

CHICAGO TEAMSTERS JOINT COUNCIL 25



NEWS >>

TAFT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS GET LESSON IN LABOR

Local 727 Business Agents Use Hands-on Approach to Teach Kids About Teamsters

Armed with construction paper, plastic deputy badges and bags of candy, Teamsters Local 727 Business Agents Michelle Williams and Cristian Leiva spent a day teaching high school students about the Teamsters.

For the third straight year, Local 727 business agents took part in the series of career day presentations at Taft High School. They spoke to three classes – one all sophomores, one juniors and one seniors – with about 25 students each on Monday, April 27.

After sharing a handout with a brief rundown of Teamster history, Williams and Leiva divided the students into groups to begin an exercise in how and why labor unions like the Teamsters are essential in the working world.

Williams said she wanted to come up with a way to engage the students and get them involved.

“I like making things hands-on. It’s the best way to really get any educational or professional development,” said Williams, who joined Local 727 in October 2009 but has worked with unions for the past nine years.

One group of students was the “managers,” and the other, larger group was the “workers.” Williams and Leiva used these groups to illustrate different points. For example, all of the managers were male and were given plastic deputy badges; meanwhile, all of the female workers were given less money than the male workers. Leiva said the students started to point out the disparities – and that’s when the business agents explained the workers could come together as a union to fight for equal rights.

“In the beginning, the kids were kind of standoffish – you know, kids being kids. But once we started the exercise, they started participating more and getting involved in the discussions,” said Leiva, a graduate of Northern Illinois University College of Law who joined Local 727 in October 2009. “I was pleased we were able to get our points across. Kids have such a short attention span, but we were able to engage them so they learned something new. They have a different understanding of what it means to be an employee and were able to see the ‘power in numbers’ concept.”

Williams and Leiva said their experience was so positive that they would like to try to do similar presentations at other high schools.

“It was very fulfilling to me. I would love to do it again,” Williams said. “Students need a way to see what’s possible for them in the world. A lot of times, they see certain jobs or opportunities as impossible, and we need to let them know that things can and are changing. If they don’t get that exposure in their lives, we need to bring the exposure to them.”