NHFT Victory over Achievement First
Perhaps the highlight of the year was our victory over the Achievement First proposal to bring the “Elm City Imagine” charter school into the NHPS. The hard work and cooperation of all involved included NHFT leadership, individual teachers, AFT-CT, parents, and fellow union members from the Central Labor Council network propelled us to victory and strengthened old bonds and created new ones. The fight continues as the governor has proposed $14 million in funding for 2 new charter schools. With New Haven underfunded by $25 million of ECS funding, and virtually all other school districts underfunded by varying amounts as well, it is inappropriate to direct any money toward new charter schools.

Our position on charter schools remain the same: we support charter schools. The very concept of charter schools was the brainchild of past AFT National President Albert Shanker. Back in the 1980’s, Shanker proposed experimental public schools which would free educators from restrictive school district policies to implement new and different pedagogy, scheduling, student grouping, etc. Shanker stated charter schools should be “incubators of change” free to experiment. If these new idea(s) proved to be successful they could be potentially implemented and ramped up. What

It Was a Long, Cold Winter! By David Cicarella, NHFT President
As I write this article, the snow is gone and the warmer weather has finally arrived! As we head into a much deserved summer recess, I thought it appropriate to recap the events of the winter (and virtually nonexistent spring) season. Hope to see everyone at our End of the Year Party on June 22nd!!
charter schools were NEVER designed to be is a parallel school system adjacent to the traditional public school system with separate admissions and transfer policies (the one-way street whereby charter schools send back their “discipline problems” to us and close their door to our students refusing them access).

We will support experimental charter schools on a limited basis that agree to accept all students throughout the school year and keep these students despite the challenges while also agreeing to improved fiscal and educational oversight of the charter school network. To put it simply: charter schools are public schools that take tax dollars and therefore we should have one set of rules for all public schools, both charter and traditional public schools alike. We support this creative, fair model of public schools. However, at this time, due to the underfunding of public schools across the state, we (NHFT and AFT-CT) are urging Governor Malloy to remove his request for the $14 million to fund the two new charter schools and align himself with our legislators on the state appropriations committee that have refused to fund any new charter schools in this year’s state budget.

NHPS – Calendar Vote

Many teachers emailed with questions as to the process for our ballot vote and creation of the calendar for school year 2015-2016.

First and foremost, calendars are created by the school district. They are not subject to teachers’ union approval. If the NHPS district were creating a calendar whereby the school year begins after Labor Day, there would be no contractual obligation to discuss any aspect of it with us. However, because our contract clearly states that the school year will not begin prior to Labor Day, Central office must negotiate this with us. Therefore the school district prepares 2 calendars, one with a before Labor Day start and another with an after Labor Day start. Because this is an issue that affects all of us, this is a decision I always put in the hands of all teachers to decide by a ballot vote.

The calendars are created with input and discussion from the NHFT, SAA (School Administrators Association), and central office. I go to the table with suggestions conveyed to me from our Executive Board members, building stewards, and individual teachers. For example one suggestion that came from the stewards’ meeting was to have an early student dismissal on report card conference days. The early student dismissal provides an additional 2 hours to be combined with the regularly scheduled 2 hour session. The parent conference thus becomes a 4 hour session without pushing the teacher day out any further beyond what now exists in our contract. Everyone agreed that a 2 hour parent conference is insufficient for an elementary classroom teacher with 25 students or a departmentalized teacher with 100 plus students.

Other items of discussion were whether school vacations would be a full week in both February and April versus a long weekend in February, when to start school on the before Labor Day calendar, etc. These collaborative discussions were paramount in the ultimate construction of the 2 calendar options that were presented.

Our contract guides all decisions. It was negotiated in good faith by a 15-member diverse team of teachers. The contract is then voted upon by all teachers that are full union members.

NHFT Decision Making Process

As NHFT President, I am the “face” of our union interacting on a daily basis with teachers, building administrators, central office, community members, and leaders of local, state, and federal government. Throughout the course of any given day I make decisions in this capacity. However, it is important for everyone to understand the process and protocols for these decisions. Our contract guides all decisions. It was negotiated in good faith by a 15-member diverse team of teachers. The contract is then voted upon by all teachers that are full union members.

The NHFT has a 26 member executive board that is the governing body of the NHFT. Every executive board member runs on the ballot along with the executive officers (president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer) and is voted into their positions every 3 years.
Congratulations to our NHFT President Dave Cicarella on receiving the AFT-CT Presidents award!

AFT-CT President Melodie Peters presenting the Presidents’ Award to Dave.

“It is with great honor that I presented the President’s Award to David. The recipient of this award is chosen by the President of AFT-CT and is meant to be the highest award given. David’s leadership, tenacity, and courage to stand up to anyone that tries to diminish access to quality education for all children and his timeless advocacy for traditional public education makes him a wonderful local president and someone I hold with deep admiration.”

– Melodie Peters, President AFT-CT.
One of the very reasons I decided to leave the classroom after 28 years and run for NHFT president is because I felt that the decision making process of union leadership was not inclusive enough. My goal was to have a union driven by an Executive Board that made all decisions in an inclusive, transparent manner whereby the president utilized a consensus decision making process. Voting creates “winners and losers” and allows for those who did not vote in favor to not “buy-in”. Consensus decision making ensures all voices are equal. At the end of the discussions, which are often spirited, everyone agrees to the decisions and moves forward. The vote is a formality as all have agreed through consensus. However, there must be a process to vote when consensus cannot be reached. The 5 trustees, head trustee, and president do not have voting privileges. This leaves 19 voting members. The President can only vote to break a tie. So while the impression is that I have a great authority to make unilateral decisions, the exact opposite is true. I make decisions on a daily basis consistent with our contract but all matters of substance go to the Executive Board for discussion and they make final decisions via consensus and then a vote.

I MAKE DECISIONS ON A DAILY BASIS CONSISTENT WITH OUR CONTRACT BUT ALL MATTERS OF SUBSTANCE GO TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD FOR DISCUSSION AND THEY MAKE FINAL DECISIONS VIA CONSENSUS AND THEN A VOTE.

School System Email

This is perhaps our most effective email communication as every teacher has an account and we are expected to check it on a daily basis. A few years ago I asked central office to create an ALL TEACHER distribution list. This differs from the ALL distribution list which includes every BoE employee (teachers, administrators, security, maintenance, etc.) The downside is because it is the “employer’s” email system I can only use it with permission from the superintendent. I can use it for innocuous items such as announcement of our holiday and end of the year parties, but cannot conduct union business nor send messages of a political nature, etc. If you are not receiving messages sent through this email account it simply means you are not in the ALL TEACHER distribution list. This is an easy fix. Just let me know and I send a request to the HELPDESK at the tech dept and they add you to it, usually the very same day.

AFT-CT Email

I often send emails through AFT-CT (and you receive some of theirs as well). They have a dedicated communications department and have great expertise in creating high quality messages with our logo, video links, etc. I am often contacted by teachers stating that they are not receiving these messages. Simply provide your personal email (they have a link at their homepage for you to do so easily) and you will begin receiving messages from both AFT-CT and the NHFT. This is, of course, voluntary as you are free to decide if you wish to provide a personal email account. We utilized this email account to keep members informed on a regular basis during our charter school fight with Achievement First over the Elm City Imagine proposal.

NHFT Building Stewards School Email List

All building stewards are charged with maintaining a distribution list for the teachers in their respective buildings. This is vital as stewards also cannot use the school system email account to conduct union business. Therefore, stewards maintain a distribution list of personal emails for all teachers in their school that choose to provide them with one. This allows stewards (and me) to send an email to the teachers in any building in the school system. Please provide your steward with any change to your personal email so they can keep an accurate, up-to-date distribution list for your school.

NHFT Communications

Technology has increased our ability to communicate with anyone, anywhere on a seemingly instantaneous basis. Hard copies are slow to arrive, costly, and environmentally insensitive. We employ three primary email methods: school system email, emails to teachers personal email accounts via AFT-CT, and through your building steward(s) each of whom create and maintain a distribution list of all teachers within their building.

It Was a Long, Cold, Winter!...continued from page 2
FIFTEEN THOUSAND teachers, counselors, and other members of United Teachers Los Angeles filled downtown’s Grand Park on February 26 to demand a fair contract for themselves and their students.

“I am here to tell you that I am sick of not having enough of anything—especially teachers,” Beverly’anne Ogorro, a student at Dorsey High School, told the cheering crowd.

A week before the rally, UTLA had declared impasse. Its negotiations with the nation’s second-largest school district, L.A. Unified, covering 31,000 employees, are now in mediation.

“I feel disappointed and betrayed by the district. We took pay cuts to help the district get through a tough time,” said Leticia Duggan, a teacher in the pre-Kindergarten School Readiness Language Development Program. She walked the picket line with her six-year-old daughter, a public school student.

“I think the demands that we are making are more than fair,” Duggan said. “We’re not asking for something outrageous. We are asking for cleaner and safer schools, for a payback of wages we lost three years in a row.”

Teachers and support staff lost ground in their last contract, signed right after the 2008 economic crisis and after courts blocked a planned one-day strike. It expired three years ago. A shortened school year and numerous furlough days between 2008 and 2011 also hit members in the wallet.

CLASSES OF 45

After 20 bargaining sessions since the summer, the district has made no offers on class-size caps or staffing ratios. It’s continuing to stand by its offer of a 5 percent salary increase—though teachers have gone without a raise for eight years.

Three thousand middle and high school classrooms have more than 45 students apiece, according to the superintendent’s own report.

“When did it become radical to have class sizes that you can actually teach in? When did it become radical to have staffing, and to pay people back after eight years of nothing?” UTLA President Alex Caputo-Pearl asked.

The high-energy, diverse crowd—educators in red T-shirts, nurses in white coats, students with banners and noisemakers—flooded onto Broadway as the chants grew louder, demanding that the district and board bargain in good faith.

Speakers included rank-and-file members of the negotiating and organizing teams, parents, high school students, community members, and presidents of the National Education Association, California Federation of Teachers, and California Teachers Association. (UTLA is affiliated with both the NEA and the AFT.)

The rally followed districtwide picketing February 12 at 850 schools. Members, parents, and community allies also signed an open letter to the school board, supporting the educators’ 12 demands on salary, working conditions, and the learning environment.

SCHOOLS STUDENTS DESERVE

The contract campaign strategy reflects the vision of the local’s new leaders, who swept into office last March on the Union Power slate. Since taking over, they’ve emphasized member organizing and partnering with parents and the community.

The new leaders have mobilized around a platform they call “The Schools LA Students Deserve,” modeled on a similar initiative by the Chicago Teachers Union. Demands include safe, clean, and fully staffed schools, smaller class sizes, a commitment to arts, music, and physical education, and good salaries and benefits to encourage teacher retention.

Members ratified this platform in a 2013 referendum that called on the union to mount a contract campaign, starting by working with community groups and parents to identify shared issues. It also demanded UTLA put more resources
São Paulo Teachers Vote to Continue Two-Month Strike

By Steve Payne

Originally published March 27, 2015 at Labornotes.org

Thousands of teachers in the Brazilian state of São Paulo voted on May 15 to continue their now two-month strike.

“We are lacking very basic things...like water to drink or paper to write on,” said Glovis, a high school teacher in São Paulo. In negotiations, “the government is not proposing anything concrete.”

At an open-air assembly on the plaza next to the São Paulo Art Museum, vendors mingled, selling food and beer. Giant sound trucks occupied an entire lane on busy Paulista Avenue. The crowd swelled, soon spilling onto the street and blocking traffic both ways on a major thoroughfare.

Every Friday the teachers hold these assemblies to discuss how the strike is going and vote on whether to continue it. Regular votes by assemblies are part of the Brazilian labor tradition, and are often the lifeblood of a strike. Picketing is both legally difficult and not a traditional tactic.

Teachers carried colorful signs, many mocking Governor Geraldo Alkmin, whose Social Democratic Party of Brazil, despite its liberal-sounding name, is staunchly right-wing.

The governor is a major adversary of São Paulo’s social movements. He has gone on the attack against unions and community organizations, and refuses to invest in badly needed improvements to transportation and water infrastructure.

STRIKES ACROSS BRAZIL

Teachers in at least 10 states went on strike in March, at the beginning of the Brazilian school year. They are demanding smaller classes, adequate infrastructure for students, and increased pay for teachers.

The issues vary from state to state—for example, in Parana, teachers are striking to protect their retirement funds.

While the strike has been peaceful in most parts of the country, Parana police attacked demonstrators on April 30, injuring more than 200 teachers with rubber bullets, truncheons, and tear gas.

The strike in São Paulo began March 13 with a 60,000-person rally.

For two months, teachers in the city of São Paulo have maintained an encampment in front of the Department of Education. The union, APEOESP (Official Teachers Association in the State of São Paulo), has taped up sample paychecks testifying to the teachers’ low pay.

I saw checks ranging from 603 to 3,076 reais ($192 to $978) a month; most were around 1,000 reais ($318). Brazil’s minimum wage is 788 reais ($251) per month.

Poverty wages force many teachers to work second jobs as tutors in private schools after their workdays in the public schools. Most public schools in Brazil only run for a half-day.

Besides low salaries, Flavia, a high school teacher, told me that “there are teachers that are contracted out, and their jobs are very precarious. They don’t have any rights, and do not receive any salary increases.”

Steve Payne is a graduate student at the University of Memphis, a member of United Campus Workers (CWA), and a former organizer with the Service Employees in Minneapolis.

L.A. Teachers Escalate...continued from page 5

into both member and community organizing and plan a series of escalating actions.

After the Union Power slate won office, this program became the basis for its contract campaign.

Since the union declared impasse, each of its eight areas has begun holding trainings for chapter chairs—the elected leaders at each school site—and activists. UTLA plans a series of escalating actions, including faculty meeting boycotts, beginning March 24.

CAUCUS ACTIVITIES

Meanwhile, the Union Power caucus has been holding its own general membership meetings every month. Attendance ranges from 15 to 40 people.

The ongoing caucus was created after Union Power’s election win to channel energy into member organizing for the demands the slate had campaigned on. Any UTLA member can join. Recent discussions have been zeroing in on which demands are top priorities in the areas of working conditions and learning conditions.

The caucus is also working to engage newer teachers in the union. In February it held a meeting for student teachers and those with one to two years of experience to discuss the contract demands and the connection between social justice education and unionism.

L.A. teachers hope their renewed willingness to fight—not just for themselves, but for their students and communities—will be enough to turn the tide.

“The recession, the cuts to the bones at schools, the attacks on public services, the increasingly savage racism and economic inequalities that our students face,” declared Caputo-Pearl at the February rally, “all of those have set us back, and we’re not going to take it anymore.”

Karla Griego is a UTLA member and a teacher at Buchanan Street School.
Remember the Hawaii teachers who in 2012 led a statewide work-to-rule campaign against low pay? This spring they won the top three spots in the Hawaii State Teachers Association—but the union’s board of directors is refusing to let them take office.

The board has kept the vote results secret, citing vague irregularities—and ordered a new election.

Teachers Corey Rosenlee, Justin Hughey, and Amy Perruso ran for president, vice president, and secretary-treasurer of the 13,000-member statewide local. They were backed by a reform caucus, Hawaii Teachers for Change.

Votes were cast April 13-24, and the results were supposed to be certified May 4. But board members delayed announcing the outcomes—claiming they were waiting for runoff results for the vice presidency, since no candidate for that post had won a majority.

The union’s elections committee certified the tallies. But after the May 15 runoff, the board voted not to certify results for any post.

“They basically rejected the results because they didn’t like them,” said Perruso, a high school social studies teacher in Oahu. “That’s not a legitimate way to run a union.”

#TELLUSNOW

Vice President Joan Lewis and Secretary-Treasurer Colleen Pasco, running for president and vice president, were among the board members who voted to toss the election results. In a press release, the winning candidates point out that HSTA by-laws prohibit members of the board whose elections are challenged from voting to reject the results of an election.

Rosenlee, Hughey, and Perruso each won by more than 150 votes, according to their press release. The incumbent slate’s third candidate, Osa Tui, publicly acknowledged that Perruso beat him, and has withdrawn from the secretary-treasurer race.

Three days after the board meeting, in an email to union members explaining the decision, the board majority claimed that “many” members said they hadn’t received email or paper ballots, and that there’d been possible ethics violations about where in schools the campaign materials were put.

The Teachers for Change slate is pursuing a legal challenge to the decision, arguing that tossing the results violates the union’s own rules.

Their supporters have started an online petition and a hashtag, #tellusnow, to build pressure on the board to come clean about the numbers and respect the outcome.

The board has announced a “three hour walk-in only” revote on June 2—one day before summer break at most Hawaii schools. Rosenlee said the new election format is intended to discourage turnout by making teachers travel to vote at a time when they would ordinarily be picking up their kids, grading year-end assignments, or supervising graduations.

TEACHERS FOR CHANGE

Perruso said the board’s decision reflects the problems that led her group to run in the first place: they’re out of touch with members and make decisions behind closed doors.

At the union’s most recent convention, she said, Hawaii Teachers for Change delegates spearheaded supported several resolutions that members voted up, including one to push for smaller class sizes.

But the board, at its discretion, either ignored or voted not to adopt those resolutions.

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The reform slate wants to address the reasons why educators are feeling increasingly demoralized—including low pay and new teacher evaluations tied to students’ standardized test scores.

The challengers campaigned on turning the HSTA into a more activist union whose members fight for teachers and students, following the model of Chicago and Los Angeles. Mitzie Higa, an Oahu middle school curriculum coordinator and supporter of the Hawaii Teachers for Change team, said the caucus’s three candidates were already highly visible education activists before they ran for union leadership.

“They were doing things without anyone’s permission,” Higa said. “They were doing it because it was right.”

WORK TO RULE
Rosenlee, Perruso, and Hughey based their run on the support they’d generated in a month-long work-to-rule campaign. It started at Rosenlee’s suburban Honolulu high school in 2012 and spread to over 100 schools across the islands.

Organized outside official union channels, the grassroots action aimed to draw attention to Hawaii teachers’ low pay and overwork. It made national headlines.

One day each week, teachers would work only their mandated hours, from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Before school they would gather outside, wave signs, and talk to parents. Then just before 8, they would march in.

When the school bell rang at the end of the day, they would march back out, rally again, and end their workday—skipping the hours usually devoted to afterschool activities and lesson planning.

These protests came after the governor imposed a contract on teachers, after years of stalled bargaining. Hawaii has the U.S.’s only statewide school district.

Besides building public support, the activists were also trying to push their union to wage a stronger campaign when their contract next expired in 2013.

“That stemmed from teachers’ frustration,” Higa said. “[Union] leadership was saying we just have to wait.”

Later Rosenlee and other teachers organized around local school issues such as the need for air conditioners. Hawaiian classrooms can be sweltering year-round, sometimes reaching 100 degrees.

LATER ROSENLEE AND OTHER TEACHERS ORGANIZED AROUND LOCAL SCHOOL ISSUES SUCH AS THE NEED FOR AIR CONDITIONERS. HAWAIIAN CLASSROOMS CAN BE SWELTERING YEAR-ROUND, SOMETIMES REACHING 100 DEGREES.

COST OF LIVING
Low pay is a central issue. The Hawaii Teachers for Change candidates say the district’s salaries, which start at $33,000, are too low to recruit and retain teachers. Hughey works a second job as a waiter.

Average teacher salaries are 9 percent lower than in Washington and 20 percent lower than in California. When you factor in the state’s cost of living—the highest in the nation—Hawaii teachers say they’re the worst-paid in the country.

The reformers are also calling for the elimination of the state’s new “Educator Effectiveness System,” where teachers’ evaluations and pay are linked to students’ test performance.

They want to make their union more open by involving members in bargaining—and all union activities—rather than cutting deals behind closed doors, like previous leaders did.

“We need new leadership,” said Higa. “This is all making our union look bad. Whoever won the election should just be announced.” If the vote is rerun, she vowed to continue campaigning for the Hawaii Teachers for Change team.

THE HAWAII TEACHERS FOR CHANGE CANDIDATES SAY THE DISTRICT’S SALARIES, WHICH START AT $33,000, ARE TOO LOW TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN TEACHERS. HUGHEY WORKS A SECOND JOB AS A WAITER.

Higa hopes HSTA members can follow the wave of teacher activism happening in other parts of the country. “We looked to Chicago and we saw what they were doing,” she said.

“We need to figure out ways to get members more involved. We are trying to have a more organized union.”

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