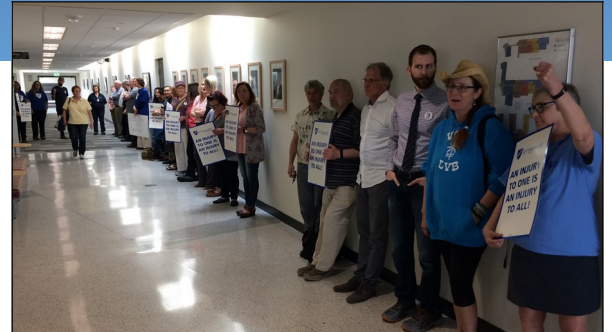




Local 243 Organizes to Stop an Unfair Nonrenewal

In April 2018, cosmetology instructor Melissa Brainerd was notified that after 14 years of teaching she would not be renewed for her position at Madison College. She was a great instructor, and beloved by her students—there was no just cause for the decision. Melissa called on her union, AFT Local 243, for help.



They decided to fight it. They knew a grievance wouldn't be enough to overturn an administration-led decision. The grievance procedure not only gave power to the administration at every step, but failed to offer the grievant the collective power of her coworkers. The “secrecy” of closed-door grievance meetings furthermore could only help the administration. They needed a strategy that involved the public and collective support of *all* workers and the college community.

They sent an email to all members describing the situation. Over the course of a few meetings, members then created a plan to maximize pressure on the College Board at an upcoming meeting. They set numeric goals for organizing to pack the Board meeting and have workers and students speak there. They had students, alumni, and staff sign an online letter of support. They distributed a press release to shine a public spotlight on the Board's impending decision. Last but not least, they used this growing pressure to give the College President multiple opportunities to back down without suffering public embarrassment—opportunities the President consistently refused to take over the ensuing weeks.



By the day of the Board meeting, members had exceeded their own goals for attendance and public support. Over 100 employees, students, and community members lined the entrance to the hearing room. Over 500 had signed an online letter. Numerous press outlets interviewed members. Members held signs saying “Do the Right Thing,” “Respect Due Process,” and “We Can Do Better.” Despite the College President's public prediction earlier that day, the Board decided *not* to take up the nonrenewal vote. During his Address to the Board, the President was forced to admit that “yes, we can do better.”

The next day he talked to union leadership. By May 7 he had backed down entirely, sending an email to the entire college pledging to review nonrenewal standards. Having fought alongside her colleagues for over a month, Melissa's contract was finally renewed. She works at Madison College as a proud union member to this day.