# FIGHT FORMARD Resilience, power, respect: Saving public education and our democracy

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REPORT FOR DELEGATES TO THE 2025 NEA REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY

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## FIGHT BACK, FIGHT FORWARD

#### Resilience, Power, Respect: Saving Public Education and Our Democracy

#### **REPORT FOR DELEGATES TO THE 2025 NEA REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY**

The attacks on public education and our democracy over the last six months have been unprecedented: but so has been the level of engagement to fight back against these attacks and to fight forward for a better America based on our values of equal opportunity, democracy and a just society. As we gather to plan the course ahead, this overview is designed to ensure that all delegates know about the breadth of the work that has already been done by NEA, its affiliates and members. There is much more planned and underway.

#### EDUCATE. LITIGATE. ORGANIZE. MOBILIZE. LEGISLATE. ELECT. COMMUNICATE.



- Guidance for Members, Schools, Colleges and Universities on Immigration Issues – To prepare our leaders and members on the impact that immigration issues can have on schools and our communities, NEA issued comprehensive guidance and held several webinars regarding *Plyler v. Doe*, Safe Zones resolutions for local affiliates, an FAQ around mass raids, how educators can safely engage in immigration advocacy, a Know Your Rights guide around immigration enforcement, and an update on the DACA program.
- Understanding the Right to Peacefully Assemble

   NEA distributed legal guidance to state affiliates to
   inform leaders, members and staff of their legal right to
   protest, as well as the risks under the current climate of
   increasing militarized response to protests and defense.
- NEA pivoted the design of the **Leadership Summit** in March to underscore the urgency of the moment, educate members on the Fight Back, Fight Forward strategies and amplify the five focus areas: Defending Federal Programs for Students, Educators, and Public Education; Defeating Vouchers and Privatization; Promoting Racial, Social, and Education Justice Through Inclusive Education; Standing Up for Union/Educator/ NEA Rights; and Protecting Immigrant Students and Educators. 1,621 members, from across every state affiliate, participated.
- NEA revised the **Minority Leadership Training and Women's Leadership Training** West and East seminars with new post-election engagement strategies that were socially, emotionally, and culturally responsive. This included greater intentionality with the co-creation of community agreements, coordinating a robust "Rest as Resistance" room, visual engagement with a "Giving and Receiving Wall", deliberately designed state connection time activities, and curated special interest workshop sessions.
- Bargaining for the Common Good: Racial Justice Guide – NEA published a new guide for affiliates on how to go on offense to advance issues of racial, social and education justice in our classrooms and our communities.
- LGBTQ+ Bargaining Guidance NEA just released new guidance that identifies important issues to ensure equal treatment and fairness for LGBTQ+ educators, their students, and allies. This comes on the heels of the recent Bargaining for the Common Good Racial Justice Guide for locals.
- Bargaining Guidance on Immigrant Rights NEA has also released Sample Contract Language to Support Immigrant Students and Educators, which includes examples of language that has been negotiated into contracts by both K-12 and higher education unions, and others, from across the country.

#### LITIGATE

The new administration is trampling on our constitutional rights on a weekly basis. Already more than 350 lawsuits have been filed challenging the assault on established rights and protections. Lower courts have held many of the President's actions to be unlawful and enjoined them. The administration has been appealing some of the more far-reaching rulings to higher courts and has secured reversals in some cases. Our legal team is tracking all the cases and keeping our network of state affiliate attorneys informed of the impacts on our members, our students, and their families with weekly updates. NEA is taking the lead in filing lawsuits that directly impact public education; we are assisting on others through amicus briefs, such as on the birthright citizenship case.

- Defending Inclusive Education In partnership with NEA-New Hampshire and the ACLU, NEA sued the US Department of Education and won a huge victory, halting the enforcement of the February 14 Dept. of Education "Dear Colleague" letter threatening to withhold federal funding from any school, college, or university that engages in any "DEI" work. The preliminary injunction prevents enforcement "at any school, college or university that employs NEA members." The case now proceeds before the trial court, who will rule on whether to grant summary judgment to NEA on all of our claims later this summer.
- Fighting for Collective Bargaining Rights of Federal Educators – The new administration issued an executive order depriving our members in the Federal Education Association (FEA) of their rights to collectively bargain, unilaterally canceling their contract. NEA has filed suit on behalf of FEA, arguing it violates educators' First and Fifth Amendment rights and exceeds the authority of the administration.
- Defending Members Attacked for Teaching "DEI" – NEA is successfully defending members attacked for delivering truthful, respectful, age-appropriate

and inclusive content and attempting to create spaces of learning that are safe and welcoming for every student. NEA worked with the **Tennessee** Education Association in its successful state lawsuit to reinstate with full back pay, a teacher who was fired for using the spoken word poem *White Privilege* (by Jenée Lacey). The case now is on appeal. NEA has similarly secured relief for an educator in Florida who refused to remove a Black Lives Matter banner from the school hallway, and we have fended off efforts to discipline a teacher in South Carolina targeted for assigning *Between the World and Me* (Ta-Nehisi Coates' memoir) to her AP English students.

• **Protecting School Funding** – The **Wyoming** Education Association won a landmark court case against the state government that will force the state to modify its education funding formula to comply with the requirements of the state constitution.

- Challenging State Voucher Programs NEA and the Wyoming Education Association have filed suit challenging the constitutionality of the state's \$50 million universal school voucher program.
- **Defending FMCS** NEA and the **Ohio** Education Association have joined as plaintiffs in a suit challenging the dismantling of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service.
- Expanded Legal Assistance for Members Facing Immigration Issues – NEA has increased support to members and affiliates grappling with the assault on immigrant members. We have expanded our legal services to include an optional Immigration Legal Advice Program. This reimburses state affiliates for legal advice and consultation to members needing assistance with their immigration status in connection with their employment or facing employment-related legal action for lawful actions taken in response to an immigration enforcement action on school property, higher education campuses, and official school bus stops. The program also benefits states developing Know Your Rights guidance and trainings around immigration issues.

#### ORGANIZE

- Supporting Member Organizers NEA provides support to state affiliates across the country in training and deploying 2,194 member organizers working to grow and strengthen their local unions. Working evenings, weekends and summers, these member organizers are granted stipends to assist with the goal of recruiting potential members and increasing member engagement in their local and state affiliates.
- **Protecting Collective Bargaining** When the **Utah** legislature passed HB267 revoking collective bargaining rights for Utah education employees, NEA, its affiliates, and the labor movement across the state mounted a truly remarkable signature gathering collection effort

to put the legislation on the ballot to let voters decide. They gathered 324,000 signatures on a punishingly short 31-day timeline, qualifying 23 of the state's 29 state senate districts and shattering signature gathering records.

• Re-Establishing Collective Bargaining in Virginia – Having ended a 30+ year ban on public sector collective bargaining, educators across Virginia are winning back exclusive recognition and the right to bargain. More than 60,000 educators across the state have already won first contracts, including the large districts in Fairfax, Loudoun and Prince William counties, among others.



- Helping New Members Organize Growing and strengthening the union means organizing new workplaces. NEA has ramped up its support for affiliates that are organizing recognition and first contract campaigns for previously unorganized groups of workers, including new units in Colorado, New York, New Mexico, and Kansas.
- Funding for Affiliate Staff Organizers Through the UniServ Grant Program, NEA's Growth and Strength Organizing Program, and the new Campaign Lab, NEA is providing support to affiliates to hire and deploy 167 full time staff organizers across the country.

Building power to make change starts at the local level. Whether we have formal collective bargaining rights or not, the ability to win meaningful changes in our members' work lives is the foundation of our collective power, and our ability to both fight back and fight forward. Over the past year, local affiliates have gone on offense at the bargaining table, engaging thousands of members and winning concrete gains for them, their families and their communities.

- United Teachers of **Richmond** (UTR) secured one of the first and most comprehensive **community school contract articles** in the nation. Their campaign also secured positions for community school lead teachers at all community school sites.
- The **Columbus** Education Association has built an Education Justice Coalition that launched "Board Watch," where parents, neighbors, and educators attending the school board meetings and recording issues are able to report out to the base. Board Watch became an extremely effective entry point for new leaders; the coalition earned extensive local media coverage and **stopped the school closures**.
- In **San Francisco**, UESF members voted 97% to authorize a strike. They had a 70-person bargaining team, won an **84% raise** for their lowest paid classified workers, won a 19% raise for certificated, and won community schools CBA language.
- In Sacramento, SCEA was able to prompt the departure of the anti-union superintendent and then reach an agreement on a path-breaking community schools MOU that creates both district-wide and site-specific community schools steering committees with broad oversight responsibilities. Plus they won a 10% across the board increase and 6% more for hard-to-fill positions.
- In Los Angeles, UTLA won the second largest pay increase ever: 22.9% compounded over 3 years. They also went on a 3-day Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) strike in solidarity with the classified staff union (SEIU) and staged a huge rally to push back against proposed district budget cuts that resulted in those cuts being rolled back. UTLA and the Reclaim Our Schools LA (ROSLA) coalition also won a reduction in standardized testing.
- Chula Vista Educators passed a record-breaking contract that included a 9% salary increase, class size caps and community schools language.
- The **Portland** Association of Teachers (PAT) won a new contract that included **expanded language on target**

class sizes and caseloads and a guarantee of 410 minutes of protected planning time for educators at every grade level.

- The San Antonio Alliance won the biggest compensation package in over 25 years, secured the district-wide implementation of a culturally responsive/ sustaining teaching framework, won the creation of district-wide committees with worker, parent, student, and community members, and saved 6 schools from being closed.
- The St. Paul Federation of Teachers won contract language that establishes site councils at every school.
- The **Asheville City** Association of Educators (ACAE) **reached majority status**, making it the first local in North Carolina in at least a decade to have a majority of district employees be union members.
- In a non-bargaining state, the Durham Association of Educators achieved majority membership (>2,637, wall-to-wall) and built a district-wide Organizing Committee structure that can move a majority of all Durham Public Schools (DPS) staff to action. After a classified pay "debacle" rocked the Durham community, 19 work sites went on strike to prevent pay cuts. They earned sympathetic media coverage, partnered with parents and community, and won a set of emergency demands related to classified pay. The local launched a fight for formal recognition and a Meet and Confer process, and to push the County Commission for historic increases in local funding for public schools. They tripled their membership and won \$27.4 million in new county funding for public schools, including raises for classified staff, an increase to the local teacher salary supplement, locally funding Master's Pay (which was stripped away at the state level several years ago), and providing an additional supplement for hard-to-fill positions in Special Ed and ESL. The Durham school board's \$27.5 million budget request to the county was 2.7 times larger than any budget request in memory.
- Guilford County Association of Educators cafeteria workers engaged in wildcat sick-outs — a supermajority

calling out several days in a row—and 40% of the nutrition services department participated on picket lines, and **winning 4%-7% raises** from the district.

- The New Hanover County Association of Educators partnered with New Hanover for All, to respond to budget cuts and the staffing crisis with a dynamic labor-community campaign to increase local school funding. They saved almost 270 student-facing positions from being cut.
- The Pueblo Education Association launched their "big bargaining" campaign with a series of escalating structure tests designed for majority participation, beginning with a photo petition and culminating in walk-ins district-wide, led by their new and expanded Organizing Committee. As a result, bargaining was highly successful this year, reaching a \$50,500 base pay. "All the Way to \$50K" seemed like a pie-in-the-sky goal when PEA's fledgling Organizing Committee set their eye on it. The new contract was ratified at 96%, and

PEA is now only 75 recruits away from supermajority status (75%).

- The Aurora Education Association won a new contract that resulted in at least \$3,000 raises for all educators, with some early career educators gaining significantly more, including some of the highest starting salaries in the state! They also won LGBTQ+ protections for students and staff as well as an expanded definition of "family" for sick leave.
- The **Denver** Classroom Teachers Association sponsored a **mutual aid campaign for new arrival families,** collecting nearly \$6,000 in monetary contributions as well as household items and clothing. DCTA also engaged over 100 members to lobby and pass legislation providing additional funding to districts that received immigrants.
- The **Tucson** Education Association (TEA) won 12 weeks of **paid parental leave**. This historic victory is one of a kind in the state and impacts thousands of employees.

#### MOBILIZE

In the current moment, we must both build and exercise our muscles at mass member mobilization. Mass mobilization alone will not defeat authoritarianism, but it is an indispensable piece of a multipronged strategy. It is how we build a broad-based movement.

Just like T-shirt days, walk-ins and chalk-ins, events such as May Day, Hands Off! and No Kings Day are opportunities to assess which locals and which buildings are connected enough with members to turn them out for collective actions and activities—and which locals and buildings need targeted support to build capacity. These "structure tests" are essential to building power at the local, state and national levels to achieve the change we seek for our students, educators, and our communities.

- March Tele-Town Halls NEA held two national Tele-Town Halls to briefing members and affiliate leaders on the emerging threats from the new administration. 2,939 members joined the Town Hall on March 6, and 5,335 joined the Town Hall on March 13.
- March 19 Walk-Ins In cooperation with our allies in the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools (AROS), thousands of NEA educators, parents and community members participated in pro-public education walk-ins on this coordinated Day of Action for Public Schools. 95 NEA



locals participated, organizing 229 school and worksite walk-ins across the country.

- April 5 Hands Off! Rallies NEA affiliates and members turned out across the country to support the more than 1,400 local events held to protest the new administrations attacks on federal programs and essential safety net services like Medicaid and funding for Title I and IDEA. The coalition effort was led by Indivisible and MoveOn.
- April 8 Labor for Higher Education National Day of Action – NEA higher education affiliates organized events across the country as part of this multi-union Day of Action to protest the attacks on higher education.
- May 1 May Day Strong Day of Action NEA was a leading partner of the May Day Strong movement that saw 1,373 actions in 1,031 cities and towns across all 50 states: from press conferences and walk-ins, to rallies and art builds, to strikes and sit-downs. 247 of those events were organized by NEA affiliates. NEA is partnering with May Day Strong to plan for a next round of mass mobilizations on Labor Day 2025, followed by a focus on building cross-union connections on local campaigns and building an escalating campaign toward an even larger Day of Action on May 1, 2026, reaching 2000+ participating cities and towns.
- June 14 No Kings Day NEA members and affiliates across the country turned out on June 14 to oppose the

growing authoritarianism of the new administration. According to the data trackers at Strength in Numbers, between 4 and 6 million people participated in the No Kings Day demonstrations—making it one of the largest single-day protests in US history. Over 2,000 local events were held around the country: evidence that the pro-democracy movement continues to grow.

- 2025 World Pride NEA leaders, members, and staff stood up to support World Pride and LGBTQ+ Pride Month: marching in the World Pride parade and celebrating Public School Pride on the world stage.
- June 7 Teach Truth Day of Action NEA members were active in over 200 cities, joining other educators, families and students in organizing events advocating for the teaching of full and honest history, as part of the resistance and working together to demonstrate what public education can be.
- Teach Truth Day/Month of Action in Partnership with Banned Together Film – Inspired by the Zinn Education Project Teach Truth. NEA members and community partners organized film screenings to promote inclusive education, including showings in Tucson, AZ; Gainesville, FL; Ocean View, HI; Topeka, KS; South Hadley, MA; Maplewood, NJ; New Paltz, NY; New York, NY; Fairview, OR; Mount Lebanon, PA; Seattle, WA; and Phillips County, AR.

#### LEGISLATE

In the current reality, policy-making in state legislatures is more important than ever. We must work to defeat efforts to undermine our schools, destroy the social safety net, and weaken our democracy—as well as play offense where possible to advance pro-public education and pro-working family policies.

- Winning Increased Investment in Education There is a growing list of states winning school funding increases. Noteworthy victories this spring by state affiliates include:
  - **Texas.** The state passed its largest ever school funding increase, providing \$4.2 billion for teacher pay raises—resulting in the largest teacher pay raise in state history.
  - **Wisconsin**. Governor Evers partial veto was upheld by the Wisconsin Supreme Court, effectively codifying education increases into law for the next 400 years! (*Ask a Wisconsin delegate about it.*)
  - **Alaska**. The legislature increased per pupil funding by \$700, or \$183 million annually. The legislature overrode the Governor's veto to sustain the funding

- Mississippi Educators won a \$16 million increase in school funding, including funds to cover increases in educators' health insurance premiums and retirement plan contributions
- Defending the Right of All Students to a Public Education – In Tennessee, HB 793/SB 836 was designed to challenge the Supreme Court's *Plyler* decision guaranteeing the right of immigrants to attend public school. With support from NEA, the **Tennessee** Education Association successfully defeated the bill.
- Winning Paid Parental Leave The Alabama Education Association helped win a landmark bill guaranteeing paid parental leave for all educators and state employees. Female employees will now be entitled to up to eight weeks of paid parental leave, and male employees will be eligible for two weeks.

- Blocking Voucher Expansion NEA worked with our state affiliates in Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota to successfully defeat universal voucher expansion schemes by legislatures this spring.
- Winning Back Pensions Since the closure of the prior defined benefit pension plan in Alaska in 2006, NEA and our partners have staged a long-term fight to right the ship. In May, we moved one step closer when the Alaska House passed HB 78—a bill that would create a new defined benefit pension plan for public sector workers in the state. The bill is now pending in the state senate.
- Defeating Attacks on Union Rights -
  - Educators in **Montana** defeated bills to ban payroll deduction of dues and union release time and helped to defeat a statewide Right-to-Work bill.
  - Educators in **Indiana** also defeated several anticollective bargaining bills
- Fighting for Bargaining Rights for Federal Workers. NEA is working in Congress to restore collective bargaining rights to our members in the Defense Department schools. A bipartisan bill is moving that would reinstate collective bargaining rights for all federal employees in affected agencies, including DoD. It boasts an impressive 222 cosponsors and is nearing the opportunity to advance by a discharge petition, similar to NEA's recent successful fight for GPO-WEP repeal.
- Standing Up for Public Education in Congress! The Congressional Budget Reconciliation Bill is the most immediate and serious threat to students, educators, public education, working families, and democracy that we have seen in Congress. The bill proposes draconian and immoral cuts to Medicaid (which serves over 37 million children—over 47% of all kids in the US) and food assistance programs on which 16 million

children rely for their meals. Gutting \$300 billion from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program over the next 10 years means deep cuts to school meals as well. To add to the depravity of risking children's health and ability to learn, this bill would create a \$100 billion-federal voucher scheme—that would impact all 50 states and rob public schools and the students who attend them, while providing tax breaks to the ultra-rich. There are \$1.1 trillion in tax cuts for the wealthiest in America in this bill, which are financed by the taxes of the rest of us. NEA has been working on multiple fronts to stop this legislation—and minimize the damage should it pass:

- The entire NEA Board of Directors was on Capitol Hill in February and again in April to educate members of Congress on how harmful these cuts would be to children and schools
- Members in 30 targeted districts have sent more than 1,200 patch-through calls to specific members of Congress who may be persuadable to stop this devastating bill
- More than 115,000 digital messages opposing the bill have been sent by NEA members
- NEA has been coordinating closely with SIEU, as well as AFSCME and AFT, to oppose the Medicaid cuts
- NEA is working with our partners in the National Coalition for Public Education to oppose the federal voucher program, including bringing in rural elected officials, Republicans, and faith leaders from Republican-led states to meet with their representatives.
- The voucher plan has been scaled back to \$20 billion— but it remains a threat to public education and a massive tax giveaway to billionaires.



Want to stay informed and involved in the movement to **Fight Back and Fight Forward**?

#### Go to www.nea.org/protect

### ELECT

- Flipping the US House of Representatives. It is clearer now more than ever that elections matter. The 2026 election for the House of Representatives is the best opportunity to establish a check on the President's lawlessness. Preparations are already underway with state affiliates across the country.
- Electing Pro-Public Education, Pro-Worker, Pro-Democracy Governors – While 2025 is an off year for elections in most states, there are two highly important governor races this year. NEA is partnering with our state affiliates in Virginia and New Jersey to defeat antipublic education politicians and advance pro-public education, pro-worker advocates.
- Winning State and Local Elections in 2026 In addition to preparations for the Congressional elections next year, NEA is working with affiliates to be ready to elect pro-public education candidates across a wide range of state and local elections. 38 states will be electing governors in 2026, along with state legislatures, state attorneys general, and literally thousands of local school board seats.
- Expanding the Number of NEA Members Who Are Trained to Run for Elected Office – NEA is continuing to expand its See Educators Run program to support members in running for—and winning—elected office.

#### COMMUNICATE AND BUILD A MOVEMENT

We cannot win without telling our stories. We must lift up a unifying narrative across the propublic education movement—to increase investment in public schools, not privatize them—in order to capture the hearts and minds of the latent pro-public education majority. And we cannot accomplish that on our own. Our multi-pronged strategy includes deepening our relationships with strategic partners who share our values and our goals. This movement building work is being advanced by NEA engagement across multiple alliances. These are just a few examples:

- **Put Families First** Coordinated planning that aligns the advocacy of the four large national public sector unions: **AFSCME, SEIU, NEA** and **AFT**.
- The Fight Back Table Led by Indivisible, MoveOn and the Working Families Party, the FBT led the planning and execution of the April 5 *Hands Off! Day of Action*. FBT is focusing both on engaging activists and creating on-ramps for individuals to join the movement.
- Leadership Conference on Civil Rights NEA has leaned into our involvement with LCCR, as a leading coalition of more than 200 national organizations fighting to protect, defend and expand the rights of every person in the United States.
- The May Day Strong Movement is the emerging national campaign that planned May Day 2025. Leading partners include Bargaining for the Common Good, NEA, the Chicago Teachers Union, Federal Unionists Network, Peoples Action, and the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools (AROS), among more than 200 endorsing organizations.
- Public School Strong NEA is partnering with Race Forward and HEAL Together on a national campaign to promote community schools and convince local policy makers that every child deserves equitable access to public schools that don't discriminate. Public School Strong provides an on-ramp for parents and school supporters—especially in rural communities—to become more effective advocates for public schools.
- Higher Education Labor United A national coalition of local unions representing staff; student workers; adjunct, contingent, and tenured faculty; and others to advance a unified vision and action plan for higher education. Participating locals from: AAUP, AFT, NEA, SEIU, UE, UAW, and CWA.
- Labor for Democracy A group of national unions working to expand and elevate labor opposition to the assaults on immigrant workers, freedom of speech, and the right to organize and bargain. Includes the NEA, United Electrical Workers (UE), UAW, Postal Workers (APWU), SEIU, Flight Attendants (AFA), AAUP, National Nurses Union (NNU), and Painters (IUPAT), among others.