

## Magnifying the clout of part-timers

### Bergen faculty vote for 10th adjunct union in New Jersey

ADJUNCT FACULTY at Bergen Community College in New Jersey have voted to join the AFT. Their new local chapter is the 10th adjunct union in the state, sending a clear message that all faculty, including those who work part time, deserve collective bargaining rights and a fair say in determining pay rates, benefits and working conditions.

Significantly, Bergen is the largest community college in the state, with some 31,000 students, so the impact of organizing its adjuncts is magnified.

“Bergen Community College adjuncts have now joined with the many other New Jersey colleges that have had unions for years,” says Sandy Shevack, an adjunct sociology professor who was active in organizing the local. “I’m looking forward to being part of an effort that improves the quality of education and the quality of professionalism at Bergen Community College. ... Together we can promote and protect our professional contributions to education.”

The Bergen Community College Adjuncts, part of United Adjunct Faculty of New Jersey/AFT, was certified in March and will represent 678 adjunct instructors at Bergen. The school, which has campuses in Paramus, Hackensack and Lyndhurst, already has a full-time faculty union with about 300 members affiliated with the New Jersey Education Association.

Organizing efforts were challenging, given the fact that adjuncts typically have no offices on campus and are available only briefly after their classes. Scrambling to catch them in the few minutes they have after teaching, organizers quickly explained that Bergen would be following in the footsteps of sister colleges. Most signed cards immediately, says Shevack.

“The union will give adjuncts at Bergen a much-needed voice on compensation and working conditions, which will allow us to better serve the students of Bergen Community College,” says Ted Arin, a chemistry adjunct in the physical sciences department. The precedent is strong: Other adjunct unions in the state have negotiated progressively better pay tied to experience, sick days, funding for professional development, and timely notification when classes are canceled due to low enrollment.

“Adjuncts need a voice,” says Sharon Nachimson, who teaches in the American Language Program. “A union will help create a more stable, productive workforce where we can have a say in improving our jobs and our salaries. It’s a way to ensure that we are treated with dignity and respect.”

It’s about more than wages, agrees Shevack. “There is a matter of personal dignity, knowing that we’re worthy enough to have representation. It’s not just about pay.”

## Protect our kids

### Screening of ‘Bully’ documentary focuses on practical solutions

THE AFT AND THE NEA held a Washington, D.C., prescreening of the film “Bully,” which opened in theaters nationwide April 13. Following the showing, AFT president Randi Weingarten and NEA president Dennis Van Roekel led a panel discussion about solutions to student bullying. The documentary, which *Time* magazine calls “as vivid as any horror film,” follows five young victims of abuse by other students, including two suicides.



“This movie is devastating and compelling,” Weingarten said, “and it needs to be seen.” AFT local affiliates, including the Chicago Teachers Union, the United Federation of Teachers in New York City and United Teachers of Dade in Florida, are holding screenings of “Bully.” Other AFT locals, including the Houston Federation of Teachers, Houston Educational Support Personnel, United Educators of San Francisco and United Teachers Los Angeles, are publicizing the film, encouraging members to see it and share it.

Bullying and other acts of intimidation happen everywhere—in schools, on college campuses and in the workplace. AFT activists are advocating for passage of the Safe Schools Improvement Act, S. 506 and H.R. 1648, which would require school codes of conduct that prohibit bullying and harassment as well as provide training for school employees.

“We have children who are dealing with tremendous pressures every day,” says George Williams, president of the AFT-affiliated Madison County (Fla.) Education Association. “But with education about bullying, we can make a difference. We have to make a difference.”

## Montana State University graduate employees join MEA-MFT

### They know the difference between ‘work’ and ‘study’

NEARLY 600 GRADUATE employees at Montana State University-Bozeman have voted to be represented by the Graduate Employees Organization as their collective bargaining agent. GEO is affiliated with the MEA-MFT.

The vote was 195 to 67 for a unit that includes graduate teaching and research assistants. The graduate employees have been working to get a voice at the university for two years.

The battle was a tough one because the university maintained that the assistants are students, not employees. GEO filed a unit recognition petition with the Montana Board of Personnel Appeals in December 2010. In January 2011, the university filed a counterpetition,

claiming the assistants were not employees and their stipends were not wages. In July, the board ruled the assistants were indeed employees. The university appealed again. Finally, the board allowed the election to go forward in April 2012, and the graduate employees voted to form a union.

For the grad employees, the issues were both bread-and-butter and qualitative. They need health insurance, working conditions that are predictable and consistent across departments, and, especially for those with families, to earn a living wage.

It is not yet clear if the university will again appeal the vote. If it does, however, “we will prevail,” says Eric Feaver, MEA-MFT president.

See the AFT’s video about the AFT-NEA “Bully” event at <http://bit.ly/HGu7Xz>.