



It's A Whole New Energy!

— AFT CONVENTION DELEGATE

Convention News

AFT DELEGATES ENDORSE Kamala Harris

In a special session of the 88th biennial AFT Convention in Houston, delegates voted overwhelmingly on July 22 to endorse Kamala Harris as the 2024 Democratic nominee for president of the United States. The endorsement came after the 47-member Executive Council of the AFT met the night before and voted unanimously on a resolution to endorse Harris, pending ratification by convention delegates.

"This afternoon we heard loud and clear from our members across the country — from Ohio to Montana, and New York to California — that they are all in for Kamala Harris," said AFT President Randi Weingarten. "The educators, bus drivers, nurses, public employees, higher education workers, correctional officers and doctors of the AFT stand with Kamala. We are fully committed to this fight: united, mobilized and ready to vote in this year's election."

After the AFT became the first union to endorse Kamala Harris, she chose the American Federation of Teachers as the first union to address since announcing her candidacy, calling the work AFT members

do, "The most noble of work." Introducing Kamala to delegates, AFT President Randi Weingarten urged AFT members to "shatter every record for voter turnout" this fall.

Vice President Harris opened her remarks to delegates with a thank you to President Joe Biden: "Over the past three and a half years, and over his entire career, Joe has led with grace and strength." She also thanked AFT educators, adding: "You . . . have taken on the most noble of work."

Contrasting the Democratic vision with that of former President Donald Trump's, the Vice President stated: "In our vision of the future, we see a place where every person has the opportunity not just to get by but to get ahead, a future where no child has to grow up in poverty, where every senior can



retire with dignity, and where every worker has the freedom to join a union. We see a future with affordable health-care, affordable childcare, and paid leave, not for some, but for all."

As one delegate said, "It's a whole new energy."

"We are clear-eyed," Vice President Harris told delegates. "As we work to build a brighter future and to move our nation forward, there are those who are really trying to take us backward . . . to return

Inside the Critique

Implementing the CBA

Negotiations & New CBA	7
Grievance Report.	8
New from CTU BUD	8

Union News

Membership Benefits	6
Teacher Leadership	7
Taking Care of Yourself.	9
Join the NAMI Walk.	10
Paraprofessional VPD	10
Ed Issues Report	10

Education & Politics

Our Priority Endorsements	4
CMSD Levy: Choose Hope	4
YES on 1: Citizens Not Politicians.	4
Calling Election Volunteers!	5
We Need Sherrod Brown in DC	5
AFT's CTU Photoshoot	11
President Obrenski: The Promise of the Future	12

■ cont. on page 3

THUMBS UP, THUMBS DOWN



THUMBS UP to our endorsed presidential candidate, **Kamala Harris**, for accepting the challenge to run for President, and for choosing **Tim Walz**, a former educator, as her running mate for Vice President. The AFT was the first union to endorse her at its July convention in Houston, where she spoke to AFT delegates. Her resume (District Attorney, Attorney General, Senator, Vice President) is impressive, and she and Tim are what America needs to move our nation forward, to heal our divisions, and to restore American values of decency, honesty, and integrity.



And **THUMBS UP** to **Governor Tim Walz**, our kind of guy: a former educator, former AFT union member, and someone who consistently gives back to his community. At the jubilant Democratic Convention in Chicago, hope, optimism, and joy, as well as true family values and patriotism, were in full display from enthusiastic delegates. But now, as Michelle Obama instructed, we all need to “DO SOMETHING” to get them elected in November!



THUMBS UP to **President Joe Biden**, the most pro-union President in history and the first sitting President to walk a picket line. His list of accomplishments is historic: getting America out of the COVID-19 pandemic, restoring jobs and the economy, repairing America's standing in the world, passing an impressive list of acts supporting workers, families, retirees, and the middle class. Perhaps his most selfless act — a notable rarity in politics — was passing the torch to his Vice President, Kamala Harris. That act cemented his legacy as a successful lawmaker, President, and a true patriot who always put country over party.



THUMBS DOWN to the August 14 **CMSD Professional Development** disorganization! President Obrenski said CTU (again) encouraged administrators to include the Union in planning these events, to avoid CMSD's “self-inflicted mistakes” that caused lots of frustration and disappointment for educators. Definitely not the way to start the school year.



THUMBS UP to the **new Collective Bargaining Agreement** that took effect on July 1. Now the work begins to implement the new contract in every school. The focus for the CTU Negotiating Team was “respect, retain, recruit,” and this contract will provide better teaching and learning conditions for educators and students.



THUMBS UP to the new **Parental Leave Policy**, a game-changer for young CTU members and their children. And



THUMBS UP to the **Parental Leave Settlement** reached by CTU and CMSD in August. CTU's intent during negotiations was that this policy would be the same as the city of Cleveland's plan, meaning it would include births and adoptions between July 1, 2023 and June 30, 2024, as well as July 1, 2024 and after. Our negotiators believed CTU-CMSD communications during negotiations substantiated that, and the District agreed. The winners? CTU members and their new children.



THUMBS UP to the **CTU members of the Para VPD Committee**, including 1st Vice President Tracy Radich, Para

Chapter Chair Cherylane Jones Williams, Saundra Jordan, Linette Lozada, Marietta Mack-Hood, and Lisa F. Reilly. They developed the successful August 12 Zoom VPD session for paras. Great job!



THUMBS UP to **Social Committee Chair Rosa Morales Cruz**, **Community Relations Chair Christy Corte**, and **Community Relations Assistant David Adams** for their work in organizing a highly successful Puerto Rican Parade. Rosa worked diligently on the official end of the community event, getting sponsors and parade participants involved. Christy and David worked to ensure that CTU had Spanish-language books for walkers to hand out, had a trolley available, and got details to all of CTU's dedicated participants. Gracias to Rosa, Christy, and David for a job well done!



THUMBS UP to **CTU substitutes, including retired CTU teachers**, who come back to work with Cleveland's children. CTU substitutes keep classes running smoothly and continue educating children when teachers and paras are out. We appreciate you.



THUMBS UP and a big thank you to the **union linemen, communication workers, utility workers, public works, 911 operators, police, firefighters, emergency medical service workers** and everyone else who worked around the clock to restore services and keep our communities safe following the August 6 storms.



THUMBS UP to **CTU's phone bank program and the dedicated callers**. CTU Legislative Chair and MML Director Jimmy Musser explained that this is the largest paid phone banking program in CTU history, with over 100 CTU members and 279-R retired members, working for union-endorsed candidates and issues.



THUMBS UP to **retired Ohio Supreme Court Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor (R)**, who called out Governor DeWine in a response to the duplicity he spouted in a news conference in which he discussed redistricting. Ohio voters have passed anti-gerrymandering legislation several times, but Ohio's GOP supermajority continues to find a way around drawing fair voting districts — or simply ignoring the Ohio Supreme Court rulings!

Chief Justice O'Connor stated that DeWine's disinformation was “insulting to everyone in Ohio, and especially insulting to the half a million Ohioans — Republicans, Democrats and Independents — who put the Citizens Not Politicians Amendment on the November ballot. He voted with his fellow politicians seven times for unconstitutional maps, and now says what Ohio really needs is what he calls ‘The Iowa Plan,’ a system where the Governor and other politicians get the final say on maps. For nearly a year, we have been publicly collecting signatures in all 88 counties and now, 97 days before the election, he tells Ohioans that he and his friends in the legislature are already scheming to overturn what voters will pass in November.

“We're done listening to self-serving politicians tell us how they want to keep rigging the game. On to November. Since the Governor demonstrated in his rambling and disjointed press conference . . . that he does not understand our amendment, I am offering to sit down and meet with him to explain it.” Mic drop!

And in another GOP attempt to thwart the Citizens Not Politicians amendment, a huge



THUMBS DOWN to **Secretary of State Frank LaRose**, who chairs the Ohio Ballot Board, and his confusing, misleading ballot language for proposed amendment that will be on the ballot November 5. Ohioans created the five-member Ohio Ballot Board in May 1974. The Board is chaired by the secretary of state. Two Democrats and two Republicans serve by appointment, so the board always has a 3-2 political ratio in favor of the party of the secretary of state. Republicans have held the advantage since 2011. (We've seen how the GOP super-majority advantage has worked for Ohio — just look at the financial situation at STRS Ohio, that the Governor and legislature “oversee,” and the First Energy bribery scandal that cost Ohioans dearly in their electric bills.)

The purpose of the Ballot Board was to ensure fair and impartial ballot language, and for almost 50 years, it did. But the “board is now a tool for the majority party to tilt the scales for or against ballot issues,” according to Mike Curtin, guest columnist and 38-year newspaperman at the *Columbus Dispatch*, followed by his four years in the Ohio House (2013-2016).

He wrote: “On August 16, the Ohio Ballot Board did not just tilt the scales. It smashed them, dismissing any pretense of impartiality as it adopted, by a 3-2 partisan vote, language designed to torpedo a proposed state constitutional amendment on redistricting reform.

“Last year, the Ohio Supreme Court twice rejected initial language adopted by the LaRose-led Ballot Board, first for the August constitutional amendment that would have required a supermajority vote to adopt state constitutional amendments, and second for the November amendment on reproductive rights. The language adopted August 16 for the redistricting reform amendment is stunningly corrupt, an absolute perversion of the purpose of the Ballot Board.”

This deceptive behavior by one of our state's highest officials is exactly the reason Ohioans need to pass the Citizens Not Politicians amendment, and begin to restore fairness and impartiality in Ohio politics. The Ohio Supreme Court must invalidate the LaRose language. And Ohio voters must approve the amendment by voting YES on Issue 1.



THUMBS UP to **all CMSD preschool teachers and paraprofessionals** who achieved a **GOLD Step Up to Quality Rating**, making CMSD a District-wide gold medal system. This year, the state moved from a five-star annual preschool evaluation system, to a new three-level rating of gold, silver, or bronze. Congratulations to our CTU preschool educators and gold medalists!



THUMBS UP to **CTU member activists who volunteer to participate** in parades, legislative activities, and other events to represent our union and spread our message to voters and the community. Your efforts are valuable and appreciated.



THUMBS DOWN to **Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost**, who quietly signed a deal with **First Energy** on August 12, allowing the utility to avoid state criminal prosecution over its main role in the House Bill 6 GOP bribery

■ continued on page 3

AFT Delegates Endorse Kamala Harris

■ continued from page 1

America to a dark past.” She described the Trump agenda, detailed in Project 2025: failed trickle-down economic policies, union-busting, tax breaks for billionaires, cuts to Medicare and Social Security, an end to student loan forgiveness, and ending Head Start.

“We are not going back,” she continued. “And one of the best ways to keep our nation moving forward is to give workers a voice, to protect the freedom to organize, to defend the freedom to collectively bargain, to end union-busting.”

She challenged the crowd: “In this moment, we are in a fight for our most fundamental freedoms, and to this room of leaders, I say, bring it on.”

“We each in our country face a question. What kind of country do we want to live in: a country of freedom, compassion, and rule of law, or a country of chaos, fear, and hate? The beauty of our democracy is that we each have the power to answer that question — when we vote.”

AFT was proud to be the first union to endorse Kamala Harris for President — a candidate with experience as a district attorney, state attorney general, U.S. Senator, and Vice President. She has been a vital partner with President Joe Biden in the most pro-labor, pro-worker, pro-public education administration in history.

State of the Union Address

President Weingarten’s state of the union address focused on the theme “Real Solutions for a Better Life.” She described her election-year vision for American progress, freedom, and democracy during unprecedented political times.

In the speech, she announced that the AFT’s membership had topped 1.8 million, a historic mile-

stone for AFT. The national union added 185 new units and more than 80,000 new members in the last two years as “a revival of labor activism sweeps the nation.”

Our newest members include airport ground crews, staff at universities, healthcare workers, bus drivers, librarians, charter school educators, paraprofessionals and, after a 50-year fight, 27,000 educators and school staff in Fairfax County, Va.

The AFT is now the biggest higher education union, the second-largest nurses’ union, the fastest-growing healthcare union, and the second-largest K-12 union in the country. Solidarity forever!

Other Convention News

On the last day of the convention, delegates re-elected Randi Weingarten as President, Fedrick C. Ingram as Secretary-Treasurer, and Evelyn DeJesus as Executive Vice President. Additionally, 43 Vice Presidents were elected to the union’s Executive Council. CTU President Shari Obrenski and OFT President Melissa Cropper were re-elected as AFT Vice Presidents, and will serve another two-year term on the Council.

Resolutions were discussed and passed, including a resolution thanking President Joe Biden for his leadership and lifetime of fighting for working families, unions, and democracy. In another resolution, delegates resolved to activate over 1.8 million AFT members and oppose Project 2025 and any related legislation, and oppose candidates who support Project 2025 and any related legislation.

(Source: AFT)



CTU members passed out Spanish-language books and CMSD levy info at Cleveland’s annual Puerto Rican Parade in July.



Some of the CTU delegation met for an AFT convention “class photo.”



THUMBS

■ continued from page 2

scandal in exchange for paying only \$20 million. The agreement came after First Energy paid a \$230 million fine in 2021 to avoid federal charges. The bribes included \$60 million to help pass House Bill 6, a 2019 energy law that included a \$1 billion-plus First Energy customer bailout of two Ohio nuclear power plants.

By dropping the charges, state and federal governments allowed FirstEnergy to escape a big financial hit. According to the *Plain Dealer*, consultants estimated the company could face nearly \$4 billion in fines if it was indicted.

The problem? The settlement amounts only to less than a third of the bribes FirstEnergy paid, and it is just a fraction of the benefits Ohio utilities have received from Ohio energy customers as a consequence of the corrupt legislation that was passed because of those bribes.

And here’s an interesting note: although Yost’s office sends out frequent press releases, it did not send out anything about this settlement. It was first reported by the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, citing an SEC filing by FirstEnergy. For more than a year, there have been

questions about the attorney general’s own involvement in the fight to pass and protect the corrupt bailout that mostly went to FirstEnergy.

Ohio voters, do you think it’s finally time to pass Issue 1, Citizens Not Politicians, end gerrymandering, create fairer voting districts in Ohio, and eliminate some of the politically-safe districts that encourage partisan extremism and supermajorities?

THUMBS UP to Michael Hardaway, CTU paraprofessional and the track-and-field coach at East Tech. He is using Scarab track legends of the past, such as Jesse Owens and Harrison Dillard, to inspire his team and encourage them to improve both in track meets and in school. His efforts were featured in an August 8 video you can view on Channel 5’s wkyc.com.

Finally, a big **THUMBS UP** to all CTU members — educators and support staff — for your professionalism, dedication, and care for Cleveland children and their families as you begin another productive school year.



MMLs Tracey Barbieri and Avriel Chaney assist with the sign-in process at phone bank training.



Sherrod Brown for U.S. Senate

Sherrod Brown is one of the strongest advocates in the Senate on workers' rights and quality public education. He has spent his career fighting for the dignity of work and economic justice for Ohio families. Just last week he received a 100% lifetime rating on the AFL-CIO's congressional scorecard. (In contrast, Ohio's other Senator, J.D. Vance, received a 0% rating on the same scorecard.)

Senator Sherrod Brown helped pass pivotal legislation that invested in Ohio infrastructure and education, protected workers health, and protected pensions. Sherrod has introduced and is building support in the Senate for

bills that would increase school supply tax deductions for teachers, end the WEP & GPO penalties on public employee pensions, and promote community learning centers.



Michael Donnelly, Melody Stewart, and Lisa Forbes for Justices on the Ohio Supreme Court

OFT has endorsed Justices Michael Donnelly and Melody Stewart for reelection to the Ohio Supreme Court based on their proven record of putting the rule of law and the Ohio Constitution above partisan politics. OFT has endorsed Judge Lisa Forbes for a seat on the Ohio Supreme Court because she has also pledged to prioritize fair application of the law and to protect Ohioans from interests that are seeking to infringe on our freedoms.

These races are very important for the future of public education and democracy in Ohio. In the coming term, we expect the Court may address the constitutionality of Ohio's expansive private school vouchers scheme and restrictions on voters' rights and political spending.



Citizens Not Politicians

OFT is proud to be part of the bipartisan coalition supporting the Citizens NOT Politicians Amendment to ban partisan gerrymandering in Ohio. Ohio voters deserve to have the fair, non-gerrymandered districts that are guaranteed to us in the Ohio Constitution. But those requirements were completely disregarded by politicians acting in bad faith, and the current law was inadequate to hold them accountable.

This isn't a Republican or Democratic problem — last year politicians from both parties voted for an illegally gerrymandered map that

protected incumbents and limited competitive elections. It's an Ohio problem, and it's a problem we can fix it in November!

YES on CMSD Levy

Choose HOPE for the Future

CMSD is seeking approval of a single ballot issue on November 5. It has two parts: 1) an 8.6 mill, 10-year operating increase; and 2) a \$295 million, 2.65 mill, 35-year bond extension authorization **that will not increase taxes.**

"Cleveland voters have a critical choice this fall," said Kurt Richards, CTU 2nd Vice President and Levy Coordinator. "Passage of this issue will continue the progress CMSD has made to improve graduation rates, student test scores and achievement, and college and career readiness."

The 8.6 mill **operating levy component** is educationally and

financially necessary to continue to provide quality schools and programs for CMSD students. It will raise \$52 million annually.

The funds will be used to support student achievement; strengthen programs in STEM, arts, business, and communications; improve discipline, safety, and security in and around schools; maintain vital support services for students and families; retain quality teachers and support staff that Cleveland students need; continue a limited number of key programs that were previously funded by ESSER-ARPA (federal COVID funding that is ending); restore the District's pre-COVID trend of higher graduation rates with more skills; and provide 0.5 mills to high-quality charters.

The 8.6 mills will increase property taxes for the owner of a median value Cleveland home (\$64,400) by \$194 per year, or \$3.73 weekly. Businesses will pay more than half of the total, homeowners less than half.

By state law, the current reassessment does not increase the millage or cost of the levy or bond.

Without it, CMSD is projecting an \$80 million deficit for FY2026. With

U.S. Congress and Ohio General Assembly

OFT is also proud to endorse candidates for the U.S. Congress and the Ohio General Assembly who have a track record of fighting for working Ohioans, protecting our democratic rights, and standing up for quality public education and public services.

Find our endorsed candidates for your districts at www.oft-aft.org/oftvotes2024.

already \$60 million in cuts planned for the next two years, this would significantly reduce Cleveland students' chances for greater success in school, career, and life.

The **bond issue extension component** is needed to renovate, equip, and right-size schools for better efficiency, education, and safety. The bond extension will replace existing bonds being retired. **This will not increase annual taxpayer cost.**

The bond issue will provide safe, well-maintained, up-to-date schools

with educationally conducive classrooms, labs, technology, and arts spaces; support a facilities plan to save money; and create schools that meet the needs of each school's student body.

The annual cost on a median value home for the bond component is about \$60. **However, since this will replace retired bonds, it will not increase annual bond issue taxes.**

"Investing in education is hard, but the choice is clear," said Jimmy Musser, CTU Legislative Committee Chair. "This issue is truly a necessity. Without these funds, the District will have to make severe cuts to balance its budget."

Stopping CMSD's progress will endanger Cleveland's next generation and hurt the community's safety, future workforce, and quality of life. Passage of this issue will help keep the key educational and support programs CMSD students desperately need to be safe and successful in school, to prepare for jobs of the future, and to be ready for additional training or education.

Choose HOPE for the future — please vote YES for the CMSD levy.

Save These Dates!

CTU members, we need you! Please volunteer for our levy campaign activities this fall. Below are the dates, and details will be available from the CTU and in President Obrenski's Friday email updates.

- Monday, Sept. 2: The Labor Day Parade
- Saturday, Sept. 28: Kickoff Levy Lit Drop (10:00 a.m.)
- Saturday, Oct. 5: Levy Lit Drop
- Saturday, Oct. 12: Levy Lit Drop
- Saturday, Oct. 19: Levy Lit Drop
- Saturday, Oct. 26: Levy Lit Drop
- Saturday, Nov. 2: Levy Lit Drop & Get Out The Vote

The Canary Pin & the Dignity of Work

“When you love this country, you fight for the people who make it work.”
— Senator Sherrod Brown of Ohio

If you look closely at U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown, you will notice he wears a lapel pin of a canary in a birdcage. He says the pin was given to him two decades ago by a Lorain steelworker at a Workers Memorial Day rally. He chooses to wear the canary pin instead of the official Senate pin “because it represents all of us.”

In the early days of the 20th century, coal miners took a canary down into the mines with them to warn them of poisonous gases. The canary would die quickly when exposed to poisonous gas, and was a warning to miners to get out quickly. Those workers didn’t have a union strong enough or a government that cared enough to protect them.

Throughout the 20th century, Americans changed that. We passed worker safety laws and overtime pay. We banned child labor. We passed clean air and safe drinking water laws. We enacted Social Security and Medicare, and workers’ rights, women’s rights, and civil rights.

But that progress didn’t happen on its own. It happened because people like you stood up and demanded their government work for them. It was citizens and workers, in union halls and

church basements. It was civil rights activists and child advocates who took on powerful special interests and changed this country for the better.

Today, the pin symbolizes the tragic deaths of many and is worn to bring about awareness of the need to legislate for safe working conditions for all workers.

For Senator Brown, the canary pin also represents the role of government to support the middle class, and those who aspire to the middle class. It represents the progress America has made, and the better society we continue to fight for every day.

“We have so much left to do to raise wages, lower healthcare costs, and make sure everyone who works hard can retire with the dignity that they have earned. That’s what we fight for every day,” said Senator Brown.

P.S. He also proudly wears suits made by union workers ten miles from his house in Cleveland.

The Dignity of Work
“Dignity of work means hard work should pay off for everyone, no matter who you are or what kind of work you do.”

This is the philosophy of Senator Brown.

But for too many people in this country today, hard work isn’t paying off like it should. People are working harder and producing more than ever before. Wages are rising, but so are costs, and too many people find it difficult, if not impossible, to save for retirement.

As we work to change that for everyone, we must also acknowledge that it’s even worse for women and people of color, not only because they face the same economic challenges at even higher rates, but because they face those challenges while also having to navigate sexism and racism that make it even harder to get ahead, no matter how hard they work.

Senator Brown believes that when



work has dignity, everyone can afford health care and housing. People have power over their work schedules. They have the economic security to start a family, pay for daycare and college, take time off to care for themselves or their families when they are sick, and save for retirement.

“When work has dignity, our country has a strong middle class. Working together, we can make hard work pay off for all Americans.”

Please volunteer with your union to help re-elect Sherrod Brown to the U.S. Senate! He is a lifelong supporter of working people, labor, and public education, and has earned the votes of Ohio workers.

Election Volunteers

Your Union Needs YOU!

CTU President Shari Obrenski sent a request in May to all CTU members via her Friday email updates, asking for members to sign-up if they were interested in paid phone banking this fall. CTU members did not disappoint, with over 225 current members expressing interest!

This is the highest number of members who have expressed interest in phone banking in a single season, so the CTU matched the energy by running the largest paid phone banking program in our history, with over 100 CTU members and 279-R retired members.

The political phone banking program is always a multi-organizational program, with coordination among the Ohio AFL-CIO, Ohio Federation of Teachers, and CTU to make political calls to union members across the state. Legislative Chair Jimmy Muss-

er is the lead for the CTU, with help from Assistant Chair Avriel Chaney and CTU office staff Ed Wegrzynowski and Meg Ryan Shockey.

The phone banking program began with two one-hour on-boarding sessions that every phone banker was required to attend. Phone banking has adapted since the pandemic, and the phone bankers are able to do their work remotely during set hours. Once school began, the retirees focused on making calls during the weekday hours, while active CTU members are able to make evening phone calls

Monday through Thursday as well as on the weekends.

“There has been a bit of a learning curve, as this is the first year I am overseeing the program, and we have more than double the number of phone bankers than we’ve ever had in the past,” said Legislative Chair Jimmy Musser. “But the phone bank program is off to a great start. We are just one month into this program, and have expanded from making calls for the reelection of Senator Sherrod Brown and the statewide redistricting campaign to include calls for congressional candidates, too. We are now calling union members about Ohio AFL-CIO endorsed congressional candidates.

This phone banking program is an important tool to educate union

members about the pro-labor candidates who will be on their ballot on November 5. Other methods that the AFL-CIO, OFT, and CTU are using to educate candidates include volunteer labor walks, labor-neighbor canvass efforts, and writing postcards. While we do not have any more paid opportunities at this time for political efforts, it is vitally important for CTU members to volunteer for the 2024 election season.

Electing Vice President Kamala Harris and her educator (and former AFT member) running-mate Governor Tim Walz as President and Vice President, re-electing U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown, and passing the Cleveland School Levy will be our priorities this election season.

CTU members, we need you this election season! We have opportunities for every comfort level of participation, from writing postcards to knocking on doors and everything in between. Get a group of friends from your school and sign up for an event — it’s more fun with friends. Please help us elect pro-labor candidates in November.

You can sign up for one or any or all of these efforts as a volunteer at the QR Code here.



CTU phone bank callers attended training sessions during the summer.

Welcome, New Members!

Benefits of CTU Membership

CTU welcomed over 100 new members at CMSD New Employee Orientation meetings in July and August, reports Lisa Arraj, CTU Membership Committee Chairperson. She and other CTU leaders explained some of the benefits of union membership to CMSD’s newest employees, distributed the CTU New Member Information Booklet to them, and encouraged them to join the union and get involved in CTU activities.

Most of us already know the basic benefits of union membership: negotiated salaries, benefits, working conditions, and guaranteed workplace protections through the collective bargaining agreement and the grievance process.

“Those are the basics, but membership in the CTU provides many additional services and perks through a variety of union activities and programs,” said Ms. Arraj. “Your CTU membership provides automatic membership in our national and state affiliates, the American Federation of Teachers and the Ohio Federation of Teachers, and access to the additional benefits that they provide.”

One of the most valuable benefits, for members only, is the one-million-dollar AFT Occupational Liability Insurance and AFT Legal Action Trust.

CTU Benefits

CTU members can participate in a variety of professional, educational, legislative, and social activities provided by CTU Committees tear round.

The Membership Committee arranges reduced-price tickets to professional sporting and theater events for CTU members and their families. They organize the annual spring Scholarship Golf Outing, a fundraising event that raises money for scholarships to Cuyahoga Community College for CMSD grads. Last year’s event raised about \$10,000 for the scholarship. They also recognize CTU members during Educator Appreciation Week with gifts for all CTU members.

Extra AFT+ Benefits

Through the AFT, members are



CTU welcomed our newest members at CMSD’s New Teacher Orientation.

part of a community with its own marketplace, AFT+ Member Benefits, that combines the purchasing power of AFT’s 1.7 million members with the benefit offerings of Union Plus, the AFL-CIO’s benefits branch. AFT+ provides an array of discounts, services, and benefits that go beyond the workplace. Many of these programs are available to family members, too.

All members are encouraged to look into the AFT+ Member Benefits Program. The program provides discounts and special opportunities in the areas of education; finance and legal; health services; discounts and shopping; insurance; travel; and mortgages, auto, and home services.

Whether you need help with student loans, higher education, a competitive mortgage rate, no-fee credit cards, a better wireless plan, discounts on travel opportunities, the AFT+ has benefit programs for all of these, and more. For additional information about all AFT benefits available to you through your union membership, visit www.aft.org/benefits.

“Besides providing special benefits for members, the Membership Committee also works to build solidarity and collegiality among members, increasing the power and strength of CTU,” added Ms. Arraj. “Our strength comes from our membership, so get involved, participate in union activities,

and make our union stronger — we are all CTU!”

If you have questions about membership benefits and activities, email Lisa Arraj at larraj@ctu279.org or contact aftplus@aft.org.

AFL-CIO Union Benefits

The Cleveland Teachers Union is a part of the North Shore AFL-CIO, Ohio AFL-CIO, and national AFL-CIO. Through the membership with the national AFL-CIO comes the Union Plus benefits to Union members (current and retired) and their families.

Union Plus benefits are selected by union members, for union members. Benefits through Union Plus include discounts in insurance, home and auto loans, shopping, travel, and education. To learn more about specific benefits in each of those categories, visit them online at: <https://www.unionplus.org/>.

For education benefits, the Union Plus program partnered with Central State University’s online unit, Central State Global, to offer discounted online courses for union members and their immediate family members. You can learn more about this specific partnership on their website at: <https://www.centralstate.edu/central-state-global-union-partnership-program>.

2nd Semester

Teacher Consignment Resource Shop

2nd Semester Consignment & Resource Shop at 616 East 185th Street in Cleveland is a unique educational resale store that has a special connection with the Cleveland teaching community. Owned and managed by teacher Monica Grays, the store is primarily operated by local teachers and parents who contribute their new or almost-new items on consignment, providing teachers a safe, hassle-free way to sell and buy items for their educational needs.

“Established in 2016, 2nd Semester has since become a valuable resource for teachers in the Northeast Ohio area,” said Ms. Grays. “Teachers can find a wide range of classroom materials such as games, manipulatives, teaching resources, and more. The store is not only a place for teachers to purchase items, but it also provides an opportunity for them to bring in new and gently used items to be resold, allowing them to profit from their contributions.”

Visit the store’s website at www.2ndsemestershop.com.

SOLIDARITY FOREVER – Why I’m A CTU Member

“I’m proud to be a CTU member because I appreciate being kept informed of important current events.”

BLISSAMBER O’BRIEN
Speech-Language Pathologist,
Miles Park

“I’m proud to be a CTU member because I feel supported through tough situations.”

KENDRA ZBINOVEC
Occupational Therapist,
Miles Park

“I’m proud to be a CTU member because the psychologists are able to have our specific needs heard and supported.”

MALERIE ANDERSON
School Psychologist
Miles Park



“I’m a CTU member because it encourages teamwork and collaboration for the overall good of the people.”

FIERO VERNON
Paraprofessional (Aut/MD),
Remote K-8



“I’m a CTU member because it gives us a voice.”

JANET WIELKIEWICZ
Teacher,
Remote K-8

“I’m a CTU member because the union supports new and innovative ideas.”

MARTHA VERDE
Teacher,
Remote K-8

Job #1: Implementing Our New Contract

The new CTU-CMSD Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) ratified last spring went into effect July 1, 2024. Now the union — and the district — are charged with its implementation.

Among many positive items in this agreement are two new key policies: parental leave and the student cell phone policy.

CTU, CMSD Parental Leave Settlement

The CBA includes a significant new benefit, Paid Parental Leave. CTU members with 30 days of continuous employment in the District are entitled to up to 12 continuous weeks (60 workdays) of parental leave paid at 100% of their base pay.

“This provision is a game-changer for our members,” stated President Shari Obrenski. “It will help CMSD recruit and retain young educators. It is a testimony to the commitment of both the Union and the District to the health and well-being of educators and their families.”

But this summer, as they prepared for implementation of the contract, CTU and CMSD had a major difference of opinion.

“CMSD thought that this policy should apply only to births and adoptions on or after July 1, 2024,” said Mary Moore, 3rd Vice President, K-8 and Director of Negotiations. “In the negotiations process, CTU’s intent was that this policy would be the same as the city of Cleveland’s parental leave plan, which meant that it would cover one year back from the contract’s start date. We believed notes and emails

from the negotiations process made that clear.”

CTU grieved the issue, and an arbitration was set for August 6. Instead, on August 5, CMSD representatives met with CTU leaders and a settlement was reached.

“This is an amazing victory for CTU,” said President Obrenski. “The Paid Parental Leave agreement will cover those members who had babies or adopted children between July 1, 2023 and June 30, 2024, as well as after. This is the time period that the Union and District were disputing.”

In other words, qualifying CTU members who have babies or adopt children on or after July 1, 2024,

are covered under the new contract language as written. And now, those who had babies or adopted children between July 1, 2023 and June 30, 2024 are also included in the plan (as CTU always intended), thanks to the settlement agreement. These members should have received an email from Stephen Christian on August 6. If you did not receive that email, but believe the settlement applies to you, please contact employeerelations@clevelandmetroschools.org and copy CTU Secretary Michelle Rzucidlo in that email.

Members who used sick time or took time without pay for parental leave from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024 will be reimbursed appropriately, up to 60 days. This settlement impacts a very specific portion of CTU membership, and circumstances will vary from per-

son to person. If you have questions, call or email for further clarification.

“This settlement covers everything that we intended to include in the CBA language during negotiations,” added Ms. Moore, “and is an important victory for our members who are new parents.”

Student Cell Phones

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in the new contract states: *Beginning with the 2024-2025 school year, CMSD will implement a personal cell phone and electronic device collection or storage protocol for students.*

“Some schools had already implemented collection plans successfully, such as Yondr bags or other methods that worked for them,” said Ms. Moore, “but other schools have had a few bumps now that the policy is in place district-wide.” Some principals have tried to assign paraprofessionals or Sign Language Interpreters, but this is unacceptable, since they already have students and other jobs for which they are responsible at that time. Classroom teachers are not required or expected to collect cellphones in the classroom.

Teachers and related-service providers can volunteer — that’s VOLUNTEER, not be assigned — and they will be paid at the breakfast rate for handling cell phone collection and storage.

“CMSD and CTU will be monitoring the cell phone policy in each school through the Student Behavioral Supports Committee (SBSC),” explained Ms. Moore. “They will be collecting feedback from chapter chairs and building leaders, and based on response data, will make recommendations to the CEO and CTU President about the cell phone policy.”

Based on the data, the District and the Union may jointly revise the MOU to improve the cell phone policy’s effectiveness. Both CMSD and CTU wanted to limit distractions during lessons and reduce opportunities for student disputes. The MOU regarding student cell phones is a mutual effort to make our classrooms safer, more secure, and more productive learning spaces.



Teacher Leadership Program Renewed

by **Sara Baldassar** Teacher Leader Coordinator

CTU will be participating in the AFT Teacher Leaders Program again in the 2024-2025 school year. CTU was approved to have 12 new participants, who will be trained to advocate for policy change. Application information will be sent to members during the last week of August. The application period will be open through September 14.

Participants will collaborate on a monthly basis around educational policies. In May, Teacher Leaders will present a showcase of their research at

the Halle Building. A modest stipend is provided for participation. Further information, including the application, will be sent to chapter chairs, and will

be available on the CTU website.

Second-year Teacher Leader participants also have the opportunity to continue research through a special tract program. They will be working with AFT to use their research to create a policy advocacy plan. They will also have the opportunity to participate in an advocacy program to implement the policy change they would like to see.

If this program sounds like you, be sure to apply!

SOLIDARITY FOREVER — Why I’m A CTU Member



“I am a CTU member because our Union is a support system. My wages and benefits are negotiated and protected. I also love standing in solidarity with my fellow Union brothers and sisters, especially regarding issues that impact educators.”

JENNIFER FARRAR
*Intervention Specialist,
Charles Mooney*



“I’m a CTU member because of the hard-fought benefits.”

DARLENE MAUL
*CCCCC,
Charles Dickens*

Overage Payment Errors Trigger Backlog

The CTU Grievance Team, led by Co-Directors Jillian Ahrens, 3rd Vice President, K-8, and Debbie Paden, 3rd Vice President, Senior/Special, continues to deal with a large number of grievances regarding late and incorrect payments, especially for overages.

From January 1, 2024 to mid-August, CTU had processed 492 grievances. Almost all of them were compensation-related, with 288 grievances specifically regarding incorrect or late overage payments.

“We’re frustrated, and we know members are frustrated too,” said Ms. Paden. “CTU members have done the work regarding overages, they accepted extra students, and now they deserve to be paid correctly and on time for their work. But CTU can’t cut the checks. It’s very frustrating all

around.”

Incorrect compensation and payment delays create a domino effect. When a member wins on an incorrect payment grievance, along with 10% late-payment penalty (per the Collective Bargaining Agreement), when the corrected payment is not made on time, the grievant then qualifies for an additional 5%. The delays create a backlog that requires extra time and resources to address. The Union has suggested holding a meeting with the CMSD personnel who process these

payments and the CTU officers who deal with the grievances, to work together to try to improve the process, but no meeting has been scheduled yet.

“We are working hard to clear the backlog as soon as possible and ensure that CTU members are paid what they are due,” said Ms. Ahrens. “Our members should be respected and their professional work honored by correct, timely compensation from the District.”

Don’t Wait – File A Grievance!

The Grievance Team advises CTU members to check their pay each time to be sure it is correct. Don’t sit on money issues — file a grievance immediately if you have not been paid

correctly. Some compensation issues have deadlines, and waiting could cost you money.

Besides compensation issues, the Grievance Team members also handle grievances related to working conditions and all other violations of the contract.

The Grievance Team members are Co-Directors Jillian Ahrens and Debbie Paden; Mary Moore, 3rd Vice President, K-8; Christy Corte, Member-at-Large, K-8; Cherylane Jones-Williams, Paraprofessional Chapter Chairperson; Cheryl Neylon, Sergeant-at-Arms; and Jim Wagner, Treasurer. They are available to answer members’ questions and assist with the grievance process.

Grievance Basics

The CTU Grievance Team asks every CTU member to read the contract book and the copy of May 6 Tentative Agreement, now part of the Collective Bargaining Agreement. They are available on the CTU website, www.ctu279.org.

If you believe the contract is being violated, file a grievance. It’s not personal — it’s business, and it is your right as a union member.

Step 1 grievances are filed at the building level. Present the completed Step 1 grievance to your principal or supervisor. They have three working days to respond. If they don’t respond in three days, or if the issue is not resolved to your satisfaction, complete a Step 2 Appeal form.

Send the completed Step 1 form, all related paperwork and evidence, and the completed Step 2 Appeal form to grievances@ctu279.org. All grievance forms are available online at the CTU website.

Be sure you have completed all parts of the grievance forms. Don’t email incomplete grievances or leave out evidence; that will delay the process. If you have questions, ask your Chapter Chair for help or call the CTU office at 216-861-7676.

News from CTU Bargaining Unit Director

All members should have received their new blue CTU 2024-2025 calendar book, the popular pocket-size book with valuable information, names and phone numbers, important dates and events for the upcoming school year, and an introductory message from President Shari Obrenski.

The CTU calendar book — its arrangement, printing, and distribution — is just one of many duties of the CTU Secretary and Bargaining Unit Director Michelle Rzucidlo. If you are a member and did not receive a book, check with your chapter chair or contact Ms. Rzucidlo at the CTU office. Now that school is in session, she is collecting updated membership lists from chapter chairs, so CTU members’ information can be updated at the CTU office.

New Contract Books

In addition to the Bargaining Unit Director’s duties, the Secretary is part of the Negotiating Team, and works with other team members

and the attorneys to exchange and proofread drafts of the new contract book with CMSD’s team. Proofreading the contract book is by necessity a slow and meticulous process.

The contract book is the legal version of our agreement, and it is critical to get every detail correct, including every word and number and punctuation mark. Ms. Rzucidlo explained, “A small error can change the interpretation of the contract, so everything on every page must be proofread very carefully.”

Leadership Conference

Ms. Rzucidlo and CTU Treasurer Jim Wagner are co-chairs of the CTU Leadership Committee. With the help of their committee, they

plan and organize the annual two-day Leadership Conference for CTU officers and chapter chairs. The educational and informational sessions help prepare our union leaders to better represent the membership. This year’s conference will be held at the Sheraton Suites in Cuyahoga Falls on October 17-18.

Any chapter chairs who have not returned their completed reservation forms for the Leadership Conference are asked to send them to the CTU office now.

Training New Chapter Chairs

Ms. Rzucidlo and Mark Baumgartner, CTU Director of Professional Issues and Trustee-at-Large, also organize additional training sessions just for new chapter chairs.

“The training and information that our chapter chairs receive at the Leadership Conference and the sessions for new reps are important,” explained Ms. Rzucidlo. “They help provide better representation and services for CTU members.”

SOLIDARITY FOREVER – Why I’m A CTU Member

“I’m a CTU member because I like the 5,000-strong community support.”

ZACH SWITZER
Teacher,
John Marshall IT



“I’m a CTU member because of benefits like paid parental leave.”

CAM CUTLER
Teacher,
John Marshall IT

Taking Care of Yourself First

by Amy Such
CTU Salary & Benefits Chair, and School Psychologist

The end of summer break and beginning of a new school year can be exciting, but also stressful. Family and work responsibilities often feel overwhelming. How do you cope? It's important to take care of yourself first. The following suggestions are from NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

To be able to care for the people you love, you must first take care of yourself. You've heard that advice on airplanes: put on your own oxygen mask before trying to help someone else with theirs. Taking care of yourself is a valid goal on its own, and it also helps you support the people you love.

Caregivers who pay attention to their own physical and emotional health are better able to handle challenges. They adapt to changes, build strong relationships, and recover from setbacks. Improving your relationship with yourself by maintaining your physical and mental health makes you more resilient, helping you weather hard times and enjoy good ones. Below are some suggestions for personalizing your self-care strategies.

Understand How Stress Affects You

Stress affects your entire body, physically as well as mentally. Some common physical signs of stress include: headaches; low energy; upset stomach, including diarrhea, constipation and nausea; aches, pains, and tense muscles; and insomnia.

Begin by identifying how stress feels to you. Then identify what events or situations cause you to feel that way. Once you know which situations cause you stress, you'll be prepared to avoid it (if possible) and to cope with it when it happens.

Protect Your Physical Health

Improving your physical well-being is one of the most comprehensive ways you can support your mental health. You'll have an easier time maintaining good mental habits when your body is a strong, resilient foundation.

Exercise daily. Exercise can take many forms, such as taking the stairs whenever possible, walking up escalators, and running and biking rather than driving. Joining a class may help you commit to a schedule, if that works best for you. Daily exercise

naturally produces stress-relieving hormones in your body and improves your overall health.

Eat well. Eating mainly unprocessed foods like whole grains, vegetables, and fresh fruit is key to a healthy body. Eating this way can help lower your risk for chronic diseases, and help stabilize your energy levels and mood.

Get enough sleep. Adults generally need between seven and nine hours of sleep. A brief nap, up to 30 minutes, can help you feel alert again during the day. Even 15 minutes of daytime sleep is helpful. To make your nighttime sleep count more, practice good "sleep hygiene:" avoid using computers, TV, and smartphones right before bed.

Avoid alcohol and drugs. They don't actually reduce stress and often worsen it.

Practice relaxation exercises. Deep breathing, meditation, and progressive muscle relaxation are easy, quick ways to reduce stress. When conflicts come up, these tools can help you feel less controlled by turbulent feelings and give you the space you need to think clearly about what to do next.

Recharge yourself. Sometimes it can be hard to find time for yourself, and even when you do, you may feel distracted by thinking about what you "should" be doing instead. But learning to make time for yourself is critical. Any amount of time you take for yourself is important.

Practice Good Mental Habits

Avoid guilt. Try not to feel bad about experiencing negative emotions. When you allow yourself to notice your feelings without judging them as good or bad, you dial down the stress and feel more in control. When you feel less stressed, you're better able to thoughtfully choose how to act.

Notice the positive. When you take the time to notice positive moments in your day, your experience of that day becomes better. Try writing down one thing each day or week that was good. Even if the positive thing is tiny (it was a sunny day), it's real, it counts, and it can start to change your experience of life.

Gather strength from others. NAMI (and other) support groups exist to reassure you that countless other people have faced similar challenges and understand your concerns. Talking about your experiences can help. The idea that you can, or should be able to, "solve" everything by yourself is false. Often the people who seem like they know how to do everything are actually frequently asking for help; being willing to accept help is a great life skill.

Nurture friends. Friendships are important. Friends help you feel con-

nected and can offer support.

Remember, if you or someone you know is struggling, you are not alone. There are many supports, services, and treatment options available. For more ideas and support for yourself or others, go to the NAMI website at www.nami.org.



WHERE TO FIND HELP

Ease@Work 1-800-521-3273

Free, confidential employee assistance program for you, your household members, and dependents. Contact for physical/mental health issues, wellness supports, or urgent needs. Use code **CMSDIST** when accessing services.

www.mylifeexpert.com

Ease@Work member portal and app for access to wide range of information and services. Use code **CMSDIST**.

Call or Text 988

National suicide and crisis lifeline. Available 24/7, call or text to connect with mental health professionals. Veterans can press 1 after dialing 988 to connect directly to the Veterans Crisis Lifeline. For texts, Veterans should continue to text the Veterans Crisis Lifeline short code: 838255.

FrontLine 216-623-6888

Private, non-profit behavioral health organization that provides 24/7 mental health and other supportive services to those in Cuyahoga County.

CMSD Rapid Response – 216-838-2273

CMSD hotline for school-based crises such as suicide threats and attempts, grief response, and student victimization.

THE CRITIQUE

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SOLIDARITY FOREVER – Why I'm A CTU Member

"I'm a CTU member because my concerns are heard."
ANNELIESE COLEMAN
School Psychologist,
John Addams

Join Our Walk to Support Mental Health

by Amy Such

CTU Salary & Benefits Chair, and School Psychologist

CTU is sponsoring a team for the Saturday, September 14 fundraising NAMIWalk at Edgewater Park in Cleveland, and you are invited to join our team!

NAMI is the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the nation's largest grass-

Coming Soon . . .

Did you love the 100 Days of CTU Action campaign? We know many members did, and we want to continue that positive UNION energy in the 2024-2025 school year. Watch for information on upcoming actions and activities to continue the CTU spirit!

Para News

August VPD Targets Para Interests

Article 24, Section 2 of the new contract reflects the union's commitment to ensure CTU paraprofessionals receive appropriate Professional Development opportunities, with meaningful input from paras in the PD process. The contract language set guidelines for Voluntary Professional Development (VPD) days for paraprofessionals, and established a committee to plan the first VPD day.

The new committee includes the Para Chapter Chair Cherylane Jones-Williams and four other paraprofessionals selected by the CTU President: Saundra Jordan, Linette Lozada, Marietta Mack-Hood, and Lisa F. Reilly. A K-8 principal, a high school principal, and three CEO designees also serve on the committee. Tracy Radich, CTU 1st Vice President, worked with the committee to develop a survey that was sent to paras asking for their input about PD topics, and based on the survey results, they developed a half-day VPD session set for August 12.

The Zoom session began with a welcome session featuring Jessica Wiseman, CMSD Executive Director of Special Education and Intervention Services, and special guests: Chief Academic Officer Dr. Selena Florence; Student Services Officer Jose Gonzalez; Principal Katie Haneline; and Para Chapter Chair Cherylane Jones-Williams.

Participants then attended two sessions which they selected from among six topics: Best Practices for Working with English Learners and Their Families; Self-Care for Paras;

roots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness. This alliance of more than 600 local affiliates works in our communities to raise awareness and provide support and education that was not previously available to those in need.

By joining our Cleveland Teachers Union team, you — like thousands of others across the country — will bring us closer to our goal of “Mental Health for All.”

The CTU Team page on the NAMI-

TDES Refresher for Paras; Calm-Down Strategies and Work-Completion Strategies for PreK-8 Students; The Effects of Trauma on Students; and Special Education Categories and the Evaluation Process.

The PD concluded with a closing session, Paraprofessional Roles and Responsibilities, led by Audrey Staton and Cherylane Jones-Williams. Their presentation explained para job requirements, duties, working conditions, expectations, and paras' rights. It included a list of “Paraprofessional P's” for a productive school year: professional, positive, proactive, passionate, patient, polite, and participate.

Thanks to all who planned, provided, and participated in this beneficial VPD opportunity prior to the new school year!



Walk registration site explains: “We, as CTU educators and supporters, have an impact to make, and the larger our team, the bigger our effect as we raise money and supercharge awareness to power NAMI and its free, life-changing programs. NAMI has provided quality professional development to our educators, and direct support and services to our students, families, and greater community. NAMI is available for everyone.”

Of course, if you can't walk with the CTU group, please consider supporting the cause with a donation. It's easy, fast and secure. Here is the link:

<https://www.namiwalks.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=donorDrive.team&teamID=67335>

CTU team T-shirts will be given to all attendees and to those who donate \$20 or more toward our NAMIWalk team goal. We hope to see you on September 14!

Use the QR Code at right to register and/or donate.



Ed Issues PD to Focus on Members' Needs

by Sara Baldassar

Educational Issues Chairperson

The Educational Issues Committee didn't rest this summer! Thank you to the CTU members who have dedicated their time to making this committee work: Tracey Barberi (Cleveland School of Science and Medicine), Angela Bowman (Harvey Rice), Lynn Carney (Gifted Itinerant), Alicia Cross (Glenville), Lorna Gamble (Gifted Itinerant), Naimah Gooden (Media Specialist), Sha Star Jordan (Mary Bethune), Clarissa Kline (Memorial), Kinsey Robinson (Mary Bethune), Stacey Smith (Willson), and Tisha Watkins (Memorial). We couldn't do this without them.

We met over the summer to use the information from last spring's planning survey to organize meaningful professional development for CTU members. We are working with presenters from last year to continue the series from the Behavior Services Department, and to incorporate more Social-Emotional Learning for students and adults. The workshops for IPDP support and TDES tips will also be scheduled based on members' feedback.

Additionally, we plan to introduce new topics and material based on the survey responses. We will be working with other CTU committees as well, to make sure we are meeting members'

needs.

The Educational Issues Committee worked with leaders from across the city of Cleveland to support the Science of Reading Back-to-School Event on August 23-24. At the Saturday morning event at Cleveland Public Auditorium, we distributed 5,000 books, provided by AFT and CTU from First Book, to families across Cleveland. Thank you to those who have volunteered their time to prepare, transport, and distribute books to the children and families we serve.

Watch for flyers about upcoming Educational Issues events, and take advantage of the many PD opportunities available to CTU members!



Smile! U. S. Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) snaps a selfie with CTU President Shari Obrenski at the Democratic National Convention.

AFT Member for VP



Tim Walz is Our Kind of Guy!

Just in case you missed it: former teacher and current Governor of Minnesota, Tim Walz, has been chosen to be Vice President Kamala Harris's VP! This November, AFT members can put not just a union ally, but an actual public school teacher who was an AFT union member and a veteran in the White House.

Governor Walz has been a great governor for Minnesota, and he will be an excellent Vice President. The AFT supported him when he ran for Congress and Governor, and for good reason: he has provided record funding for public education in Minnesota, including free school meals for all children. He also has protected reproductive rights and expanded collective bargaining, affordable child care, and paid family and medical leave.

Walz is a veteran and a former schoolteacher who consistently gives back to his community. Together, Kamala Harris as president and Tim Walz as vice president will deliver the future we hope for: freedom and opportunity for everyone. Find out more on the AFT Votes website, www.aftvotes.org.

CATHERINE NORWOOD



CHANELLE STEPP



LAKISHA TUGGLE



PAIGE NOVAK

TONDRIA SUGGS



CTU Members 'Star' in AFT Photoshoot



TYLER WYCHE



JACKIE WEGRZYNOWSKI

As the school year was winding down last spring, CTU Community Relations Chair Christy Corte was gearing up for a special project request that the AFT Political Department had for CTU. AFT contacted President Obrenski, telling her of our national affiliate's interest in a first-of-its-kind project: highlighting real AFT members in their political videos and literature that goes out to members.

Instead of using stock photos in its political pieces, the AFT Political Department wanted to start a collection of pictures of real members who represent the various job titles within the national union. To make this happen, AFT asked CTU to have about 10 CTU members available on a single day at one or two schools in Cleveland during the summer break. President Obrenski put her Executive Assistant Meg Ryan Shockey and Christy Corte in charge of this project.

On a single day in June, a dozen members met at Joseph Gallagher to volunteer their time for individual photoshoots and to record video testimonials about how legislation from the Biden-Harris administration helped them as educational professionals and as individuals.

Representatives from the AFT Political and Communication Department, a video team, a photographer, and

a make-up artist were all part of this full-day project.

"While I was not expecting AFT to be taking pictures on a cell phone, the photo and video production was a lot more than I originally thought!" said Ms. Corte. "We told members to expect to be at Joseph Gallagher for about one hour, but many spent two to three hours on site to make sure we could get both pictures and videos completed."

Since then, President Joe Biden has dropped out of the race, and AFT delegates endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris for President at their Convention in July. "Even though most of the videos were championing President Biden, we saw a clip of CTU member David Adams talking about the importance and benefits of student loan forgiveness at the AFT Convention," said Ms. Corte.

CTU sincerely thanks the following members for participating in this fun summer project: David Adams (Intervention Specialist); Jimmy Musser (High School Teacher); Catherine Norwood (Paraprofessional); Paige Novak (Intervention Specialist); Tequita Spoon-Hector (High School Teacher); Chanelle Stepp (Primary School Teacher); Amy Such (School Psychologist); Tondria Suggs (Residential Schools); Lakisha Tuggle (Health Services, LPN); Jackie Wegrzynowski (College & Career Center Coordinator); Tyler Wyche (Music Teacher).

Look for these members (our CTU stars!) pictured in AFT's political literature, videos, and ads this fall.

SOLIDARITY FOREVER — Why I'm A CTU Member



"Membership has its privileges." This was a popular catch phrase in a 1990s credit card ad, but as a CTU member, I believe this. As CTU members, we have a negotiated contract with a nice compensation package, and representatives to assist us if we have issues with our employment. As AFT members, there are a plethora of discounts, savings, and trainings we can access. Let me mention a few other benefits some may not realize.

"As paraprofessionals, we are a specialized group of professional, dedicated educators who share many of the same concerns regardless of our specific jobs. When we stick together and work collaboratively, we can be quite a force. We have many talents and can share our knowledge and expertise to help one another grow.

"Union members can network, access professional trainings, and engage in helpful and meaningful relationships. Becoming an active CTU member, especially in the Paraprofessional Chapter, gives us a greater voice.

"Membership really does have its privileges. Become active in the union — all are welcome!"

ALICIA M. DODSON

Instructional Assistant, Remote K-8

BY SHARI OBRENSKI

The Promise of the Future

“Our unity is our strength, and our diversity is our power. We reject the myth of ‘us’ versus ‘them.’ We are in this together.”
— Kamala Harris, August 2024

What a week it was in Chicago at the Democratic National Convention! I had the great honor to represent Ohioans as a delegate, and I’m writing this column on the way back to Ohio.

If there was any doubt about Kamala Harris’s ability to lead our nation, to fight for a better future for all Americans, and to unite our nation after years of partisan divide, those questions were answered. She is ready and able. Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, a former teacher and AFT union member, coach, veteran, and all-around good guy was a brilliant choice for Vice President.

We learned about both candidates and their families, and witnessed genuine love and affection in both families. Both Kamala and Tim have impressive resumes, with knowledge, skills, and experiences that qualify them to be excellent leaders for our nation. And the Democratic Party, plus a number of Republicans and Independents, are solidly behind them in this election.

The general feeling at the Convention was joyful, optimistic, even exhilarating. Diversity and inclusion were celebrated, not feared, and the Democrats’ big tent welcomed several notable Independent and Republican speakers. Adam Kinzinger, a conservative and former Republican Congressman from Illinois, spoke at the Convention and told fellow conservatives that “Democrats are as patriotic as us,” and “Democracy knows no party,” as he endorsed the Harris-Walz ticket.

The Democrats’ list of star speakers and performers was extensive and amazing, beginning with President Joe Biden, Oprah, Hillary and Bill Clinton, and Michelle and Barack Obama, and more — too many to name here. The usual routine roll call of states’ votes became a joyous dance party with a state-by-state playlist of songs put together by celebrity DJ Cassidy (his list went viral online).

There were lots of happy moments, but also serious, poignant presentations that brought tears. It was an honest look at our nation, what we celebrate about America, and what we need to do to make our country better for all Americans. If you missed any of the four nights, I recommend that you go online and watch some of the speakers and performers. You won’t

be disappointed.

But the joy and hope and solidarity we — and everyone who watched — experienced was only the starting bell to a difficult race that will end November 5. Americans will make a critical choice this fall. The question is, what will we choose?

Unity or division? Justice or corruption? Inclusion or exclusion? Hope or fear? Honesty or dishonesty? Truth or the big lie? Integrity or corruption? Freedom or a dictator? The rule of law or a convicted felon?

Unity or division? Justice or corruption? Inclusion or exclusion? Hope or fear? Honesty or dishonesty? Truth or the big lie? Integrity or corruption? Freedom or a dictator? The rule of law or a convicted felon?

CTU brothers and sisters, our work begins now. It is time for all hands on deck, and all boots on the ground. Michelle Obama gave delegates and Americans our marching orders: “Do something!”

So Let’s Do Something!

The CTU and North Shore AFL-CIO are coordinating election campaign activities every week. There will be canvassing, postcard writing, and door knocking events. Use the QR code here to see the list and register to attend.

Check for fliers and updates about additional activities. Postcard parties for the two debates are being planned: the September 10 Presidential Debate and the October 1 Vice Presidential Debate. Look for details soon.

Besides electing Kamala Harris and Tim Walz, our priorities will be reelecting U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown and passing the CMSD school

levy. Senator Brown has a 100% pro-labor voting record and deserves our vote. His race is key to Democrats holding the Senate. Passage of the levy will enable the District to continue the progress we’ve made toward improving teaching and learning, and prevent severe budget cuts after the expiration of COVID-19 funds.

Another important priority is passing Issue 1, Citizens Not Politicians. The anti-gerrymandering amendment will finally take politicians out of the map-drawing process, and give Ohio voters to fairer districts and better representation.

We are supporting three judicial candidates for the Ohio Supreme Court. Two Ohio Supreme Court Justices, Michael Donnelly and Melody Stewart, have been endorsed by the OFT for re-election based on their proven record of putting the Ohio Constitution and the rule of law above partisan politics. OFT has also endorsed Judge Lisa Forbes for the third seat on the Ohio Supreme Court. She pledged to protect Ohioans from interests seeking to infringe on our freedoms, and to prioritize fair application of the law.

The OFT expects these judicial races to be very important for the future

of public education and democracy in Ohio. In the coming term, the Court will likely address the constitutionality of Ohio’s ever-expanding private school voucher scheme, and recent GOP restrictions on voters’ rights and political spending.

Are you ready to do something, CTU members? Talk, write, call, knock, and most importantly, VOTE for our union-endorsed candidates and issues!

Back to CMSD

I hope the first week with students went well. Our new contract is now in effect; it was negotiated with a focus on respecting, retaining, and recruiting educators and support staff.

The Parental Leave Policy and related Settlement Agreement are major wins for CTU members who are growing their families. The CBA policy covers births and adoptions beginning on July 1, 2024. The settlement covers births and adoptions from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024; this was always what CTU intended in negotiations, and the District agreed.



As stated in my August 9 email update, if you are impacted by the settlement, you should have received an email from Stephen Christian. If you did not receive the email but you believe the settlement applies to you, please contact employeerelations@clevelandmetroschools.org and copy Michelle Rzucidlo on the email. These situations vary and will be handled individually, so please call or email the CTU for further clarification. Katie Baltas Grenig is the CMSD contact for this issue.

CTU will be monitoring implementation of the new student cell phone policy, asking chapter chairs for their input and ideas. Implementation will vary from school to school, and CTU will be offering support if needed. Remember, cell phone collection is not CTU members’ responsibility!

If you have questions about this policy, or any of the new contract language, please call the CTU for clarification. Sometimes administrators “interpret” the contract differently and the language needs to be explained. That’s what we are here for at the CTU office, so don’t hesitate to call with your questions and concerns.

In the next months, let’s keep that Convention enthusiasm and energy alive. In the words of Kamala Harris, “It is now our turn to do what generations before us have done. Guided by optimism and faith, to fight for this country we love. To fight for the ideals we cherish. And to uphold the awesome responsibility that comes with the greatest privilege on Earth. The privilege and pride of being an American.

“So, let’s get out there and let’s fight for it. Let’s get out there and let’s vote for it. And together, let us write the next great chapter in the most extraordinary story ever told.”

Let’s have a great school year and a successful election season. Thanks for all you do for Cleveland kids and families, and for your Union.

In union,
Shari Obrenski
CTU President