For more than a century and a half, NEA has led the country in advocating for children and the educators who teach, nurture and inspire them. Through the power of the collective, our Association has given voice to some of the defining issues of our times: establishing the civil rights of black children and educators, granting women the right to vote, leading the charge against child labor, and gaining the right to collectively bargain.

Throughout some of the most pivotal moments in our history, our members have acted as the catalyst for change. Today’s challenges require the same kind of leadership inspired by the trailblazers who built our Association.

For the last ten years, NEA’s leadership has been working to return the union to its deep roots – to articulate NEA’s vision and mission for the times and refocus our work on what our members know best: how to educate children.

But while we have been working hard to increase student success and to arm our members with the skills and resources they need, anti-public education interests have stepped up their efforts to dismantle public education as we know it—attacking our union, our members, our right to collectively bargain, and all of our hard-won gains.

We have fought back mightily—using all of the resources and tools at our disposal. But we know that in today’s ever-changing world that’s not enough. Change is inevitable. Progress is not.

Our leaders know that we need to do much more than respond to our detractors. We need to work together to push our own positive agenda for change. That’s why we’ve established two over-arching organizational priorities to guide our work: 1) to build our affiliates’ capacity and 2) to unite the nation in support of Great Public Schools. In partnership with our affiliates, we are working to strengthen our infrastructure, engage more deeply with our members, build stronger partnerships with communities, and, most importantly, to drive a student-centered agenda.
As President Van Roekel has indicated, “This is a critical time for public education in our country.” I share his sense of urgency. And I believe that how we choose to respond to our growing challenges will define the Association for years to come.

Now is our generation’s time to lead. Now is our time to embrace the kind of change that is so crucial to put our organization on a path to a strong and successful future. We all know this work won’t be easy. Change never is. But, together, we can write a new chapter in our Association’s rich history as our members lead the way. Our leaders and staff take our responsibility to our members—and to our schoolchildren—seriously and I’m certain that we’ll do everything within our power to do right by them.

John Stocks, executive director