Embracing Change Our Members Can Believe In

The last decade has been filled with economic, demographic, and technological changes that are transforming the way we live our lives.

Nowhere is that change more evident than in our Association and in our schools. Technology is transforming the classroom. Students in our public schools are becoming increasingly more diverse. And the face of our educators is changing as more experienced educators retire and younger ones replace them.

The Association understands we have to change, too, to keep pace and to be relevant to the lives of our members—particularly the new, younger ones who are entering the profession.

Today, we know that one in three K–12 students will be assigned a teacher who is in the first three years of her or his career.

These young educators are the future of the Association. And we know we need to do more to capture their hearts and minds. We know this generation cares deeply about equality and social justice—values that mirror NEA's commitment to equal opportunity and collective action. But we also know that we have to flip our traditional script and meet these young educators where they are. We have to broaden our appeal and work collaboratively with our affiliates to make union membership compatible with younger educators’ professional and personal goals.

The challenge before us is clear. We must continue our commitment to traditional union advocacy, but we must also step up our efforts to empower educators and support their career development and highest professional aspirations. We must do more to develop their voices and influence in their classrooms and in their schools. And we must ensure that all educators have the support, training, and mentoring they need to be successful.

NEA has an important opportunity to be an anchor for educators joining the professions today. We have an opportunity to help them find their voices, improve student
learning, strengthen their professions, and champion the cause of public education in the midst of all the change they are experiencing in their lives.

One thing we’re learning about these young educators is that they’re not averse to change. They embrace it. But young educators—like all our members—want to see the right kind of change. They want to see change that values their profession and respects their contributions. They want to see change that acknowledges their commitment to their students. And they want to see change that creates new opportunities for them to improve their skills and grow as leaders.

NEA has to be more like our young members. We have to embrace change. We must adapt to serve the needs and interests of all of our members in contemporary and future environments. We must be open to learning new ways to reach, engage, and inspire young educators joining the profession.

It’s only when we speak to educators’ strongest ideals, their deeply-held values, and their highest professional aspirations that we will build our ranks and safeguard our Association’s future.

John Stocks, executive director