

The FEDERATIONIST



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Legislative Priorities Include 1% Pension Payback

Among the top issues for the Rhode Island Federation for the 1999 session of the General Assembly is the reinstatement of the 1% of pay which had been used to reduce the state's contribution to the Employees' Retirement System (ERS).. The Federation is seeking support from the General Assembly's leadership, the Governor's and the Treasure's offices to bring back the level of deductions to where they had previously been. The RI AFL-CIO has also made this a priority item in its lobbying efforts this year.

For those who were not RIFTHP members four years ago, the General Assembly increased teacher and state employee contributions to the ERS by 1%. The state had a deficit to address and the Governor had proposed many benefit reductions. The Assembly passed and the Governor signed a bill to balance the budget on the backs of public employees. Rhode Island teachers were then paying 8 1/2% and state employees 7 3/4%. The rate changed contributions to 9 1/2% and 8 3/4% respectively. Even without these changes, Rhode Island teachers and state

employees were paying more than almost any other public employee group in the country.

Other legislative priorities include:

- Providing for quality professional development for teachers and paraprofessionals
- Initiating state assistance for home health care for the elderly and infirm homebound

cally disruptive students
 • Creating an independent teacher certification standards advisory board

As in the past, the RIFTHP will maintain its presence in the State House every day the Assembly is in session to watch bill introductions and to fight for public education, public workers, quality health care, and worker rights. Each year the RIFTHP closely watches over 300 bills. The

Union also testifies on scores of bills that affect our members and the institutions where our members work

Each year brings new challenges and 1999 will be no different. We will certainly encounter

attempts to change the method and manner of testing teachers. We may again face attempts to limit teachers from striking. In the wake of former Governor DiPrete's conviction, pension revocation laws may be revisited. Undoubtedly, there will be more charter school legislation introduced.

There may also be legislation to further control mergers and acquisitions of health care institutions and legislation on HMO liability.

"Each year the RIFTHP closely watches over 300 bills Each year brings new challenges..."

- Limiting courts' ability to overturn arbitration awards
- Increasing allocations for student assistant counselor programming to cover schools not now covered
- Increasing the transcript payments for court reporters
- Providing state money for full-day kindergarten programs
- Strengthening state law on student discipline and creating alternative education programs for chroni-

Bits and Pieces... Fair's Fair



Sometimes life is unfair. And sometimes we can do something about it.

The State of Rhode Island was in a financial mess in 1995 and the Governor's office and the General Assembly were taking myriad steps to balance Rhode Island's budget. One of the steps was to increase the amount of money each teacher and state employee paid into the Employees Retirement System. A full percent increase contribution was imposed. But that was then and this is now.

The state is now flush with money. There were a few poor decisions made by the prior Treasurer with the investments, and the state's portfolio suffered a little along with the rest of the stockholders in the world during the volatile 1998 stock market. Nevertheless, our pension fund has never been more healthy.

The Retirement Board actuaries recommended new assumptions, which have been adopted, which will be used to increase the local cities' and towns' contributions to the ERS on behalf of teachers, buttressing the funding of the pension plan.

With the stock market again on the rise and the state enjoying a huge surplus and

living well within its budget for four years, it's now time to put those teachers and state employees who helped the state through its crisis back into a position of having the 1% pay which was taken directly from our paychecks reinstated.

State employee contributions increased from 7 3/4% to 8 3/4% of pay. Teacher contributions increased from 8 1/2% to 9 1/2% of pay. Even with rolling back the contribution rates to those of 1994, Rhode Island public employees will continue to be amongst those workers making the highest contributions to their retirements in the entire nation.

For our contributions, we receive very good benefits. But the last increase in contributions had nothing to do with helping out the retirement fund. It had nothing to do with improving our benefits. It had to do with helping to bail out Rhode Island from a problem. Rhode Island no longer needs our money to fill a budget gap. It doesn't need our money to take care of an ailing retirement fund.

The fair thing to do would be to restore the 1% into our paychecks. We'll be working at the RI General Assembly and with the Governor's and General Treasurer's offices to try to bring about this result.



Victory at Election Time

The RIFTHP/FNHP is celebrating its solid performance in the 1998 elections. We helped Sheldon Whitehouse win a major election upset over Nancy Mayer. Her history and attacks on union leadership were major reasons for our members overwhelming support for our endorsed candidate. Paul Tavares was elected General Treasurer in a close race where every vote counted.

In our General Assembly races, we endorsed 26 candidates and had 23 wins. We helped reelect 21 legislators who have outstanding voting records on issues of concern to health care, education and working families. We also assisted in the election of two new legislators, Arthur Corvese, Rep. District 71, and David Iglizozzi, Senate District 7. Both of these candidates went through extensive interviews on our issues conducted by members of our local unions.

It is important to note that every vote cast by our members is critical. Rep. George Levesque, Newport/Jamestown, won his reelection by a margin of just less than 100 votes. Rep. Levesque has a 100% voting record on our issues. We have every reason to believe that our members were responsible for his reelection as we mailed information on Rep. Levesque to just under 100 of our members who live in his district.

Pictured left is Senator John Celona from North Providence endorsed and reelected

'...Rhode Island public employees will continue to be amongst those workers making the highest contributions to their retirements in the entire nation. "

ER & D Series Meeting Members' Professional Needs

Over 50 people representing a broad spectrum of RIFTHP locals, grade levels, subject areas and years of service took part in the RIFTHP Falls Series, ***Foundations of Effective Teaching***, held from October through January at CCRI in Lincoln.

Facilitated by RIFTHP Director of Professional Issues Colleen Callahan Bielecki, and ER & D Coordinators Jan Santos (Cranston Teachers Alliance), Patricia Morris,

Paula Akers and Kathy Rainone (Central Falls Teachers Alliance), Nancy Brown (Johnston Federation of Teachers) and Carol Keiser and Joan Moran-Phillips (Pawtucket Teachers Alliance), the course covered research-based strategies on classroom and group management, small group cooperative learning, interactive direct instruction and parent/family involvement. Participants were urged to make connec-

tions between the research presented and the classroom strategies necessary to meet the needs of all children and create a classroom environment conducive to raising student achievement. Additional ER & D series are scheduled for the winter (January through March) and spring (March through May). For information on ER & D, see your building representative or call the RIFTHP for details.

ER & D Winter Seminar Series

The ER & D Winter Seminar is currently running on selected Thursday afternoons through mid-March. This seminar series is designed to address teachers' need for information on a variety of current educational issues and to introduce the research concepts and hands-on activities contained in our ER & D programs. Registrations are still being accepted for the remaining sessions:

February 11th Managing Anti-Social Behavior

Focuses on the identification of behaviors that disrupt the learning environment, the causes of acting out behavior and strategies for dealing with them.

February 25th Standards-Based Instruction and Assessment

Examines the role of standards in our current accountability system and how those standards can be used to guide your curriculum, instruction and assessment.

March 4th Recognizing Excellence in Teaching: National and Board Certification

Highlights the work of our Rhode Island National Board Certified Teachers, the process involved in getting certified and what supports exist in Rhode Island for you to become certified, too.

March 11th IDEA: Its Impact on Kids and Classroom

Focuses on the new IDEA regulations through a discussion of the law itself and questions teachers have about its implementation.

All sessions are held from 3:45 P.M. until 6:30 P.M. at Lincoln High School. Registrations are accepted for single sessions or for the full series at \$10.00 per session, or by calling the RIFTHP office at 273-9800. Checks may be made payable to the RIFTHP and sent to 356 Smith St., Providence, RI 02908, or brought to the session.

Is Your School Improvement Plan Up to Standard?

Whether a teacher or parent, a new vocabulary has to be learned about public education. It's hard to pick up a newspaper or go to a meeting without hearing Article 31, SALT, standards assessments and accountability. We offer you an abbreviated taxonomy of terms.

What do they really mean for teachers, administrators, students, parents and schools?

Article 31 was enacted by the General Assembly in 1997 and was strengthened in 1998 to set a system into law to hold districts and schools accountable for student performance, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics.

Among other things, the law requires school districts and schools to use information from state-wide assessments and other indicators (survey responses, demographic information, etc.) to create district and school-level plans designed to close gaps in student achievement. The law also provides funds for professional development to be allocated to each school and requires that decisions about the use of the funds be made by a school-based team.

SALT, school Accountability for Learning and Teaching, is the RI Department of Education's accountability system, focused on raising student achievement by setting high standards for teaching and learning, collecting and reporting data on student achievement and using that data to set targets and create plans for closing gaps in

student performance. SALT is the son of Article 31.

Last November, districts were required to submit strategic plans to RIDE and schools were required to set targets for improving student achievement based on the data from state-wide assessments. Professional development plans also had to be submitted. Next year, districts will have to submit action plans for the strategic plans and schools will have to submit school improvement plans.

So what does all of this mean for teachers, students and parents? It could mean an opportunity to use standards as concrete goals for student performance at each grade level and to clearly define what is needed to meet those goals. By getting involved in School Improvement Teams or Professional Development Planning Teams, teachers and parents have the opportunity for addressing questions of how to teach to high standards, assessing student work in new ways, targeting programs for raising student achievement, such as after-school programs, Saturday academies, standards-based summer schools, and intensive reading and mathematics at all levels, especially in the early grades, to name a few ideas.

The standards movement makes sense. It should provide a common ground for all children in terms of stating what all kids must know and be able to do to be successful. The standards should make communications between

parents and teachers about student expectations easier, allow for better grade-level and cross-grade level articulation among colleagues, and serve as a guide in developing curriculum, instruction and assessment. However, unless the appropriate resources for teachers, administrators and students are provided, accountability systems based on standards cannot be fairly enforced. It is important that teacher members lend their concern for their students, their professional expertise and their voices to the school improvement planning process to ensure that when targets are set the means to reach the targets are explicitly stated.

Hotel Royal Plaza

This official Walt Disney World hotel near Disney World in Florida offers a special union discount. You should simply ask for the union discount when you make your reservation and show a union card or a letter from your local union confirming membership when you check in.

Highlights of the discount include transportation to all Disney theme parks and preferred status at Disney's five championship golf courses.

To make hotel reservations, call the hotel at 1-800-248-7890 and ask for the union rate. This rate applies to standard rooms with one to four occupants and is subject to availability. Hotel Royal Plaza is a unionized hotel.

"It is important that RIFTHP members lend their concern for their students, their professional expertise and their voices to the school improvement planning process..."

Four Additional Coventry Teachers Are Board Certified

The National Board of Professional Training Standards has awarded four certificates to Coventry teachers who stood for Board certification in 1998. They are Suzanne Bartlett who teaches kindergarten at Tiogue School, Joyce Martinelli who teaches third grade at Washington Oak School, Kathleen Miner who teaches sixth grade at Oak Haven School and Robyn Simoneau who also teaches sixth grade at Oak Haven. These are in addition to two previous Coventry teachers, Susan Toohey Kaye, grade one at Washington Oak, and James Erinakes, math at the high school, who have been Board certified.

The process of standing for Board Certification is quite difficult, but also satisfying, according to both those who have and have not been awarded certification. It has been called the best professional development process for teachers available.

There are now 28 teachers throughout Rhode Island in the National Board process. The \$2,000 application fee for this round have all been funded through a subsidy program shared by the RI Foundation, the federal government and the RI General Assembly. Representative Stephen Anderson particularly persevered in bringing the funding subsidy to fruition.

The University of Rhode Island and Rhode Island College are providing gratis support programs and Kathy Swann who is RI's National Board Facilitator, offers assistance to those interested in learning about Board certification and those who are in the process.

While certificates in all teaching areas are currently not available through the National Board, additional areas are being developed. For information about areas of certification and other questions, you may call Kathy at 222400, ext. 2215, or by e-mail at kaswann@worldnet.att.net.

Photo courtesy of Arthur W. Lisi



Pictured from left to right: Suzanne Bartlett, Joyce Martinelli, Kathleen Miner, Robyn Simoneau and Kathy Swann

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FNHP Presidents on RI AFL-CIO Board

At the January meeting of the RI AFL-CIO Executive Board, two RI FNHP local presidents were elected to serve on the board. They are Alma Egan, who is president of VNA of Rhode Island, Local 5090, and Pauline Silvia, who is recent past president of St. Joseph Hospital FNHP Local 5018.

Alma has been the president of her local for 12 years. Pauline had been the president of Local 5018 for 2 1/2 years.

Both Alma and Pauline have been involved in significant problems confronting the health care industry.

VNAs are suffering cutbacks in Medicare reimbursements and layoffs are occurring or are threatened in every visiting nurse service in Rhode Island.

Pauline's members work in a specialty hospital and there are rumors that it may be shut down as part of a merger with another Rhode Island institution.

Unions exist for the periods of time when times are tough. Both Pauline's and Alma's unions are tough and can handle the adversity which is being thrown at them.

Tech Assistants Unionize

Eleven Cranston Public Schools' Technical Assistants are now represented by the Cranston Teachers' Alliance. The Alliance was designated the official representative of the previously non-represented employees by the Rhode Island Labor Relations Board on October 23, 1998.

The Technical Assistants work with vocational teachers at the Cranston Area Career and Technical Center. The Alliance represents teachers, teacher assistants and bus aides. Contract negotiations are scheduled to begin shortly.