to develop processes so that we can be a coherent and consistent district.

It is imperative to me that these changes improve working conditions for our members and allow them to focus on teaching and learning. It is also imperative that our members be

treated like the educated professionals and experts in their field that they are. I know that many of these changes have led to our members feeling overwhelmed and micromanaged. We are working with district leadership to ensure that our members' concerns are heard and addressed. I ask you all to continue sharing your concerns

and suggestions with your building reps and the officers. I also encourage you to attend General Membership and our Regional Get-Togethers and meet with the full-time officers on school visits. These are great opportunities to have your voices heard and hear from members across the district.

This summer I was lucky enough to attend the United Illuminating Internship Graduation. This program is run by our UWUA Local 4701 siblings for our students. Of course I ran into some of our dedicated teachers who were there to cheer on their students. UWUA Local 4101 President Moses Rams and Connecticut AFL-CIO President Ed Hawthorne joined us for a photo.



Executive Council Meeting

Dates & Locations

9/2 @ Wilcox
10/7 @ Vinal
12/2 @ TBD
1/6 @ Wilcox
2/3 @ Vinal
3/3 @ Prince
4/7 @ Eli Whitney
6/2 @ TBD

General Membership Meeting

Dates & Locations

11/4 @ Cheney
5/5 @ Platt

Health & Safety Committee Visits

Dates & Locations

Our committee visits each school biannually. We visit shops and science labs. This is an opportunity for teachers to share concerns about their working conditions and the students' learning conditions.

9/3 @ Abbott
10/8 @ Bristol
11/5 @ Cheney
12/3 @ Ellis
1/7 @ Goodwin
2/4 @ Grasso
3/4 @ Kaynor
4/8 @ Emmett O'Brien
5/6 @ Wilcox
6/3 @ SSAMT

Standing Together: Building a Stronger SVFT

by Bob Riccitelli

Bob Riccitelli is SVFT's Vice President. He is a Sustainable Architecture Department Head from Platt. He is also an alum of our district.

I am glad I decided to run for Vice President of the SVFT.

When I made that decision, I thought one of the biggest things I could offer was institutional knowledge. After many years of involvement with the SVFT, I wanted to help preserve what we have learned, assist our Executive Union Representative in understanding the intricacies of our union, and help prepare the next generation of SVFT leadership.

My intent remains simple: when my time is finished, I want to leave the SVFT in a better and stronger place than when I came into this position.

Nine months into this job, I believe we are moving in that direction. With Makenzi leading this incredible union and Melanie doing a great job in my former position, we have a strong team working on behalf of our members.

But there is one piece that I believe we must continue to strengthen: member engagement.

That is where much of my focus will be.

It begins with our Building Representatives. I am here to support our Reps in doing the important work that happens at the school level—meeting regularly with principals to bring forward your concerns, holding monthly membership meetings so everyone knows what is happening, welcoming and supporting members, and making sure communication flows between our buildings and union leadership.

Makenzi, Melanie, and I will also be visiting every school, spending time in the buildings and, most importantly, listening to you. We want to know what is working, what isn't working, and what issues are affecting you and your colleagues. Through our Health & Safety visits, we will also continue looking at the conditions in our schools and advocating for safe and appropriate working environments.

But member engagement has to go beyond meetings and school visits.

We need to get our members together.

You know what is happening in your building better than anyone. What you may not always know is that members at another school could be experiencing the same thing. That is one of the most valuable things we have seen through our Regional Get-Togethers. When members from different schools sit down together and talk, connections are made. Information is shared. What may appear to be one building's problem can suddenly become clear as a larger issue.

That collaboration makes all of us stronger. It helps members support one another, and it helps your officers represent you more effectively with school administrators, district leadership, and on legislative issues affecting our members.

Last year, we saw that strength in action at Kinsmen Brewing when members came together to write postcards to their legislators asking them to support public employees and our contract. It was a simple act, but it demonstrated something important: when our members participate, our collective voice becomes much harder to ignore.

We will need that kind of engagement again.

There will be challenges ahead. We will not agree on everything, and we will not solve every problem overnight. But we will be much stronger facing those challenges together than we ever could be separately.

We need to stand together.

All 1,300 of us.

One SVFT.

One voice.

Full-Time Officer School Visits Dates & Locations

Every Monday, Makenzi, Bob, and Mel will spend the entire school day in a building. This is an opportunity to say hello, have a snack, ask questions, and share concerns.

9/14	Ellis
9/21	Wright
9/28	Oliver Wolcott
10/5	Grasso
10/19	Norwich
10/26	Windham
11/2	Abbott
11/9	SSAMT
11/16	Bullard Havens
11/23	Prince
11/30	Hartford Aero
12/7	Kaynor
12/14	Goodwin
1/4	Cheney
1/11	Emmett O'Brien
1/25	Platt
2/1	Vinal
2/8	Eli Whitney
2/22	Wilcox
3/1	Ellis
3/8	Wright
3/15	Oliver Wolcott
3/22	Grasso
3/29	Norwich
4/5	Windham
4/19	Abbott
4/26	Bullard Havens
5/3	Prince
5/10	Kaynor
5/17	Goodwin
5/24	Cheney

A Big Win for the Just Cause

by Melanie Perry

Melanie Perry is SVFT's Executive Union Representative. She is an English teacher and General Education Department Head from Platt.

SVFT recently won a major arbitration with implications well beyond one grievance. The award affirms that non-tenured teachers with more than two years of service are protected by the just-cause standard when terminated during the term of an existing contract, and it reinforces the evidentiary and procedural showing the district must make to establish just cause.

Article 13 of our Collective Bargaining Agreement states that tenured employees *and non-tenured employees with more than two years of service* shall not be dismissed, suspended, or disciplined except for just cause. CTECS argued that non-tenured teachers were limited to the review process under Article 15 and could not arbitrate a disciplinary termination.

The arbitrator rejected that interpretation.

The ruling does not change the district's contractual rights regarding nonrenewal of probationary teachers for a succeeding school year. However, when a teacher with more than two years of service is terminated during an existing contract, the district must have just cause, and the Union may challenge that termination through arbitration.

The award is equally important for what it says about the just-cause standard itself.

CTECS has increasingly relied on investigative findings made under a "preponderance of the evidence" standard when imposing discipline. In this case, the arbitrator found that the district failed to meet even that burden. She also identified significant problems with the evidence, the investigation, and the due process provided to the employee. Ultimately, she found the termination arbitrary and capricious, sustained the grievance, and ordered the teacher reinstated and made whole.

Preponderance may be an evidentiary standard, but just cause is a contractual standard. Those terms are not interchangeable. Just cause requires more than an investigative finding. It requires credible and sufficient evidence, a fair and adequate investigation, and appropriate due process before discipline is imposed.

Our union attorney, Eric Chester, did an exceptional job presenting this case and defending both the member and the contractual protections at stake. Eric also represents SVFT in contract negotiations, and that broader work gives him an important role in both shaping and enforcing the language of our agreement. His work therefore extends well beyond the cases that ultimately reach arbitration.

In light of this recent win, we have seen encouraging efforts from CTECS leadership to work with our union toward resolutions, and that is a positive development. Our goal is not simply to win grievances; it is to enforce the contract fairly and resolve problems whenever possible. Our contract protects our working conditions and—as I always say—positive working conditions for teachers create positive learning environments for students. Having the resources to enforce that contract when necessary depends on our members. Our strength, quite literally, is in our numbers.



Reflections on Convention

by Jerome Grant

Jerome Grant is an SVFT Delegate, Prince Tech's Trade Building Representative, and the Chair of the MTC. He is the Masonry Department Head at Prince Tech.

Attending the AFT Convention in Washington, D.C., was an incredible experience and one that I will always remember because it was my first time attending. As a masonry instructor, department head, and delegate, I found it inspiring to be surrounded by thousands of educators and union members who are passionate about improving education and advocating for the rights of teachers, staff, and students.

One of the biggest lessons I took away from the convention was the importance of unity. Seeing delegates from across the country come together to discuss important issues, debate resolutions, and vote on policies showed me how powerful our collective voice can be. It reinforced that the decisions made at the convention have a direct impact on our schools, our profession, and the future of public education.

I also appreciated the opportunity to learn from experienced educators and union leaders. Hearing about the successes and challenges that other school districts face gave me new perspectives and ideas that I can bring back to my own school. It reminded me that although we work in different states and communities, many of the issues we face are the same.

Beyond the educational sessions, I enjoyed meeting new people, networking with fellow educators, and representing my local union. I will leave Washington with a greater appreciation for the work the AFT does on behalf of its members and with a renewed commitment to staying active and informed within my union.

Overall, attending my first AFT Convention was both educational and inspiring. I returned home with new knowledge, a broader perspective, and a stronger appreciation for the importance of union involvement. I look forward to applying what I learned to better serve my students, support my colleagues, and contribute positively to my school and my union.



Your Delegates shining bright and representing SVFT at the AFT National Business Convention!

#ShapingFuturesBuildingCT



Delegates, building representatives and committee members serve for two-year terms. If you are interested in joining a committee, becoming a delegate, or serving as a building representative, be on the lookout in future newsletters for information on how to join!

Welcome to our first SVFT Paraeducators! On September 4, 2026 we signed our first paraeducators. We are looking forward to 25 paraeducator members this year and many more to come!

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

Do you know a local college student who is looking for part-time work?

We are seeking a reliable, organized, and detail-oriented **Part-Time Office Manager** to support the day-to-day operations of our office.

The ideal candidate is comfortable working with computers, has strong Microsoft Excel skills, and enjoys learning new software and database systems. We are looking for someone who is adaptable, organized, and able to work independently while managing multiple tasks.



Hours: 10 hours per week, schedule flexible

Please have them send their resume to president@svft.org.

Responsibilities

- Manage general office operations and administrative tasks
- Maintain accurate records, files, and databases
- Work with Microsoft Excel to organize, track, and analyze information
- Enter, update, and maintain data in office databases
- Learn and work with new software and database systems
- Prepare reports, spreadsheets, correspondence, and other documents
- Maintain confidentiality and handle sensitive information professionally
- Provide administrative support to union leadership

Qualifications

- Strong computer skills and willingness to learn new technology
- Proficiency with Microsoft Excel, including spreadsheets, sorting, filtering, and basic formulas
- Ability to learn and navigate databases and new software systems
- Excellent organizational and attention-to-detail skills
- Strong written and verbal communication skills
- Ability to work independently and prioritize multiple responsibilities
- Dependable, professional, and able to maintain confidentiality

Labor Management Committee Meetings

→ Do you have concerns that are not related to our contract language?

Four times a year, our Labor Management Committee (one trade teacher, one academic teacher, and one support service teacher) meet with management to bring forward issues that are affecting members across the district.

Please share your concerns with your building representatives or Makenzi, so that we can represent you in the room. This year our meetings are scheduled for:

October 1, 2026

December 16, 2026

March 18, 2027

May 19, 2027

→ **Minutes were always shared on our app.**

Important Reminders

Advanced Degree Stipend Sign Up is open until October 15th. Please read the email from Scott Barnes that was sent to your work email. If you are already receiving Advanced Degree Stipend for your highest degree, you do not need to apply again.

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. Your building reps will have a list of who is eligible 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.

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.

Calendar

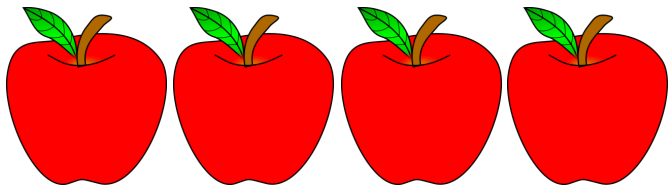
9/22 Constitution & By-Laws Committee
9/28 OWTS FT Officer Visit
9/28 UTAC
10/1 Labor Management
10/5 Grasso FT Officer Visit
10/7 Executive Council
10/8 CTECS Board Meeting
10/12 No School
10/14 Regional Get-Together
10/19 Norwich FT Officer Visit
10/26 Windham FT Officer Visit



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



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 jlamitie@svft.org

Vocational Instructor

*is the monthly 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

439 Main Street
Wallingford CT 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.