A CCC Adult Education Quarterly Update
Winter 2016 News and Updates

● There is a general meeting this Saturday at 1:30 at AVI, 2800 S Western Avenue.
● We will be mailing out an official request to the district to initiate contract negotiations.
● Congratulations to Judith Sherman, Instructor and Union Steward at Malcolm X, who has retired after 30 years of service! Elections for the steward position to be announced as per our constitution.
● Appreciation goes to Jeff Scheder for stepping in and serving as an Interim Steward at Malcolm X.
● Want to be involved? Join one of our committees now! Call, email, or write to inquire or share your talents. Contributing writers are needed from each of our colleges. We want to hear your voice and know what issues you face on your campus. Please send submissions for inclusion in this newsletter to George at afscme3506@gmail.com
● Upcoming meetings and events can be found on our calendar at http://afscme3506.org/events/
● We now have a Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/afscme3506/. Like it and participate in our ongoing dialogue. Continue to check out our website, http://www.afscme3506.org, for updates.

A Message from our President

As we have just celebrated Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, let’s remember that immigrants and refugees come to the City of Big Shoulders with open hearts, facing jobs that are disappearing to China, India, and Ghana. They come because they have a dream, a dream best expressed by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., that God willing, one day we will remember that we are brothers and sisters, and we shall treat each other accordingly. And in this rich, ever-giving land, we shall at least share generosity and justice for all.
I have always thought that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a Chicago kind of guy, and he always measured his words and even more his actions. He never backed down from pompous preachers or greedy leaders. He was a real Chicago guy; he was true to the end, true to people who would not claim him, but was still like all of us, who still owe him.

So God bless Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and God bless you for choosing to teach, and for your love of our union and our students. Let’s enjoy that one extra day of peace and rest, and remember him and his victories on behalf of our humanity.

George Roumbanis
AFSCME 3506 President
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From the Desk of GED Instructor, Marilyn Cosentino

As teachers of all stripes know, we develop battle wounds. Before I found my way to Adult Ed, I taught high school and still have scars deeply etched on my heart from the students I taught there. There was freshman Brittany, pregnant with her second child, who had already gone through a semester of school before she found her way to my class. By the second day of class, I realized she couldn’t read. This came as a surprise to every teacher she had during that first semester. Then there was Jackie, who was legally blind and spent the day squinting through a magnifying glass at materials the school and teachers couldn’t be bothered to enlarge for her. She would cry with headaches by the end of the day. The icing on the cake was when the dean gave her Saturday detentions for missing too much school.

Another scar bears the name of Irene. Irene was brilliant, but she clearly had dyslexia or some other serious issue, as all her written work was gibberish. Until she came to my class in her junior year, nobody had bothered asking her to explain what she had written. If they had, they would have realized that she was brilliant. Instead, they rolled their eyes at the mention of her name, and the guidance counselor spoke of maybe getting her training as a hair stylist, as she was “clearly really not smart.” So, after waging war with uncaring and incompetent administrators on behalf of these and other students, I thought I could handle whatever the adult ed students brought to my classroom. However, this past semester’s students have humbled me, inspired me, and broken my heart into a million pieces.

Adult ed students always bring lots of baggage with them: court orders, undiagnosed learning problems, abusive husbands that can’t find out their wives are in school, struggling single parents, immigration problems, and lack of bus fare, to name just a few. I shouldn’t have been surprised by all the troubles lurking beneath their (mostly) studious demeanors, but I had no idea of the depth of their struggles. Halfway through the class, the students wrote a personal
history essay. They were given the option of either writing about how a decision they or someone they knew made that changed the course of their lives.

The first essay I read described how a threat at school caused my student’s big brother to walk my student to school the next day. Big brother had brought along his best friend, who brought along his dad’s gun. Across the street from school, somebody started shooting at the trio. Shots were returned, and big brother is now serving 26 years in the federal pen. The writing in the essay was sparse, but the pain for the loss of his big brother was heart-rendering.

The second essay was written by a really sweet kid that has some mobility issues and learning problems that are clearly the result of a traumatic brain injury. He’s figuring out how to overcome these issues and is clearly very smart. He’s also funny, and always, always smiling. In his essay, he described how a gang provided him with the love he didn’t get from a messed up home life. He described the adrenaline rush of crime. He described the bullet to the head that essentially reduced him to infancy as he had to learn how to do everything all over again. He writes of the agony of no longer being free to do all the things he once enjoyed, like riding a bike. Surely, I thought, the essays had to get more cheerful?

Not quite. The third essay spoke of being fifteen and suddenly being uprooted from friends and family in Mexico to move to a crime-ridden neighborhood here in Chicago. The student still mourns her former life and dreams of being able to return to a home that she realizes will no longer be the same. In the fourth essay, the student described the exact moment he had to become an adult—when he was 14 years old—and heard the news that his father had dropped dead. In the fifth essay, the student describes losing a job and being desperate enough for money to rob someone at gunpoint. The student is awaiting sentencing for the crime, but his essay focused on how his actions have negatively impacted his family. The regret is palpable.

On and on the essays went, one devastating story after another. When I finally got an essay about the day a student and his brothers decided to play hooky so they could buy a new Xbox game that was being released that day (which turned out to be the “best day” of the student’s life), I nearly wept with relief. But the relief was short lived. The last essay I read will haunt me forever.

In a few very brief paragraphs, the student describes the fateful decision to go out dancing with friends at the age of 14. One of her friends slipped something into her drink, and she woke up in a hotel room with people she thought were her friends and a man that she was forced to marry because she was now pregnant with his child. She writes of never being able to trust anyone again, but closes her essay by saying “at least I have my son, who I love more than anything in this world.” The writer of this essay is yet another student that is always there, always smiling.
The stories these students have shared will likely always live on in my heart. So many people in their lives have failed them, making the job of a GED teacher incredibly daunting. Thank you all for taking on this challenging, inspiring, heart-breaking, life-changing work.

AFSCME: 75 Years of History Fighting for Working Families
A Short History of AFSCME

The history of AFSCME began in 1932, as the country suffered through a severe economic depression, when a small group of white-collar professional state employees met in Madison, Wisconsin, and formed what would later become Wisconsin State Employees Union/Council 24. The reason for the group’s creation was simple: to promote, defend and enhance the civil service system. They also were determined to help spread the civil service system across the country.

State employees feared that politicians would implement a political patronage or “spoils” system and thousands of workers would lose their jobs. Meetings were held, marches and demonstrations were organized, and the Wisconsin State Employers Association saved the civil service system in Wisconsin. By the 1930s, such organizations existed in major cities and states around the country, saving the civil service system nationwide. In 1936, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) granted a charter for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). And Arnold Zander was chosen as AFSCME’s first International President.

Growth did not come easily at first. The union’s primary tactic was lobbying to pass or strengthen civil service laws. At the end of 1936, AFSCME had 10,000 members. Ten years later membership was up to 73,000. In the 1950s, the viewpoint and composition of AFSCME began to change. Many of the union’s new members were blue-collar workers and came from big cities that had strong trade union roots and traditions. The 1955 merger with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) brought in 40,000 members and a strong commitment to collective bargaining as the means to improve working conditions.

In 1958, a series of strikes and demonstrations forced the mayor of New York City to grant collective bargaining rights to unions representing city employees. A turning point had been reached. The desire for collective bargaining became AFSCME’s driving force. In New York City, under the leadership of Jerry Wurf, AFSCME began winning elections that made it the strongest public worker union in the city. At the 1964 AFSCME International Convention, Wurf — running on a platform of more aggressive organizing, pursuit of collective bargaining rights for public employees, and union reform/union democracy — was elected the second International President. A year later, a special convention re-wrote AFSCME’s International Constitution and included a “Bill of Rights” for members, a first in the American labor movement.
During the 60s, AFSCME’s struggles were linked with those of the civil rights movement. Progressive unions like AFSCME joined students and civil rights activists as they took to the streets to protest economic and racial oppression. This alliance culminated in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1968 when sanitation workers struck for union recognition after two African-American workers were crushed to death in a garbage truck. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who was organizing the Poor People’s March, went to Memphis to support the strike. Only after Dr. King’s assassination did the city agree to recognize the workers’ union, AFSCME Local 1733. By the end of 1969, several states had enacted collective bargaining laws and the union’s membership grew to more than 250,000. At the bargaining table AFSCME and other unions gained substantial breakthroughs in living standards such as living wages and family health insurance that greatly exceeded those achieved by non-union workers.

In the 1970s and 80s, AFSCME members increased their efforts politically in order to win collective bargaining laws, organize new members, and wield clout on behalf of existing members. All across the country, at every level of government, candidates for public office learned they had to pay attention to AFSCME’s political muscle. During this time, AFSCME also enjoyed phenomenal success in affiliating independent associations of public employees. Almost 60 associations, representing 450,000 members, joined AFSCME by affiliation or merger. With the affiliation in 1978 of the state of New York Civil Service Employees Association, AFSCME membership passed the 1-million-member mark.

AFSCME’s growth across the country gave the union a more powerful voice when it came to fighting the injustices of the day. On September 19, 1981, at the AFL-CIO’s Solidarity Day — a massive demonstration in the nation’s capital demanding fair treatment for U.S. workers — AFSCME’s 60,000-member delegation, the largest from any single union, led the march. That same year in San Jose, California, AFSCME Local 101 staged the first strike in the nation’s history over the issue of pay equity. The action attracted national media attention and helped spark the pay equity movement. AFSCME affiliates in 10 states soon followed with pay equity actions of their own including lawsuits, legislation and bargaining demands.

In 1981, Gerald W. McEntee, leader of the successful drive to organize 80,000 Pennsylvania state employees (now Council 13), became the union’s third International President. He succeeded Jerry Wurf who died in office. William Lucy — founder of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists — continued in his role as International Secretary-Treasurer. Their vision of AFSCME as the union of all public service workers — public or private — helped propel the union’s political and organizing agenda for the decades that followed. During the 1980s, AFSCME won collective bargaining rights and organized workers in Alaska, Illinois, Nebraska and Ohio. In 1989, the affiliation of the health care union — National Union of Hospital and Health
Care Employees: NUHHCE/AFSCME Local 1199 — helped solidify AFSCME as a leading voice in the fight for the rights of health care workers.

With state legislatures increasingly in the hands of the right wing, it became more difficult to expand collective bargaining rights in the 1990s. Governments at every level sought to cut costs by contracting out public service jobs and attacking the hard-won benefits and wages of union members. AFSCME responded by mobilizing its membership to a historic level, increasing its visibility and political influence. In 1995, AFSCME helped lead the change in the leadership and direction of the national AFL-CIO. At its national convention in 1998, AFSCME's members committed to an even bolder and more aggressive program of political action and organizing the unorganized.

Since 1998, 320,000 public service workers in a dozen states and Puerto Rico have joined AFSCME. They include private-sector food service workers, child care workers, health care workers and public-sector corrections officers, university employees, and social workers of every race and religious background, and speaking several languages. United with their union brothers and sisters in their desire for fairness, economic justice and a voice on the job, they represent the face of AFSCME today.

(From http://www.afscme.org/union/history/afscme-75-years-of-history)