Unite, Inspire, Lead
Our Students, Our Union, Our Future

Trials and Triumphs in Wisconsin
Higher Ed Organizing Post Act 10

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Indicate the NEA Strategic Goal and NEA Organizational Priority your session addresses:

• **NEA Strategic Goal**
  – Strong Affiliates for Educator Voice and Empowerment

• **NEA Organizational Priority**
  – Early Career Educators
COMPETENCY: Organizing

- Level 1: Foundational and Level 2: Mobilizing & Power Building
  - Utilizes organizing best practices
  - Engages in collective action to identify and address pivotal issues
How Did We Get Here? The History of Wisconsin’s Act 10
What is Act 10?

– Known specifically as the 2011 Budget Repair Bill, Act 10 severely dismantled public sector union rights to collectively bargain

– Bargaining became restricted to one topic: CPI base wage increase

– Public employers must receive approval via public referendum to provide base wage increases above CPI
Act 10 Basics

- Requires public employees to begin to contribute 50% of the annual pension payment into their WRS accounts
- Requires public employees to contribute a minimum of 12.6% of the health insurance premiums to their own plans
Act 10 Basics

• Collective bargaining units/locals required to participate in a yearly certification election
  - Locals must achieve a minimum of 51% “yes” votes to remain certified.
  - Abstaining from the voting process is counted as a “no” vote.
Act 10 Effects on Public Employees

- Take home wages for public sector employees have fallen between 10-20%
- Salary increases have been minimal as CPI has been relatively low (.12% for 2016-2017)
- Without the ability to negotiate robust CBAs, benefits and working conditions have atrophied
Act 10 Effects on State Organizations

• Fair Share elimination
• The NEA and AFT state organizations (AFT-WI and WEAC)
  - Have seen up to a 60% reduction in membership
  - Have gone through reorganizations
    *WEAC sponsorship of Higher Ed locals (“Region 8” - eliminated as of September 2016)
Gateway Technical Education Association (GTEA)

- 273 Bargaining Unit Members
- Represent Instructors, Counselors, Advisors, Lab Techs, and Librarians
- Dues paying membership presently stands at 95
Act 10 Effects on Our Local: GTEA

• Contract Model vs Organizing Model Thinking:
  - Due to a “retirement rush” post Act 10, we were left with a dearth of leaders possessing institutional capital
  - New hires were brought in at significantly lower starting salaries, making member recruitment difficult
  - Difficultly in recruiting new local Leadership
Rebuilding and Reframing

• Soon after Act 10 was passed, GTEA began the process of moving toward an Organizing Model
  – One that views collective action and advocacy as touchstone
  – One that moves toward a conversation surrounding what “we give” instead of what “we get”
  – One that attempts to acknowledge and unify the needs of all members of our bargaining unit
No Compromise on GTEA Inner Values

*We insist on maintaining a local dues structure
  - $120/year
*We insist on providing GTEA Leadership Officers with yearly stipends for their service

*We refuse to compromise our cash reserves
Trials...

*Convincing people to organize is difficult
  - Individualism vs Collectivism are values
  - Fear is pervasive

*Communication is difficult
  - We are located across 4 campuses and 75 miles
  - Disparate bargaining unit member cliques
  - Prohibited from conducting outreach during the workday
And more Trials...

• Relationship Building with Administration is painstakingly difficult
  – Grudges
  – Lack of new political players
  – Excessive power grabs
  – GTEA framed as the enemy of employees
Triumphs

• Rebuilding Local Leadership
  - The COR (Council of Reps), down to 7 members in 2013, now sits full at 15 Leaders
  - We added a new Leadership position in 2016
    *Communications Coordinator
      - Designed a Newsletter: Our Voice
And More Triumphs...

• Successfully engaged in a small and large group organizing activities in 2015-16
  * Organized 3 student services members to address their issues directly with their supervisor
  * Organized a group survey response to GTEA’s Inservice presentation elimination

These activities had an effect, though temporary.
Trials and Triumphs to Come...

• “Merit Pay” pushback in favor of reinstatement of lanes and steps model
• We contacted and onboarded 17 bargaining unit members with frozen salaries
• We expanded that group during lunch at Inservice in January 2017.
• Goal is to empower the large group to address salary issues with administration in May of 2017
Group Roundtable Discussion

- Initial feedback?
- If you were a GTEA Leader, what would be your organizing strategy moving forward?
- Examples of successful organizing campaigns in your states or locals?
- How do we prepare for what might be universal right-to-work legislation, the elimination of Fair Share, and the decimation of our contracts/CBAs?
Session Outcomes

• The content from this session can be used in the following ways in your current position/role:
  – Prepare for what may be the inevitable spread of Act 10’s agenda to your state
  – Return to the grassroots organizing principles of Unionism at the local level instead of hiding behind and within your Contract
Thank You!

• Please complete the evaluation for this breakout session!

• Please visit the Leadership Development Resources website at www.nea.org/leadershipdevelopment