

## MIA WARD

CERTIFIED CANDIDATE FOR NEA BOARD OF DIRECTORS, ESP AT-LARGE

How can NEA expand its focus on higher education members and the issues affecting them, such as threats to academic freedom and tenure?

Education is the fabric from which our leaders of tomorrow emerge. It's the same fabric in which our educators bind together to ensure student success. At the same time, the career choice of being an educator is how their daily living is funded but is now under attack. I never thought I'd see the day when education would be in crisis, not only for educators, but for fundamental student learning at every grade level, including post-secondary. With such important jobs, you wonder why so many in this industry feel undervalued, unsupported, overworked, and underpaid. It's truly a thankless industry.

I believe NEA and its affiliates do an amazing job of sharing knowledge and keeping us informed about the present dangers to the education industry. Going forward, it remains imperative to continue sounding the alarms, making sure that all stakeholders have a clear and concise understanding of the present threats and the need to respond appropriately. Consider offering seminars and workshops to parents and students to provide insight as to how their academic freedoms are being affected as well.

That said, we want to assure that there are methods to disseminate as well as receive information. All stakeholder voices should be heard. Parents, students, community and educators alike should be able to have dialogue in a safe space to promote education instruction and be in support of educators. Awareness is essential to faculty, staff and students to increase their knowledge of professional organizations that will also participate in advocating in support of tenure laws favoring educators.

Advocacy is a vital component to protecting our industry. To me it means, "See Something, Say Something". Taking our concerns to legislators so they hear what educators face and how students are affected is a must. At the same time, we should continue to engage our institutions' leaders while developing policies protecting academic freedoms and tenure. Educators are a diverse group across the spectrum. Involvement from all corners is critical so that everyone is knowledgeable, and on one accord and included in the advocacy and ultimately changes to be made. Support from school districts, local, state and other governing bodies is very necessary for change to occur.

Any policy revisions in favor of academic freedoms and tenure should clearly state the essential terms being adopted so there are no gray areas leaving room for interpretation that could ultimately hurt those affected.

Lastly, I would encourage every educator to document their contributions to the education industry. Toot your own horn! When asked what you do at any given time, always be prepared to thoroughly explain your role as an educator and why you deserve to continue. Show your passion for the students, your craft and others in this industry. Educators, continue to stand strong! You have earned the right to be here and to retire here.