

THE ROAD TO STUDENT SUCCESS:

A REPORT ON NEA'S STUDENT-CENTERED BARGAINING AND ADVOCACY GRANT PROGRAM



“Thank you to DCTA for giving us this forum to speak about this issue. It feels like you are the only ones fighting for what is best for our children.” - Denver Public Schools parent testimony during open bargaining

Introduction

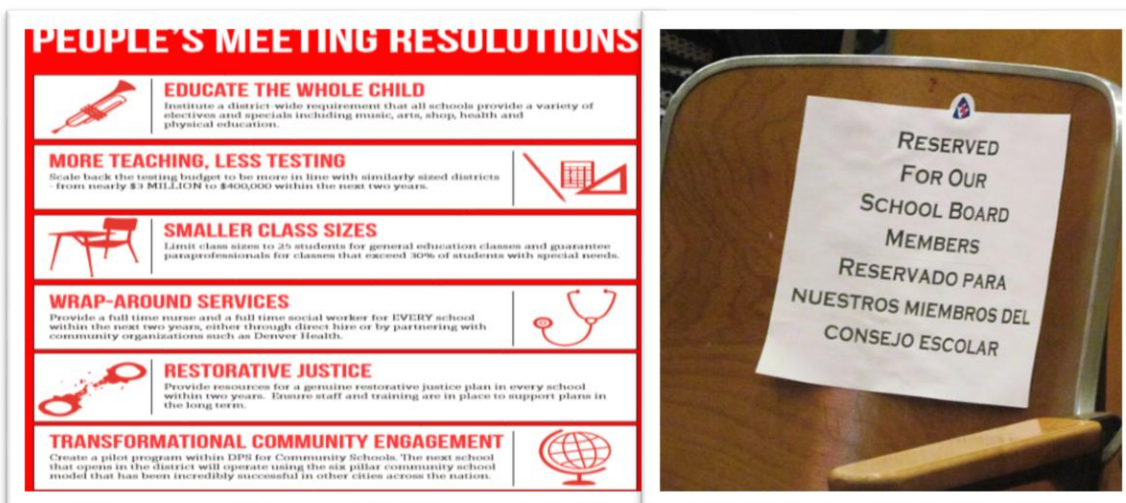
Reaching an eleventh hour deal on the heels of a marathon bargaining session is common in labor negotiations, so it came as no surprise when the *Denver Classroom Teachers Association* (DCTA) and the Denver Public Schools struck a last minute agreement following 20 hours of bargaining.

What made the August 31, 2017 negotiation session unusual was the crowd of some 300 educators and community members who were in attendance and the opportunity for those who were unable to be physically present to watch the drama unfold live on Facebook.



*DCTA and DPS bargaining broadcast live on Facebook
(August 31 - 889 views)*

DCTA wanted bargaining to be a transparent process and it used public negotiations and social media to make that happen. DCTA also opened up its preparations for negotiations by working closely with the public to develop its student-centered bargaining platform. The union hosted community forums and a People's Meeting to solicit input and reach consensus on what needs to be implemented to create the schools Denver Students Deserve. DCTA also invited DPS school board members to the meetings.



Student-Centered Bargaining and Advocacy Grants

In December of 2016, NEA's Collective Bargaining and Member Advocacy Department (CBMA) awarded a Student-Centered Bargaining and Advocacy (SCBA) grant to DCTA. The association used the grant to assist it in fully exploiting Colorado's open bargaining law to engage its members and the community to identify, articulate, and achieve its student-centered demands. DCTA's open bargaining campaign enabled the union to negotiate several positive changes to its master agreement, including giving bargaining unit members a voice in curriculum review and adoption, implementing restorative practices, and promoting whole child supports for students.

Since 2015, CBMA has awarded 56 SCBA grants to state and local affiliates, providing more than \$1.3 million in total funding. Affiliates have used these grants to:

- Unite educators with parents, communities, and students to advocate and bargain for the schools that students deserve.
- Open up negotiations and make collective bargaining a more transparent process.
- Advocate for students away from the bargaining table.
- Join the Red for Ed movement to improve educator pay, preserve health care and pensions, increase education funding, and achieve student-centered victories through collective bargaining and other forms advocacy.
- Bargain for the Common Good.

This report describes some of the best practices in student-centered bargaining and advocacy and highlights the experiences of select SCBA grantees. Our hope is these stories will motivate readers to rethink how they look at their union and encourage them to plan and execute strategies that align with our commitment to elevating educators, advocating for students, and advancing the common good.

The Schools Our Students Deserve



The Saint Paul Federation of Educators (SPFE) commitment to student-centered advocacy began well before CBMA awarded the local its first SCBA grant in 2015. In fact, SPFE served as a model that helped to shape NEA's SCBA agenda.

By the time SPFE received its first grant, it had already successfully run its first comprehensive student-centered contract campaign, a campaign

that was the culmination of a years' long transformation in the union's vision, values, and culture.

In the years leading up to its 2014 contract campaign, SPFE had:

- Developed a new narrative used by the union to guide its decisions and inform its work.
- Started bringing members to the table to present on issues.
- Created its first Contract Action Team (CAT), whose members share negotiation information at their buildings and collect data and stories for the bargaining team.
- Experimented with open bargaining.
- Involved parents in discussions of the future of their schools.
- Used member, parent, and community input to create its student-centered bargaining demands.
- Prepared a research-based report that thoroughly explained the rationale behind these demands.

After successfully organizing its members and engaging the community for the teacher bargaining unit, SPFE applied for and was awarded an SCBA grant to increase ESP membership engagement through student-centered contract demands for its educational assistants (EA) bargaining unit.



SPFE used grant funds to hire a temporary organizer to coordinate its efforts to meet one-on-one with unit members, sign up new members,

identify new leaders, add new EA members to the CAT, build support for the union's student-centered contract demands, and organize EAs to participate in a social media picture campaign.

Subsequent grants have helped resource SPFE efforts to:

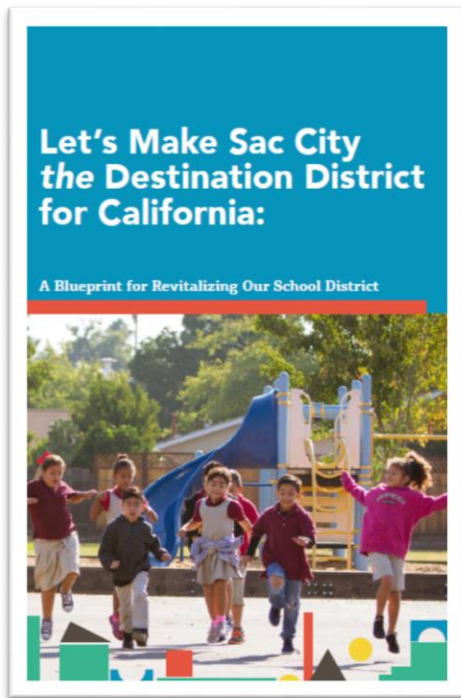
- Ramp up organizing and communications in support of School and Community Service Professionals (SCSP) negotiations.
- Develop a Teaching and Inquiring about Greed, Equity, and Racism (TIGER) Team, made up of parents, teachers, and community members, to plan and lead actions to promote investment into schools to meet student needs.
- Expand bargaining for the common good by going after corporations to pay their fair share in taxes.

As Saint Paul's innovative approaches to student-centered bargaining and member and community engagement gained national attention, education associations from across the country began to replicate the "School Our Students Deserve" model and adapt it to their own bargaining and advocacy campaigns – SPFE itself borrowed the nomenclature from the Chicago Teachers Union. Several of these affiliates received SCBA grants to support their campaigns.

The *Hawaii State Teachers Association* (HSTA) launched its "Schools Our Keiki (Children) Deserve" campaign when it decided it was time to "flip the script" on public education in the Aloha State from a narrative focused on "accountability" and the "bad teacher" to one based on union-led student-centered advocacy. HSTA created a Speakers Bureau, comprised of activist educators, to work with community organizations to plan, scaffold, and execute connected actions on specific issues to support the overall campaign.

HSTA and its speakers Bureau carefully threaded ESSA implementation into its student-centered initiative, using the priorities and provisions of federal law to connect its organizing training with its professional development redesign and its campaign for contract negotiations.

The *Sacramento Classroom Teachers Association* (SCTA) used its SCBA grant to promote Sacramento as the "Destination District for California" and bargain a contract that would support this claim. The union's student-centered bargaining proposals included demands for lower class sizes, more school nurses and psychologists, less testing, more art and music, better pay, and teacher driven professional development. SCTA also proposed contract language to make practices for students with disabilities more inclusionary, to develop an early intervention program, and to implement a resourced, bottom-up restorative practices culture throughout Sacramento public schools.



Opening up Bargaining

In 2016, the *Fresno Teachers Association* (FTA) formally launched its bargaining for the common good campaign when it brought a slew of student-centered demands to the table in negotiations over a mid-term contract reopener. Though FTA ultimately withdrew these issues when the board refused to discuss them during negotiations that were expressly limited to economic matters, the union sent a clear signal to the district; these issues would be the central focus of upcoming negotiations over the successor agreement.

With the ink scarcely dry on the mid-term agreement, FTA and the district returned to the table to bargain a new contract.

FTA doubled down on its student-centered demands, this time employing a “big bargaining” strategy to open negotiations to FTA members and the community.

On the invitation of FTA, 449 members and “persons with special knowledge relevant to the negotiations” – language lifted directly from the parties’ ground rules for contract negotiations – attended the initial bargaining session. In response to the district’s assertion that FTA’s effort to open bargaining to the public constituted an unfair labor practice, the union



amplified its efforts to pack the room for subsequent bargaining sessions. This strategy was so successful that 928 educators, parents, and community members showed up for a January bargaining session. Those unable to be physically present at bargaining were able to keep apprised of the parties' progress – or lack thereof – via regular electronic communications and broadcasts on Facebook.

A strike – an action authorized by 99 percent of voting FTA members – was averted when the parties reached a last minute agreement that included many of FTA's student-centered demands, including smaller class sizes in all grades, increased registered nursing staff, a School Climate and Safety Committee to address safety concerns, and a fair economic package.

Student-Centered Advocacy Away from the Bargaining Table



Before it negotiated its first bargaining agreement, the newly organized *Keene Paraprofessionals Association* (KPA) decided to tackle head-on the issue of student mental illness. KPA wanted to end the stigma associated with mental illness so Keene students would no longer have to suffer alone and in silence. KPA used its SCBA grant to provide training to 20 members in mental health first aid. Several potential members joined KPA so they too could be eligible for the training. KPA also sponsored family nights and other community events to increase awareness and provide education on mental health issues.

New Hampshire's public sector bargaining law is unique in that it requires tentative bargaining agreements be ratified by union members, board trustees, and citizens. The community overwhelmingly approved KPA's initial contract 254 to 57, an outcome no doubt influenced by the goodwill KPA created in its community.

After attending a Teacher Union Reform Network (TURN) meeting a few years ago, leaders of the *Greece Teachers Association* (GTA) were inspired to rethink the local's commitment to social justice. GTA decided to rededicate its social justice committee to having a positive impact on its upstate New York community, a community that was rapidly becoming more economically and demographically diverse.



From this decision came:

- Operation Warm, a partnership with local firefighters to provide children winter coats and gloves.
- A collaborative effort with the district that reduced family spending on school supplies by more than half.
- A musical instrument drive, which collected gently used instruments for Greece students.

GTA applied for a student-centered advocacy grant to help expand an already robust social justice program. Using only a fraction of its award to support existing initiatives, GTA budgeted the lion's share of grant funds to launch plans for a kindergarten-to-college 529-account plan and health and nutrition services for students and parents.



In Florida, the *Broward Teachers Union* (BTU) used its grant monies to help renovate the Mobile School Pantry (MSP) school bus and expand the number of elementary schools served by the MSP. Additionally, BTU partnered with a non-profit health plan to provide nutritional education to both the students and families who attend food pantry distributions.

In the foothills of the Appalachians, the *Rock Hill Education Association* (RHEA) used its SCBA grant to work with district officials to

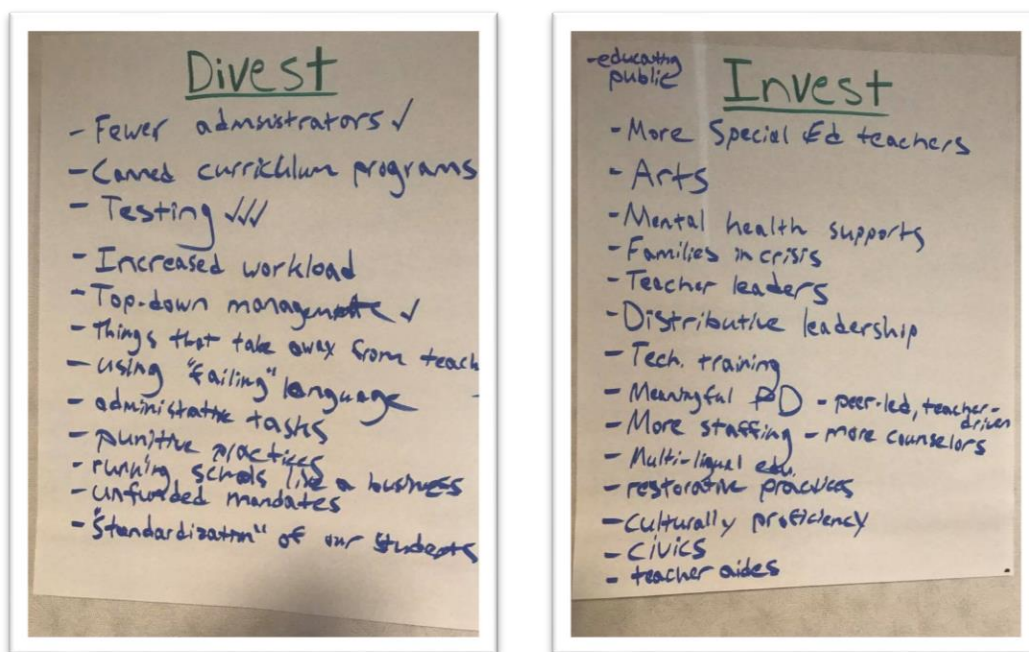
start a trauma-sensitive school to support children of their rural Ohio community who had been affected by the opioid crisis.

Red for Ed

Red for Ed has brought national attention to the harm caused by the chronic underfunding of public education and a generation of draconian policies implemented under the guise of education reform. SCBA is directly linked to Red for Ed.

The *Colorado Education Association* (CEA) has used multiple SCBA grants to work with local affiliates and individual member activists to train, engage, and win on local organizing campaigns that help grow local capacity and increase power as a union. Two of these locals, the Pueblo Education Association and the Pueblo Paraprofessionals Education Association, used this work to build capacity to win a fair contract, an outcome that was achieved after the first educator strike in Colorado in a quarter of a century. During the strike, picketers and supporters,

including district students, parents, and union members from throughout the state, gathered outside the administration building for daily rallies.



Drawing on the lessons learned from its 2017 bargaining campaign, DCTA demanded, and won, following the second educator strike in Colorado in a quarter of a century, double-digit raises and a restoration of a salary schedule for teachers and specialized service providers when it renegotiated ProComp, Denver's incentive laden pay system.



Just outside of Washington DC in suburban Maryland, the *Montgomery County Education Association* (MCEA) is using its grant to pay some of the costs of running an open and transparent student-centered bargaining campaign. Long known for its innovations in labor management collaboration and interest-based processes, MCEA now intends to present concrete student-centered proposals to the district in traditional contract negotiations.

In nearby Prince George's County, the *Prince George's County Education Association* (PGCEA) received a grant to continue the energy from its recently completed open negotiations by building congruent parent and educator leadership structures to ensure successful implementation of its contract wins.

The *Columbus Education Association* (CEA) received an SCBA grant to help resource its “Schools Columbus Students Deserve” bargaining campaign. The association created a bargaining platform that included a demand to fund schools and save taxpayers money by ending handouts for wealthy corporations that do not need them. With a strike looming, the parties reached an agreement that included the first reductions in K-3 class size caps in 25 years and 60 additional nurses, social workers, and social emotional learning practitioners. While the final agreement did not address corporate tax abatements, which deprive schools and local governments of necessary funding, CEA started, and pledges to continue, a very public debate on corporate welfare reform.



Bargaining for the Common Good

Many SCBA grants have gone to resource bargaining for the common good (BCG) contract campaigns. BCG campaigns involve affiliates going on the offense and organizing with community partners around a set of demands that benefit the wider community. Affiliates use BCG to expand the scope of bargaining to include non-traditional, student-centered topics, such as guaranteed recess, or topics that generally fall outside the realm of public education, but affect the broader community.

For example, Saint Paul has joined labor and community allies in the Twin Cities to get corporations to pay their fair share of taxes, to treat their own employees with dignity and respect, and to cease business practices that disparately harm communities of color. In contract negotiations with the school district, SPFE put a proposal on the table to forbid the school district from doing business with banks or other financial institutions that foreclose on the homes of school-age children during a school year, do not pay their employees a \$15 an hour minimum wage, and do not offer paid sick leave to their employees.

Conclusion

Since 2015, NEA has awarded SCBA grants to dozens of state and local affiliates. The expanding pool of SCBA grantees serve as exemplars within their states and across the nation.

Many affiliates have modeled their own bargaining and advocacy campaigns after those of SCBA grant recipients. Grantees are also connecting with other leaders and staff to share resources and offer candid assessments on things that worked well and not so well.

CBMA continues to lead NEA’s SCBA and BCG initiatives, collecting and sharing applicable content, resources, and stories. CBMA staff also continue to refine training materials and give

workshops on student-centered bargaining and advocacy and bargaining for the common good. CBMA will also continue to award SCBA grants. The grant application process typically opens in early October.

The SCBA grants have become more than simply a funding source for initiatives that are important to a specific state or local. These grants provide us an opportunity to learn from and support one another. They help us in our collective struggle for professional dignity and respect and in our fight for what is best for our children.

**** Find information on Student-Centered Bargaining and Advocacy grants and other NEA grant opportunities here: www.nea.org/partnerships ****