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## **Nurses at CREC Schools Vote to Strengthen their Voice to "Speak Out for Those Who Depend on Us"**

*Caregivers employed by Hartford area regional educational service center choose to form union, commit to collaborate with administration to maintain professional standards, improve students' health*

**Hartford** - Registered and licensed practical nurses who provide vital student healthcare at schools operated by the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) have overwhelmingly chosen to unite for a voice on the job. A Connecticut State Board of Labor Relations (SBLR) agent yesterday counted the ballots cast by the bargaining unit of 30 caregivers employed by the Hartford area's regional educational service center (RESC).

"Even before the votes were tallied, we had already won," said Kimberly Leslie, a registered nurse (RN) employed by CREC for 10 years and currently based at Two Rivers Magnet Middle School in East Hartford. "We came together and spoke with a united voice like never before. I'm so proud of all my colleagues for everything we've done, and I know we'll be even stronger advocates for our students' health going forward," added Leslie, a member of the organizing committee of school nurses that spearheaded the organizing effort.

Leslie's comments refer to her colleagues' strong support for unionizing in order to address the challenges facing all school nurses. The profession has been strained in recent years by dwindling public education resources as well as high turnover in the broader healthcare field. At the same time, school nurses are serving increasing numbers of students with complex medical situations and playing a greater role in determining overall learning outcomes.

"My decision to vote 'Union Yes' was always about quality care for our students," said Judy Niedzielski, an RN with six years experience at CREC who currently serves as a floating nurse for its 19 elementary and secondary schools. "We needed a voice not just for ourselves, but to speak out for those who depend on us. Together with our teachers, support staff and administration, we'll make sure our students get the care they need," added Niedzielski, who also served on the organizing committee.

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Niedzielski's comments refer to the collaborative relationship that CREC leadership has for years enjoyed with its employees who already benefit from labor union representation. The Connecticut Education Association (CEA) represents CREC's certified teachers, classroom paraprofessionals and child care providers are in Council 4 AFSCME, and school van drivers are International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) members.

"When school nurses are denied a voice, students are put at risk," said AFT Connecticut President Jan Hochadel. "The nurses at CREC have voted to collectively speak on behalf of their profession and their students, and we are proud to stand with them," added Hochadel.

Hochadel's comments refer to years of advocacy by AFT Connecticut and its affiliated local unions to promote policies empowering school nurses to keep their students healthy and ready to learn. The federation in 2013 successfully campaigned for establishment of a legislative council to advise the state's public health and education departments on school nurses' professional development needs and staffing levels. Union-supported legislation introduced in 2015 would have required at least one nurse for every 750 students in public schools.

*AFT Connecticut represents nurses and health professionals in local and regional school districts, acute care hospitals and medical clinics as well as visiting nurse associations across the state. For more information, visit [www.aftct.org](http://www.aftct.org) or follow the labor federation on Twitter at [@AFTCT](https://twitter.com/AFTCT) and on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/aftct](https://www.facebook.com/aftct).*

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Link --

AFT Connecticut Video: "CREC School Nurses: United in Sisterhood"

<https://youtu.be/a3zyawxPcdM>