



Colorado Connection

3rd Quarter 2025



President's Message

Welcome back to a new school year!

I hope you had a restful summer, found some time for fun, and are ready to return to our students with renewed energy.

Membership in AFT Colorado continues to grow thanks to the hard work of our locals over the summer—and that momentum will carry into this school year.

I'd like to welcome back Emma Bliesener and Fiona Boomer to AFT Colorado.

*Emma is our legislative lobbyist, representing us at the Capitol.

* Fiona, in addition to serving as our Executive Director, is now also working as an organizer to support locals across the state.

We are also fortunate to be adding even more organizing power. AFT National is providing us with an additional organizer this year. Please join me in welcoming Arianna Josue, who will begin on September 8, 2025. Arianna is a former Denver Public Schools paraprofessional and graduate of Knapp Elementary. She also attended Cornell College and comes from a strong labor family—both of her parents were union members. She will be working with locals across Colorado as needed. Please give her a warm welcome when you see her or at our next meeting.

This fall, school board elections will once again be a priority. I have participated in many candidate interviews, and as soon as we know which candidates DALF will endorse, I will share that information with you. Please remember: Election Day is November 2025.

I'd also like to introduce our new AFT Colorado Executive Board:

- President: Bernadette Jiron (DFP-NSE)
- Secretary/Treasurer: Bill Hamaker (DCF Retirees)
- Executive Vice President: Richard Wagner (MSFF)
- Vice Presidents:
 - Deidre Smith (DFP-NSE)
 - Christina Garcia (DFP-NSE)
 - Marshae Banks (DFP-NSE)
 - Wayne Scott (CSSP)
 - Lucy Squire (DCF)
 - Chris Graham Herring (DCF)

If you have news you'd like included in the AFT Colorado Newsletter, please send it to Cheryl Reiling at clreiling@aftcolorado.org.

Finally, let's get ready for another strong year with our students!



In solidarity,

Bernadette Jiron, President, AFT Colorado

Colorado Workers Rights United

The time is now to come together to modernize Colorado's labor laws to level the playing field so ordinary workers can stand up to billionaires to increase worker safety, put more money in the pockets of working families, and decrease the wealth gap.

Who We Are

The Colorado Workers' Rights United Table exists to unite labor unions and community groups to build worker power through organizing and solidarity in Colorado. Specifically, the Colorado Workers' Rights United Table exists to modernize Colorado's labor laws to make it easier to organize and empower Colorado workers.

The Problem

Colorado's outdated labor laws harm workers by weakening collective bargaining rights, allowing wealthy corporations to cut corners on workplace safety and wages while amassing record profits. Forming a union under federal law is already a very challenging and lengthy process, and Colorado's law makes it even harder, benefiting corporations over workers. Workers in Colorado have to participate in an inherently undemocratic election that sets them up for failure. For workers who want the freedom to form a union to level the playing field, our undemocratic law puts up untenable and unnecessary roadblocks.

The Historic Moment

- Support for unions is at an all time high.
- Decision-makers and candidates are publicly supporting unions and taking action to support workers organizing.
- More than 70,000 Colorado workers are currently organizing to form a union.
- Given the historic moment we are in, it is time to modernize the Colorado Labor Peace Act of 1943.

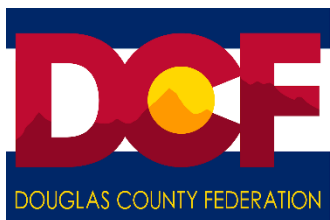
Our Policy

Colorado is the only state in the nation that creates additional barriers for workers who want to form strong unions. Our goal is to eliminate those barriers and have Colorado's laws match the standard set by the National Labor Relations Act and most other states in the nation.

Why It Matters¹

- Coloradans should have the freedom to voice their opinions on safety and pay at work – workers need the freedom to form a union to level the playing field.
- If we remove the barriers to forming unions, all workers benefit with higher wages and safer workplaces, which is good for our economy.
- Union workers' wages are 10.2% higher than workers in the same industry with the same education, job title, and experience.
- Increased union density in an industry improves working conditions for all workers in that industry, whether or not they are part of a union.

Local Union Updates



Douglas County Federation of Retirees



General Membership Meeting

Thank you to everyone who attended our biannual General Membership Meeting at Maggiano's on June 19. Our guest speaker, [Howard Chou](#), shared valuable insights on political strategy drawn from his lifelong commitment to political engagement and social justice. We also welcomed our new Colorado AFT lobbyist, [Emma Bliesener](#), who provided a helpful overview of key legislation from the recent session.

In addition to holding elections and other important business, we enjoyed the chance to reconnect with friends and fellow retirees. (See more photos [HERE!](#)) Please encourage your retired friends and colleagues to join us for food, fun, and friendship at our next meeting this fall- they can sign up for membership [HERE!](#)

Elections and Membership

A big thank you to those who helped defeat the [Home Rule Charter in Douglas County](#) - an inspiring example of what we can achieve through solidarity. As we look ahead, we'll need to stay politically engaged with the upcoming school board elections this fall. DCFR members are also needed to support the critical membership drive launching in August as the new school year begins. Teachers continue to work toward securing a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) with the district. Please contact me or [DCF Executive Director Fiona Boomer](#) if you're able to lend a hand.

Lobbying at the Capitol

Finally, I'm pleased to share that [HB24-1136: Healthier Social Media Use by Youth](#), a bill I testified in favor of last year, has passed! As a result, the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) has just launched a [youth mental health and technology resource bank](#) on its website. Our lobbyist, [Emma](#), would love to see more retirees get involved in this vital work—whether by testifying in person at the Capitol or remotely—on legislation that impacts education.

As we celebrate Labor Day, we are reminded more than ever of the importance of staying alert, engaged, and hopeful. Whether it's joining a rally, helping with elections, or standing up for those whose voices too often go unheard, **your actions matter**. From the local to the state and all the way to the national level, **AFT** - and **YOU** - are making a difference.

So please don't give in to apathy or discouragement. We all dedicated our lives and careers to children and the future they represent. Be proud. Be strong. Be union!

In Solidarity,

Bill Hamaker, President

Douglas County Federation of Retirees



The advertisement features a photograph of a smiling male teacher in a light blue shirt and khaki pants, sitting on a desk in a classroom and interacting with several young students. To the right of the photo, on a red background, are three circular icons with white text: a credit card icon for 'CREDIT CARDS', a house icon for 'MORTGAGE PROGRAM', and a car icon for 'CAR RENTAL'. Below these icons, the text 'Benefits Designed with AFT Members In Mind' is written in white. At the bottom left, it says 'Learn more at [unionplus.org/aft](#)'. At the bottom right, there are logos for 'aft A Union of Professionals AFT+ Member benefits' and 'UNIONPLUS'.

METROPOLITAN STATE FACULTY FEDERATION

The year 2025 has been a challenging time for faculty and students at Metropolitan State University. Besides an increased role in shaping university policy concerning on institutional budget, policy, and handbook committees, the Metropolitan State Faculty Federation (MSFF) has also advocated for responses to the damaging Trump agenda. MSFF organized a rally as part of a national Day of Action Defend Higher Education and MSFF members joined several other rallies in solidarity with numerous labor and civic organizations.

2025-2026 Metropolitan State Faculty Federation Officers are:

Richard Wagner, President
Alex Boodrookas, Vice-President
Arlene Sgoutas, Secretary
Matt Maher, Treasurer



MSFF Vice President Alex Boodrookas speaking at May Day (Day Without Immigrants) rally at the State Capitol



Douglas County Federation

Last Wednesday, a group of DCF leaders and members came together to interview candidates for DCSD school board. We were looking to endorse pro-union candidates that we could support with monetary contributions from our national union partner as well as our volunteer power on the ground. We would like to announce that DCF has endorsed the following four people:

Kelly Denzler
Tony Ryan
Kyrzia Parker
Clark Callahan

We believe electing these four candidates (who are running as a slate) will give us the best chance at restoring collective bargaining and getting a contract.

How did we make this decision?

Last spring at our General Membership Meeting, attendees helped develop a candidate questionnaire to help us understand their stances/knowledge on key issues. We then worked with community groups over the summer to identify and recruit pro-public education people to run for school board. We sent questionnaires to everyone who had filed their candidate petition and asked them to interview with us for endorsement. Keaton Gambill, Deborah Kramer, Matthew Smith and Stephen Vail (who are running together as a slate) did not respond to our request.

Kelly, Tony, Kyrzia and Clark all filled out questionnaires and came to our office to interview. We asked them questions and took the opportunity to educate them on key issues for members.

As a federation, we were clear that restoring collective bargaining is the most important issue for our profession and our district. While some candidates expressed strong support and commitment, others were more hesitant. It will be up to us to continue engaging with these candidates and hold them accountable to the needs of educators. Here is an assessment of each of them.

Candidate #1: Kelly Denzler

- **Background:** Roughly ten years of experience in education, primarily in private schools, some experience in Cherry Creek SD.
- **Position on Collective Bargaining:** A staunch supporter who made it very clear she would fight for educators to secure a strong, binding contract. She would publicly support a collective bargaining agreement and push to bring it to a vote at the board level.
- **Key Priorities:** Strongly values experience, education level, and years of service. Concerned about the district's ability to retain great educators without a contract, noting many are leaving for better opportunities.

Candidate #2: Tony Ryan

- **Background:** Public defender with direct union experience—he joined the public defenders' union despite it being unpopular in his field. Comes from a family deeply committed to union work.
- **Position on Collective Bargaining:** Understands its importance in attracting and retaining quality educators. While supportive, he was more cautious about how publicly vocal he would be during the election cycle (“not shouting it from the rooftops”). He understands that his public position on collective bargaining while trying to get elected is different from his public stance once elected.

Candidate #3: Kyrzia Parker

- **Background:** School social worker with a strong focus on equity and inclusion.
- **Position on Collective Bargaining:** Acknowledged she is still learning and would not commit at this stage. She expressed willingness to listen and make an informed decision as she gains more knowledge.
- **Other Notes:** Admitted she is green in certain areas but demonstrated openness and a genuine desire to grow into the role.

Candidate #4: Clark Callahan

- **Background:** Administrator at an alternative charter school in Denver.
- **Position on Collective Bargaining:** Appeared open to the idea but hesitant to commit publicly at this time. Emphasized that he would not make decisions without input from staff and wanted to hear directly from district educators before fully deciding.

Thank you to all of the AFT Colorado members for your continued support and involvement. Together, we will ensure that Douglas County educators have the voice and protections we deserve.

STANDING TOGETHER: MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Committee on Political Education (COPE) Deduction

1777 S. Bellaire St., Suite 440, Denver, CO 80222 www.aftcolorado.org 303-947-6709

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.

FIRST NAME _____ LAST NAME _____

BILLING ADDRESS _____

BILLING CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

HOME PHONE _____ WORK PHONE _____

MOBILE PHONE _____  wish to receive periodic text messages and accept the associated charges.

HOME EMAIL _____ LOCAL _____

WORK LOCATION _____

PAYMENT

*Due to the associated fees, we prefer that you sign up for **bank draft** payment.*

MONTHLY COPE AMOUNT ☐ \$5 ☐ \$10 ☐ \$15 ☐ \$OTHER _____

BANK DRAFT **PREFERRED METHOD******

Fill out below or simply attach a voided check.

BANK NAME _____

ROUTING NUMBER _____ ACCOUNT NUMBER _____

CREDIT/DEBIT CARD: CARD TYPE: ☐ VISA ☐ MC

NAME ON CARD _____

CARD NUMBER _____ EXP DATE _____

I hereby authorize a monthly contribution to the AFT CO COPE (AFT CO COPE) in the amount indicated above. This authorization is signed freely and voluntarily and not out of any fear of reprisal, and I will not be favored nor disadvantaged because I exercise this right. I understand this money will be used to make political contributions by AFT CO COPE. AFT CO COPE may engage in joint fundraising efforts with AFT COPE and/or the AFL-CIO. This voluntary authorization may be revoked at any time by notifying AFT CO COPE in writing of the desire to do so. Contribution or gifts to AFT CO COPE are not deductible as charitable contributions for federal income tax purposes. Contributions cannot be reimbursed or otherwise paid by any other person or entity.

SIGNATURE: _____ Date: _____