



DIVERSITY
EQUITY
INCLUSION &
RACIAL JUSTICE

2021

ILLINOIS FEDERATION OF TEACHERS ANTIRACISM ORGANIZING GUIDE

Advancing Antiracism Work in Your Union

The Antiracism Organizing Guide is designed to help members understand why the Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFT) is engaging in and prioritizing antiracist work. It serves as both a compass, guiding our actions and decision-making, as well as a mirror, helping us to reflect and self-correct when necessary.

This guide is meant to assist members who want to advance antiracism work in their union, spark conversations, and center racial justice in their organizing and collective bargaining work.

Why is the Illinois Federation of Teachers engaging in antiracist work?

THE SHORT ANSWER: WE MUST.

IT IS OUR DUTY AS A UNION. We cannot fight economic injustice without fighting racial injustice. It is a part of who we are as an organization. In Article II of our Constitution, one of our listed objectives is, “to expose and fight all forms of racism, discrimination, and promote policies, programs and trainings that enhance participation in the union by underrepresented minorities.” In 2019, we passed a resolution to encourage our members to participate in learning opportunities on implicit bias, restorative justice, and equity, and to commit our organization to fighting for the measures that would mitigate the impacts of trauma on our students and communities. We passed a resolution committing our union to participate in the Black Lives Matter at School movement as well.

IT IS IMPERATIVE TO US WINNING. Race baiting has always been used as a strategy to divide workers and push anti-labor, corporate interests. Racial solidarity is our strategy to build power and dismantle oppressive systems that exploit working people.

IT IS THE MORAL THING TO DO. If we tolerate injustice anywhere, it undermines our credibility. When we commit to being antiracist, we are helping to create a world where we can all live fully in our humanity.

We live in a nation that was built on land and wage theft, broken treaties, slavery and Jim Crow, xenophobia, and the exploitation of the most marginalized. Inequity has been woven into the fabric of our institutions and systems. Whether you live on the South Side of Chicago or in Southern Illinois, these racist structures are present every day. We must come to terms with our history so that we understand how it is reinforced in the present, impacting our work, our communities, our students, and ourselves. We must reflect, learn, and then act so that we can build a better future.

IFT staff, board members, and locals across the state have already begun taking on this work. We hope this guide helps even more commit to antiracism as a part of our personal and work lives. We must do this together to achieve the future we all deserve.

We must do this together to achieve the future we *all* deserve.



For more diversity, equity, inclusion, and racial justice resources, visit ift-aft.org/oei.

WHO NEEDS TO DO ANTIRACIST WORK?

- IFT Executive Board and officers
 - Local and Council Presidents and their officers
 - IFT staff in all departments: administrators, professional and support staff
 - IFT rank and file members
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WHAT IS ANTIRACIST WORK?

The definition of “antiracist” as defined by Dr. Ibram Kendi involves 4 components:

- 1 Systemic:** The racial disparities we see in every institution--healthcare, housing, education, criminal justice--are not the results of “bad” individuals or “deficient” cultures. They are the results of systems designed to advantage those perceived as White and disadvantage those who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Antiracist work seeks to identify and dismantle these racist systems.
 - 2 Focused on outcomes:** Doing antiracist work requires looking at the outcomes of a system, policy, practice, or procedure (written or unwritten). The policy or practice either produces racial inequities (and is racist) or doesn’t (and is antiracist). There is no in between, and intended results do not supersede actual outcomes.
 - 3 Action-based:** Once a system, policy, or practice is identified as racist, we must work to dismantle it. If we do not, we are complicit in perpetuating racism. Antiracist work disrupts racist policies and processes and instead promotes and advocates for policies that will eliminate racial inequities.
 - 4 Intersectional:** We have multiple social identities (e.g. gender, class, age, disability, immigration status). Race intersects with all these identities, resulting in different experiences of oppression and privilege. For example, Black and white women both experience sexism. But Black women also experience racism--and anti-Black racism--and therefore have a different experience than white women because of intersecting layers of oppression. Being queer, undocumented, and/or having a disability “intersect” and add to those layers.
Antiracist work is anti-oppression work. It not only seeks to eradicate racism, *but all the “isms” that intersect with race to oppress, dehumanize, and marginalize groups of people.*
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WHAT DOES ANTIRACIST WORK MEAN FOR THE ILLINOIS FEDERATION OF TEACHERS?

The antiracist framework outlined above guides our internal and external decisions, practices, and processes; it impacts our political and legislative decision-making (i.e. political candidates we support, bills we support or oppose, policies we advocate for), our organizing and collective bargaining processes (from the language used to the seats occupied at the table), and the professional development and learning opportunities we offer to our members.

Doing antiracist work means we:

- Unapologetically center the most excluded, exploited, and marginalized when making internal and external decisions. For example, when making a decision, we are intentional in asking questions such as, “How will this impact Black and Brown folks? Those with disabilities? The undocumented? Paraprofessionals? Adjunct professors?” **When we do what is just and beneficial for our most marginalized, we ALL benefit.**
- Promote and advocate for policies that eliminate racial inequities, and dismantle policies that produce negative outcomes for the most marginalized.
- Provide space and education for members and staff to learn about racist policies, institutions, and the need to dismantle them.

HOW DO WE INCORPORATE ANTIRACIST WORK INTO OUR LOCAL UNION PROCESSES AND PRACTICES?

Antiracist work starts with examining the many systems, policies, and practices of a workplace and union. Are they producing racist outcomes? Do they center the needs of the most marginalized, excluded, and exploited?

Here are some entry points to begin doing antiracist work:

- Incorporate a commitment to social, economic, and racial justice into your union constitution and by-laws (see the IFT Constitution's Objectives as an example).
- Assess processes in your union and your workplace, such as:
 - **Recruitment, hiring, retention, and promotion**
What processes are used to recruit and hire candidates? Is the candidate pool diverse? Are there internal systems to ensure that there is intentional outreach to historically marginalized groups? Are there support systems in place for diverse candidates to succeed and thrive in your workplace? Are BIPOC members disproportionately assigned to less desirable work that is compensated at a lower rate?
 - **Evaluation procedures**
What is the tool being used? Is the tool culturally responsive or based on white norms of behavior? Do Black and Brown folks consistently score lower than their white peers?
 - **Induction and mentoring programs**
Are the needs of Black and Brown folks being met? LGBTQIA+ folks? Is it more important to have a mentor in the same grade/content or a mentor who has faced similar experiences?
 - **Union leadership**
Does the leadership of your local/council/chapter reflect the diversity of your membership? The community you serve? Are there opportunities for engagement and participation for all members? Are the contributions and participation of all members welcomed and valued? How does the local/council/chapter encourage or discourage the engagement and participation of underrepresented groups?
 - **Curricula**
Do students see themselves in positive and affirming ways within the curricula? Do they have an opportunity to “see” and learn about other cultures and their contributions to society? Do the curricula encourage students to critique and challenge systems? Does it encourage students to ask questions or just answer questions?
 - **Discipline policies and procedures**
 - **Students:** Are Black students, students with disabilities, or queer students disciplined more frequently or more harshly than their peers? Do students have more access to police than to social workers, counselors, or psychologists? What about dress codes: Does the district discourage certain hairstyles and styles of dress that are commonly associated with non-white cultures?
 - **Members:** Are folks of color or LGBTQIA+ folks disciplined more frequently/harshly? Does the code of “professional dress” adhere to white standards? Do certain rules impact marginalized staff more than others? Are rules fairly applied?
 - **Tenure processes (Higher Education)**
What is considered “scholarship?” Is the tenure panel racially and culturally diverse? Are processes vague and subject to implicit bias? Does participation and leadership on diversity, equity, or similar social justice committees count towards the requirements for tenure/promotion?
 - **Class/student assignments**
Are Black and Brown teachers more often assigned “those kids?” Do Black and Brown teachers have less access to teaching higher level courses (i.e. Advanced Placement and Honors)? Are Black and Brown students underrepresented in Advanced Placement and Honors courses and overrepresented in remedial courses? How is student placement in these courses determined?

WHAT IS NEEDED TO ENGAGE IN ANTIRACISM WORK? IFT CAN HELP YOU WITH:

- › Lesson plans with tools to incorporate racial justice
- › Conversation starters to engage in racial justice topics during meetings
- › Reading suggestions with book club study guides
- › Book list for children and classrooms
- › Webinars and discussions
- › Starting a committee dedicated to racial justice within your local or council
- › Providing a dedicated webpage with links to guides and resources
- › Conducting a survey to get your members' thoughts on issues
- › Providing learning opportunities around racial justice, including guidance on how to lead racial justice conversations and move those conversations into action
- › Engaging school boards and politicians to ensure that they develop, support, and sponsor antiracist policies

WHEN SHOULD WE DO ANTIRACIST WORK?

It starts now and is continuous. The long term vision for being an antiracist union is that we will live and model our values every day, with antiracism woven into the fabric of what it means to be an IFT member.

Until we get there, here are some thoughts on good times for engaging people in this work:

- › Inviting members to have a union presence at local community effort focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion
- › Regular conversations with members of color and underrepresented groups to understand their challenges and identify ways their union can help them address and overcome those challenges
- › During contract time, review contracts, policies, and procedures to identify practices that are producing racist outcomes
- › Embrace moments to show commitment and unity

WHERE IS ANTIRACIST WORK HAPPENING?

A few examples of our locals engaging in antiracist work are on the following pages.

CHICAGO TEACHERS UNION, LOCAL 1

President: Jesse Sharkey

WHAT IS THE MAKEUP OF YOUR DISTRICT AND WHAT WORK ARE YOU DOING?

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) predominantly serves Black and Brown students: almost half of our student population, 47%, is Latinx. 35% are Black, 4% are Asian and approximately 11% are white.

Our members have sought to make antiracist work a priority in our union since 2010 and in 2018, voted to institutionalize our commitment to social justice work by adding language to our constitution, which now explicitly states that one purpose of our union is to “to promote racial, economic and social justice in order to achieve educational justice and build community and labor coalitions to achieve that objective.”

We have also used our power at the bargaining table to advocate for our most marginalized students and communities, including working with our community partners to secure \$10 million annually to transform 20 neighborhood schools into Sustainable Community Schools grounded in the principles of racial justice and community self-determination. These neighborhood schools anchor Black and Brown communities that suffer from disinvestment. It is our goal to transform CPS into a Sustainable Community School district where students, families, and educators receive the services they need.

Our collective bargaining power has also been instrumental during the pandemic. We advocated for safety measures to protect all our members, particularly for Black and Brown communities hardest hit by COVID. We fought for vaccine prioritization for the educators (teachers and PSRPs), students, and families in those communities.

CHALLENGES:

We have learned to be unapologetic about framing our union work as racial justice work, but there are internal and external challenges. We represent 25,000 members, and while election results for the changes in our constitution and for a leadership that centers racial justice indicate broad support, we can't expect everyone to be on the same page. Even members who are committed to ending systemic racism can disagree about strategies and tactics. In addition, CPS is a large, bureaucratic structure that is resistant to change and shared leadership. Structural inequities are woven into every process and procedure. So it is, at times, overwhelming and exhausting to have to vigorously struggle for the most basic resources and supports for our students. We continue to recommit and reaffirm that our union is strong only if we are willing to challenge ourselves to be explicit about how white supremacy shapes the lives of our students, families, and communities.

HOW DO YOU BUILD SUPPORT?

We recognize that every issue is a racial justice issue. We see inequities in our schools and classrooms, and they impact our ability to do our jobs well. When students are hungry, homeless, or traumatized, they bring all of it to school. We try to help our members see that these things are union issues because they impact the work we do. As educators, it is our responsibility to lift up the root causes of inequity and to challenge power structures to take them on. We are committed to lifting up and growing the leadership of rank and file members to lead antiracist work and to make more space to do so in our union.

HARLEM FEDERATION OF TEACHERS, LOCAL 540

President: Brad Sweet

WHAT IS THE MAKEUP OF YOUR DISTRICT AND WHAT WORK ARE YOU DOING?

Harlem is a predominantly white school district (80%). We currently have three teachers of color. Two prior principals have been people of color.

Local 540 has been doing equity work for over a decade. The district was sued 10 years ago because of racist speech targeting a student. The local got involved to start making positive changes in our school community, and the district has since added an African American history class (currently taught by white teachers).

Today, we've seen our school community respond to several calls to action:

- ▶ Activism following the murder of George Floyd.
- ▶ Our local took action when the current African American principal was not interviewed for the open Superintendent position in the district. The district hired a current board member who subsequently quit. Our local executive board is determined to have input going forward so this does not happen again.
- ▶ The local hung a banner up in our office that states Black Lives Matter, no human is illegal, and love is love. The sign was designed by a 16-year-old student.

WHERE HAVE YOU SEEN CHALLENGES AND HOW DO YOU BUILD SUPPORT?

Support has been organic within the local after the last year. Members are looking for action on these issues.

The most recent issue was the district denied teachers the right to wear Black Lives Matter shirts designed by our multicultural student union. Students attended the board meeting to explain the positive impact of white teachers wearing the shirts. It was powerful. After the meeting, the Board relented.

Additionally, two members are interviewing past BIPOC student graduates about their experiences in Harlem and the impact of not seeing teachers of color or female teachers. The student perspective has been the most impactful to our membership.

Finally, our district created a Social Justice and Equity Committee but canceled all the meetings after the first. The local is working to resurrect the committee under local control.

WEST SUBURBAN TEACHERS UNION, LOCAL 571

CICERO COUNCIL

President: Rachel Esposito

WHAT IS THE MAKEUP OF YOUR DISTRICT AND WHAT WORK ARE YOU DOING?

We have about 10,000 students, and 90% are Latinx. We have 815 teachers who are predominately white. The district has tried to do equity work but it has not been sustainable. The local organized around this work.

Due to the events of the last year, our members began to move on this issue. We started with book clubs, reading “White Fragility” and other books. We met multiple times over the summer to discuss how race affected our work.

When we approached the district to form an agreement to provide professional development on equity and establish a joint committee, the district would not agree. They stated Black Lives Matter is a political movement and should not be discussed in school. We convinced them to start an equity committee that includes some of our members. Members meet before the meeting to discuss agenda topics the union wants to bring up.

HOW DO YOU BUILD SUPPORT?

We do coffee, cocktails, and conversation meetings with members every two to three weeks. We provide topics for each meeting, but meetings are not limited to those topics.

We have surveyed our membership to determine what things they would like to see changed. We have tried to open lines of communication for members. And though we have had some pushback, we have taken time to have one-on-one conversations to explain the union’s position. We need a train-the-trainer model to move this work forward to empower more members to work on these issues.

GRANITE CITY FEDERATION OF TEACHERS, LOCAL 743

President: Chuck Noud

WHAT IS THE MAKEUP OF YOUR DISTRICT AND WHAT WORK ARE YOU DOING?

The student population is 25% BIPOC. Two out of 372 teachers are African American.

WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES?

This issue is a sensitive topic. Great care must be taken to approach it in a way that will create buy-in and ownership in order for real change to take place. In our community, like many in Southern Illinois, the perception that there is a problem is not always widely recognized or accepted. The histories of many communities in this part of the state have a racial legacy of segregation and being a sundown town which has contributed to the racial instability, preconceived notions about race and closed-minded thinking. These are some barriers that must be navigated without a full-on attack, but rather starting with a subtle approach and building from there.

HOW DO YOU BUILD SUPPORT?

We are starting with one-on-one conversations, finding allies, and growing from there. We are starting with teachers who work on extracurricular activities who may know students better.

NORTH SUBURBAN TEACHERS UNION, LOCAL 1274

President: Pankaj Sharma

WHAT IS THE MAKEUP OF YOUR DISTRICT AND WHAT WORK ARE YOU DOING?

We have a very diverse student population, including many immigrant families, but our teaching staff does not reflect the student population. Students, parents, and staff are concerned that the teaching staff is not as diverse as it should be. Equity initiatives have been driven by local members. The district has been supportive at times, but action has mainly been driven by local members.

The local created an Equity Chair. The chair opened the committee to all council members in the local. We have also created affinity spaces within the local to allow members from smaller councils to engage with members from other councils within the local. Our largest council created Equity Chairs on that level as well.

HOW DO YOU BUILD SUPPORT?

We have support, but students, teachers, and the community have concerns and criticism that a lot of the diversity initiatives are superficial, and that people do not want to get to the root of anti-Blackness, racial equity, and injustice.

We are ok having an International Day assembly but not talking about systemic racism. A lot of members think they are colorblind or race neutral, but we also have many members who find value in the union pushing for equity issues.

Last year, we created an equity chair for the local executive board. The chairperson has held monthly equity meetings with different members from our councils. These meetings have helped identify and empower many younger members of color who may not have participated in local events in the past. These members have been excited to share their experiences about making our schools and councils more equitable and welcoming for all.

We have had thorough discussions on the school resource officers (SROs). Our local's largest council helped facilitate a task force with students, parents, teachers, and community members not only about the role of SROs, but also the larger question about how discipline is handled in our schools and why it disproportionately impacts Black and Brown students.

Among other conclusions, this task force recommended reimagining security in our schools and hiring our outsourced security personnel as district staff.

CHAMPAIGN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS, LOCAL 1925

President: Mike Sitch

WHAT IS THE MAKEUP OF YOUR DISTRICT AND WHAT WORK ARE YOU DOING?

The student population is about 10,000, with 33% African American, 33% white, 15% Latinx, and 10% Asian. We have 900 teachers, of which 78 are African American. In the 1980s, the local had more teachers of color than today.

WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES?

We were under a consent decree 20 years ago to improve outcomes for African American students. At the time, teachers had a lot of rationalization and projection onto others on why the disparity existed. Since, we've seen a lot of growth within the district by both administration and our membership. We're proud to say that members have driven the change. The board and administration is interested in doing the work, but we believe our ideas are better.

HOW DO YOU BUILD SUPPORT?

The local supported the district in passing a resolution stating that racism is a public health crisis. We also sought out Black Lives Matter signs from local businesses, and members displayed the signs in their classrooms and workspaces. We did have some backlash claiming this was a political statement, comparing the sign to a Trump sign. The district agreed to a sign for the classroom: Black Lives Matter in Champaign Schools.

We also changed our local constitution to create a Black Caucus Chair, which is a leadership position within the local. The chair is reaching out to BIPOC members to discuss how the union can serve them and continue in the work. A Black Lives Matter group has also been created in the local. Union leadership is supportive of the group, but there has been some member resistance.



For more diversity, equity, inclusion, and racial justice resources, visit ift-aft.org/oei.