Putting Our Values To Work

The National Education Association is critical to this country’s future. The work of our members—in the nation’s public schools and public colleges and universities—strengthens classrooms, communities, and our democracy. Our work is something no one else is positioned or built to do.

In our current divisive culture, more and more people want to stand for something, they want to be active, and they want to associate themselves with a cause and an organization that is not only good, but has the infrastructure to make a real difference. And we are increasingly giving these activists a home with NEA.

Our Association is uniting the masses—not by ourselves or for ourselves. We are building long-term, large-scale coalitions to create systemic and necessary changes in our public schools. The #RedForEd movement has shown us that when educators, parents, community, and students stand together we are a formidable force, and together we can fight and win.

Reflecting on the past year I have come to realize that had we been marching by ourselves it’s doubtful that we would have won the kind of victories we did. We need to be in deep relationships with people—talking one-on-one and cultivating new partners. We need to proudly share our values and ask them to join with us. Our mission compels us to unite our members and the nation.

We are proudly uniting with people who have been marginalized and silenced—our LGBTQ family, immigrants, women, our Muslim brothers and sisters, poor people, people of color, and our working families. Their movements are our movements—because equality and justice calls us to be better and do better. Their children are also our students—and we need to make our public schools beacons of hope and opportunity for every young person in this nation.
We can’t shrink away from people or partners. Just the opposite. This is a time to lean in. This is a time to forge deep relationships with all who share our values, recognizing that our core values are timeless: Equal Opportunity, Collective Action, Professionalism, Democracy, Partnership, and A Just Society.

NEA has been at the forefront of some of this nation’s most important movements: Abolition, Civil Rights, Women’s Rights, Gay Rights. These movements helped shape who we are as an organization. And if we live by our values, our legacy will place us on the right side of history—whether it is immigration, gun violence, school funding, or economic justice.

Our union demanded an end to child labor and said that every child should be in school, not working in a factory. Our union put a stop to firing teachers when they became pregnant. And our union was the first union to have a comprehensive statement in support of same sex marriage. NEA is made from tough, righteous stuff. Our organization has a true calling and a clear purpose: to keep fighting and keep educating—for our students, for our union, and for our democracy.

Continuing on this audacious path will secure our place on the right side of history!

**John C. Stocks, executive director**