

City of Pembroke Pines Charter School Teachers Vote 181 to 46 to Join Union

Charter school teachers for the City of Pembroke Pines recently became the first in Florida to vote for union representation. About 80 percent - 181 to 46 - of the teachers voted in favor of choosing the Broward Teachers Union to represent them. Florida now joins only six other states in the nation where charter school teachers have voted to unionize. Union leaders believe this could inspire union drives at other charter schools in the county, state and across the nation.

BTU President Pat Santeramo congratulates the Pembroke Pines teachers for initiating the union organizing effort at their seven municipally operated charter schools. About 300 employees including teachers, guidance counselors and other professional staff are affected.

“This is an historic day for Florida and the union movement in our county, state and country,” Santeramo said. “From the very beginning, this campaign was driven by charter school teachers because they recognize the value of having union representation, a contract, job security and a voice in their schools.”

With the assistance of BTU and AFT staff, a committee of charter school teachers worked to educate their colleagues about the benefits of union representation during the last several months.

The union’s charter school campaign liaison, BTU Field Staff Representative Jamie Daniels, said the Pembroke Pines union organizing effort received state and



Pembroke Pines Charter School organizers from left Dawn Eichorn, Elizabeth Fisher and Grace Thomas discuss vital reasons for joining the union with Miami Herald reporter Amy Sherman outside the voting booth.

national attention because other unions have expressed interest in conducting similar campaigns. Organizing committee members created a well-thought-out and systematic strategic campaign and established a library of materials so their efforts could be easily replicated by other labor groups.

Daniels said committee members will begin recruiting members. Florida is a right-to-work state and the Pembroke Pines teachers must now decide whether they want to join the union. He indicated

a top priority will also be starting contract negotiations in March.

The charter school contract will be the first for the BTU and city. Generally, first contracts can be challenging for both sides to reach a timely agreement, but Daniels remains optimistic that the talks will be successful.

“From the beginning, this has been a teacher driven campaign, and we are very proud of the Pembroke Pines teachers and their success,” Santeramo said.