

The President's

# Solidarity Report



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## **There are no weak unions, only weak people**

One of the most absurd reasons for not joining PCTA comes from people who say that our union is weak because we do not have the right to strike. Apparently, they feel that a strike is the sole measure of the union strength. This argument comes from people who are weak themselves and shy away from any activity that would put them in jeopardy. It comes from those who weaken the union by not joining and then shout with delight when the union comes up short in a grievance, negotiation or a court case. In moments like that, they can proudly justify their decision to not join and let others do all the work. There are no weak unions, only weak people.

Florida has the most draconian penalties, of all the states in country, for teachers who go on strike. Teachers that go on strike in Florida could face loss of contract status or be placed on special conditions for reemployment. At worst, they could be terminated and lose all of their retirement benefits. A union instigating such a strike is subject to decertification which would then nullify the contract that is in place since they would no longer be the sole bargaining agent. Still, there is nothing illegal about it. If teachers wanted to strike, they could, and if 100% of the teachers walked, they would have a heck of a shot at winning their demands. There are no weak unions, only weak people.

Before we get too excited about a strike ending in victory, let's get real. Only 54% of our teachers belong to PCTA. If every PCTA member walked out tomorrow, the District would still have over 3,000 teachers show up for work. Are we supposed to assume that the non-members, who have alluded joining us, would suddenly stand shoulder to shoulder with us and walk out? Even if I wanted to strike, it is hard enough just to get everyone to wear a red shirt or attend a School Board Meeting. I could never ask them to walk out on strike and risk their livelihoods and pensions. Sorry, I never claimed to be Jimmy Hoffa. PCTA is not a weak Union because we won't call for a strike. It would be irresponsible for us to put our members in harm's way unless we were certain that an overwhelming majority of educators would follow suit. That of course is simply too unrealistic an expectation. There are no weak unions, only weak people.

The kryptonite that weakens us is not that we care for our members' safety and well-being, it's the many critics and blowhards who scare timid bystanders from joining us. We have all heard them as they work to undermine and weaken us so that they can complain all the louder if we are unable to make change happen on their timetable. They are great at telling everyone what we should have done or what they would have done, but in reality they do nothing and contribute nothing but weak criticism. Those bystanders should know that they do not have to be meek and timid. They can choose to add their voices to PCTA and their voices would become roars. A Union's strength is in its numbers. There are no weak unions, only weak people.

So, let's define what we mean by "weak":

- ✓ Critics who point out where others fall short but they themselves remain safe doing nothing.
- ✓ Those that join alternative unions that promise legal services but have no interest in your contract because they were formed by organizations that plot to decertify unions and eradicate contracts altogether. (just how effective is an attorney in a right to work state if there is no contract in place?)
- ✓ Those who claim to be professionals but are too afraid to demand they be treated as professionals.

There is a cure for weak, and that cure is joining PCTA and having the strength of 4,000 members in Pinellas, 145,000 in Florida, and 5,000,000 in the country. Strong educators stand up for themselves and for those unable to. Strong educators fearlessly advocate for their students, their profession and for Public Education.

We may not choose to strike in Florida, but that does not make our Union weak. We have always been stronger than we think, and educators should know that this is the time to join and be strong. We have a short window of opportunity right now because even if we have not called for a strike, there is a "Silent Strike" going on right now in Florida. Every single day, teachers walk off the job and will never come back. They have reached that point where they must choose between their physical health and continuing to teach. They have reached the point where their mental health requires them to leave the profession. They have reached the point where the demands of

work are stealing from time spent with family, and so they walk. This “silent strike” is not going to last forever but it presents an opportunity for the strong educators to take back their profession.

There are no weak unions, only weak people. If everyone joined PCTA, there would be no weak people, only strong professional educators making up a strong Union.

## **Tentative Agreement Passes Ratification**

On Tuesday, February 5<sup>th</sup>, the bargaining unit voted to ratify the Tentative Agreement signed on January 19, 2019 between the Pinellas County School Board and the Pinellas Classroom Teachers Association. The employees voted overwhelmingly in support of the agreement. The tentative agreement passed with 95% of the votes cast in favor of ratification.

I would like to commend the bargaining team for a job well done. It is my hope that the new contract changes will alleviate some of the stress that educators have been subjected to. There is still, however, much more to be done if we are to take back our profession and bring the joy of teaching back to the classroom.

To accomplish what must be done here in Pinellas as well as at the state level, requires a concerted and unified effort. In short, solidarity can save public education. I have preached this same gospel for going on five years now and while we have filled the cup of solidarity to the half way mark, we still have a long way to go. Let’s take this ratification vote for example. The results of the ratification vote should send the District the message that educators approve of the changes we fought for, it will not pass their notice however, that half the bargaining unit did not bother to vote. What message does that send to the District who will be sitting across from us at the bargaining table once again six months from now?

## **Fund Our Future**

Dear Leaders and Staff:

The FEA Officers asked that I forward an important update on a school safety measure being discussed in Tallahassee.

A proposed bill to allow armed teachers in our public schools has been introduced in the Florida Senate during National School Counseling Week. The Florida Education Association (FEA) does

not support more firearms inside classrooms. Increasing counseling services, however, is at the top of our list for improving the safety of our students and schools.

To make our schools safer, we should:

- Prioritize preventative services, such as comprehensive mental health services
- Return guidance counselors to their proper roles as resources for students, rather than deploying them as test facilitators and administrators
- Increase the number of guidance counselors in our schools
- Ensure law enforcement personnel are properly trained and understand their duties
- Ensure that local agencies can communicate effectively
- Make buildings and campuses less open to threats, as through hardening schools

We will be advocating for the simple idea that teachers want to teach and we are asking legislators to focus on that goal. We need to *fund our future* — fund our neighborhood public schools, fund security for our schools and fund opportunity for all students.

You can read the full text of the bill here: [SB 7030 - relating to school safety and security](#)

The bill language:

- Deletes the prohibition against classroom teachers to serve as guardians under in Coach Aaron Feis Guardian Program.
- Requires county sheriffs to establish a Guardian program if their local school boards vote to implement one even if the sheriff did not want to participate.
- Requires Commissioner Corcoran and the State Board to monitor districts' compliance with required safety and security actions and identify noncompliance.
- Calls for a committee to review and prioritize school hardening and safety initiatives.
- Calls for the creations of a statewide behavior threat assessment instrument and database.

The Senate education committee is to discuss the new bill next Tuesday Feb. 12.

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# INCOME TAX INFO

If member was on payroll deduction for the entire calendar year 2018, they paid dues as follows:

## PCTA

11 Deductions @ \$32.90 (1/5/18 – 5/25/18)	=	361.90
9 Deductions @ \$33.90 (8/31/18 – 12/21/18)	=	305.10
Total Dues Paid, 20 Deductions total	=	\$667.00
Total dues paid for tax purposes:		\$667.00

## PESPA

20 Deductions @ \$16.46 (1/12/18 – 12/28/18)	=	\$329.20
Total Dues Paid, 20 Deductions total	=	\$329.20
Total dues paid for tax purposes:		\$329.20