



Education Association of St. Lucie LOCAL 3616

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The VOICE

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“I’m sticking with my union!”

President’s Message - David Freeland

You’re going to be seeing this slogan a lot in the coming months. It is the message we need to send to the Florida Legislature and Governor as they continue their relentless attack on public education, with their most recent attacks on our union and local school boards.

The latest from the Governor’s office is the Teacher’s Bill of Rights which tries to convince us that we were tricked into joining our union, that we didn’t choose to join our union, and that we need his protection.

The document also attempts to convince us that he and the legislature will work to protect educators’ rights better than their union can and will. Remember these are the same people who have spent the last several years working to convince parents that we all are teaching a secret curriculum, that we tried to close schools during COVID, and most recently that we are pedophiles and groomers.

I’m sticking with my union for a reason. It is impossible to separate educators from their union, to say, “I love educators” and then say, “I hate their union”. You can’t have one without the other. The union is educators, and educators are our union.

In 1968 our colleagues advocated for themselves, and ultimately for all of us and our students; for people they didn’t know and some who weren’t even born yet. They chose to make a stand, to take big risks, to walk out and tell legislators, “Enough is enough” and “This isn’t good enough for us or our students”.

What our colleagues won in 1968 was a legacy of unions and workers’ rights, the right to collectively bargain, the right to protect our profession and our students. *The deal that was struck was that the legislature would grant to us the **Constitutional right** to collectively bargain, to join a union if we chose to, and in return, we would not go on strike.*

Our legislature and governor have continually broken that agreement – the latest being the attempt to eliminate payroll deduction and to increase to 60% density (percentage of union members out of our total potential) as the threshold to remain certified as a union. All of which are ways in which they seek to eliminate our very existence.

I am not advocating that we go on strike; as a union leader in Florida I can’t do that. What I am advocating for is three things. First that we do what we do best as educators – *we educate the public about the work we really do, and that we chose to be members in our union*. Second, that you take the time to fill out the surveys and forms that you will be receiving in the next weeks as we convert to EZ Pay so that you can continue to pay your union dues easily and with minimal fuss. Third, that you answer your union’s call to action. WE are the union. ALL of us, and we have to unite to push back on bad policies.

Once we move members to this new system, they should see no difference in how their dues are deducted and the entire Association will enjoy several benefits. You will hear more details shortly, but these two things: educating our friends, family, and neighbors, as well as responding right away to your union’s surveys and documents, are the best ways to protect the rights our colleagues fought so hard to get for us and that our union continues to protect for us to this day.



The Education Association of St. Lucie enjoyed participating in Literacy Week.

Thank you to all the schools that extended an invitation for us to be guest readers. We wish we could have said yes to all of them as we really look forward to participating in events such as this. Please keep us in mind for future events. With enough notice, we will add an event to our calendars to support the amazing work that is being done in classrooms across the district.



EASL President, David Freeland read to third grade students in Ms. Struble's class and in Ms. Palagonia's class at Morningside Elementary.



CTA Vice-President, Rebecca Petrie read to first graders in Ms. Wells' class at Lakewood Park Elementary.

**Focus on CU
with CU Vice President
Sandy Rohn**

Hopefully everyone is settling back into the routine now that the holidays are behind us. We've made it past the mid-year point...yay! Let's make the second semester as successful as the first.

By the time this newsletter is sent out, we will be closer to receiving the most recently negotiated bonus. Thanks to both the district's and the union's negotiating teams for making sure that support staff was included. Funds for

the teachers' bonus came from referendum revenue and the district prioritized additional funds to provide the bonus to other bargaining units. Way to go SLPS and EASL.

This is a good time to remind your colleagues who aren't yet union members about the work that the union does to benefit employees. We are STRONGER TOGETHER!



-Sandy

SPOTLIGHT ON HB1557

Katie Avra, Teacher & Worksite Leader, Fort Pierce Central High



As a union worksite leader, LGBTQAI+ ally, and sponsor of the student chapter of Fort Pierce Central's Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), Florida's House Bill 1557 hit hard.

To some, the Parental Rights in Education Act of 2022 put more control in parents' hands, while others felt increasingly marginalized, left stripped of basic human rights, and less safe. For teachers, the risks for supporting vulnerable student populations, created increased pressure and scrutiny.

In December 2022, the Florida Education Association hosted a LGBTQAI+ presentation to train and inform members of the implications of HB 1557. The main take-aways are that all students deserve to feel safe, comfortable, and seen as valuable individuals in schools. In third grade and below, conversations are restricted regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. Conversations of this nature should also be gauged appropriately by age and maturation, including individuals with cognitive disabilities.

As there are many nuances for legal tethers, as it currently stands in SLC - members, if a student requests to use another name or pronoun in your class, consider honoring the request. The confidence and bravery it took the student to ask demonstrates trust in you. Inform the student that if directly asked by administration or families, you the educator, are required to disclose the alternative identifiers. Find a comfortable time and place to have a conversation to encourage the student to share their request with their families.

If you do not feel comfortable having these conversations, it is ok. Contact an ally on your campus, your guidance department, or April Mincey who is an ally at the district.

Education Association of St. Lucie Local 3616

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Sandy Rohn, Vice-President CU: FPOCHS
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Breathe In and Breathe Out!!!



The Education Association of St. Lucie
presents:



"The Power of Connection"

An annual CU Conference designed especially for our ESP's

When: Monday, February 27th from 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
(a district PD Day)

Where: St. Bernadette Social Hall
350 N.W. California Blvd, Port St. Lucie, FL 34986

All **Classified Unit (CU)** members* are welcome and encouraged to attend!

This custom-designed conference just for ESP's will leave you feeling better connected not only to yourself but to your union and your colleagues as well.

Sessions Include:

1. **Know Your Contract** (Connect with the UNION)
2. **Managing Stress** (Connect with SELF)
3. **Customer Service & Networking** (Connect with OTHERS)
4. **Situational Awareness** (Connect ALL the Pieces)

There is no cost to attend.

Continental breakfast and lunch will be served.

Participants who complete all sessions will receive in-service points.

Participants MUST have approval from their administrator or supervisor to attend.

Online Registration Only

Please click on the link below to complete the registration survey. Registration closes on Friday 2/17. You will receive a confirmation email by Wednesday 2/22.

<https://leadernet.aft.org/webform/cu-conference-registration>

Space is limited. Don't delay!

Questions? Please call 772-464-6430.

*Members who have not attended the previous three CU Conferences will be given priority when registering.



Education Association of St. Lucie
Local 3616
Your Union Working for You!

Let's Talk
Benefits

Let's Talk Benefits with
Lucy Bravo, Organizing and Member Advocacy Specialist
This month's focus will be on the union benefit partner



IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR!



As an Educator did you know you are able to deduct certain expenses—

- ◆ **Educator Expense**—\$300.00 for classroom supplies that you were not re-imbursed for.
- ◆ **Student Loan Deduction**—up to \$2500 for interest paid on Student Loans
- ◆ **Education Credit**—for courses you pay for yourself
- ◆ **Retirement Savings Credit**—for contributions made to your 403 (B)

Let one of your union benefit partners, K-12 Tax Services, assist you with your tax return!

Save 20% on the cost of your tax return.

For drop-off times OR to schedule an appointment at either the EASL Office or at the K-12 Tax Service Inc. Main Office
Contact K-12 Tax Services, Inc. at 772-646-0037, www.k12tax.com, or K12taxes@gmail.com