

AFT Colorado's Biennial Convention

Sarah R. Mesmer, President

We had a successful biennial Convention for AFT Colorado in April, with attendance from many of our local unions and several guest speakers. AFT's President, Randi Weingarten, called into the convention and shared inspiring thoughts with the group. Colorado Treasurer Dave Young talked with members about what the State Treasurer does and how it affects our lives as Coloradoans. Rob Gould, from Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA) spoke to us about the organizing efforts that culminated in the successful strike of the spring--inspiring our members and giving them ideas about our own organizing.

We awarded three recognitions at the convention:



- Kathy Dorman, a DCF member for 34 years, won the *Meyer-Mall Outstanding Volunteer Award*. The impact of Kathy's work on her local, the DCF, is hard to overstate. She has consistently contributed to growing collective power for her union. She recruits members and leaders, acts as a voice for members in meetings with the district leaders, and holds positions in district committees--ensuring

that the DCF voice is in the room. Currently, she is one of the leaders who will be responsible for bringing collective bargaining back for DCF members.



- Rob Gould accepted the *Friend of Public Education Award* for DCTA. AFT Colorado's members benefit from DCTA's brave actions. Administrators everywhere are watching, as are politicians and voters. We all know, unions raise wages not only for their bargaining units, but for workers all around them. The attention their strike brought to education funding in Colorado will have an impact for years to come.

Voters statewide have a new look at what happens when teachers and staff are not compensated appropriately. DCTA has moved the needle even more since our last election and amendment 73.



- Senator Tammy Story received the *Friend of Public Education Award*. Senator Story has a long history of standing strong for public education, since her fight for Jefferson County Public Schools Board of Education elections--when Jeffco was under attack by right-wing reformers to her endorsement and active campaigning for Amendment 73 this past fall.

Most recently, Senator Story courageously took on Senate Bill 10-191. She sponsored a bill that would have begun to make small changes to the teacher evaluation bill that has been destructive to public education in Colorado--placing too much emphasis on test scores and acting as a punitive tool for many administrators across the state. Senator Story faced formidable foes, which may explain why it's taken eight years for any legislator to sponsor a bill.

Senator Story served on the Education Committee as the Vice Chair, was the Prime Sponsor of six education bills, and was the co-sponsor for countless education bills this session, both pre-K-12 and higher education. She also co-sponsored SB 19-057, Employee Information Student Loan Repayment Program, a bill that AFT Colorado has run for several years. That bill passed.

It has been my absolute honor to serve as the President of AFT Colorado over the past several years. I will continue to serve as the Secretary/Treasurer and will pass the gavel to my colleague, Kallie Leyba, who is the President-elect of AFT Colorado and officially takes on that role on July 1, 2019.

Enjoy your summer and I look forward to working with you in the fall as we face elections yet again! Remember, solidarity equals power and we are all in this together.

Officers for the 2019-2021 term are:

President: Kallie Leyba, *Douglas County Federation*
Secretary/Treasurer: Sarah Mesmer, *Douglas County Federation of Retirees*
Executive Vice President: Bernie Jiron, *Denver Federation of Paraprofessionals & Nutrition Service*
Vice President: Robin Handy, *Douglas County Federation Retirees*
Vice President: Victoria Pacheco, *Denver Federation of Paraprofessionals & Nutrition Service*
Vice President: Joanne Slanovich, *Douglas County Federation of Retirees*

Thank you to all who attended the convention and special thanks to the individuals who planned and executed another successful event!

Colorado Legislative Session 2019

AFT Colorado and the education community, as a whole, have a lot to celebrate following the 2019 legislative session. Our elected officials made significant strides towards more adequately funding our schools, addressing the student debt crisis, closing the achievement gap, and bringing in more sensible tax policies. We are especially proud of the successes around the student debt crisis – a priority of ours over the last several sessions that we finally saw bear some fruit.

This year's legislative victories withstanding, there were also some setbacks this session. State employees are still without meaningful collective bargaining rights, Colorado's outdated teacher evaluation system still needs some improvement, and Colorado's per-pupil funding and educator compensation levels remain towards the bottom of nationwide rankings. As always, there remains plenty of work to do moving forward. Let's take a look at some of these issues in-depth:

Student Debt Crisis

The student debt crisis is far reaching and requires a multi-faceted approach to completely address it – on both the state and federal levels. We took two meaningful steps this year on the state level – bolstering regulation of student loan servicers and increasing access to public service loan forgiveness.

- **SB19-002:** Requires student loan servicers to apply for licensure to operate in Colorado and created an ombudsman office to oversee and handle complaints with student loan servicers.
- **SB19-057:** Requires state agencies and other qualifying employers to provide annual notification of their employees' eligibility for Public Service Loan Forgiveness and to provide helpful resources to aid in their enrollment in the program.



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School Funding

TABOR remains a major obstacle to adequate school funding. Given those restraints, the state legislature managed to bring us closer to our pre-2008 funding levels. If passed, a ballot measure, referred by the legislature, would slightly loosen up TABOR's grasp on our funding woes. Here's a summary of what happened with school funding this session:

- \$100M buy-down of the budget stabilization factor
- \$22M recurring funding for special education
- \$20M one-time funds for rural schools
- **"De-Brucing" Referred Ballot Measure:** The state legislature voted to refer a question on this year's ballot that would allow the state to keep, and not refund, any excess funding raised that fall under TABOR revenue limits. This funding is not guaranteed, but could raise several hundred million dollars for K-12 education, higher education, and transportation projects.



Free Full-Day Kindergarten

- School districts are not required to provide full-day kindergarten, but will receive funding to pay for every eligible student to attend full-day kindergarten.

State Employee Collective Bargaining Rights

Colorado state employees are allowed, based on an executive order created by Governor Bill Ritter about a decade ago, to be represented by a union. Colorado WINS' (state employee union) members do not have "true" collective bargaining rights under this executive order, i.e. there is no binding arbitration or mandated bargaining between the state and Colorado WINS.

A bill was introduced this session to codify this executive order into the law and to give state employees 'real' collective bargaining rights. Unfortunately, Governor Polis and Colorado WINS could not reach an agreement to make this happen. Because it appears as though the Governor would have vetoed the bill, the sponsors decided to work towards a solution next session.

Local Union Updates



DCF is Organizing for Collective Bargaining

The Douglas County Federation (DCF) is asking their school board to reinstate collective bargaining. The DCF was chartered in 1972 and enjoyed an award winning collaborative relationship until 2012, when the school board was in the control of corporate reformers and discontinued the collective bargaining agreement. The reform takeover began in 2009, and since then, student achievement has dropped significantly. Colorado Department of Education shows that in 2010, Douglas County School District scored above 90.8% of all other districts in Colorado, according to the Colorado Performance Framework (CPF). In the latest results, the district scored ahead of only 81.2% of Colorado's districts. This is a significant decline in performance over eight years. Research across the nation, and across the world, shows that districts with strong unions have better outcomes for students, and the education "experiment" in Douglas County was no exception.



Because Colorado isn't a collective bargaining state, nor is it a so-called "right to work" state, districts can choose whether or not to collectively bargain with the educators' union. The DCF spent the spring talking to members and non-members about collective bargaining, some of whom have never worked with an agreement, asking them to sign a petition requesting that the district collaborate. The percentage of educators who signed was extremely high, showing a clear desire for collaboration on the part of educators. The DCF is waiting to hear from the district. Will the district show its educators the same professional treatment and respect that the bus drivers have – a collective bargaining agreement?

Educator Leader Program in DCF

DCF was honored in 2018-2019 to be selected as one of 26 locals in the nation for participation in the AFT Educator Leader Program. We know that educators are the foundation to the success of a school system. Certainly, leadership takes place in the classroom, but leadership on a larger scale occurs when educators have opportunities to influence policy. The Educator Leader Program provides a forum for teachers and classified staff to engage in action research regarding topics for which they have passion. Based on research results, recommendations are made for policy or procedural changes that will improve professional practice, and the overall function of the district.



Pictured from the left: Tara Holst, Alanna Cohen, Kallie Leyba, Dain Eric Cunningham, Sarah Mesmer, DCSD Board member Kevin Leung, Kathy Dorman

Four phenomenal educators presented their research to a group of colleagues, friends, family and others interested in education policy on Saturday, April 20, 2019. The DCF is looking forward to participating in this enriching opportunity again next year.

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AFT COLORADO

STANDING TOGETHER: MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Committee on Political Education (COPE) Deduction

925 S. Niagara St., Suite 600, Denver, CO 80204 www.aftcolorado.org 720-443-8032

What is COPE? COPE is how AFT Colorado raises and collects voluntary political contributions from members. COPE is a non-partisan political education committee. These voluntary funds are used statewide to help back candidates and committees that support education and labor. There is one reason AFT Colorado needs to grow our COPE program, **YOU**. With the current economic environment our priorities are vulnerable and are constantly being targeted for reduction. Education budgets, programs, and services are often first on the chopping block when states face dwindling tax revenues. Along with decent working conditions, retirement, and health care. All vitally affect our lives. A strong COPE program will protect our various interests.

At the local level COPE is essential. AFT Colorado will use your voluntary funds to assist in school board races, levies, and referendums in your district. Reductions in state education aid and inflation have made local budgets even more of a challenge. We use COPE dollars to work with labor and education friendly supporters on both sides of the aisle.

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