

AFT-WV IN ACTION
ACTIVISTS DETERMINE LEGISLATIVE GOALS

MEMBERS WIN CASH
AFT-WV MEMBERS WIN BIG IN RECRUITING CONTEST

AFT MEMBER BENEFIT
SUMMER STUDENT DEBT MANAGEMENT, SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES



THE INSIDER

THE PUBLICATION FOR AFT-WEST VIRGINIA MEMBERS

From the desk of...

AFT-WV President Fred Albert



It feels like we blinked since the school year began and now it's time for the holiday break!

Over the past year, we heard first hand from our members about the post-Covid

challenges you face each day in your schools. The social-emotional needs of our students have become a greater factor in our daily work. The behavioral disruptions in our classrooms and on our school buses have reached a crisis level. In addition to salaries and PEIA, student behavior is a top priority issue as we approach the 2024 Legislative Session.

As you go to work each day, please remember that you are making a difference for so many children, even when you may feel like you are spinning your wheels. Often, those tougher days are when we make the greatest impact on students, we just aren't aware of it. Keep moving forward, you are changing lives even when you aren't aware of it!

Wishing you and your loved ones a healthy and happy new year! I hope to see you at a union meeting or event soon. Ask a colleague to join AFT-WV and stand with us for what is right for our students and profession! Remember, YOU are the union!

In solidarity,

Fred

AFT-WV campaign to focus on student discipline, safer classrooms

Learning is best achieved in a classroom environment free from disruptive behavior. Whether they occur in the classroom or on the school bus, disciplinary problems make it difficult for educators to deliver quality instruction and services to all children.

Prior to the pandemic, student behavior was already at the top of educators' concerns. Over the last several years, there has also been an alarming increase in the number of teachers and service personnel who are being physically assaulted by students. Post-COVID, the prevalence of behavior disruptions has also increased significantly. AFT-WV has led the charge in fighting for safe and orderly schools in West Virginia for decades. The union was instrumental in the passage of the Safe Schools Act in the 1990's and has pushed for several additions to strengthen the law over the years.

The Safe Schools Act was designed to protect the rights of everyone in the classroom; educators and children do not forfeit their rights to a safe work environment when they enter a school. But, we all know that schools and students are different than they were when the law was initially passed, so there is always room to improve or adapt the law to address today's challenges.

AFT-WV will be focusing on a campaign to educate school staff on the

laws designed to help them, as well as students. The union will also be seeking the input of our members on what is needed to minimize behavior disruptions.

"We look forward to our members getting involved in this campaign and providing their invaluable feedback, because it's the people out in our schools who are best equipped to help us identify and implement solutions for disruptive behavior," explained AFT-WV President Fred Albert.

The campaign will include conducting trainings/ workshops, soliciting our members' opinions regarding the best resources and solutions and discussing social and emotional resources for schools. A key part will be working with lawmakers for legislative remedies to aid with student behavior.

"We know behavioral disruptions are having an impact on every child in our schools, not just the student who is acting out. It's also becoming a reason that many education employees are leaving the profession. During the upcoming legislative session, we hope to work with lawmakers to find solutions that will help both educators and our students."

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AFT-West Virginia, AFL-CIO
1320 Kanawha Blvd, East
Charleston, WV 25301
800-222-9838 www.aftwv.org

AFT-WV members win big for helping to grow their union

Last spring, AFT-WV launched a contest during our annual “Buck A Month” membership promotion. New members who joined AFT received free dues until September. Existing members who recruited a new member by September 1st and listed their name on the referral line received an entry into our cash giveaway. Members received an entry for each dues-paying member they recruited. The more members recruited, the more contest entries a current member received.

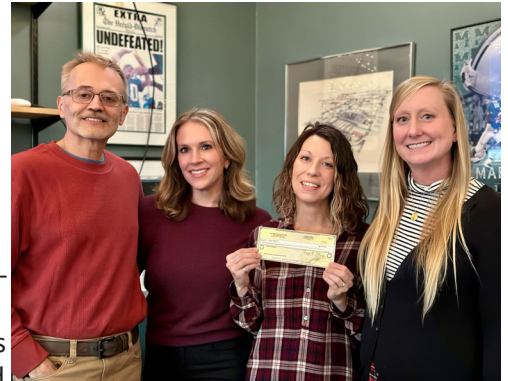
Why did we do this? Because there is strength in numbers, and we need to grow the union as large as we can to fight the many challenges facing public education and the education profession. And it’s far more meaningful and effective when a colleague asks you to join the union.

During the 2023 AFT-WV Convention in November, we drew the winners of this contest.

We drew two grand prizes of \$2500 each. One was drawn from the teacher/professional staff who recruited to earn an entry, and one was drawn from the service personnel members who recruited to earn an entry. Our grand prize winner service personnel was Tena McElwain from AFT- Monongalia Service Personnel. Our grand prize winner for teacher/professionals was Jessica Carpenter from AFT-Wood County.

Then, we combined the professional and service personnel entries into one container and drew 10 second chance prizes of \$500 each. Any member with multiple entries was eligible to win more than one prize.

The following members won second-chance prizes of \$500: Amy Neal (Cabell), Marlee Amos (Wetzel), Kellie Wood (Cabell), Patty Hamilton (Kanawha), Alison Douglas-Chiles (Kanawha), Deborah Authur (Putnam), Penny Creel (Berkeley), Gene Estel



AFT-WV Vice-President Greg Merritt, AFT-WV Staff Rep. Jessica Robinson, and AFT-Wood President Amelia Roedersheimer present Jessica Carpenter with her \$2500 prize.

(Putnam). Tena McElwain (Monongalia Service) was handsomely rewarded for the numerous members she recruited, as she won two \$500 prizes in addition to one of the \$2500 grand prizes.

Congratulations to all of our winners and every member who participated in this contest to help grow the power and strength of your union. We appreciate every one of you!

Delegates pass resolutions, elect board positions at state convention

Morgantown was the site for the 2023 AFT-WV Convention, an action-packed event featuring professional development workshops, awards highlighting our locals and members, and the election of board member unexpired terms.

During the convention, delegates approved resolutions and the 2024 Legislative Agenda, learned how to utilize the data in certified second month reports, and attended workshops on a variety of topics including Safe Schools and Special Education.

During the awards presentation on Saturday, AFT-Mingo Service Personnel won the percentage membership growth award, and AFT-Cabell County won the net growth award. Members Crystal Adkins (Marion Co.) and Amy Kent (Marshall Co.) were honored with the Apple Award for making a



difference in their union, schools and communities. AFT-Marion County was recognized with the Pride of the Union Award for empowering and engaging members. Private sector local HRDE/HRDF won the 100% membership award. The AFT-WV Lifetime Service Award was presented to Jerry Throckmorton and longtime AFT-WV staffer Christine Barr, who recently retired, was honored with the Distinguished Service Award.

Delegates elected executive board members to fill the unexpired terms of board positions. Greg Merritt

Left: Justin Altizer, Greg Merritt and Tena McElwain take the oath of office after being elected to executive board positions.

Below: Frank Caputo, AFT-WV President Fred Albert and AFT-Marion President John Foley pose with Apple Award winner Crystal Adkins.



(Wood County) was elected as Vice-President, Justin Altizer (Lincoln County) was elected as Treasurer, and Tena McElwain (Monongalia Service Personnel) was elected as a board member at large. These newly elected activists are ready to help lead the union forward, address the challenges facing education, and fight for working families.

AFT activists meet to determine legislative priorities

AFT-WV members from across the state came together for the 2023 Legislative Summit, held September 8-9 at the Doubletree Hilton in Huntington. Local union activists attended the day and a half event to draft the union's priorities and goals for the 2024 legislative session.

After enjoying an evening of fellowship at Friday's reception and a hospitality room sponsored by AFT-Cabell County, members got right to work on Saturday morning, reviewing last year's legislative session and recommitting to the overarching issues that remain most important to education and public employees. Salaries, health and safety protocols, long-term funding for PEIA and addressing student discipline were among the top priorities identified.

The group also selected positive education bills that, despite having bipartisan support, did not reach passage during the previous session. AFT-WV hopes to work with the sponsors of these bills to create the momentum for passage this year.

The group's recommendations were used to draft a concise Legislative Agenda, which was approved by delegates at the 2023 AFT-WV Convention in November in Morgantown. To read the full 2024 Legislative Agenda, visit www.aftwv.org.



Attendees at this year's Legislative Summit, held in Huntington, pause their work for a photo.

Members enjoy fellowship at annual Marshall game and tailgate

Over 80 AFT-WV members and their families enjoyed a day of fellowship and football during the union's Family Fun Day, held September 30th in Huntington. Members enjoyed a pre-game tailgate then cheered on the Thundering Herd as they faced off against Old Dominion.

"This is a great chance to just have fun together as a union family. Food, football, cornhole and great weather...we couldn't have asked for a better day to enjoy with our members," remarked AFT-WV Staff Rep. Brandon Tinney, who organizes the annual event. AFT-WV extends a heartfelt thanks the Schmidt Family Restaurant Group, who owns the Wendy's location we use for the tailgate, for their

continued support of our local educators.

Quick thinking by AFT-Cabell member saves life of student

The quick actions of a member in Cabell County saved the life of a student who experienced a serious medical emergency. Ashlee Hayes, a special education teacher and cheerleading coach at Cabell Midland High School jumped into action and administered CPR on the student until EMS arrived.

Ashlee was honored at a Cabell Board of Education meeting with the Superintendent's Superhero award and AFT-WV applauds her for her quick thinking and bravery. Your union is proud of you, Ashlee!

Members and their families enjoyed a great day of football and fellowship during the annual AFT-WV Family Fun Day.



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Your union: Helping you simplify student loan debt

We hear about it all the time in our student debt clinics: Our members who are struggling to pay off their student loan debt simply don't know who to turn to for help or are overwhelmed at the where to even start.

Meet Summer—an online resource, started by student loan borrowers who wanted to help others avoid bad information and bad actors in the student loan market. Summer harnesses the expertise of public policy experts to optimize borrower options, and it uses technology to make the process easy and secure. The AFT trusts Summer to help our members navigate the student loan repayment landscape.

Using Summer's online student loan management platform, AFT members who enroll in this free member

benefit can:

- Enroll in income-driven repayment plans and manage annual income recertifications for these plans;
- Complete the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Employment Certification Form and manage the PSLF certification and application process;
- Find other options for loan forgiveness programs, including state- and occupation-based loan forgiveness, and get assistance in applying for them; and
- Talk through options with Summer's borrower success team so they can understand how to best maximize their loan repayment and forgiveness options.

Thousands of AFT members have already joined Summer, reducing their monthly payments by hundreds of dollars a month and saving tens of thousands over the life of their loans!

Are you ready to get your student loans under control today? Summer's got your back! Enroll for free today at <https://www.aft.org/benefits/summer>.

SAVE THE DATE

AFT-WV Summer School

June 24-28, 2024

AFT Benefits: Scholarship opportunities for members and dependents

AFT has two scholarship programs available to help members and their children achieve their educational dreams.

The AFT Robert G. Porter Scholars Program offers four 4-year, \$8,000 post-secondary scholarships to students who are dependents of AFT members, as well as 10 one-time \$1,000 grants to AFT members to assist with their continuing education.

The 2024 Porter Scholars application period is now open and the application deadline has not been announced yet, but typically is March or April.

Because AFT is affiliated with the AFL-CIO, members are also eligible to apply for the Union Plus Scholarship Program.

Since 1991, the Union Plus Scholarship Program has awarded more than \$4.2 million to students of working

families who want to begin or continue their post-secondary education. Award amounts range from \$500 to \$4000. Applications are due before 12 PM on January 31, 2024.

There have been several winners from West Virginia of both scholarships in the past few years.

For more details and eligibility requirements for both scholarship programs, visit www.aft.org/member-benefits/scholarships.