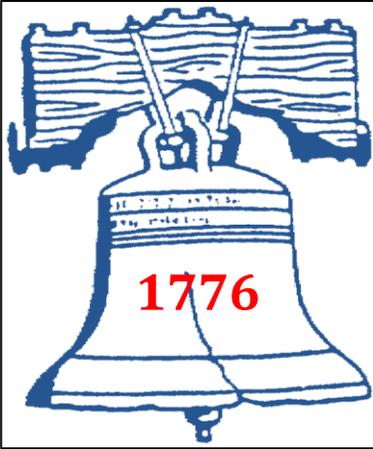


# THE

The Newspaper of Local 1776  
The Association of Catholic Teachers



# SPIRIT OF '76

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## *From the President's Desk*

### **A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT**

Dear ACT Member,

I am writing to announce to you that I will not be running for re-election as ACT President.

It has been an honor for me to work for all of you over the past 53 years. I was involved in the actual formation of the Association of Catholic Teachers and to have it recognized as the sole and exclusive collective bargaining representative of the lay teachers in the Archdiocesan high schools. I was elected to the Executive Board in 1967 as Recording Secretary (later Executive Secretary) and served under the first three Presidents. In 1975, after teaching at St. Hubert High School for 12 years, I went on a Union Leave of Absence to become part of the ACT Staff. I was elected President of ACT in 1984, 36 years ago.

The decision not to run for re-election and to retire was far from an easy one; it was also not one that was made quickly, but I feel that it is the right decision for me.

**(Continued on Page 2)**

Over these past 36 years, we have weathered some extremely challenging times. There were three strikes, 2 attempted reorganizations of our schools and a System that consisted of 32 schools and 1100 teachers in 1967 and now encompasses 17 high schools with 500 teachers. Throughout all of this, the Union membership has remained strong and united, fighting for ourselves, our families and our students.

Our recent contract negotiations were successfully completed. You were a force to be reckoned with and I couldn't be prouder. You even got national attention (See the **National Catholic Reporter** article reprinted on Page 8).

As of January 1, 2021, for the first time in over half a century, I will not be in the middle of the action, but I will, definitely, be watching and cheering from the sidelines. You will always have my undying support and I will keep all of you in my heart and in my prayers.

Thank you for your faith in me over the years and your loyalty. I will forever cherish both.

*Rita*

## **UPDATE ON INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING**

By now, all of you should have seen the video/power point introducing Instructional Coaching and you have received the Instructional Coaching Policy that was agreed to during the recent contract negotiations. Even though the concept of Instructional Coaching was accepted by the ACT membership when the 2018-2020 contract was ratified, the particulars of the Policy have remained unresolved until now.

The unresolved items were whether or not Instructional Coaching was mandatory and whether or not teachers would receive negative comments on their evaluation if they did not want to be coached.

If you read the provisions of the Instructional Coaching Policy that were given to you at the time you saw the video, nowhere in the Policy does the word "mandatory" appear. Nowhere is there any language that states you will receive negative comments on your evaluation if you are not coached.

If your local administration is telling you anything that is contrary to the above, that information is not accurate.

The Association has always supported the concept of Instructional Coaching. The Association encourages you, please, to take advantage of Instructional Coaching and what it has to offer. However, the choice is yours.

*Rita*

# EXECUTIVE BOARD ELECTIONS

**THE EXECUTIVE BOARD HAS APPOINTED THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS TO THE NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE:** Anne Boland (LF) Dorothy Burdziak (BMD), James Flannery (RC), Devin Gallagher (AC), Glen Galeone (AR), Rich Knowlton (AC), Katherine Nobles (AW), Beth Sagers (BS) and Fred Vietri (BS). *Glen Galeone was appointed Chairperson of this Committee.*

**The rules for the upcoming election are posted on page 4 of this Newsletter.**

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The Nominations and Elections Committee met on October 22, 2020 to set the ground rules for the upcoming election and to open and verify the petitions. The following ACT Members are running for Office:

**PRESIDENT**

Tara Murphy (Abp. Wood)  
Irene Tori (ACT Staff)

**VICE PRESIDENT:**

Kathleen Toenniessen-Innes (O'Hara)

**EXECUTIVE SECRETARY:**

\* Thomas Imburgia (O'Hara)  
Katheryn Tucker (Abp. Carroll)

**TREASURER:**

Frank Costantini (Shanahan)  
Billy Mitchell (Abp. Carroll)

**LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE:**

\* David Sommers (Shanahan)

**MEMBERS-AT-LARGE**

James Brennan (Roman)  
Christine Hanley-Maldonado (Conwell-Egan)  
Bridget Mierzejewski (West)  
Anthony Polselli (Abp. Carroll)  
\* Lou Valenti (Abp. Carroll)

\*incumbent

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**Ballots will be sent out no later than November 10, 2020 and must be returned no later than November 25.**

## **ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC TEACHERS EXECUTIVE BOARD ELECTION REGULATIONS**

The Nominations and Elections Committee shall oversee the election process and enforce the election regulations.

**Between the time nominating petitions are approved and the election is certified:**

1. No declared candidates may visit the schools in order to campaign.
2. Any ACT Staff member who is running for elected office in any contested position shall not conduct any regularly scheduled school visits.
3. The Association will schedule a “Meet the Candidates” General Membership Meeting. The candidates will be afforded the opportunity to speak to the membership at this meeting. The meeting must occur prior to the mailing of the official ballot.
4. A one-page biography and platform submitted by each candidate shall be published and distributed to the eligible voting members with the official ballot.
5. No by-lined articles by any candidate for a contested position shall appear in the Association’s newsletter, *The Spirit of '76*.
6. There shall be no personal attacks or derogatory campaigning by any candidate.
7. Only campaign literature approved by the Nominations and Elections Committee that has been published by the Association may be disseminated to the teachers.
8. All election regulations will be published in the Association’s newsletter, *The Spirit of '76*, prior to the start of the election period. A copy of the regulations will be sent to all candidates.
9. The Association’s Executive Board will review and, if necessary, modify the election procedures prior to the start of each election period.

# **LEGISLATIVE UPDATE**

**ACT1776 Legislative Report given by D. Sommers, Legislative Representative  
July/August 2020 Executive Board Meeting (via Zoom), August 26th, 2020**

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## **Pennsylvania General Assembly:**

- I.
- II. **Senate and House Education Committees Joint Hearing (August 19th, 2020)**
  - A. Secretaries of Health and Education participated answering questions from lawmakers (House and Senate)
  - B. Discussion on the metrics for opening schools; percent population of a given county
  - C. State will provide “guidance” not “mandates”
  - D. Negative impacts of virtual learning discussed; i.e. lack of child abuse reporting; depression; anxiety
  - E. Lawsuits and litigation issues unresolved; future legislation tbd
  - F. Lack of equality for PA students, i.e. special needs; technology
  - G. Unlikely in-school testing to be provided by the state; lack of rapid-test kits availability
- II. **Pennsylvania 2020-2021 Fiscal Year Budget (Education highlights)**
  - A. \$12.8 billion state education investment  
Same financial level of spending as last year; full year of education funding passed into law
  - B. \$200 million in federal funds for COVID-19 health and safety needs
  - C. \$6.74 for “Basic Education” funding and general operations
  - D. \$1.18 billion for “Special Education” funding and operations
  - E. This budget provides monies for our parochial school Act-95 textbook funds, busing, nurses, school security grants, etc.
- III. **PA House Education Committee (August 20th, 2020)**
  - A. **HB 2787: Sports and Activities**  
Act allowing individual schools, districts the right to hold athletic, sports, and extracurricular activities during the upcoming school year.
  - B. **HB 2788: Right to Repeat Grade Level**  
Students would be allowed the opportunity to provide an “option year” of education in an attempt to make up for any lost educational opportunities due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - C. **SB 1216: Teacher Certification Requirements Relaxation**  
An act providing for special provisions regarding teacher certification for the 2020-2021 school year including waiving of various requirements.
- IV. **SB1243: Face Mask Requirements for in School Use**  
The act would allow school districts to not require face masks, face coverings for students.  
\*\*Last Action: Referred to the Senate Education Committee on August 12, 2020.

## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

(continued from page 5)

### V. United States Senate Bills

#### S. 4317: Safe to Work Act

\*Introduced on July 27, 2020 and referred to the Judiciary Committee.

\*\*The bill would provide safeguards for healthcare facilities, business, and schools from unfair lawsuits from the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### S. 4432: Support Children Having Open Opportunities for Learning (SCHOOL) Act

\*Introduced August 4th, 2020 in the HELP Committee (Health, Education, Labor, Pensions)

\*\*The bill would provide funds to follow each eligible child for the school of their choice; this could be used for tuition for a nonpublic school

#### \*\*\*\*\*Noteworthy:

United States Supreme Court Ruling: "Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue (6/30/2020)

\*Victory for school choice advocates

\*Court ruled in favor by a 5-4 decision

\*\*The ruling states excluding religious schools from student aid programs is unconstitutional. Citing a violation of the *Free Exercise Clause* of the U.S. Constitution, the high court ruled in favor of the families. States can no longer exclude religious schools from choice and voucher programs funded by tax payer monies.

## RETIREE IN THE NEWS



*CONGRATULATIONS TO ED MACKO, RETIRED TEACHER FROM ARCHBISHOP RYAN, ON BEING NAMED 2019-20 GIRLS SWIMMING PA STATE COACH OF THE YEAR. COACH MACKO LED HIS TEAM TO YET ANOTHER PCL AND DISTRICT CHAMPIONSHIP THIS PAST SEASON. ED IS PICTURED ABOVE WITH HIS DAUGHTER AND FELLOW COACH, SARAH. CONGRATS, ED!*

# ACT WEBSITE

All teachers are asked to logon to the ACT Website ([www.act1776.com](http://www.act1776.com)) and verify your personal information. It is critical that we have your current information and that it is accurate. It is important that we have a **PERSONAL** email address for you, since Executive Board Minutes, Newsletters, and other pertinent information will be sent via email. We cannot and will not send email to a school email address.

Every teacher was provided with a username and password for the ACT Website. (New teachers will receive their logon information in an email.) If you do not have this information, please contact Ginny at the ACT Office at 215-568-4175 or email her at [ginny@act1776.com](mailto:ginny@act1776.com) and she can provide this information to you. To update your personal information, logon to the ACT Website and, in the upper right hand corner of the homepage, click on member login. Type in your username and password and then verify the information on file. Any changes made will be sent to the ACT Office automatically.

## ***CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR RECENT RETIREES***

*Congratulations to the following teachers on their retirement from the Secondary School System: **Ignatius Brodzinski** (Archbishop Wood), **Susan Devlin** (Archbishop Ryan), **Arthur Gutzler** (Father Judge), **Eileen Hildenbrand** (Lansdale Catholic) **Chuck Lohse** (Roman Catholic), **Mary Lou Graham** (Lansdale Catholic), and **Elaine McElroy** (Archbishop Ryan).*

***Best Wishes for a Happy and Healthy Retirement!***



## **VOLUNTARY VISION PLAN THROUGH DAVIS VISION**

***Enrollment information for the Voluntary Vision Plan through Davis Vision for the 2021 calendar year will be e-mailed to teachers the week beginning November 1.***

For teachers currently on the Voluntary Vision Plan: if you have not used the plan this year, try and do so before your benefits expire on December 31, 2020.

***Teachers wishing to enroll in the Voluntary Vision Plan for the 2021 calendar year, will need to submit a completed application form along with payment by Friday, December 10, 2020.***

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)  
Sep 25, 2020

## As Catholic school teachers head back to the classroom, discontent simmers

by Alexander Thompson

When Elaine Sage, a teacher at St. Francis Xavier School in Wilmette, Illinois, thought about going back to the classroom this fall, she was afraid. She is 64 and her husband has beaten liver cancer twice, meaning he is at higher risk for COVID-19.

She thought the Chicago Archdiocese's reopening plan, which emphasized in-person learning, put students and teachers at risk.

"That's why I decided to go public," she told NCR. "I knew what would happen if I did. I knew I would lose my job. I just knew it, but I thought that people needed to know the truth."

After she told administrators her concerns and asked to teach remotely, she was informed in a Aug. 19 letter from the school that she was being released from her contract. There were no remote-teaching positions available. Neither was a leave of absence.



*James Cahill, 32, a middle school social studies teacher at St. Francis Xavier School in Wilmette, Illinois, speaks out against the Chicago Archdiocese's reopening plan at a rally in front of schools' headquarters in downtown Chicago on Aug. 20. (Courtesy of Arise Chicago/Shelly Ruzicka)*

(Continued on page 9)

"It was incredibly hard," Sage said. "There are days I just sob."

Hundreds of other archdiocesan teachers formed a private Facebook group to air their concerns about the reopening plan. Few spoke up, though, Sage said; they were afraid they would end up like she did. Out of a job.

Manuel Gonzales, a spokesman for the archdiocese, declined to comment on internal personnel matters. However, he told NCR in an email the plan adheres to all public health guidance on social distancing and that schools are providing teachers with ample personal protective equipment.

Gonzales cited a survey distributed in the second week of September in which 87% of school employees indicated they are comfortable with the safety measures and only 5% are not.

Much like the Chicago survey results suggest, a majority of Catholic school teachers have gone back to the classroom without the forceful opposition public schools received from their teachers' unions. But, some teachers insist, that belies widespread alarm and anxiety hidden by Catholic teachers' fear for their jobs and deference to the church.

Bobby Nichols, 30, a former campus minister and high school theology teacher in the Archdiocese of Louisville, Kentucky, said online chats with his former colleagues are alive with those fears. He left teaching for reasons unrelated to the coronavirus.



*Elaine Sage was a teacher at St. Francis Xavier School in Wilmette, Illinois. (Provided photo)*

In private, he told NCR that teachers were saying classrooms are too small for social distancing, hallways are worse and the buildings are poorly ventilated. Even if teachers felt their school's plan was safe, there was an abiding sense the archdiocese had not consulted with them, Nichols said.

But no one spoke out.

(Continued on page 10)

"There's a real fear that if they say anything they could get fired," Nichols said. In August, he wrote an op-ed in the Louisville Courier-Journal decrying the schools' plan, to say what his friends and colleagues could not.

As of Sept. 19, more than a month after school began, Louisville's archdiocesan schools had 81 active student cases of coronavirus and 10 among staff, the second highest school district totals in the state, according to Kentucky Public Health data.

Cecelia Price, a spokeswoman for the archdiocese, told NCR in an email that those cases represent a small fraction of the 18,500 students in schools there.

The school leadership is working individually with teachers who have concerns, and a representative of the superintendent's office met with teachers during the second week of September, she said.

"We believe that most teachers and most families are happy with the return to in-person instruction," Price said.

In the absence of national surveys, it is unclear what the majority of teachers think about Catholic education's push for an in-person return, and responses would depend on the hundreds of plans developed by states, dioceses and schools.

"Most places have been able to work it out exactly the way everybody wants," said Kathy Mears, CEO of the National Catholic Educational Association. "But we don't know how to work it out sometimes because the finances can be a brick wall."

The pandemic threw Catholic schools' already strained balance sheets into disarray and pushed them to reopen in person in a bid to attract parents wary of more remote school offered by their public districts.

In the Philadelphia Archdiocese, school officials' attempt to insure themselves in case that bet does not pay off sparked a showdown with teachers.

Rita Schwartz, president of the Association of Catholic Teachers Local 1776 in Philadelphia, which represents high school teachers, said that school officials inserted a clause into the new contract that would have allowed them to make a round of staff cuts in October after evaluating enrollment, among other "poison pills."

"They were trying to take teachers' rights away from them when they needed them the most," Schwartz said.

**(Continued on page 11)**

## As Catholic school teachers head back to the classroom... Continued from page 10

When the proposed contract went up for a vote before the union's 500 members on Sept. 8, they voted it down nearly four to one.

"My teachers are not afraid of a strike, never have been, never will be," Schwartz said. Over the next two days, Schwartz and archdiocesan officials negotiated down to the wire to produce a new draft with the controversial clauses excised.

The new contract was ratified at a hastily called, late-night Zoom meeting on Sept. 11, averting a back-to-school strike.

Teachers' open defiance in Philadelphia contrasts with muted reactions by Catholic teachers elsewhere.

Only a handful of Catholic schools across the country, like those in Philadelphia, are unionized, but the pandemic has demonstrated their importance for winning protections for members, said Schwartz, who also leads the National Association of Catholic School Teachers.

Unionized Catholic school teachers were filing labor complaints against the New York Archdiocese for many of the same reasons the teachers without unions in Chicago and Louisville were fuming in Facebook and text groups.

"That's why teachers form unions. No one listens to them. They have no input. They are told what to do," Schwartz said.

That is how James Cahill felt.

Cahill, 32, works at St. Francis Xavier in Wilmette, the same school where Elaine Sage lost her job last month.

The middle school social studies teacher spoke out publicly against the reopening plan, but in the end agreed to return in-person. He told NCR that when he hears about students in the archdiocese catching the virus, he worries about giving it to his mother, who has asthma, or students' families who he knows are vulnerable.

Gonzales said the archdiocese currently has "a few" cases of the virus in "a few schools," but said school officials have moved quickly to contain them.

"There's a high level of fear and anxiety," Cahill said. "There's sort of a sense of, 'When is the other shoe going to drop?'"

*Editor's note: This article has been edited after publication to correct identification of a source.*

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**Source URL (modified on 09/27/2020 - 2:42pm):** <https://www.ncronline.org/news/coronavirus/catholic-school-teachers-head-back-classroom-discontent-simmers>

### Links

[1] <https://www.ncronline.org/join-conversation>

## **NORTHEAST CYCLE**

Rita DiBenedetto, teacher at SS John Neumann-Maria Goretti High School, and ACT Senior Delegate teaches a Cycling Class at Northeast Cycle on Frankford Avenue across from Holy Family University. **The owner of Northeast Cycle would like to offer all Archdiocesan teachers 10 classes for \$95 (normally \$120).**

It is easy to sign up and your **FIRST CLASS IS ALWAYS FREE!**

- 1.) Download the Northeast Cycle app
- 2.) Create an account OR if you already have a Mindbody account you can log in with this!
- 3.) The promo code is **ARCHPHIL**. You can use this code over and over again! If you happen to already be a member, feel free to use this the next time you buy classes!

*Thank you, Rita, for sharing this offer with your fellow Union Members!*

**DON'T FORGET TO  
PERFORM YOUR CIVIC DUTY.**

**VOTE  
ON  
NOVEMBER 3, 2020**

# Protect yourself from the seasonal flu



One of the most critical steps you can take in staying healthy is getting your flu shot. Each year thousands of people are hospitalized because of complications from the flu. That's why we encourage all our members to get their annual flu vaccination.

It's also important to remember that the flu and COVID-19 may present similar symptoms but are very different viruses. There is currently no vaccine for COVID-19. So, it's more important than ever to stay up to date with the available immunizations that keep you healthy, including your flu shot.

## Seasonal flu shot coverage

The cost and payment method of getting the flu shot depends on the plan you have and where you choose to get it. Below is a list of where you can get the flu shot:

- HMO, POS, Keystone 65 health plan members can receive the flu shot at any eligible in-network provider; PPO health plan members can receive the flu shot at any eligible provider both in- and out-of-network

**For location or provider offering flu vaccinations near you, visit [ibx.com/findadoctor](https://ibx.com/findadoctor) and type in flu.**

- Participating MinuteClinics® at CVS pharmacies, RediClinics® at Rite Aid pharmacies, or other retail-based clinics in accordance with your standard benefits plan
- Vaccination clinics organized by local health departments and other private settings (e.g., place of employment)

## Seasonal flu reimbursement

If your plan includes coverage for immunizations and you paid for your influenza vaccine, you may submit a *Seasonal Influenza Reimbursement Form* for reimbursement of up to \$50. For a copy of the reimbursement form, [visit ibx.com/flu](https://ibx.com/flu).

If you do not know if your plan covers immunizations, you may call Customer Service at the number on the back of your ID card.



Independence Blue Cross offers products through its subsidiaries Independence Hospital Indemnity Plan, Keystone Health Plan East and QCC Insurance Company, and with Highmark Blue Shield — independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.

1157624 (09/20)

*Happy Halloween*



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