



The Benefits of Belonging

Did you know that union membership in the US is at its lowest point in 70 years, and it continues to slide downward each year? Currently only 13% of the workforce overall is unionized. Compare that with 35% in 1950. In the 50's there was a culture of unionism that people shared within their communities, but, today, fewer folks can identify even what a union is let alone what it does for them. How fortunate we teachers are to be part of a 1.2 million member force of the AFT union with its clout to command collective bargaining, negotiations, arbitration, seniority rights and a multitude of other benefits of belonging.

Teachers' unions were seeded in the civil rights movement of the 60's and 70's. The public sector and farm workers were left out of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, which unionized most factory workers. It was not until some 40 years later that farm workers and school employees were able to put collective bargaining laws into place. It was the personal commitment of individual teachers acting together in unity that created the powerful force we now have in controlling our pay, our benefits, and our right to retain our positions within the district. And, it will take the continuing commitment of each individual teacher to continue to enjoy the power of the union.

Our local union works in conjunction with the state and national offices throughout the year in response to teachers' needs and desires. At this year's CFT/AFT convention last month in San Francisco, some 55 resolutions were proposed by local unions to be debated and voted on for presentation to the state legislature. Two of those resolutions came from our own SVFT local 1020. No Child Left Behind asks for a mandate of formal negotiations and agreement on bargainable issues and full funding as a legislative priority before any sanctions are imposed under the auspices of the "No Child Left Behind" Act. *And*, Substitute Teachers resolution makes substitute teachers, who are terminated from long-term assignments or not employed in non-school attendance weeks, eligible to collect unemployment. It is these kinds of checks and balances that we can be proud to support, and which are vital to our well being.

The size of our membership allows the union member to benefit from many special programs and group discounts from loans to insurance; extra medical benefits; educator tax guides; discounted travel, books; and dining out to college scholarships for members and their families. Did you know that new members of AFT are entitled to \$10,000.00 of life insurance for a year at no cost, and that there are several other new insurance and

accident protection plans for all members, some at no cost? To get the information about all the programs available to you call 1-800-238-1133 ext. 8643 or log on to www.aftplus.org. Be a part of this important and powerful group. Be an active member of the union and know the benefits of belonging!