

TOTEM NEWSLETTER

May 2025

2025 PSRP CONFERENCE REFLECTIONS

TOTEM Association



PRSP PROUD

A Message from your President, Sandy Thompson Wallace

As President of TOTEM Association, I also serve on the national AFT (American Federation of Teachers) Program and Policy Council. We are the voice for our states, bringing concerns and issues forward to our national Union.

Part of our responsibility is also helping to facilitate our PSRP (Paraprofessional and School Related Personnel) Divisional Conferences. On April 4-6, the PSRP Division held it's 46th Professional Issues Conference "Framing our Future, Solutions for a Brighter Tomorrow" in Portland, OR.

This conference was well attended by 400 PSRP division staff from across the country. Our division has approximately 370,000 clerical, paraprofessional educators, tutors, bus drivers, custodians, food service workers and many other valuable and important jobs within a school district represented, so there are many unique and different perspectives that come to the table at a conference like this.

All three (3) of our national AFT Executive Officers spoke during this conference, including our PSRP Division co-chairs. There was a job classification breakout so that those who work in similar roles could come together and share concerns and issues together. These will all be compiled and shared with AFT and our division for possible resolutions or actions to be taken to support our members. I was a co-facilitator for the "Paraprofessionals in the Secondary Setting" breakout.

Like our TOTEM Spring Conference, there were 30+ workshops offered over the day and a half. Everything from AFT member benefits to opioid education, to labor history, organizing, problem solving to working with medically fragile students and the essentials of special education. There were topics of a wide variety of interests and job roles. There were great takeaways and networking happening.

Included are reflections from TOTEM Board members who also attended the two-day conference in this newsletter. I hope you will take time to read through them.



Reflections by Alicia Woods

TOTEM Secretary

Sessions Attended:

- Avert, Active Violence Emergency Response Training with Bleeding Control
- IDEA and the Role of the Paraprofessional/Paraeducator
- Work Shouldn't Hurt
- Building Representatives Problem-Solving Clinic
- Understanding Trauma

I have always enjoyed attending this conference because of the networking and the information I learn from other unions from other states. I chose the workshops that would allow me to bring back information that would benefit TOTEM and my school. There were several good workshops, but a few were excellent.

The Active Violence Emergency Response Training, or Avert, class is similar to the Alice training, but it takes it further by teaching you how to disarm an intruder. The class started with bleeding control, practicing using a tourniquet, and hands-on bleeding control. The instructors demonstrated where and how to grab a rifle or a handgun if an intruder entered the room that you were in. Then, to instill what was taught, the instructors created a scenario of an active intruder for us to role-play.

The other workshop was on IDEA and the role of the Paraprofessional/Paraeducator. Although I do not work as a paraprofessional, I would like to advocate for my paraprofessionals in my building and district. During this workshop, I learned the history of Special Education and how it became a Federal Law. Then, the presenters broke down

each acronym and the different IDEA Disability Categories. They also shared the Paraprofessional's role in implementing the IEP and/or the 504. They also went over FBA and a Behavior Plan.

Reflections by Amanda Marley

TOTEM Member at Large - Instructional

Sessions Attended:

- AVERT, Active Violence Emergency Response Training with Bleeding Control
- Wellness of Being

The PSRP conference was held in Portland, OR this year. Not as far to go, not as overwhelming, but how this city has changed! It has been twenty years or so since I last visited this peaceful and quirky city. Oh, how it has grown, the trees, the buildings, the neighborhoods, yet the volume of people is still as friendly and sincere as ever.

From arrival to departure the message of Portland and the PSRSP was strong. The message was about PEOPLE. From the connections we make, the similarities we have, and experiences we are all encountering to the coming together to solve, learn and share. Classes varied from aspects of AFT benefits, law and safety and all the way to wellbeing of oneself.

I started my weekend strong with a class called AVERT. Active Violence Emergency Response Training. No-one wants to see active violence in our schools, but we do want to be prepared. The training started off with basic first aid on controlled bleeding and then moved on to the action part of learning to disarm an active shooter and ending with a scenario. Every person in the room had a role to play-shooters, victims, emergency responders and they played it well. The chaos of that experience was true to the chaos of a real situation. The most valuable part of this training is knowing what you are comfortable doing and doing it WELL. My last class was on Wellness of being. "Chuck" Wilson- a gentleman with a sparkle in his eye, kind words of sincerity pour from his heart, with a warm thump of responsibility on you. He taught not only through his words, but with interactive games and conversations. He started by explaining about the two faces (sometimes more) we have as we navigate many different types of situations. Using his principles of WEG- Warm, Encouraging, and Genuine, you make yourself more comfortable in the situation and therefore the situation is easier to manage. Chuck's message was humble, kind, sincere, with a sprinkling of responsibility.

I thought of a few more WEG's. Willing, Elevating, Entertaining, Engaging, Exhilarating, Generous, Great, Good hearted, Gracious, Gregarious. Do you have any of your own WEG's?

2024-2025 TOTEM BOARD MEMBERS

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Sarah Widdison

Reflections by Leah Parks

TOTEM Treasurer

Sessions Attended:

- Opening General Session: Inspirational as Fed Ingram shared a message of "Make your Monday better than your Sunday." I have used that the past two Mondays and it seems to help set my week off to a positive mindset.
- AVERT Training: Fast paced without being overwhelming, while covering all things needed to know if involved in a high-risk situation with an individual using a weapon. I love how it was not intense but informative. We were able to practice skills that would be utilized in a real case scenario and it never felt invasive or traumatizing.
- Orientation for First-Time Attendees: I was distracted by all the Anti-Trump talk and outfits people were wearing.

- Exhibits (tons of information and talked with several people in different areas of PSRP that gave great information on a variety of subjects working in Unions).

My FAVORITE part of the weekend was participating in Solidarity Night Rehearsal. When the summary in our booklet read, "Come join us and practice for the solidarity chorus and skits for Solidarity Night," I knew I was heading into a day of fun. They took familiar Motown songs and swapped out wording to reflect on our Unions. Conveying messages of hope, commonality, a fight for equality, and solidarity as we stand strong with one another. I had an opportunity to meet and talk with AFT members from Oregon, New York (Brooklyn), Tennessee, Texas, Illinois and Michigan. Through each session our group grew in numbers and diversity. All voices were welcomed, and experience and talent did not matter. The blend of choral unity at times brought my heart full of joy and may have made my eyes a little more moist than usual. We got to share things about ourselves, our joys of work, our fears our frustrations, what we do to overcome them and be stronger. We sang, we laughed, we complimented and critiqued in ways that no one felt less than the other. It was a true moment of gathering many different people that truly made me feel like I was a part of something greater than we let on that we are.

The great part was that we got to perform between acts during the Solidarity night. We sang our hearts out, Union members clapped, cheered, laughed, lit up phone lights and swayed to the music and singing. Tears fell as we spent time honoring previous Union members who have passed on. I felt supported, I felt valued, I felt like in those moments, no matter where we worked or what our job was, that we had a strong commonality of Solidarity. I had a chance to lift my voice to help lift my Union. Not only was it a load of fun but it gave me a feeling of purpose and that our fight is not in vain. If we choose to stand tall together, we can conquer!

Reflections by Sarah Widdison

TOTEM Member at Large - Non-Instructional

Sessions Attended:

- Bill of Rights: Respect and Dignity
- School Office Secretarial Staff K-12
- AFT Member Benefits for you and your Local Union
- New Employees Are our Future
- Running Effective Union Meetings

I thoroughly enjoyed attending this conference and found it to be an incredibly valuable experience. I was able to take

away a wealth of information and gained a great deal of insight throughout the event.

One workshop that particularly stood out to me was New Employees Are Our Future. From the outset, the presenters demonstrated a high level of energy and genuine belief in the strategies they were sharing. Their enthusiasm was contagious, and they did an excellent job keeping participants engaged while fostering meaningful dialogue and feedback.

The presenters were well-prepared and provided useful documents designed to support interactions with new employees and assist in tracking those interactions—tools that will be especially beneficial in our recruitment efforts for TOTEM membership.

I especially appreciated how they broke down the recruitment process into manageable, approachable steps. From introducing union information during new employee orientation to presenting effective, non-intimidating methods of initiating conversations, the workshop offered practical and realistic strategies.

The materials provided were not only visually appealing but also easily adaptable to TOTEM branding. What excited me most, however, was the spreadsheet tool designed for tracking key information about each new employee. This resource will help us organize our outreach efforts and use collected insights to better encourage and support new member recruitment.

Get in touch!

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call the TOTEM office at (907) 562-1183 during normal business hours, Monday-Friday from 8am-5pm, or by email at office@totemassoc.org

Visit the TOTEM website for great information!
<https://www.totemassoc.org/>

TOTEM Association



PRSP PROUD

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