

As your NEA Vice President, my heart is with our members. I do this work because I love our members, believe in them, and see their humanity. I will always put our members first. I am, also, a lifelong learner and always seek continuous improvement. While NEA has made progress in addressing higher education issues over the past three years, there is room in which NEA can expand its energies:

**College Affordability and Declining Enrollment** - There is a \$1.7 trillion student loan crisis in America. As a trustee on the University of Mary Washington's board, I understand the impact of college affordability on the overall survival of colleges and universities. Making college more accessible increases opportunities for both students and faculty. As chair of the NEA Member Benefits Board, we introduced the student debt navigator, SAVI, to help our members with student loan cancellation. NEA Member Benefits will continue the loan program, SAVI, to help members navigate the current student loan landscape in order to identify and secure the forgiveness they deserve. In addition, NEA continues to partner with the White House to address loan cancellation. While the Supreme Court's decision on the program is pending, as indicated by our continued SAVI program, loan cancellation is still a top priority. College enrollment has been on the decline over the past ten years and was exacerbated by the pandemic. In order to appropriately address, we must address college affordability as well as students' social and emotional needs.

**Member Organizing** – we must continue to organize the unorganized. While there has been some improvement in organizing higher education units, there is much opportunity to recruit more members and more higher education units into our organization. In addition, organizing is more than about recruiting members. It is about listening to members, identifying their issues, and working to address those issues through appropriate engagement and collective action. We must also ramp up our commitment to organizing faculty, staff and students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) as well as organizing public community colleges, to ensure that we preserve and expand educational opportunities for low-income students of color. In order to do these things, actions we can take include: training more members organizers to do effective one-on-ones, intentional membership blitzes, and expanding our member organizing fellows program to ensure we build the capacity on our campuses to engage with potential members.

**Political Interference** – Whether it's Academic Freedom, Honesty in Education, and/or Free Speech, our students and faculty must have the freedom to communicate ideas and facts without fear of retaliation. The same people attempting to censor speech and curricula are the same people trying to defund public education, suppress the right to vote, and privatize public education. We must join together, tell our truths, and fight like hell to save our democracy.

**Racial Justice In Education** - The inequities, systemic racism, and implicit bias evident in US higher education institutions reflect our country's failure to redress the harms caused by slavery and by centuries of violence and discrimination. We must stay committed to our NEA racial justice agenda and fight for racial justice in higher education and thus an end to institutional and structural racism. We must do this by supporting our members; working with key partner groups such as our HBCUs, Race Forward, and Color of Change; and fighting to ensure higher education access to marginalized and underrepresented groups.

I always appreciate the opportunity to listen to the voice of the National Council for Higher Education and interact with all of our Higher Education members. Thank you for your work and voice.