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AFT New Jersey State Federation Convention Highlights Growth

State Federation Now Represents More than 28,000 Education Workers from pre-K Through Ph.D.

EDISON... In a challenging political climate fueled by a poor economy, workers are organizing new unions and AFT New Jersey State Federation is structuring to continue growing, according to president William Lipkin. The political science professor is presiding over the group's largest convention April 23-24 in Galloway, NJ, having established cooperating divisions in higher education and pre-kindergarten to 12. "We are proud to represent diverse groups of educators and welcome newly organized workers ranging from post doctoral associates and fellows at Rutgers to high school teachers at private Monsignor Donovan High School in Toms River," said Lipkin. "These are groups that decided to unionize to improve professional standards and conditions in their schools for everyone."

State assemblyman David Wolfe accepts a "Friend to Education" award on Saturday. An Ocean County College psychology professor elected to the legislature and appointed to the education committee in 1992, Wolfe is being recognized in part because he took the time to learn about issues effecting urban and rural school districts, far removed from the assemblyman's suburban base, according to AFT State Federation legislative director John Abeigon.

Wolfe reflects on his dual roles and said he recently had a former student who got to college through the now-threatened STARS program thank him for helping him "find his calling" which turned out to be continuing to The College of New Jersey then returning to teach English at the vocational high school he graduated from. "That was extremely gratifying to me as an educator," said Wolfe. "As a legislator I want to make sure that more students have those opportunities to improve their lives and give back to their communities."

The AFT State Federation has been advocating against education cuts in the current state budget and calling on legislators like Wolfe to work to fill the gaps. These statewide efforts are buoyed by the national AFT and executive vice president Lorretta Johnson is opening the convention Friday with a plug to encourage members to advocate for the federal Keep Our Educators Working Act (S. 3206). This act will provide \$23 billion nationally to help school districts and higher education avert layoffs in the same manner as the federal stimulus helped offset some of New Jersey's budget problems last year.

As the threats of layoffs due to budget cuts looms, political education efforts continue to advocate for much-needed resources to the education sector and to create a stable framework for designated funding. And new unions are forming as education workers seek to gain a professional voice within their institutions and to advocate for education.

AFT New Jersey State Federation consists of a higher education division including full-time and part-time faculty and staff at state ten state colleges and universities and six community colleges and a pre-kindergarten through 12 division representing teachers and support personnel in schools throughout the state.

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