



# 1274 NEWSLINE



North Suburban Teachers Union – Local 1274, CFL, IFT/AFT, AFL-CIO

## Starting the School Year During a Pandemic

By Steve Grossman, NSTU President

On June 23 the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) put out its much anticipated [guidance on restarting schools for the 2020-21 school year](#). Though 60 pages long and full of suggestions and guidelines, the document is short on specifics, unrealistic in its expectations, and defers most of the important decisions to school districts. It seems to raise more questions than answers but, to be fair, this pandemic has created an unprecedented time of doubt and uncertainty.

Below is a summary of the document, along with some information from, and links to, other sources that might help you better understand and prepare for the school year ahead. But what your work life will look like next year will be based on decisions made at your school district's level. Many of those decisions will need to be bargained with your union. And ISBE strongly recommends that districts create Planning Teams including teachers, support staff, and other stakeholders to determine how its schools will handle issues of teaching, learning, and public health during this pandemic. At this time, all of the councils in our Local are actively engaged with their school districts in making those decisions. **Protecting the health and safety of our students and school employees must be the paramount concern. It is difficult to imagine any of our schools meeting the health and safety benchmarks in ISBE's guidance for in-person instruction - especially our high schools.**

### Phase 4

The guidance for next school year is predicated on the assumption that we will still be in Phase 4 (Revitalization) of Governor Pritzker's "Restore Illinois" pandemic recovery plan. Phase 4 requires a declining rate of COVID-19 cases, acceptable

The graphic features a dark blue background with white and light blue text. At the top, it says "VOTE YES FOR FAIRNESS" in large, bold, white letters. Below this, it says "and ILLINOIS EARNERS will receive TAX RELIEF" in white and light blue. A large "97%" is prominently displayed, with "of" in a small circle next to it. At the bottom, there is a white button that says "CALCULATE YOUR TAX RELIEF AT ILLINOIS.GOV/FAIRTAXCALCULATOR".

### [Fair Tax Calculator](#)

Use this to determine what your taxes will be once a Fair Tax is enacted.

hospital capacity, widespread testing availability, and contact tracing in place.

In Phase 4, schools can open for in-person instruction as long as they meet the following Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) guidelines:

- Require use of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), including face coverings;
- Prohibit more than 50 individuals from gathering in one space;
- Require social distancing be observed, as much as possible;
- Require that schools conduct symptom screenings and temperature checks or
- Require that individuals self-certify that they are free of symptoms before entering school buildings; and
- Require an increase in school-wide cleaning and disinfection.

## In-Person, Blended, or Remote Learning

Perhaps the biggest decision that school districts must make is whether to open the year with in-person learning, remote learning, or a blended schedule of each. Though the ISBE guidance leaves that decision up to school districts, it makes clear throughout that “In-person instruction is strongly encouraged,” noting that “no amount of technology can replicate the effect of face-to-face interactions and instruction between teachers and students.”

Concerns over child care for families with parents at work and children learning from home, and the inequities created by remote learning, also inform ISBE’s push for in-person instruction when possible. And I think that we would all agree that, in a perfect world, it would be best practice to allow teachers and staff to meet with and get to know their students before the possibility of being forced to shut down again.



### In-Person Learning

But for In-person learning to occur, schools must meet the Phase 4 IPDH guidelines listed above. That is easier said than done.

#### Symptom Screening

Guidelines state that “school districts must conduct temperature and symptom screenings or require self-certification and verification of all staff, students, and visitors entering school buildings.” Those with temperatures above 100.4°F or with signs of known symptoms of COVID-19 may not enter school buildings. The state does not provide much in terms of guidance or assistance for how that will actually be carried out in the real world.

#### Face Coverings

All students, faculty, staff, and visitors will be required to wear face masks when entering school buildings and keep them on throughout the day. To help make that happen, the Governor has announced that the state will be providing schools with 2.5 million free masks. But how will teachers enforce face mask requirements on students? We think cell phones are a distraction, imagine the time spent reminding students to pull up their masks.

And what about us? Will teachers and staff be disciplined for not wearing masks? They could be! (see *Rights of School Employees During the Pandemic* on page 6)

#### Other PPE

To be in compliance, schools will need to be stocked with other PPE including cleaning and disinfecting products, soap, paper towels, hand sanitizer, etc. To assist schools in that effort, the Illinois’ Department of Central Management Services will have master contracts with vendors, allowing school districts to purchase PPE products without engaging in competitive bidding with each other. The state further requires school districts to provide staff with in-servicing on proper hygiene and use of PPE. And the guidelines recommend time given to allow students to use proper hygiene such as hand washing.

#### Social Distancing

In Phase 4 there can be no gathering of more than 50 individuals in one place and 6’ distancing must be maintained. Thus school districts providing in-person instruction must plan for and adhere to those restrictions. Again, easier said than done. Here are some of the suggestions in ISBE’s guidelines:

- Classrooms: arrange desks six feet apart, though no provisions are made for lower class sizes;
- Cafeterias: Stagger schedules and have students eat in classrooms;
- Hallways: Limit the number of students allowed in hallways at one time; have teachers travel from classroom to classroom rather than students; place traffic flow arrows and 6-foot spacing markers on floors;
- Busses: Place a limit of 50 people on a bus and all must wear masks.

#### Cleaning and disinfecting

School districts will need to greatly amp up their custodial services to meet the IDPH mandates for safe school reopening.

While technically not impossible, it is difficult to imagine the practicalities of meeting all of those mandates for in-person instruction, especially in our larger schools. But that is not all; there are other health and safety guidelines that will challenge our schools.

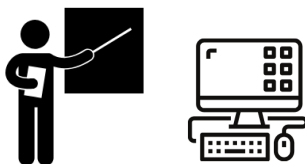
School districts must inform families and staff to stay at home if they test positive or have any signs or

symptoms of COVID-19. Districts are encouraged to provide a checklist of those signs and symptoms. Families and staff will be expected to report possible cases to the school district.

Proper contact tracing, isolation, and quarantine protocols should then follow.

Students and staff out with COVID-19 should not return until they are fever free for 72 straight hours and at least 10 days past their first signs and symptoms. Students showing signs or symptoms in school must be identified, sent to the nurse, and sent home. Schools will need to have designated areas for those showing signs and symptoms to isolate in while waiting to be taken home. Do our schools even have the requisite numbers of nurses and other staff to handle such responsibilities?

Now, reflect on all of the hurdles covered above for opening our schools for in-person instruction and ask yourself, can your workplace meet those benchmarks for health and safety?



### Blended Learning

Given the challenges for opening our schools to in-person instruction, some school districts have already announced plans to begin the school year with remote learning. Others are considering a blended approach that would have some students in school while others learn from home. That strategy would help schools meet the difficulties of in-school instruction by reducing the number of students present in the building at any one time. Sample blended schedules are shown in Appendices D and E of the ISBE guidelines.

**“Protecting the health and safety of our students and school employees must be the paramount concern.”**

If a blended format is used, ISBE recommends prioritizing in-person instruction to students with more intensive needs, such as those with IEP's, 504 plans, and English Language Learners; classes requiring hands-on instruction, such as labs; and students under the age of 13.



### Remote Learning

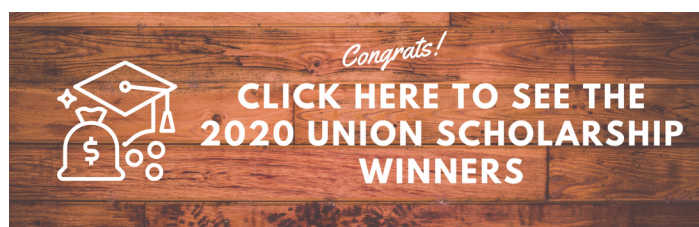
ISBE recommends remote learning be provided to students with underlying conditions that would place them at a high risk for severe illness if they were to contract COVID-19. With that in mind it seems clear that all of our schools will need to plan for at least some remote instruction right from the start. In fact, it may be possible to match students with faculty and staff members who will need to work from home due to their own health issues.

The reality is that we may all be forced back into full-on remote learning if the state sees a rise in COVID-19 cases and backslides out of Phase 4. The ISBE guidelines include some broad, general suggestions for remote learning, such as live-streaming classes and providing synchronous access to those at home. But even those raise more questions than they answer, including concerns over privacy and consent.

There is no doubt that teachers will once again be challenged to adapt their lessons for online learning. To help, there is a new state law that allows for up to five school days to be set aside for remote learning professional development, in addition to the four existing institute days. We need to make sure that our school districts offer that time and training.

#### Instructional Guidelines and Grading

Finally, the ISBE report includes a section providing instructional recommendations for these times. Those guidelines suggest that before diving into next year's curriculum, teachers should assess students for "learning loss" due to last year's shutdown and determine standards and skills that might not have been met. Ideas for remote learning and social distancing in the classroom are also presented.

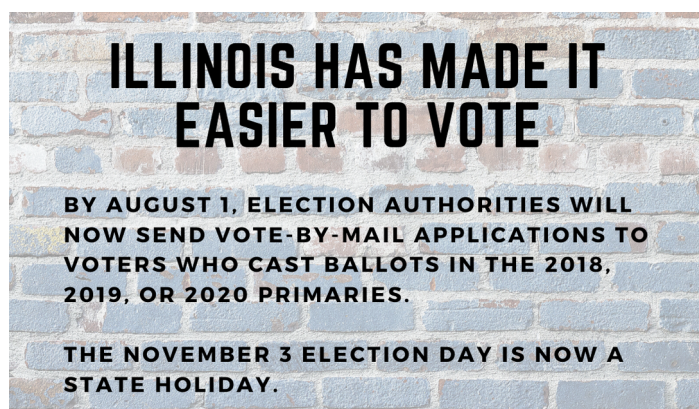




But the most significant issue in this section involves grading. Last year's recommendation of grading policies that would "do no harm" to students was based on the extraordinary circumstances of the shutdown that left no time to plan, and with the understanding that inequities existed among the millions of public school students in terms of access to support, resources, technology and other elements needed to succeed in a remote learning environment. These guidelines for 2020-21 allow school districts to return to traditional grading, but before doing so they are "strongly encouraged" to "ensure that students have all the necessary tools, technology, and teacher supports at school and at home to complete all assignments, take assessments, and complete projects in a timely manner."

It is clear that the ISBE packet does not have all of the answers. Yet there are other sources out there for guidance. The National Labor Management Partnership, a coalition that includes the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), put out [this framework](#) to help school districts develop its back-to-school policies in collaboration with all stakeholders, including faculty, staff, and their unions. The framework envisions school districts creating a COVID-19 Taskforce, and then dividing its tasks among five working groups: Public Health & Safety, School Operations Logistics, Teaching & Learning, Equity & Family Needs, and Social-Emotional Health. The document goes on to layout the purview of each of those groups. And the AFT put out its own [Plan to Safely Reopen America's Schools and Communities](#).

The time is now and the resources are there for the school districts across our Local to develop their own plans for reopening for the 2020-21 school year. In doing so, it is imperative that they work collaboratively with their teachers and staff and through our councils that represent them, while making the health and safety of students and school employees the top priority.



## In Support of Black Lives Matter: Next Steps from NSTU

By Pankaj Sharma, NSTU Vice President

The mass protests following the tragic killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Rashard Brooks, and others, have forced all institutions and organizations, including the North Suburban Teachers Union, to examine the policies, practices, and history that have allowed systems of racial inequality to remain in place. The NSTU supports the protests taking place all over the world in support of racial equity and an end to racial violence, but words are not enough as we have heard from so many. We as an institution must take specific actions to make changes. Clearly, it is essential that all institutions take this moment of national trauma to examine their practices and policies and to work towards equity, eliminating anti-Black racism, and being more just. Our schools, districts, faculty, staff, unions, and communities must do the same. If we do not, we will continue to remain part of the systemic problems of racial inequity that have plagued our country for generations.

As union members, educators, and community leaders, we are all in an exceptionally unique and important moment in our country, schools, and communities. The widespread, peaceful protests and demands for change are resulting in policy and societal changes that seemed impossible just a few weeks ago, and it is important that we see our responsibility in also pushing for change. In the past, the American Federation of Teachers and its locals have fought for racial justice. For example, the AFT banned locals that refused to integrate and also filed

a friend of the court brief on behalf of integrating schools in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Then, as now, our students, their families, colleagues, and community members are looking to us for ideas, support, leadership, and real change.

Within each of our councils, we should carefully consider the moment and our next steps knowing that we have a real opportunity to demand policy changes that may truly attack systemic racial inequalities in our workplaces. The NSTU is taking the following steps to work concretely towards anti-racist policies and fighting racial inequities within our schools and union. Recently the NSTU executive board voted to create a local committee specifically focused on equity, including a NSTU equity chair who will attend all NSTU executive board meetings. One specific goal of this committee is to encourage and assist all councils within our local to develop their own equity policies and programs to encourage anti-racist policies and efforts at the council level with union and school activities. In addition, the NSTU is exploring opportunities for offering equity and anti-racist professional development trainings for members through the NSTU. In the past, our local has offered meaningful PD courses on teaching strategies and math curriculum. Finally, we plan to include an equity portion to the new council president and officer training conducted by the NSTU at the beginning of every school year.

While the above steps are being taken by the local, additional steps should be taken by individual councils and unions within the NSTU. Some possible actions are adopting anti-racist policies with the council, ensuring that our union leadership is diverse and committed to racial equity, working with district administration to diversity faculty and staff members, implementing equity and anti-racist professional development training for all staff, advocating for restorative justice programs as opposed to traditional punitive school discipline models, surveying members on this important topic, asking districts to adopt anti-racist policies, and advocating for more mental health professionals to work with students.

Lastly, all of us as individuals must take this moment to reflect on what we each can do to take action to work towards combating racism, which may include self reflection, having uncomfortable conversations with family members, friends, and colleagues, and examining the institutions that we work in and the policies that they use. Words of support are not enough. We must take action in order to better serve our students, their families, and each other.



Udoka Nwansi just graduated from Niles North High School. She spoke at the Vigil For Black Lives held June 14 at Oakton Community Center in Skokie. Udoka also won this year's NTFTSS Sweeney-Dougherty Scholarship. (Photo credit: Brian OMahoney, [Pioneer Press](#))

## Udoka Nwansi's Skokie Vigil Speech

Hi everyone, my name's Udoka Nwansi and I'm a Niles North graduate as of today, actually. I just wanted to share a few thoughts about everything that's going on right now and the potential I see for the BlackLivesMatter movement.

These past few months have been filled with a lot of loss. Lost job opportunities, lost experiences, lost lives, and so on. Despite all that we've all lost in the past few months due to Covid-19, we've been provided with a unique opportunity to fight for something bigger than all of us. The world has been turned upside down and as a result, we are fully exposed to seeing injustices that we can no longer ignore. Unemployment rates are high, wages are low, and the cost of living is only climbing. We have a presidential administration that is reluctant to take action to slow the spread of corona and it's costing us more and more lives everyday. Racism is still just as much of a cancer as it was 8 years ago when BlackLivesMatter started. People are tired of the injustice and the pot of frustration has begun to



bubble over. If you ask me, I don't think there could be a better time for a revolution.

Systemic racism is ingrained into the very roots of our society and it's time to completely disrupt the institutions that perpetuate it. Institutions like our police force and the prison industrial complex. Because really, these systems aren't broken. They work as they were designed to. The problem is that they just weren't designed to protect black people in the first place. We have to rethink the way that our police and prison systems function and reimagine them in a way that doesn't disproportionately attack black and brown communities. A step in that direction looks like defunding our police force. And not only defunding it, but reallocating these funds into community programs that operate in lower income neighborhoods. I mean, imagine a society in which we don't have over policing in black neighborhoods. A society in which we don't criminalize our black youth. A society in which we don't try to blame a 17 year old boy for his own death because he looked like a "suspicious figure" with his black hoodie, a can of Arizona, and a bag of skittles. These things don't have to be a fantasy; they can very well be a reality. Minneapolis recently announced that they're taking steps to dismantle their police department and New York City officials have proposed a plan to defund their police as well. This is not only a practical goal we can work towards, but it's an attainable one as well.

And I've had some people ask me over the past weeks, "Well what happens when the protests are over? When we aren't in the streets anymore?" I guess they're asking what happens when the current "hype" of the movement dies down. Well the answer is: We don't stop. We never did, really. Black lives matter has been around and active since 2012 and it's not going anywhere anytime soon. I mean, some areas like Miami and LA have been protesting every single day for the past two weeks. As far I see it, Black Lives Matter is here to stay. Because Black lives matter today, tomorrow, and every single day after that. There's always more work to be done.

And that work starts here at home. To all the young people leading the change, we need to aim for longevity, even after BLM is no longer all over the headlines. Our allies, and especially white allies, need to keep showing up for the black community. Continue to stay informed. Read books, watch the news, stay in the know. Have tough conversations with your friends and family. Get comfortable with being uncomfortable. Acknowledge the privileges

you have in your own life. Celebrate black culture. Reject racism and bigotry in every way, shape, and form. Today, you'll all be leaving with information on how you can keep participating in the BlackLivesMatter movement. So take advantage of the opportunities you have to make change, no matter how big or small it may be. We can't have any more victims like Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, or Breonna Taylor. This is our time to step up because we are the last generation to be messed with. So let's roll up our sleeves, and get to work. Thank you.



## Rights of School Employees During the Pandemic

Opening a school year in the midst of a pandemic raises many questions about the rights of employers and workers in regards to health and safety, work assignments, privacy concerns, and other issues related to these unique times. With the help of guidance put forth by IFT Research Director Nick Christen, we will attempt to answer some of those questions here. But since we cannot possibly cover every possible situation or concern, be sure to direct your own questions to your union representative.

### Must an employee return to work if they:

- are over the age of 65?
- have an underlying medical condition that puts them at risk of serious illness if they contract COVID-19?
- care for someone at home that is at high risk?
- simply do not feel safe or comfortable being in close contact, indoors, with many other people, over an extended period of time, during a pandemic?

The general answer is yes. That is, if the Illinois Department of Public Health has determined that it is safe to reopen our schools, and if the school district has complied with all requirements for reopening (screening students, staff, and visitors; requiring face covering and other PPE, maintaining social distancing

and gatherings of fewer than 50 people in one space, and provide enhanced cleaning and disinfecting), then an employee cannot refuse to return to work.

However, there may be some exceptions and accommodations that can be made in the case of those at high risk of severe illness.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), employers must provide "reasonable accommodations" to those with a disability that makes them unable to perform their work duties. It is possible for someone who is elderly or immunocompromised to invoke ADA rights and ask for reasonable accommodations (e.g. working remotely). However, the ADA only requires employers to make reasonable accommodations that do not impose an "undue hardship" on the employer.

That said, our councils will make every effort to negotiate with school districts to provide opportunities for our most vulnerable members to work remotely. For example, immunocompromised teachers and paraprofessionals could be assigned to work remotely with students who are unable to return to schools for in-person instruction.

### **Can employers screen for COVID-19 by asking employees about signs or symptoms, conducting temperature checks, or requiring medical certification to return to work?**

Yes. Given the public health imperative of stopping the spread of the pandemic, recent guidance from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has provided employers with the go-ahead to screen workers for COVID-19 signs and symptoms, including temperature checks. However, employers must maintain medical confidentiality about the results of such screenings.

Our unions have the right to bargain for the effects of those policies. Some examples might be protecting privacy and social distancing while testing, and conducting testing during the workday or providing extra pay if called in prior to the start of the workday for screening.

### **If an employee tests positive for COVID-19, can the employer inform other employees, students, or community members?**

No. That would be a violation of ADA privacy rules. However, the district could issue a general warning that a possible exposure may have occurred in a

school building without divulging information that may identify the infected individual.



### **Can an employee be required to wear a mask while at work?**

Yes, and in fact the state requires it of all teachers, students, and others in school buildings. It is possible to obtain a medical exemption if one has a condition that prevents them from wearing a mask. Visors may be used as an alternative to masks in some situations.

### **Can an employee be disciplined for refusing to wear a mask?**

Yes. Employers have a right to enforce legitimate rules. If there are extenuating circumstances, such as a documented health concern, it is possible that a grievance could be filed against such discipline, but our advice is always "obey first, then grieve." And no, you may not refuse to wear a mask simply because it violates your own political beliefs or sense of civil rights. Doing so would make you subject to discipline without a legitimate basis for a grievance.

### **Can teachers be required to livestream or record their classes?**

Probably, but there are issues of privacy and student consent, and the possible use of those lessons in a teacher's evaluation must be bargained.

### **Should a teacher or PSRP be worried about liability issues if they inadvertently infect someone at school with COVID-19?**

No. The school code provides school employees with tort immunity (the school not the employee may be sued). To prevail in a lawsuit, the person would need to prove that their illness was caused by an employee's negligence. COVID-19's contagiousness would make that impossible to prove. However, an act of intentionally spreading the disease - knowing that you are infected and coughing on someone - would be a criminal act.

## From the President: Your Union in the Age of Coronavirus

It began late last year as a distant threat that most of us did not take too seriously. On New Year's Eve, China announced a cluster of cases of a respiratory illness in Wuhan Province caused by a novel coronavirus. Though alarming on its surface, we had seen similar threats arise and fade over the years. On January 20, the U.S. had its first reported case in faraway Snohomish County, Washington, of a man who had traveled from Wuhan. Four days later the second U.S. case hit close to home, right here in Cook County, also carried with the traveler from Wuhan. Yet through January and into February, most did not see the virus as a present danger. Cases here were still few and isolated, and almost all brought directly by travelers from afar.

The reality, our perception of it, our lives and our lifestyles changed dramatically and quickly as we moved into March. Cases emerged that were no longer directly tied to travel from abroad, and then spread exponentially. The second week of March was pivotal. As the Local office prepared for its March 12 Executive Board meeting, the agenda was full of what now seems mundane: upcoming primary and union elections; an early-April AFT training session in Baltimore for four of our PSRP council leaders; a treasurer's report; the AFT convention; Local defense cases. But by the beginning of that week, our council leaders were in active discussions with their district offices about measures to protect students and staff from the spreading virus - including the possibility of shutting down schools. By mid-day of the 12th, all attention, and our meeting agenda, was turned toward the crisis.

The following day, March 13, Governor Pritzker announced that schools would be closed across Illinois effective Tuesday, March 17, giving school administrators, teachers, and staff that Monday to gather their belongings and begin to imagine what teaching and learning would look like remotely. And that was that for the school year as we knew it.

Within days, momentous decisions were made and policies adopted that dramatically affected our students, our work lives, and our livelihoods. It is easy now to take that all for granted, without considering how things could have been. Though school districts all have emergency plans, none were prepared for this: the complete shuttering of our schools and the daunting task of teaching our students remotely. How would it be done? Would those days count toward

the school year? If so, would they need to be full days of teaching? Would missed days or partial days need to be made up? And what would that mean for us as employees - our wages, our hours, our working conditions? Would we even keep our jobs? And who would make those decisions?

There are 852 school districts in Illinois, each led by mostly elected, autonomous bodies. Imagine if the status of educational employees across the state had been subject to the whims of those school boards and superintendents. Teacher unions, where they exist, would all have been forced to negotiate with each of those districts for fair treatment while making decisions on the fly. That process had already begun across the Local where, fortunately, our council leaders have mostly forged productive relationships with their district officials, though that has not always been the case. Imagine the havoc that could be wrought by a superintendent who sought to use the crisis to cut hours and wages or layoff staff; make intrusive demands on worker time and job expectations; place workers' health at risk by bringing them unnecessarily into school buildings without proper PPE.

But, thanks in part to your union, that is not what happened. Instead Governor Pritzker listened to our concerns. He brought all stakeholders together: the IFT, IEA, ISBE, and organizations representing school boards and administrators, and by the day that schools officially closed, March 17, a [joint statement](#) was issued that set forth the policies and rules under which schools would operate during the shutdown.

That historic document declared the school closures, then scheduled for March 17-30, to be Act of God Days. As such, those days would not need to be made up and all school employees - teachers and support staff included - would "get paid as if they did all the normal work they would have done if schools were functioning normally." It went on to define "normal pay" as salary, hourly wages, stipends, benefits, and service credit in pension systems. Just as significantly, the statement made clear that decisions on how schools would operate during the shutdown would be "worked out through mutual agreement" between school districts and unions representing its workers. Finally, it deemed the "health and safety of students and staff as paramount," emphasizing that work should be done remotely whenever possible.



Ten days later, when it became clear that the shutdown would last longer, a [second joint statement](#) was issued reiterating the terms of the first statement for the duration of the shutdown while shifting the focus of the days ahead to remote learning. By that time, an ISBE task force that included teachers from all areas and grade levels - and several IFT members - had created [remote learning guidelines](#).

### Unions Matter

These extraordinary times have presented many challenges and threats. Yet as the American economy was shedding jobs at a historic rate, we were able to work from home (for the most part), doing our best to still serve our students, while remaining employed - all of us, including our support staff members who do not always have the same job protections as teachers, at least for now. That was not always a certainty, but having a union provided us with protections that others do not have. The rights and benefits contained in our collective bargaining agreements, so easily taken for granted, remain in force and cannot be changed without good faith negotiations. Where workers have no union, they have no real contract - they are "at will" employees. Their wages, hours, and working conditions are determined by their bosses and can be unilaterally changed at any time.

And, of course, the Joint Statements referenced above would not have contained the strong protections of our health and welfare without the influential voices of the IFT and IEA at the table with the Governor's office and other stakeholders.

### Elections Matter

As we have pointed out many times in these pages - elections matter. Our union endorsed Pritzker for Governor and many of us worked for his election. He has not disappointed, proving to be a strong ally for workers and public education while actively seeking our advice and guidance on those issues. Imagine if we still had Bruce Rauner, a failed governor whose main mission - in fact his obsession - was to weaken worker rights and destroy unions. In four years of office, he never once met or consulted with union leaders. Negotiating an agreement with him to protect our rights during this pandemic would have been unthinkable.

We have been through a lot in the last three months. It is comforting to know at times like these that we do not have to go it alone. As union members we are part of a larger community that is committed to each

other. Rest assured that while we cannot solve all problems, and we certainly cannot will away this virus, your union - from the AFT, to the IFT, Local 1274, and down to your own council - will be right there to help you through these challenging times by providing you with relevant information and resources; defending and protecting your rights; and negotiating with your district on all issues related to wages, hours and working conditions. Together we will see this through.

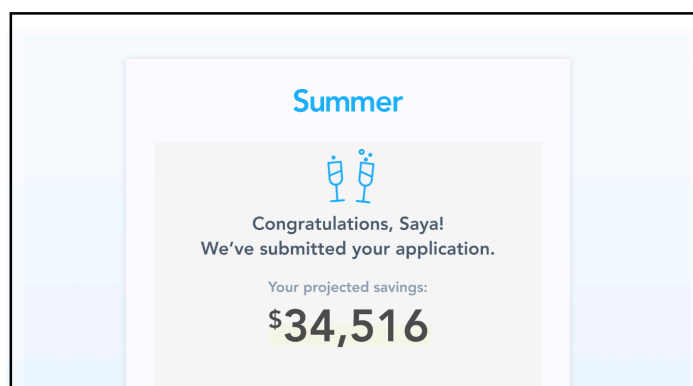
In solidarity,




## Do You Have Student Loans?

AFT has partnered with Summer to give you [free access to an app](#) that helps you track your student loans and enrolls you in savings programs. Summer is a social enterprise founded in partnership with Yale University and is a trusted, secure application.

Our members have already benefited from this valuable resource! NSTU member and Niles West teacher Eric Oddo wrote an article for *AFT Voices* about his own student debt and how he was able to restructure through Summer. Read [On Track for Student Debt Forgiveness](#).



[Sign up and start saving today!](#)

## “They fought hard for us.”

Earlier in the school year the Local produced a video featuring some of our own members sharing thoughts on what it means to be a union member. Their unscripted testimony pays tribute to the purpose, strength, and effectiveness of our union. Local member and Niles North teacher Ivan Silverberg filmed and edited the video. [Watch the video here.](#)

## Congress Has More Work To Do

It's hard to fully comprehend the devastating effect that COVID-19 has had on our lives so far. Over a [hundred thousand people](#) in Illinois have contracted COVID-19. [Thousands](#) have died, [hundreds of thousands](#) have lost jobs, schools closed, and businesses have shut down. We need federal help recovering our lives and economy. House Democrats have a plan, but it faces a huge obstacle from Senate Republicans. It's time to [contact our U.S. Senators](#) and let them know where we stand.

The current \$2 trillion economic relief plan (CARES Act) passed by the United States Congress at the end of May will expire on July 31st. Last month, the House passed the [HEROES Act](#), which provides much needed funds for education, state and local governments, and for health and safety:

- At least \$100 billion for public K-12 education and public colleges and universities
- \$500 billion for state aid and \$350 billion for local aid
- \$175 billion for the health and safety of our frontline providers and the American people

Without federal aid, Illinois state and local governments face sharp budget cuts. This is particularly alarming in the face of a possible second wave and a president who insists the virus is [“going to fade away.”](#) We can expect [little coronavirus help](#) from the Trump administration.

The Republicans have no sense of urgency and would rather wait and see what happens when the money runs out. McConnell [said](#) he will not back this bill. He [referred](#) to aid from the federal government as a “blue-state bailout” and would rather states “use the bankruptcy route”. McConnell would see states *go bankrupt* before helping them stay afloat during a pandemic. Members, remember this when we go to the polls in November.

Here is something you can do right now. Add your information to this [easy-to-use AFT form](#) urging Illinois Senators Durbin and Duckworth to support the Heroes Act. They already support the Heroes Act, but a strong show of support from constituents helps them move the legislation forward in the Senate.

## NTSU Unions at Work

NTFTSS leaders worked with the District 219 to ensure that contracted workers for the district would be paid when schools closed on March 17th. District 219 uses contracted employees from third-party companies for security, grounds, food service, and day care workers. These employees work for the district but are not district employees and are not part of the NTFTSS contract. NTFTSS was concerned that the contracted employees -- most of whom are front-line workers -- would be left out in the cold. Fortunately, the Board approved the recommendation made by the administration and the Union.

In his March 17th email to teachers, NTFT President of Teachers Tim Miller said, *“Our district has shown great strength and power when coming together to do right by people. What great respect we should have for our administration and board of education members to work with the Union in such a steady and fast way to make positive impacts on so many lives.”*

### 1274 Newsline

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