

THE

The Newspaper of Local 1776
The Association of Catholic Teachers

SPIRIT

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3070 BRISTOL PIKE, BLDG. 2, SUITE 101, BENSALEM, PA 19020- 215-568-4175 – VOLUME XXXXV-NO.1
Fax 215-568-8270 – email (act@act1776.com) - website (www.act1776.com) **SEPTEMBER 2024**



From the President's Desk

THE APPROPRIATE USE OF TECHNOLOGY FOR THE 2024-2025 SCHOOL YEAR

PLEASE APPROACH WITH CAUTION AND COMMON SENSE

Each year, technology becomes more and more a part of our lives, whether that is in school or outside of school. During the past several school years, all of us experienced the benefits and, in some cases, the detriments of 21st century technology. With a new school year upon us, it is more important than ever to remind everyone to use technology wisely, both professionally and personally.

At the beginning of this school year, you should have signed a document that attests to the fact that you have read and will uphold the Acceptable Use Policy for Technology, which is an Addendum to the Archdiocesan Standards of Ministerial Behavior and Boundaries. The Policy

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states that there is to be a “safe environment for learning with technology”. In keeping with this “safe environment”, there is a “responsibility to use the equipment correctly”, and “to follow the policies as outlined in the Guidelines”.

Please read the Policy and follow it. Your job could very well depend on you doing so. Any teacher who violates this Policy could be subject to disciplinary action. In situations where the Association represented teachers at meetings dealing with breaches of the Acceptable Use Policy, some of those meetings have not ended well for the teacher.

Within the school building, the first thing to remember is that anything you write, email, download, Google, etc. on the school computers is not your property and is not private. Anything and everything you do on a school computer is accessible to the school administration.

Also, make sure you are very careful in how you try to enhance teaching and learning through integrating technology into the curriculum. Considering the current environment in which we are all living, for better or worse, everything we say and do, including online and offline assignments given to students, has the potential to be misinterpreted, criticized and posted almost instantaneously. My advice—adhere very strictly to the curriculum. Be very judicious about what social media resources you use in class, do not engage in discussions on controversial topics no matter how much the students try to goad you into doing so. There is too much at stake for you to choose to ignore this advice, most of all, your job.

Use of technology outside of school is another, and, potentially, equally dangerous venue. Even when using your personal computer, cell phone, iPhone or iPad, you need to be extremely careful. What you blog, what and whom you text or tweet, what you include on a Facebook page can result in disciplinary and, in some cases, job-threatening action.

In starting a new school year, my goal is not to be heavy handed on an issue. My goal is to warn you and protect you. As I said at the beginning, the Association has been involved in too many situations where there have been issues with technology and these situations have not ended well for the teacher and his/her continued employment in the System.

Therefore, if there is a question in your mind or you get a gut feeling about whether or not something might prove problematic, please err on the side of caution and don't do it. This will help to ensure that you continue to teach this school year and many school years to come.

Irene

Congratulations on Another Job Well Done!

(2023-2024 Second Semester Evaluation Data Results)

As I have said in previous newsletter articles, you always rise to all of the challenges you face in the classroom. I have applauded and continue to acclaim all that you have done and are doing for your students.

Now, the data from the 2023-2024 Second Semester Evaluations is further affirmation of all that you have accomplished during this school year.

98 % of tenured teachers, including Guidance counselors, received a Distinguished or Proficient rating from their administrative evaluator. **100%** of tenured teachers, including Guidance counselors, received these ratings from their department heads.

82.23% of non-tenured teachers, including Guidance counselors, received a Distinguished or Proficient rating from their administrative evaluator. 88.1% of non-tenured teachers, including Guidance counselors, received these ratings from their department heads.

What impressive statistics, especially all of the tenured teachers receiving Distinguished or Proficient from their department heads. Congratulations to each and every one of you!

Congratulations once again on your accomplishments during the second semester evaluation period of the 2023-2024 school year. I am sure that the data will be just as impressive for the 2024-2025 school year.

Have a great school year!

Irene



ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC TEACHERS EXECUTIVE BOARD ELECTIONS



THE FOLLOWING EXECUTIVE BOARD OFFICES ARE OPEN FOR ELECTION THIS YEAR:

- PRESIDENT
- VICE PRESIDENT
- EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
- TREASURER
- LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE
- 3 MEMBERS-AT-LARGE

**Petitions must be filed with the Nominations and Elections Committee
no later than October 20, 2024.**

Mail your petition to: Association of Catholic Teachers
ATTN: Nominations and Elections Committee
3070 Bristol Pike, Building 2, Suite 101
Bensalem, PA 19020

Or email your petition to act@act1776.com and in the subject line put **ATTN: Nominations and Elections Committee**, then put your original in the mail to the above address.

VERY IMPORTANT!

Representation May Be Crucial

Article III, Section 2 of the Labor-Management Agreement is short but extremely important. Please pay particularly close attention to what it has to say.

No teacher may be asked to attend a meeting with the school or diocesan administration without a representative of the Association being present if the teacher reasonably feels the meeting could result in disciplinary action against him/her.

Disciplinary action cannot be taken against any teacher unless the teacher has been apprised in writing of his/her right to union representation.

Should you “reasonably feel” the meeting could turn into one that involves you in disciplinary action, immediately get to your Senior Delegate for advice or call the ACT Office if you choose. Don’t let a relatively minor situation turn into a major one because you decided you could “handle” it yourself.

EDUCATION GRANT

Teachers who wish to apply for an Education/Study Grant under the Labor-Management Agreement (XIII, Sec.7) must do so by **October 16th**. The grant offers 50 percent tuition reimbursement up to a maximum of \$2200 per year for undergraduate coursework, \$2500 for Master’s Degree coursework, and \$3000 for Doctoral Coursework.

The grant can also be used as reimbursement for successfully passing the Praxis Series exams in a teacher’s area of certification. As a result of Negotiations, the grant will now reimburse for the costs of converting from a Level I Certificate to a Level II Certificate.

Grants are awarded on the basis of system seniority and are available to any teacher with at least one (1) year of teaching in the System. Teachers who have received a study grant for two (2) consecutive years are not eligible to receive a grant for the following year.

You should apply for the grant if you are taking courses in the fall of 2024 or if you anticipate taking courses in the spring or summer of 2025.

ADDITIONAL CREDITS

If you received an advanced degree or additional credits over the summer, which qualifies you for payment under a different column of the salary scale, notify your school accountant immediately.

You must also send proof (an original transcript) of the degree/credit to Mr. James Molnar at the Office of Catholic Education so that the change in degree/credits can be verified.

For your records, it is highly recommended that all documents be sent via certified mail, return receipt requested.

The five lanes of salary scale are

Bachelor's Degree
Bachelor's Degree + 18 Credits
Master's Degree
Double Master's Degree
Doctorate Degree

The teacher is responsible to provide timely notification to the System, with an official transcript.

Timely notification shall normally mean within one (1) year of acquiring the additional credits. Salary adjustments shall not be made retroactively for more than one (1) year.

Ways to Protect Yourself this Fall and Winter

- Get a Flu Shot
- Get a Covid Booster
- Get a RSV Shot
- Eat a healthy diet
- Get a good night's rest

You can order up to 4 Free Covid19 test kits by logging onto [Covid19.gov](https://www.covid19.gov).

The following Legislative Report was submitted by
ACT Legislative Representative, John Corrigan, at the
August 28, 2024 ACT Executive Board Meeting held via Zoom.

1. Commonwealth of PA Budget (2024-2025): The PA General Assembly passed a \$47.6 Billion budget for the fiscal year 2024-2025 on July 11, 2024, nearly two weeks after the July 1 deadline, passing the House (122-80) and the Senate (44-5). Governor Shapiro, who originally proposed a \$48.3B plan, signed the budget into law on the same day. The budget requires \$3B in surplus cash to balance, leaving \$10.5B in reserve. The plan does not raise income or sales taxes and increases student loan interest deductions.

The budget includes 6% increase in overall spending from last year, with the increases to improve the poorest school districts and make college more affordable at state universities.

2. Education: Over \$10.5B in total funding for education is in this year's budget, an increase of \$1B in public education funding. \$900 Million more for instruction and special education (9% increase) and new subsidies for school construction and tuition for private and cyber charter schools is part of the budget.
3. EITC, OSTC, and Lifeline Vouchers: The budget increases the caps for the Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) to \$540M and the Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit (OSTC) to \$90M. This is a \$75M (13.5%) total increase from last year for a total record amount of \$630M in both programs. The budget does not, however, create a private school voucher system known as the Lifeline Scholarship Program.
4. Commonwealth Court Decision: The 2023 PA Commonwealth Court decision found the state public-school funding formula to be unconstitutional. The school districts who originally sued and won in court have proposed a \$6.2B plan over 5 years. The Democrats proposed a \$810M installment this year as part of a \$5.1B proposal over 7 years. After political disagreements, a first step installment of \$562M was approved for this year to address the court mandate.
5. Higher Education: The budget sets aside an additional \$260M (13% increase) for higher education, with most of the increase going to the state-owned university system (PASSHE) and PA Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) to expand grant programs. However, the plan gives no increase in aid to Temple, Pitt, Penn State, or Lincoln to subsidize in-state tuition.

Governor Shapiro proposed a plan to combine the systems that oversee the 10 state universities and 15 community colleges with the goal of capping in-state tuition at

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\$1,000 for many families. The proposed plan did not make it into this year's budget. Lawmakers did approve the creation of a new State Board of Higher Education to develop strategic plans and recommendations for performance assessment and distribution of funds at PA's four state-related universities: Lincoln, Penn State, Pitt, and Temple.

6. **Grow PA Scholarships:** The budget allocates \$25M for Grow PA Scholarships. A new scholarship program gives college students in an "approved course of study" like nursing or education up to \$5,000 per academic year. Students must stay and work in PA after graduation for 12 months per grant received. It also creates a scholarship program to attract out-of-state students and includes \$36M increase in the Ready to Succeed Scholarship program.
7. **Career and Technical Education (CTE):** \$30 million increase in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programming and equipment for the nearly 40 approved apprenticeship programs. Also, \$2M in first-time state funding is allotted for nursing apprenticeships.
8. **Solar Schools:** The budget establishes a new program to help schools pay for solar energy projects. The \$25M grant program administered by the Department of Community and Economic Development helps to pay for equipment, permitting fees, and other related costs.
9. **Education Highlights:**
 - Over \$1B increase in Pre-K to 12 education funding.
 - Over \$35M increase for PASSHE (PA State System Higher Education) schools.
 - Over \$140M for grants and scholarships to make higher education more affordable in PA.
 - \$20M for student teacher stipends (100% increase) in the Educators Pipeline Support Grant Program—providing \$15,000 stipends to eligible student teachers in PA.
 - Over \$38M to support teachers and address PA's teacher shortage pipeline.
 - \$7M to support dual enrollment opportunities for high school students allowing them to take advanced courses for college credit.
 - \$16.5M increase in anti-violence and after-school programs.
 - \$100M increase in special education funding.
 - \$32.7M increase for Pre-K programs.
 - \$3M investment to provide menstrual products in schools.
 - \$50M increase (\$480M total) in school safety, security, and mental health to improve student health and wellness, fix toxic schools, and create safe learning environments.

2024 ACT EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS

Irene Tori	President
Kathleen Toenniessen-Innes	Vice President
Thomas Imburgia	Executive Secretary
	Treasurer
John Corrigan	Legislative Representative
Bridget Mierzejewski	Area Vice President (Central)
Christine Hanley Maldonado	Area Vice President (Northeast)
Eric Wahl	Area Vice President (Northwest)
James Vernon	Area Vice President (Southwest)
Michael Campellone	Member-at-Large
Ellen O'Hara	Member-at-Large
Rosanne Vitali-Betham	Member-at-Large

Welcome Back!

2024-2025 ACT SENIOR DELEGATES

James Vernon – Bonner/Prendergast	Ellen O'Hara – Cardinal O'Hara
Anthony Polselli – Archbishop Carroll	Eric Wahl – Pope John Paul II
Christine Hanley-Maldonado– Conwell-Egan	James Flannery – Roman Catholic
John Masluk – Saint Hubert	Bill Finnegan – Archbishop Ryan
Mark Zataveski – Father Judge	Joseph Aquilante – Bishop Shanahan
Melissa Hart – Lansdale Catholic	Bridge Mierzejewski – West Catholic
Michael Clymer – Little Flower	Joe Webb – Archbishop Wood
Karen Elitz – SS Neumann-Goretti	

BENEFIT INFORMATION

Open Enrollment for the Dental and Medical Plans

During the month of October, you will receive an E-Open Enrollment package that will outline the benefits available to you as an Archdiocesan employee. You will be able to compare the three health plans available as well as select additional coverage such as dental, disability, cancer, and optional life insurance coverage, if you so choose.

It is important to know that teachers who opt out of the Medical Coverage are still eligible for the Dental Plan at no cost to themselves. However, you must enroll in the dental plan to obtain benefits.

The open enrollment period for both medical and dental ends on October 31, 2024, with benefits going into effect on November 1, 2024.

Open Enrollment Information for the Voluntary Vision Plan

During the month of November, you will receive information on the Voluntary Vision Plan through the *Association of Catholic Teachers*. This is a voluntary plan available to Union members. If you decide to join, your vision benefits will go into effect on January 1, 2025.

REST IN PEACE



John Canney, Retired, Lansdale Catholic High School
Charles Fowler, Retired, Archbishop Ryan High School
Penny O'Neill, Retired, Holy Cross High School

If anyone would like to submit an ***In Memoriam*** article for any of the above teachers, you are most welcome to do so. You can submit your article to act@act1776.com

TEACHERS IN THE NEWS

Congratulations, Evan Ortiz!

Congratulations to **Evan Ortiz**, Theology Department Head at Conwell-Egan Catholic High School, on being the **first recipient** of the **BROTHER LAWRENCE J. HILFERTY, TOR FACULTY SERVICE AWARD**.

The **BROTHER LAWRENCE J. HILFERTY, TOR FACULTY SERVICE AWARD** is named after Brother Larry, who spent 33 years as a faculty member at Bishop Egan and Conwell-Egan High Schools.

The award will be given annually at the Royal Blue Gala to a faculty member of Conwell-Egan Catholic High School in recognition of his or her service and commitment to the CEC Community.

Congratulations, Evan!

Congratulations, John Dunlop!

Congratulations to **John Dunlop**, Business Department Head and Head Soccer Coach at Father Judge High School on his **300th career win** in his 22nd year of coaching soccer at Father Judge High School!



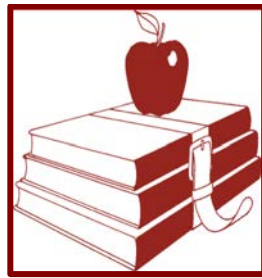
During his tenure at Father Judge, John has won three Catholic League titles, three District 12 championships, and has made the PCL finals nine times! Since Dunlop took over the Crusaders, they've become one of the best soccer programs in Southeastern Pennsylvania.

ACT School Visit Schedule 2024-2025 School Year

NAME OF SCHOOL	ACT VISITOR	DATE	DAY
Bonner-Prendergast	Irene	September 17	Tuesday
Archbishop Carroll	Irene	September 25	Wednesday
Conwell -Egan	Irene	October 2	Wednesday
Cardinal O'Hara	Irene	October 16	Wednesday
Pope John Paul II	Irene	October 22	Tuesday
Lansdale Catholic	Irene	October 23	Wednesday
Archbishop Wood	Irene	October 29	Tuesday
Bishop Shanahan	Irene	October 30	Wednesday
Roman Catholic	Irene	November 13	Wednesday
Archbishop Ryan	Irene	November 19	Tuesday
Father Judge	Irene	November 20	Wednesday
SS. John Neumann- Maria Goretti	Irene	December 4	Wednesday
West Catholic	Irene	December 11	Wednesday
Little Flower	Irene	December 17	Tuesday
St. Hubert	Irene	December 18	Wednesday

“EDUCATION is the most POWERFUL
 weapon which you can use
 to change the World.”
 -Nelson Mandela-

WELCOME BACK!



***WE WISH YOU A HAPPY,
HEALTHY, AND SAFE
SCHOOL YEAR.***