

CAROLYN ISHIDA

Speech Therapist

Santa Paula Elementary School
Santa Paula Federation of Teachers
Local 2071



MINDY PINES

Carolyn Ishida is passionate about contributing: "I absolutely love it...the feeling of being able to help teachers...to enforce the contract, and make sure the district abides by its responsibilities."

I STEPPED UP *for My Union*

By Mindy Pines

Leading for the love of helping others

On top of her teaching load at Santa Paula Elementary, Carolyn Ishida has spent 27 of the last 31 years working for her local union.

She even spent her four-year 'hiatus' from union work earning a law degree while working full-time as a special day classroom teacher because she "wanted to learn more about contracts and contract language, and to be able to apply law skills to help the union in negotiations."

Ishida does not get district release time to perform her union role and devotes 25 to 30 hours a week during evenings and weekends to the duties of her 204-member union.

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trict abides by its responsibilities."

Ishida has served in every office of her local — as secretary, treasurer, and vice president for negotiations. She became the first female president in the 1990s, but stepped down to go to law school. Upon her return, she joined the negotiations team, and later became the chief negotiator. She's been the local's president for the last four years.

"The union is the best support system you will ever have in your career," she explains. "It enables you to teach in your classroom safely and in a secure manner. If there's ever a conflict with a principal or parent, you can always turn to your union for support."

Ishida says that in her district, "Our union, not the district, gives out service rewards and welcomes new teachers at the beginning of each school year. We honor retiring teachers at the end of the each year."

Helping teachers gain the recognition they deserve is key, says Ishida. "Our teachers are overworked, under-appreciated, and they deserve better."

Ishida attributes her stamina to an "excellent executive council, a great corps of officers, and representation at every school."

While other officers assist with negotiations and grievances, Ishida meets with the superintendent and school board members, handles communications and prepares for monthly union executive council meetings. "We're all volunteers, so it's crucial to prepare...to make sure we have quality materials and keep everyone informed. We don't want anyone to feel they're wasting their time."

One of Ishida's priorities is including everyone in the union process. She encourages younger leaders to get involved and new members to be included, inviting them to trainings, encouraging their input, and trying to promote them into leadership positions.

A Japanese-American, Ishida is also concerned about a lack of Asians in both her school district and union. She hopes to see more Asian faces in both the teaching staff and union leadership roles.

TONYA LARGE

Special Education
Paraprofessional

Aromas School
Aromas-San Juan
Classified Federation
of Employees
Local 4830

ABOUT THE SERIES:

In **Part 3** of our leadership series, *California Teacher* interviews members who have been elected local union president. In **Part 2**, we talked with members who signed on for roles on union negotiating teams, political action committees or executive boards. In **Part 1**, we interviewed members who took the first step at their worksites to get involved in the union.

Building an organization that can “outlive us”

A passion to stop people from being mistreated motivated David Yancey to step up for his union 12 years ago, and before that, to become a law enforcement officer. After 10 years on the Sacramento police force, he went to San Jose City College to run the regional police academy while earning his M.A. in history. He has taught history and political science for the last 15 years.

Yancey became local president in July after serving on the union executive board and in various offices including vice president. On top of his 35–40 hour teaching week, he devotes 10–15 hours a week to union work, six to eight hours on release time. He attends at least a dozen meetings a month with college presidents, chancellors, and human resource directors at both San Jose City College and Evergreen Valley College, and represents the 1000-member local at college trustee meetings.

During Yancey’s early years at the college, his local was an independent union that he describes as “filled with internal turmoil and dissension.” He believed the local needed to be part of a bigger and stronger group and helped lead his union toward affiliation with the CFT.

“Before we affiliated,” he says, “we couldn’t get trustees to return our phone calls. Now they return our calls and meet with us regularly.” He attributes that to power gained from having a seat on the South Bay Labor Council. “If trustees want to get reelected, they know we’ll have something to say when they seek the council’s endorsement.”

Affiliation also brought more political power and strength to the bargaining table. Yancey enthusiastically lists what the local has gained — pro rata pay for adjunct faculty, progressive discipline, and a comprehensive list of class sizes for all course offerings.

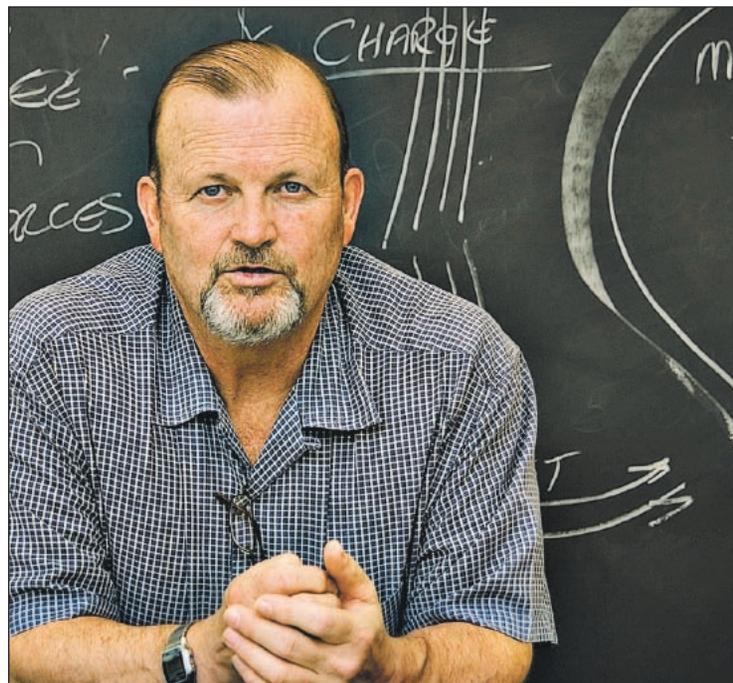
Yancey attributes the local’s

success to the “contributions and terrific teamwork of others.” He speaks of “organizational systems and the collaboration of many. If we do our job right,” he says, “who the president is, is largely irrelevant. The organization and the systems within it should func-

tion, and as long as you have people who are interested in making it work, it’s going to outlive us.”

Yancey says one of his biggest challenges has been “to change the image that unions are too confrontational.” He tells everyone, “We are an integral part of

how this place functions. Let’s all figure out how to best create the healthiest place in which we can work and do what we all love to do—to teach and help our students be successful.”



SHARON BEALS

DAVID YANCEY
History and Political Science
Instructor

*San Jose City College
San Jose/Evergreen
Faculty Association
Local 6157*

David Yancey asks members to contribute whatever time they’re comfortable with. “Not everyone can contribute the amount of time an executive board member does, but we need a lot of people who can contribute something.”

PART 3 MEMBERS TAKE ON TOP LEADERSHIP POST IN LOCAL UNIONS

Community involvement inspires union leadership



SHARON BEALS

Tonya Large is glad she ran for union president, even though maintaining balance between her 30-hour a week job, union responsibilities and family life is a constant challenge.

Five years ago Tonya Large decided it was time to find out what her union was all about. “I had no idea what the benefits were or what the union did. I was paying dues, but wanted to know for what.”

She and a few colleagues committed themselves to finding out and to taking on leadership roles. “We learned about benefits and rights we didn’t know we had,” she says, “like scholarships, and insurance...as well as rights to representation...”

Working in a district with four school sites and 62 classified employees, she and her colleagues at Aromas School felt separate from the others and set out to bring everyone together.

School involvement was nothing new for Large, who 10 years ago volunteered in her daughter’s

kindergarten class and became a leader in the Home and School Club. She held almost every position including president and vice president in this PTA-like group. After a year of volunteering, she became a classified substitute, and was soon hired into the paraprofessional position she holds today.

To stay involved with this kind of work, she was motivated “to get active in the union.” She read the contract and studied other union materials. She attended CFT meetings and trainings and presented what she learned to the local members. Large ran for local president and is glad she did, even though maintaining balance between her 30-hour a week district job, union responsibilities and family life is a constant challenge.

The union has only four hours a month of release time to be split among union officers. Large estimates that she devotes more than 20 hours a month to her union work. She attends district board meetings, serves on the district budget committee, is on the

union’s negotiations team, and assists site representatives with discipline issues and grievances.

“One of the biggest challenges,” she says, “is getting others to be involved. Some are afraid to join in because they fear that their jobs will be put in jeopardy. But, I try to tell them, joining in union activity will only protect your job.”

Soon after becoming president, she and her co-officers scheduled regular union meetings and published a newsletter to inform members of what the union was doing. At the bargaining table, the local brought salary up to parity with other districts, and won a guarantee that classified jobs would be at least four hours a day so that employees qualify for CalPERS retirement benefits.

When asked about her motivation, Large responds, “Having people thank us for the job we’ve done...making others more aware of the benefits of being in a union, and knowing that the contract we’ve worked hard at improving is pretty solid...those things keep me going.”