

THE ST. LOUIS AMERICAN

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Breaking news: ST. LOUIS GETS STATE'S FIRST UNIONIZED CHARTER SCHOOL

The Construction Careers Center in St. Louis will become Missouri's first unionized charter school, a move initiated by the school's employees to improve working and learning conditions, AFT St. Louis, Local 420, announced today.

The 32 charter school employees who will be represented by AFT St. Louis are the teachers, teacher assistants and secretarial-clerical staff. Construction Careers Center has 450 high school students.

"We're thrilled that we are now represented by a union. This will be good for teachers and other staff, and good for students," said Mike Meehan, a social studies teacher at Construction Careers Center. He said the employees are concerned about such issues as the need for a salary schedule that includes extra pay for extra work, job security, an enforced discipline policy, and smaller class sizes.

"The teachers and staff came to us and said they needed a union to improve conditions," said Mary J. Armstrong, AFT St. Louis president. "Of the 36 employees working in the building, 21 came to the first meeting with the union. It was obvious they felt strongly about the need for a voice on the job."

Armstrong said she was pleased that the board of the Construction Careers Center, which governs the public charter school, agreed to recognize the union as the sole representative of the employees, eliminating the need for an organizing election. "We hope that this spirit of cooperation extends into contract negotiations and throughout the school year," she said. "AFT St. Louis looks forward to working with the board of Construction Careers Center in a partnership to help support the mission of the school and to work together, cooperatively, for the good of the students."

Construction Careers Center is the first charter school in Missouri to become unionized. Armstrong said she believes that other charter schools throughout the state will follow suit and hopes that they too can be organized in a similarly non-confrontational way.

Nationwide, there are about 4,000 charter schools in 40 states and the District of Columbia. The American Federation of Teachers, of which Local 420 is an affiliate, represents charter school teachers and support staff in over 70 charter schools in nine other states. They, and the teachers and staff of Construction Careers Center, are part of AFT ACTS-the Alliance of Charter Teachers and Staff.

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