

## Retiree election, Florida's FCAT

By Marybeth Foley

The election of Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) retiree delegates and the escape of retirees from the winter cold all took priority during February.

The election of retiree delegates had a few glitches. Retirees received their ballots, instructions, and a smaller envelope marked "Sample" in which to place the voted ballot. The envelope marked "Sample" was then to be placed inside a larger envelope which was to be mailed back. Puzzled retirees had apparently called the CTU about mailing their ballots back in an envelope labeled "Sample". The next day, retirees received a new smaller envelope marked "Secret" and were given instructions to use either envelope. Using the envelope marked "Sample" would not adversely affect their vote.

The ballots had all the retiree nominees listed in random order (not alphabetically). Each ballot apparently began with a different name - the next name on the random list. Finding the names of the retirees one wished to select was time-consuming because of this.

Sixteen out of twenty-three Progressive Action Chicago Teacher (PACT) nominees won and nineteen apparent United Progressive (UPC) candidates won. Additionally one person who ran as an independent also won. New delegates were sworn in at the February House of Delegates meeting.

Meanwhile, in Florida during February, educational issues dominated the news articles. The concerns in Florida were new schools to relieve overcrowding, the administration of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), Florida's equivalent of the Illinois Student Assessment Test (ISAT), vouchers, and teacher bonuses.

In certain areas of Florida, south Brevard County and north Indian River County just south of Brevard County, the student population is increasing greatly. Seven new schools are being built to accommodate the present student population. New housing along the Space Coast is causing the need for new schools. At present, placing mobile classrooms upon soccer fields which can no longer be used for soccer is one solution.

During February, Florida students take the FCAT, their equivalent of the ISAT. As in Illinois, the test always causes tension for both students and teachers. The subjects tested are reading, writing, math and science. Special tests are given for non-FCAT covered grades and classes.

Florida Governor Jeb Bush had advocated vouchers, called "opportunity scholarships" by conservatives, originally planned for "under-performing" schools back in 1999. The Florida State Supreme Court had recently declared the vouchers unconstitutional. Students who had been using the vouchers to attend other schools would now have to return to their home public schools. Governor Jeb Bush was not giving up the fight. Reworking the wording of the voucher law as well as finding a way to get around the ruling were being considered.

Teacher bonuses were another heated topic in Florida. Bonuses would basically be based on how a teacher's class performed on standardized achievement tests. The top ten percent of teachers would receive a \$2000 bonus for teachers making \$40,000 annually. The bonus would not take into consideration teachers teaching non-FCAT tested subjects (music, art, gym and library, for example). Adjustments would have to be made for teachers of learning disabled

students or students who had a problem with taking tests in English. Teachers who had been disciplined would not be eligible for a bonus.

Writing in the letters to the editor section of the February 22, 2006 Florida Today newspaper, John Russo, Vice President of the Brevard (County) Federal of Teachers asked these questions about the bonuses, "the so-called 'effectiveness compensation' ": "Who will want to teach struggling students or work in low-performing schools? Which teacher is accountable for students who transfer? How will Pre-K and exceptional education teachers fare? How will teachers in support roles be included?"

Meanwhile, back in Chicago, overcrowding, standardized achievement tests, vouchers and bonuses were also concerns, along with charter and contract schools being implemented to fulfill the Renaissance 2010

"Ren-Ten" plans.

Some of the information in my article was obtained by reading Florida Today newspapers dated February 20 and 22, 2006.