

BARGAINING BENEFITS EVERYONE IN EDUCATION

Collective bargaining gives educators a voice in their workplace. It not only helps assure fair wages and benefits but also can improve teaching and learning conditions. That means everyone connected to the school—students, teachers, education support professionals, administrators, and taxpayers—benefits.

A 2011 analysis published by the Employment Policy Research Network (EPRN) found that “evidence and examples drawn from the public and private sectors show that collective bargaining and workplace innovations based on a mutual interest, joint problem-solving approach can produce positive outcomes for employers, employees, customers, and citizens, especially during fiscal crisis....”¹

What that means is that in economic times both good and bad, a smart public education employer—be it a K-12 school district or a higher education institution—can better serve students and taxpayers by negotiating in good faith with its union(s).

Bargaining can help improve teaching and learning

Teachers’ working conditions are students’ learning conditions, so by addressing school and classroom issues, everyone gains. Where teachers, including support professionals, and their employers are allowed to collaborate on issues that go beyond the scope of salary, benefits, and working conditions, education unions routinely negotiate provisions to improve student learning.

Topics have included setting limits on class size, specifying time for teachers to share effective classroom practices, addressing school building health and safety issues, ensuring teacher input into their own professional learning, and more.

Administrators and faculty members bring valuable insights to the education enterprise. To capture everyone’s very best thinking, forward-looking districts typically set up structures such as joint labor-management committees that meet regularly to resolve workplace concerns and tackle student learning issues.

1 David Lewin, et al., “Getting It Right: Empirical Evidence and Policy Implications from Research on Public-Sector Unionism and Collective Bargaining,” Employment Policy Research Network, March 16, 2011, 30, <http://www.employmentpolicy.org/topic/402/research/getting-it-right>.

Bargaining can help attract and retain the highest quality employees

Effective bargaining can bring about compensation levels that match or exceed those of competing education employers or professions. Professional salaries are a significant incentive for recruiting educators to work in a particular district—or to choose education as a career. Research shows that an 11 percent increase in the weekly salary of teachers would increase the proportion of college graduates who are willing to work as teachers by 26 percent.²



2 Karen J. DeAngelis, *The Relationship Between Teachers' Salaries and the Quality of the Supply of Recent College Graduates to Teaching* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University School of Education, 2000), as referenced by Linda Darling-Hammond and Frank Adamson, *Speaking of Salaries: What It Will Take to Get Qualified, Effective Teachers in All Communities* (Washington, D.C.: Center for American Progress, May 2011), 9.



Through a carefully designed, multi-year salary schedule—made clear when written into a binding contract—new and veteran educators alike can literally see their potential career path.

Jeffrey Pfeffer, a professor at the Stanford University Graduate School of Business, observed: “Higher wages will attract more skilled employees.... In many cases, the productivity advantages that come from a more highly skilled, experienced, and effectively deployed workforce...outweigh the extra wage costs, leaving total costs unaffected and productivity actually higher in the unionized settings.”³ And the teaching and learning conditions referenced above can also have a direct impact on retaining top-notch teachers. Noted Stanford University education researchers Frank Adamson and Linda Darling-Hammond describe the importance of a supportive working environment: “Those working conditions—including professional teaching conditions, such as the availability of materials, class sizes, the attractiveness

3 Jeffrey Pfeffer, *What Were They Thinking? Unconventional Wisdom About Management* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2007), 174-175.

and safety of facilities, high-quality leadership, and professional learning opportunities—play a role in teachers’ decisions to leave teaching in a particular school or sometimes to leave the profession altogether.”⁴

Bargaining ensures fair employment procedures

A bargained contract ensures that employees are treated fairly because both parties have discussed and agreed upon rules and procedures for the workplace.

Employees and managers understand what steps will be used to resolve legitimate employee grievances, lay off workers, or settle disputes. Unions rely on negotiated grievance procedures, with hearings at progressively higher management levels, to settle problems. If both sides cannot agree on a resolution, arbitration, in which a neutral third party intervenes and resolves contract disputes, is a common final step.

Contracts may also set forth procedures and principles for teacher evaluations that are comprehensive, meaningful, fair, and lead to improved teacher practice and student learning.

Bargaining gives the education professional a genuine voice

Every organization can benefit from the ideas and expertise of its employees. Bargaining ensures that career education employees have a respected voice in the workplace and are involved in both identifying and solving school and classroom issues, which in turn promotes student learning.

Through union representatives, front-line educators are given a meaningful say in such issues as the availability of needed resources, teaching of at-risk students, professional development, teacher-to-teacher peer assistance, and worksite health and safety.

4 Linda Darling-Hammond and Frank Adamson, *Speaking of Salaries: What It Will Take to Get Qualified, Effective Teachers in All Communities* (Washington, D.C.: Center for American Progress, May 2011), 11.

