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LFT News Special Legislative Session Update



Largely due to an intransigent faction in the House of Representatives, the special legislative session closed without completely filling this year's budget hole and leaving lawmakers to contend with an \$800 million

shortfall in the coming year.

Between now and the end of the fiscal year on June 30, the governor will have to trim between \$30 million and \$50 million from a budget that has already been scrubbed about as much as possible.

Senate President John Alario (R-Westwego) laid blame for lawmakers' failure squarely on the House of Representatives. The lower chamber balked at revenue bills during the three week special session, and then sent a big pile of rewritten bills to the Senate for its concurrence with just minutes left to go. Clearly, lawmakers had no time to seriously review the items under discussion. Sen. Alario said as the session closed, "I want to apologize to you for what happened here tonight. That's not the way to conduct the people's business." Gov. Edwards summed up the session with, "We could have done better."

The regular legislative session opened on Monday, March 14 and will run until 6PM on June 6. New revenues will not be on the agenda; the state constitution bars considering taxes in regular sessions held in even-numbered years. However, there is a strong possibility that another special session will be convened before the fiscal year ends on June 30.

For teachers and school employees, some of the agenda will look depressingly familiar. Already a bill - HB 185 by Rep. Jay Morris (R-Monroe) - has been filed to revoke the right of public employees to pay their organization dues through payroll

deduction. The new chairperson of the House Education Committee, Rep. Nancy Landry, (R-Lafayette), is proposing HB 392, a bill that would make it easier to reduce teacher pay. Numerous instruments have been proposed to change state retirement systems; some of those would be harmful to future retirees.

Please log on the Louisiana Federation of Teachers website (www.la.aft.org) for more information regarding the legislative sessions.



JFT Member Spotlight

Jessie Isidore (Teacher)

I joined JFT in the spring of 2013 after becoming a teacher at Riverdale High and hearing the great work the union was working toward. At first, I was just a member who paid dues and read the newsletter and felt I was doing my part. You may call it being naïve, but as a new teacher my idealism of working to make students feel inspired about learning and their education blinded me to negative attitudes and actions pursued against good-hearted, hardworking educators. Often, I would ignore the harshness of the job feeling it will get better. Then, a fellow teacher asked, "Do you feel as if being a teacher has changed for the worst?" I didn't know how to respond. I was new to teaching, although I did feel as if things were strange and not right.

Time and time again I would hear from other teachers about unfairness. I soon started to feel the blunt force of unfairness and I, too, became fed up. I had to convince myself that I am doing my best and not to give up. I just felt my responsibility to my students was the greater of my causes. Convinced something should be done, I became a JFT Building Representative and a Teacher Leader. I have to say becoming more involved was the best decision I made as an educator. Becoming more involved gave me a sense of empowerment to fight for what was right- to fight for my coworkers that day in and day out were in the trenches doing great things. I began to give my fellow educators more voice- civilly solving issues regarding limited resources and sick leave. My responsibility as a Building Rep also led to great insight to the vast array of incongruent internal & external policies disproportionately affecting teachers. As a Teacher Leader, I began pursuing policy research that promotes positive teacher development and instructional performance in the classroom.

The decision to become more involved continues to give me more insight and energy to make administration/teacher relations a cooperative partnership rather than adversarial. So my big message is BECOME MORE INVOLVED! I hope this testimony encourages you all to do more than just pay dues and read newsletters, and if you are not a member I encourage you to join. Please, let this message spur you to connect better to your fellow educators and lead positive action for the profession of teaching overall.

Sincerely working in the trenches, Jessie A. Isidore, Jr.

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Traveling for Spring Break?

We can help you spend less!

Entertainment Discounts

JFT members can save on movie tickets, sporting events, theme park admissions and much more...including Disney!

Emergency Assistance Plus

Whether you are in another country, touring a national park or visiting a major city, AFT's Emergency Assistance Plus helps you access the medical advice, assistance and transport you may need when a medical emergency strikes while you are away from home:

- Medical Evacuation
- Travel Assistance
- Medical Assistance
- Assistance for Companions

Hotel Discounts

Wyndham Worldwide

Save up to 20 percent off the "best available rate" at more than 6,400 participating hotels in locations worldwide when you book online or call using the AFT discount code.

Car Rental

AFT members and their families save up to 25 percent with car rental discounts at Alamo, Enterprise, Avis, Hertz, Budget, Dollar, Thrifty and National.



From The Lawyer's Desk

By: Larry Samuel, JFT General Counsel

Social Media

Is it okay for a teacher to accept a student's "friend" request on your personal Facebook account? How about if a student wants to follow a teacher on Instagram? Is it permissible for educators to post pictures of students on social media accounts? Is there a problem if an educator publicly complains about a student on social media?

JPPSS recently issued a "legal update" which was distributed to school administrators, for the purpose of guiding staff in the use of social media. JPPSS has begun to discipline educators for certain social media activities. We felt that it was important for us to highlight some of the guidance that JPPSS suggests:

- Although you have a constitutional right to free speech, those rights are tempered by obligations that you accepted by working for JPPSS. JPPSS guidance states: "If your gut questions whether or not you should post something, then you shouldn't."
- You should never, ever post comments about a student in particular or students in general, that could in any way suggest their identities.
- Some parents have signed "RELEASE FORMS," agreeing for their child's picture to be used...but that only applies to the SCHOOL DISTRICT'S USE of the pictures, NOT to an individual educator's use of the pictures.
- JUST SAY NO" to student friend requests or a student's request to "follow."
- You should "UNFRIEND" or "BLOCK" students from your social media sites.

Here's our suggestion, but it's available only for JFT members: Contact the Union office for advice before you post something, or if you have a social media problem involving a student. You'll be glad you did.

Impermissible Corporal Punishment

There is a great deal of confusion in Jefferson Parish these days on the issue of physical contact with students. Unfortunately, this confusion even includes the question of whether educators may even "touch" students, however slight the physical contact might be. Here's what the law (Louisiana Revised Statute 17:223) states: Each parish and city school board shall have discretion in the use of corporal punishment. In those cases in which a parish or city school board decides to use corporal punishment, each parish or city school board shall adopt such rules and regulations as it deems necessary to implement and control any form of corporal punishment in the schools in its district.

Here's what JPSB Policy states:

Discipline Policy (JD): "The school board does not authorize the use of corporal punishment except as set forth in the policy JDA, Corporal Punishment. Teachers shall not physically engage in disciplining students unless it is for self-defense, the safety of the student or other students, or the prevention of gross property damage, in all such instances, the teacher is limited to the use of reasonable force commensurate with all the facts and circumstances."

Discipline Policy (JD) defines the term "self-defense" as "reasonable acts used by an individual to protect himself/herself or third person from the violence of another, when the individual reasonably believes that he/she or third person is in imminent danger of receiving great bodily harm and that the acts of self-defense are necessary to save himself/herself or a third person from the danger. A person who is the aggressor or who brings on the difficulty cannot claim the right of self-defense unless he/she withdraws from the conflict in good faith and in such a manner that his/her adversary knows or should know that he/she desires to withdraw and end the conflict."

Corporal Punishment Policy (JDA): "The Jefferson Parish

school Board shall prohibit the use of corporal punishment by all of its employees. Students shall not be paddled, spanked or otherwise physically disciplined for infractions of student conduct regulations...Nothing contained herein shall be interpreted as prohibiting an employee from using physical force, reasonable and appropriate under the circumstances, in defending himself or herself against a physical attack by a student, or from using physical force to restrain a student from attacking another student or employee, or to quell a disturbance, or to protect school property.

Our comment: Corporal punishment, such as paddling and spanking, is prohibited. Excessive physical force is also prohibited. The problem is that some students may falsely claim that your physical contact was excessive, no matter how minor it might have been. And the problem is that the Human Resources Department has greatly changed its procedures. Educators who even just slightly touch students (such as a light tap on the shoulder) are likely to find themselves at a disciplinary hearing even when the physical contact was minimum and there was no force at all.

A NOTE TO JFT MEMBERS ONLY: If you are informed that you are being accused of these offenses, or any other offenses, you should IMMEDIATELY contact JFT. This is for JFT members only.

Dental & Vision Insurance Update

Employees can register below to get access to: ID Cards, Eligibility, Benefits, Find a Network Provider, Claims, and the Guardian & Davis Vision App:

- www.guardiananytime.com (Group No: 00517225)
- www.davisvision.com

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Karen Riggleman (PSRP)

I became a member of JFT because I grew up in a union family and knew the importance of the union. My husband and father-in-law are active union members, and I saw the work that unions did to ensure better working conditions and fair treatment of employees. Our union also offers professional development for teachers and support staff. I work with JFT on various issues and I am currently the chairperson of PSRP committee for the Jefferson Federation of Teachers and a member of the PSRP committee for the Louisiana Federation of Teachers. I am a national trainer with the American Federation of teachers, presenting workshops to colleagues locally and nationally. I encourage you to become an active member of your union.

