

THE ROAD TO STUDENT SUCCESS:

A Report on NEA's Student-Centered
Bargaining and Advocacy Grant Program



NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

The National Education Association is the nation's largest professional employee organization, representing 3 million elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators, and students preparing to become teachers.

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“We’re trying to repay the favors because solidarity is a verb and how teachers were there for us we can be there for teachers.”

–Chetan Soni, SPS student and co-founder of Seattle Student Union¹

Since 2015, NEA’s Collective Bargaining and Member Advocacy Department (CBMA) has awarded 91 Student-Centered Bargaining and Advocacy (SCBA) grants to state and local affiliates, providing more than \$2.6 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;
- make demands for racial justice, mental health supports, community schools, and many other important issues impacting students and communities both inside and outside the classroom;
- Bargain for the Common Good, and much more.

This report highlights the tremendous advocacy of our 2021-2022 SCBA grantees. Click on the links below to jump to a specific story.

- Jefferson County Education Support Professionals Association (JESPA), Colorado
- Jefferson County Education Association (JCEA), Colorado
- Aurora Education Association (AEA), Colorado
- Milwaukee Teachers Education Association (MTEA), Wisconsin
- Riverview Education Association (REA), Washington
- Seattle Education Association (SEA), Washington
- San Diego Education Association (SDEA), California
- South Carolina Education Association (SCEA)
- Salem Keizer Education Association (SKEA), Oregon
- Mississippi Association of Educators (MAE)
- Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA)/Pueblo Education Association (PEA)/Wyoming Education Association (WEA)/United Teachers Richmond (UTR)

¹ Nina Shapiro, Omar Shaikh Rashad, Monica Velez, “Striking Seattle teachers, aides explain why they are on the picket line,” *The Seattle Times*, Sept. 7, 2022, <https://www.seattletimes.com/education-lab/striking-seattle-teachers-aides-explain-why-they-are-on-the-picket-line/> (accessed November 10, 2022).

Colorado

Bargaining for the Food Our Students Deserve (CO)

The Jefferson County Education Support Professionals Association (JESPA) sought to address the issue of student nutrition by doing away with the highly processed, packaged meals that barely met the appropriate standards, an issue cared for deeply by the union's membership, families, and the students themselves.

When JESPA fights, they win, and they did just that when they secured a historic new contract in June 2022.

Their wins around healthy foods included:

- A pilot program that includes worker, family, and community voice on a committee with the goal of creating healthy, culturally relevant school meals through scratch cooking, meaning the food is prepared with fresh ingredients without any additional preservatives or additives
- Disclosures to all families in the language of their choice about nutritional content in the food being served, including the amount of sugar, which was not currently available on the district website nor is a requirement by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
- Instructions on how to set dietary restrictions sent to all families
- Elimination of red-circling, or sales-based wage cuts and demotions, a practice that previously encouraged the promotion of unhealthy snacks and junk food to students

In addition to these wins at the bargaining table, JESPA set its sights on the Healthy School Meals for All campaign, which passed in November. This initiative made free meals permanent for all students through state and federal funding and eliminated tax cuts for the state's wealthiest.

The program provides incentives for districts to buy local, healthy foods; increases wages for frontline workers serving students; establishes oversight through the creation of parent and student advisory committees; and enables more scratch cooking by providing resources for equipment and staff training.



“Right now, 44% of Colorado families struggle to put food on the table for their children. Because of this extreme food insecurity, our students are more likely to skip meals, more likely to eat cheap, unhealthy junk food, and more likely to go into debt for meals they cannot afford.”

—Zander Kaschub, elementary school kitchen manager, JESPA member and president of the JeffCo Food Service union.

So how did they accomplish victory and what else did they win?

JESPA put a heavy emphasis on strengthening their local union internally. They were able to increase the number of building leaders to 88, more than double the number they had in place previously. They were also able to increase union membership by 29%. The tremendous growth in activists, leaders, and membership is attributed to monthly leadership development meetings, weekly building blitzes, and a focus on membership recruitment through one-on-one conversations. Additionally, the union voted to revert to a percentage-based dues system rather than a flat rate, ensuring stronger local fiscal stability in the future.

JESPA also strengthened their ties to families and community, deepening their partnership with Coloradans for the Common Good (CCG) and solidifying their external power. CCG is a non-partisan organization comprising local institutions who share a concern for families and communities and a passion for democracy, and are led by their convictions, values, and faith to act for the common good (www.cocommongood.org).

With their increased internal and external capacity, JESPA was able to focus on agitating members to take action while strategically picking public fights. They presented their agenda around healthy foods and increased wages to school board candidates and refused to endorse any who did not support their efforts. They took advantage of Colorado's lack of statutory boundaries and used an open and public bargaining strategy.

The tactics they utilized and escalated through the campaign involved:

- Walk-ins and other education support professional (ESP) membership gatherings
- Red flag waving during bargaining and walk-outs—the red flags and the color of red stood as both a symbol of their attachment to the Red for Ed movement and as a way to call out district leadership for “red flags” that they saw as an indication of an abusive relationship such as disrespect, gaslighting, and an increasingly top-heavy administration
- Flooding the superintendent with personal phone calls from supporters that carried late into the evening
- Serving the district's bargaining team with the very same ultra-processed and overly packaged school meals that they felt was appropriate to serve to students (FYI: They didn't indulge in the meals!)



Faced with criticism and accusations of lying about school food, JESPA was met with heavy opposition at times, struggled to obtain allies, and some internally began to question their own strategy. However, they remained united in solidarity with each other and persevered. Because of this, they accomplished something historic and won a monumental contract, not just for themselves, but for the students and community they serve.

Other wins included:

- Wages and compensation
 - o Increase of 44% in starting pay! After raising the starting wage to \$15 for the 21-22 year, they now have secured an \$18 starting wage by September 2023 with the potential for more should the state have more funding (Never before had the district budgeted for ESPs beyond the upcoming school year.)
 - o Compensation for food service workers to meet families and students at back-to-school nights
- Reduction in Force (RIF)
 - o Established seniority as the only determining factor
- Leaves
 - o Paid Sick leave can no longer be denied
 - o Expanded definition of family to include domestic partners, relationships that are like family, significant others, and more
 - o Maternity leave changed to Parental and Childcare leave and includes any parent of a child
 - o Establishment of Sick leave bank for all ESPs
- Health Care and Benefits
 - o Renegotiation of the Benefits Advisory Committee, which will establish rules and boundaries that will not prevent JESPA from being able to negotiate health care in good faith with the district and their third-party billionaire insurance brokers
 - o Increased employer contribution to premiums

Today, being a member of the 3,800 strong union, made up of paraeducators, custodians, bus drivers, secretaries, food service workers, and others fills the hearts with a little more pride (and bellies of students with healthy foods!) than it did yesterday.

The Road to Rebuilding

Just a few years ago the Jefferson County School Board was taken over by a group of ultra-conservatives who were hell-bent on busting the union. Since then, the Jefferson County Education Association (JCEA) has been fighting to restore what they once had—a strong union contract.

Funded by an NEA SCBA grant, they were able to recruit and obtain release time for several Member Organizers who were tasked with conducting building visits and holding one-on-one conversations with members about the campaign. After months of contentious negotiations for a new contract, which was headed to impasse, it was time to escalate the campaign.

Fortunately, just 13 days before the start of the new school year, JCEA reached a tentative agreement after almost 10 hours of mediation. Due to the strong focus on member engagement, internal capacity, and open and transparent bargaining, they were able to achieve some great wins, especially in compensation. Those wins included the establishment of a salary schedule starting at \$50,000 and reaching over \$100,000 at the top of the scale. They also compressed the salary schedule enabling educators to reach the top of the scale faster. And they added a new lane for educators with 90 master-level credits.

JCEA knows that there is a tremendous amount of work left to do and that there is no rest for the weary. With a declining enrollment of over 30,000 students statewide, the district is facing the potential closure of multiple schools, staff layoffs, and threats of charters and privatization. All this, plus a very difficult local political climate that includes a possible decrease in public school funding.

The rebuilding process is not just about the members of JCEA, rather this long-term fight is also about the students they serve and the families and communities they belong to. They want to ensure that all stakeholders have a voice in decision-making. They are working to ensure everyone in the Jefferson County community can continue to find affordable housing, and that everyone can do their part to eliminate racism within our society.

This starts with the continual strengthening of the local (they had their greatest recruitment of new educators to start the school year in more than a decade!), enforcement of the hard-fought wins they've achieved in the contract, and preparing for the next round of bargaining. The road to rebuilding may be long and hard with a few bumps along the way, but to JCEA it is all worth it as they strive to attain the schools Jefferson County students deserve.



Getting Back to Basics: The Structure Test

Faced with a school district fully embracing education reform, where all decisions are based on test scores and all solutions seem to lead to privatization, the Aurora Education Association (AEA) has decided that enough is enough. With an eye toward increased equity for all students, they determined that their contract was how it becomes a reality and their bargaining campaign would be the mechanism to kickstart what would be a long-term plan to build power and go on offense.

Understanding the need to increase their internal capacity to engage their members and community, they started to recruit and train Member Organizers as part of their newly formed Bargaining Support Team. Made up of a majority of newly identified activists who had never been involved with the union previously, they set out to have one-on-one conversations with their colleagues, parents, and community members to find out what would make the students, schools, and the profession successful.

Like many affiliates across the country, the pandemic added a layer of complexity when it came to involving their members when they went to the bargaining table. But AEA was determined to adapt. They created digital comment cards to share feedback with the bargaining team. They provided access so that members could participate in the discussion during caucus time via Zoom. They also used Slack so members could communicate freely while negotiations were taking place—this was a huge success!

It was through all these efforts that AEA was able to win big on all their top priorities identified throughout the campaign. Wins included:

- Regulation on class size and caseloads
- Universal reporting system for behavior, including a process for referrals for students who are struggling to access mental health supports
- 8.5% salary increase, the largest in the region as of early fall '22

During the campaign, AEA wanted to determine the effectiveness of the new Bargaining Support Team and their increased organizing efforts, so they performed structure tests, such as asking members to wear red on a certain day or to turn out to a rally and see how many members participate.

By the end of the campaign, member activism and engagement significantly increased.

Following the contract campaign and entering a new school year, the Bargaining Support Team transitioned to becoming a year-round organizing committee to continue to build on their efforts heading toward the next campaign. The district has a history of failing to abide by the terms of the contract so AEA will continue to focus on education and enforcement of the new agreement. It is through the hard work of all the dedicated activists and leaders and continual strengthening and shoring up of internal structures that AEA will look to build on their tremendous wins in the near future.

Wisconsin

Nevertheless, MTEA Persisted...

More than a decade has passed since Act 10 in Wisconsin completely gutted the state public sector collective bargaining statute, leaving only annual cost-of-living increases as the single negotiable issue. And more than a decade later, the Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association (MTEA) continues to make demands of the administration and school board that best serve Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) students.

With over 500 staffing vacancies, their demands focused heavily on recruitment and retention of educators. To ensure that their demands were heard, 1,775 MTEA members submitted "wait and see" letters to the Superintendent and Chief of Human Resources, stating their refusal to recommit to employment in MPS for Fall 2022 until the district was willing to give everyone an increase of the full Consumer Price Index (CPI) of 4.7% and movement on the salary schedule.

Their pressure paid off. Both demands were met, resulting in an approximate 7% base-building salary increase for the 2022-2023 school year, MTEA's most significant salary win since Act 10 took effect. Other wins included:

- Longevity bonuses
- Increased compensation for paraprofessionals that substitute
- Additional hours for paraprofessionals and children's health assistants

MTEA will never stop organizing and making demands for the students of MPS.

Washington

Preparing to Bargain for Their Students

The Riverview Education Association bargaining team secured release time to prepare to go to the bargaining table. Their extensive preparation paid off and they achieved what was likely their earliest settlement. They focused on addressing supports for students and solutions to recruit and retain educators in their small school district.

Wins included:

- Significant increases in multilingual supports for students and educators
- Guaranteed multilingual paraprofessional time and caseload limits that trigger additional staffing
- Increased special education staffing
- Increased educator voice and shared decision-making through a new caseload review committee
- Substantial compensation gains including an average increase of 10.3% for 2022-2023

Our Voices Will Be Heard: “Striketober” Edition

Following a weeklong strike by more than 6,000 educators of the Seattle Education Association (SEA), a new three-year contract was settled with major wins for both the students and educators of Seattle Public Schools (SPS).

Seattle was facing a multitude of systemic problems such as increased class sizes, workload, and staffing cuts; racial inequality of resources and services; unsafe learning and working conditions; unaffordable cost of living for many lower-wage staff; and the very real educator [shortage](#) crisis looming. They knew that the timing was right to be aggressive in finding solutions for these problems. SPS had close to \$80 million in ESSER III funds available as of early 2022 because of the Biden administration’s COVID relief package.

In the end, SEA stood strong and won on class size and teacher-student ratios, increased mental health staffing, workplace safety and elimination of exclusionary practices through Building Safety Teams and restorative practices, annual raises, and much more. For a complete summary, visit <https://www.seattlewea.org/contracts-and-bargaining/2022-bargaining-updates/>.

Awarded an NEA Student-Centered Bargaining and Advocacy Grant early on, SEA was able to leverage strategic communications to support the organizing and bargaining with cohesive messaging, mobilization, collective action, and community engagement while centering student voice and the voices of educators of color.

Their educator voices were amplified with the support of a communications professional, hired to drive internal and external communications during the bargain and subsequent strike. It was due to this added expertise and capacity that they were able to drive their narrative on multiple fronts.

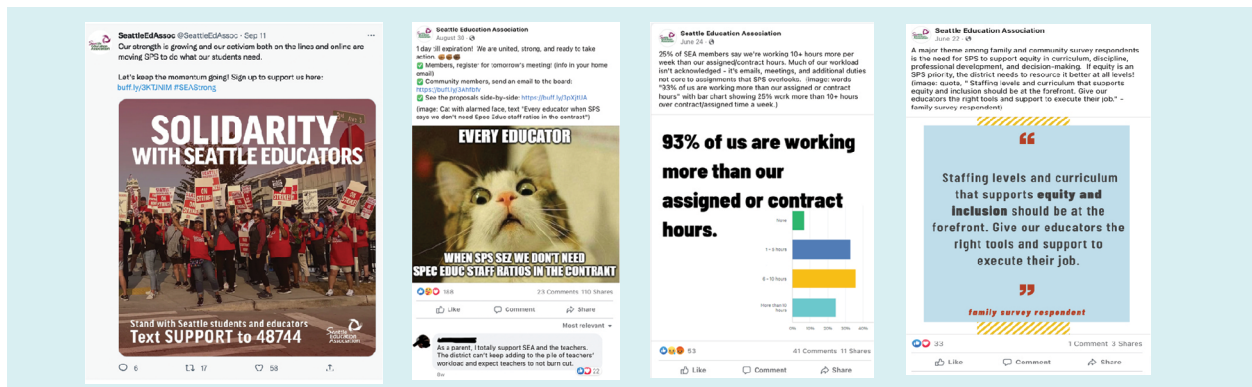
- **Message Discipline:** Having a fully developed message framework from the beginning made it possible to have a cohesive, unifying message that members repeated through the strike.
- **Community:** Having an assigned communications person made it possible for SEA to do targeted comms pieces for our community members previously not possible without the staff support, including having petitions and ads available in five languages.
- **Media:** SEA dominated the media market with pro-public education messages in support of SEA bargaining demands. The increasing media attention, particularly national media attention (CNN, MSNBC) increased the pressure on Seattle Public Schools and was a key component in bringing the district back to the table with substantive proposals.
- **Social Media:** The communications person created and executed a social media blitz including Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter and used online petition and letter writing tools to engage the community in putting pressure on the school board.
- **Cultivating Spokespeople:** The communications support also meant SEA was able to spotlight member voices and member stories for both internal and external audiences and dig deeper, beyond the “usual suspects,” to highlight new voices.

To ensure message discipline and alignment, the union created a structure for staff, governance, the Bargaining Team, and Bargaining Subcommittee to establish consistent, regular, and intentional strategic communications.

They recruited, trained, and coordinated speakers for school board meetings and other public venues; aligned communications directly with the planned organizing actions; and worked with other labor organizations in the community to build support for bargaining goals through intentional outreach and messaging.

They shared dozens of member story [videos](#), prioritized increasing their social media following, coordinated media requests, organized op-eds and letters to the editor, utilized surveys, and instituted weekly bargaining updates.

Whether they are fighting for recess time or racial equity for their students or living wages and fair compensation to recruit and retain educators, SEA talks the talk and walks the walk.




California

Coordinated Bargaining for the Common Good

Part of a long-term strategic plan many years in the making, the San Diego Education Association (SDEA) and the California Alliance for Community Schools (CACS) are poised to win big for their students and communities following a historic increase in state education funding.

CACS is a coalition of eight California Teachers Association and California Federation of Teachers local affiliates, educators, parents, and students united in their commitment to transforming education in a more just, equitable, and participatory society.

Learning from their coordinated bargaining efforts during the pandemic and the strikes in Oakland and Los Angeles in 2019, many of the CACS locals, including SDEA, were able to align their contract expiration dates, enabling them to further synchronize their planning and campaign execution.



One thing that SDEA recognized is they do not have the capacity to meet their goals alone. The idea behind the coordinated bargaining plan is simple: By working together they will build greater power to “achieve big and transformative improvements” to create the schools their students deserve.

SDEA is taking a four-pronged approach to prepare for the campaign:

1. Build capacity of SDEA educator site leaders from Contract Action Team (CAT) site structures to be organizing leads focused on family engagement and political action.
2. Educate San Diego Community Schools Coalition members and community via organizing leads about Common Good campaign and develop excitement to fight.
3. Identify local common good demands that align with statewide coordinated bargaining platform.
4. Communicate local common good demands to educators and school communities and connect local efforts to statewide coordinated campaign.

Supported by an NEA grant, one of their member leaders was able to take advantage of release time to lead the community engagement and coordinated efforts.

Identifying Issues

Several bargaining goals were identified early on through CACS, with a heavy emphasis on racial justice. To address the historical divestment across districts in schools located within communities of color, demands will focus on curriculum, ethnic studies, allocation of resources, educator pipelines, restorative practices, and support for educators and students of color. All these issues run parallel to their advocacy around community schools, staffing, and class size.

Next, common good demands were identified through transparent and democratic processes including:

- 150+ SDEA bargaining input sessions (most in SDEA history) where they asked: “What do students need outside our classrooms in order to be successful inside our classrooms?”
- 60+ family and student leader surveys on community priorities
- Input gathered from parent leaders at community forum

The inclusion of common good demands into their bargaining platform was a historic moment for SDEA.

SDEA San Diego Education Association

Educators are fighting for a union contract to **Recover, Rebuild, Rise Together!**

Fully staff schools to recruit new educators and stop burnout

Pay and benefits to stop the staffing shortage

- Educator pay raises that keep up with cost of living increases
- Keep fully-paid family healthcare and improve dental and vision care
- Extend summer healthcare benefits to temporary teachers so they don't leave SDUSD for more competitive districts
- COVID retention bonus
- Hiring incentive to recruit special educators
- Wage parity for JROTC instructors and compensation for all VAPA extended day work

Make educators' work and family lives better

- More paid planning time so teachers can do our best teaching, including more preparation time for elementary teachers
- Fewer non-essential meetings so educators have more planning time
- Transfer rules that are fairer to educators and make schools more stable for students, including eliminating the elementary TK-3 or 4-6' rule
- Improve rate for off-hour training workshops
- Expanded maternity and paternity leave



12.2022

Resources that address the impact of the pandemic on students

- Lower class size so elementary teachers can give students more one-on-one attention to overcome pandemic learning loss
- 3-5-year-old Universal TK students must continue to have both a TK Teacher and an Early Childhood Education Teacher in their classrooms
- More counseling services to meet students' increased mental health needs
- Hire more paraeducators so students with IEPs get the support they're entitled to
- Support for special education assessments so no student has to wait
- Close loopholes that allow SDUSD to overload special educators' caseload
- Strengthen SDUSD's online and independent study programs
- Invest in staffing to advance restorative practices, Ethnic Studies, Community Schools, supports for multilingual learners and student physical health
- Expand access to after school opportunities

Clean and safe schools

- Hire more custodial and maintenance staff to fulfill SDUSD's promise to keep our schools safe, clean and pest-free
- Lower class size in Physical Education classes to ensure safe supervision of students in the gym, on the field, and in the locker room
- Keep COVID air quality measures in place with portable and HVAC filters

Equitable access to education

- Broadband home internet available for all students
- Access to technology devices for all students and educators
- Access to free and efficient public transportation for all students

“We get ready to strike so we don’t have to go on strike.”

SDEA knows that to win, their members and allies will have to fight. They had a plan to do just that.

1. Win a strong union contract by April 2023
2. If not, be strike-ready
3. Now until April, get 6,500 union members and parents strike-ready

As of mid-April 2023, SDEA was turning up the heat, holding pickets at 141 schools across the district. Just the announcement that picketing was being planned caused movement at the table by the district on issues that they ignored for months. Even more movement occurred after witnessing almost 5,000 educators hit the streets.

On May 25th, a historic three-year tentative agreement was reached containing 15% raises over two years with a reopener for the third year along with important investments for classrooms and students. If ratified, it will be the largest pay increase in county history and the largest for SDEA as well! For more details about the agreement, visit www.sdea.net/2023/05/historic-contract-tentative-agreement-reached/.

SDEA School Board Member **ACCOUNTABILITY SESSIONS** San Diego Education Association

What's an Accountability Session?



An accountability session is an opportunity for SDEA members like you to speak directly to the people making decisions at SDUSD. At these upcoming accountability sessions, educators will be speaking out about our bargaining priorities and our urgency to settle the union contract now!

APRIL 18 & 19 • 4:30-6PM
SDEA AUDITORIUM

**REGISTER
NOW
ONLINE!**

South Carolina

Who Needs a Law? “Collective Bargaining” in a Non-Bargaining State

The South Carolina Education Association (SCEA) are no strangers to adversity when it comes to union rights. South Carolina has long been a state that prohibited collective bargaining for educators. However, with funding support from an NEA grant, they were determined to defy the absence of legal rights and put a plan in place to make “bargaining,” or strong advocacy, a reality.

Embarking on a listening tour across the state, The SCEA developed their bargaining platform and prepared to “negotiate” with legislators and school districts. They also conducted building visits, welcomed new educators at every new employee orientation, and leveraged their surround-sound campaigns to develop relationships with members and recruit potential members through a strong online and digital media presence.

Their plan was to begin a connection with potential members through social media so that when an in-person, one-on-one conversation took place, the future member would already know and be able to identify with The SCEA.

Their first major victory came when the Florence Education Association won paid parental leave for full-time employees, making Florence One Schools the [first](#) district in the state to provide the benefit.

This was followed by the Horry County Education Association that won significant [compensation](#) for educators, including \$1.50/hour for all classified staff and \$2,000 per cell on the salary schedule for all teachers.

The SCEA also won in the legislature where they secured guaranteed daily unencumbered [time](#) for all elementary and special education teachers across the state.

And they weren't done yet. Here are just a few of their other achievements:

- Defeated private school vouchers following a 6-month battle
- Defeated anti-truth censorship bills and amendments
- Defeated an open enrollment bill that would have deepened inequities and created fiscal uncertainty
- Increased teacher supply checks to \$300
- Increased the minimum teacher starting salary to \$40,000
- Increased bus driver wages by 3%
- Gained PEBA (retirement pension) exemption from earning limitations for retirees
- Halted dangerous insulin administration bill
- Ended lunch-shaming and the practice of sending students and families to collections over school lunch debt via unanimous passage of a bill

In May 2023, following a huge mobilization of SCEA members, the legislature passed a bill providing paid parental leave for all school employees. Taking effect near the end of June, the law includes:

- Six weeks of paid leave for an employee that gives birth or is "primarily responsible for furnishing the care and nature" of an adopted child;
- Two weeks of paid leave for a parent that did not give birth;
- Two weeks of paid leave upon the start of a foster placement.

This is more than any other state in the Southeast! Much of the advocacy work and mobilization efforts were funded through the SCBA grant.

The SCEA's motto, "Every battle is a membership battle," is indicative of their never-ending fighting spirit and staunch advocacy for all educators and students in South Carolina.

jointhescea.org

TOGETHER. A STRONGER VOICE.

Together we're stronger. Together we're heard.

Being an educator is one of the hardest jobs in the world and it's never been harder than right now. With more members like you, we're having a stronger collective voice that can help educators live better lives, so our students get the best education possible.

Who is The SCEA?

The SCEA is South Carolina's leading advocate for public education with the collective power of over 3.8 million members nationwide. We work together to ensure that educators like you have a stronger voice.

Together we are stronger!

What does that mean?

- We advocate at the state and local levels for higher salaries and improved working conditions for all education professionals.
- We meet with lawmakers from both political parties to improve our daily lives as educators.
- We work hand in hand with school administrators and school boards to make sure our voices are being heard and respected.
- We make sure that educators have the resources you need to give students your best.

THE S-C-E-A
South Carolina Education Association

For more information, reach out to:
 The South Carolina Education Association
 415 Zimmetcrest Drive, Columbia, SC 29310
 803-734-6444 | www.scea.org

The SCEA Works With Educators to Deliver Real Change.

STATE

1. Unanimous passage of 30 no-risk, July-free, universal school lunch for all students & special education educators.
2. Defeated Private School Vouchers. Won after a 6-month long battle.
3. Defeated anti-truth censorship bills and anti-truth censorship amendments. Members of The SCEA and coalition partners across SC joined to fight for honesty in education and more.
4. Defeated open enrollment bills that would have deepened inequities and created fiscal uncertainty.
5. Increased the teacher supply check to \$300.
6. Increased the minimum teacher starting salary to \$40,000.
7. Bus Driver salary raised 3%.
8. PEBA (retirement pension) exemption from earning limitations for retirees.
9. Dangerous insulin administration bill halted.
10. Unanimous passage of a bill that ended lunch-shaming and the practice of sending students and families to collections over school lunch debt.

NATIONAL

1. Due to the advocacy of SCEA members, the Union Public Service Fund Forgiveness (UPSF) bill was **overhauled** for only more workers get forgiveness, including previously unlisted occupations.
 - a. **Repealing FICA TIE Payments:** The new temporary FICA waiver will enable teachers to pay the same period of unemployment benefits for FICA as they would for Public Law Forgiveness (PLF) as long as any payments made during those years. Teachers must apply before October 31, 2023.
 - b. **HEA Use and Fee Rate will be applied:** Higher Numbers of Workers Helped: The changes to PLF F will allow 550,000 teachers with more significantly closer to student 200K+ forgiveness, including 28,000 of our immediate eligible.
2. The SCEA is the only organization in South Carolina that advocates for members at the national level!

Oregon

Joining Together with Community for The Schools Our Students Deserve

Heavily targeted by the right-wing, anti-public education Freedom Foundation that encouraged membership opt-outs, the Salem Keizer Education Association (SKEA) membership numbers were at an all-time low. While the Supreme Court of the United States' Janus decision certainly emboldened anti-union opposition, the leadership of SKEA knew there was more to the story.

For the past several decades, bargaining had taken place behind closed doors. There was minimal transparency and therefore members were not well-informed or engaged. And certainly, engagement with parents and the community was absent.

After years of stagnant activism and engagement, they saw that the opportunity to improve languishing working conditions while also rebuilding their union and increasing their power through community partnerships was ripe. So that is what they set out to do with the support of their NEA SCBA grant.

Their contract goals were straightforward:

- Compensation that kept up with inflation
- Improved salary schedule and differentials
- Strengthened working conditions language
- Smaller class size with caps
- Better benefits
- No givebacks or compromises on existing contractual guarantees

To accomplish these goals, while also rebuilding the union and their overall power, SKEA strove to increase member engagement and activism, enabling everyone in the bargaining unit to see the value of being a part of the union and how it can amplify their collective educator voice.

Starting with small, measurable objectives, they sought to increase member participation, evidenced by increased survey participation, open rates of member communications, attendance at events, and rates of voter turnout. They also planned to break the traditional cycle of the past through increased transparency and consistent communication regarding bargaining and contractual issues.

To both increase member engagement and open communication, SKEA elected one representative from each worksite to be a part of their larger bargaining team.

In the past, the school district intentionally tried to divide educators and members of the community. This has always been a common tactic by management to silence the voices of those with differing opinions and viewpoints as well as to hinder the power of the union. SKEA plans to change that. From the beginning, they held community meetings, inviting parents

and other stakeholders to share their thoughts on what improvements were needed. This information was essential when formulating their bargaining demands and they knew that they would not be alone in their fight.

Moving forward, SKEA will continue the work of building the union—through increased member engagement, activism, communication, and transparency. They will continue to develop partnerships with parents and the community by seeking input and sharing ideas. United together, they will forge ahead to create the schools Salem Keizer students deserve.



Bargaining commenced at the beginning of April with SKEA members filling the room in a sea of red at each session. While the two sides came to the table far apart on many key issues, the union continues to stand strong in solidarity together.

Mississippi

Education Issues Aren't Isolated to the Classroom

Rooted in years of racism and discrimination, an all-too familiar situation of disinvestment created crumbling infrastructure and an unsanitary and unreliable water system, causing the people of Jackson, Mississippi, led by the Mississippi Association of Educators (MAE), to reach a boiling point—literally.

Due to lead and copper found in the water, residents frequently found themselves with no access to water, low water pressure, and boil-water notices. The Jackson water crisis is a health, economic, and education crisis with impacts that will be felt for generations to come.

A health crisis

Even low levels of lead in the blood can cause developmental delays, difficulty learning, behavioral issues, and permanent, disabling neurological damage. Considering most of the city's water pipes have been found to contain dangerous levels of lead and copper, it is possible that for many residents in Jackson, the damage may have already been done.

An economic crisis

The cost of repairing and replacing the crumbling infrastructure is substantial. Residents impacted by the crisis are forced to make difficult financial choices to provide safe water for themselves and their families over other necessities. Residents with the ability to relocate will likely choose to do so.

Economic development has, and will continue to be, severely hamstrung as existing businesses shutter or move elsewhere while prospective new business may look to avoid the city.

The long-term physiological effects of lead poisoning, resulting in cognitive impairment, will have a negative impact on workforce performance and productivity.

An education crisis

The learning experience of Jackson students has been severely disrupted due to lack of water, low water pressure, and dependence on bottled water. Students were forced to learn virtually while educators had to prepare with little turnaround time.

Both part of the education crisis and an extension of the economic crisis, when schools were forced to close, parents had to make the tough choice of taking leave from work to stay home, if they had that option, or pay someone to care for their children at home. When they were physically in the classroom, if a student had to use the bathroom, some teachers were forced to take the entire class to another part of the building or outside to a port-a-potty because the closest toilets didn't flush or the drinking fountain didn't work, causing lengthy disruptions to learning time on multiple occasions throughout the day.

Providing school meals was a huge challenge for food service staff as water had to be boiled to cook. All this chaos, whether at home or in the schools, has caused stress and anxiety, learning loss, and mental trauma for the students.

"The other day, someone asked me, 'Why is MAE, why is JAE, talking about water? What does safe water have to do with education? It has everything to do with education.'"

—George Stewart, middle school teacher and President, Jackson Association of Educators

Funding solutions

If you think that the educators of JAE and MAE are going to stand idly by during such a tremendous crisis, think again!

In late September, Congress allocated \$20 million to fix the water infrastructure in Jackson.

In October, Congress then launched an inquiry to find out why the disinvestment in Jackson's water system by the state had occurred.

The Congressional Committee on Oversight and Reform and Committee on Homeland Security also launched an [investigation](#) into the use of the previously granted federal funds under the American Rescue Plan Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to determine whether Congressional funds were properly used to address the water crisis.

In November, an [agreement](#) was reached for a federal takeover of the water system whereby the U.S. Department of Justice established a third party to monitor and ensure safety for the people of Jackson.

The Department of Justice also filed a new [complaint](#) against the city for its inability to comply with previous enforcement from the Environmental Protection Agency. The goal of the interim agreement, according to the order, is to stabilize Jackson's water system while the city and federal government look at long-term solutions, through litigation or a consent decree.

Within the Omnibus, Congress allocated \$600 million to Jackson, with \$150 million allocated for technical assistance and \$450 million allocated for capital projects.

The 2022 [Inflation Reduction Act](#) created the Environmental and Climate Justice Block Grant program in section 138 of the Clean Air Act (CAA) and provided EPA with \$2.8 billion in grant funding for the program for projects to benefit communities with environmental justice concerns.

And, on March 24, 2023, the Department of Health and Human Services and Environmental Protection Agency sent a [joint letter](#) to states urging states to use federal resources for lead detection and mitigation in early care and education settings.

While there is still a long road ahead and much fallout and trauma to continue to address, the resilience of the educators leading the fight remains strong.



Pennsylvania, Wyoming, Colorado, California

The Importance of a Strong Foundation

In student-centered bargaining and advocacy and Bargaining for the Common Good, the work begins before even starting to think about running a campaign. The Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA), Wyoming Education Association (WEA), and Pueblo Education Association (PEA) used their grant funds to begin to shift their bargaining and organizing culture to be more member-driven across the state and local. And for United Teachers Richmond (UTR) in California, they have been putting in the work for several years and are looking to scale up their organizational infrastructure as they prepare to bargain for a successor agreement.

PSEA, focusing on the ranks of their higher education affiliates, established a Member Organizing program. By training a cadre of members in member recruitment and engagement, a solid foundation in bargaining skills, and education around student-centered issues, they envision a larger membership base with increased organizational capacity, which will enable them to build power both at the bargaining table and at the state legislature.

Up until seven years ago, the WEA used to hold their Research, Bargaining, & Lobbying (RBL) conference on an annual basis. Wyoming does not have a bargaining statute and there are only a handful of local affiliates that do negotiate a contract, so their focus shifted to legislative priorities. But that may all be changing.

Utilizing the funding support from their grant, WEA is about to put the “rebel” back into the RBL conference. Their plan is to engage leaders and activists from across the state to engage in bargaining and advocating for issues that matter to students, families, communities, and public-school employees. To do this, they will introduce different approaches such as an interest-based bargaining model and the Bargaining for the Common Good strategy, the latter of which WEA sees as a path to organizing for power and gaining bargaining rights where it does not currently exist.

By combining funds from multiple NEA grants, PEA was able to have a full-time release member in addition to their current full-time release president. This enabled their leadership to continue building relationships and connections among members, identify leaders, and strengthen internal structures. It also provided the opportunity to focus on community mapping and engagement and to develop partnerships, relationships, and coalitions with other organizations and allies.

Pending approval by PEA and the school board, a tentative agreement was reached that increases teacher, school nurse and counselor compensation by about 12.5% and establishes a starting teacher salary of \$45,000 while also increasing the employer contribution toward health insurance.

Through this work, PEA will continue to support the expansion and development of community schools. All of these efforts are also part of their preparation for their next bargaining campaign next year.

Having developed relationships with students and community stakeholders based on the shared interests in improving learning conditions in the schools, UTR was primed and ready to go as they headed toward the expiration of their current collective bargaining agreement. However, as with many things in all our lives, the COVID-19 pandemic threw a wrench in their plans, as member engagement became more difficult to maintain.

With an eye toward rebuilding internal capacity, their grant funds are being used to support a full-time release organizer. With member engagement being such an important part of their bargaining process in the past, they are now excited to make bargaining even more democratic and member driven.

To begin, they elected their largest bargaining team ever, with at least one person from each of the 55 school sites. Previously, only 10 sites were represented. UTR will use this rejuvenated member-student-community power to organize to win strong contract language and funding for issues like educator-led community schools, increased staffing and resources in special education, and professional pay to address educator shortages.

After failing to reach an agreement following a year at the bargaining table, the two sides were able to avoid a strike (97.3% authorization vote) and district-wide shutdown when they finally reached a settlement on a three-year contract in February. The agreement included:

- Full inclusion of community schools shared decision-making (one of the first guaranteed comprehensive structures in a CTA local association contract)
- 14.5% pay increase by July 1, 2023
- Contractual guarantees for preschool educators for the first time
- Maintenance of class size caps and class size
- MERV-13 or HEPA filters in all workspaces
- Mechanisms to address school safety

