



# THE ROAD TO STUDENT SUCCESS:

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

## 2022-23



## **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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*“...it’s important to remember that we operate under the belief that we don’t have permanent friends or permanent enemies, we have permanent issues. Our focus has always been our students’ learning conditions. We are unapologetic in our continued work to improve our school system.”*

–Jennifer Martin, MCEA President

Since 2015, NEA’s Collective Bargaining and Member Advocacy Department (CBMA) has awarded 102 Student-Centered Bargaining and Advocacy (SCBA) grants to state and local affiliates, providing more than \$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 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 2022-2023 SCBA grantees. Click on the links below to jump to a specific story.

- Lane Community College Education Association (LCCEA), Oregon
- Montgomery County Education Association (MCEA), Maryland
- Teachers Association of Baltimore County (TABCO), Maryland
- Seattle Education Association (SEA), Washington
- Washington Education Association (WEA)
- Anoka Hennepin Education Minnesota (AHEN), Minnesota
- Colorado Education Association (CEA)
- Jefferson County Education Association (JCEA), Colorado
- Pueblo Education Association (PEA), Colorado
- NEA Alaska (NEA AK)
- Connecticut Education Association (CEA)

# Oregon

## The College Our Community Deserves

Since 2014, when unions and community organizations from across the country came together and established the Bargaining for the Common Good initiative, an increasingly popular movement developed. Amongst educators, who have been the leaders in this movement, the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), Saint Paul Federation of Educators (SPFE), United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA), and others have embraced the BCG strategy. Through their tireless efforts, risk-taking, and trials and tribulations, they have successfully taken on powerful politicians and corporate oligarchs to win big for educators, students, and community. We have seen local unions become more open and transparent in their bargaining and advocacy campaigns. They are generating levels of activism and engagement within their membership ranks previously unseen. Educators are standing side by side with parents and community members and advocating for issues that had never before been considered within the scope of the union's work. In recent years, this movement has culminated in a red wave of strikes and militancy that many never imagined.

Much of what is described above has taken place in K-12 school districts. Bargaining for the Common Good (BCG) in higher education is less prevalent when compared to K-12 campaigns. However, The Lane Community College Education Association (LCCEA) in Eugene, Oregon, is looking to expand that universe into higher education; and most recently, Rutgers AAUP-AFT, at the New Brunswick, New Jersey, campus, stands out as another strong example.

LCCEA represents all part-time and full-time faculty at LCC, a comprehensive community college with transfer, career-technical, immigrant, and adult basic education programs with four campuses in both rural and urban areas. As of the beginning of the 2022-23 grant period, the LCC served 6,000 credit students and several hundred non-credit students. According to survey data, a substantial number of students and faculty suffer from significant unmet basic needs, such as food and housing insecurity.<sup>1, 2</sup> Faculty lack the resources to effectively do their jobs, such as only having four full-time counselors at a caseload of 1:1,500 to assist students with career, academic, and mental health issues. In addition, many experience bias and discrimination in the workplace.

In the spirit of their mission statement, they intend to address these issues through a BCG campaign to create a more racially and socially just campus for everyone. Their mission reads:

<sup>1</sup> What is Pathways to Opportunity?" *Pathways to Opportunity | Career Pathways | Lane Community College*, <https://www.lanecc.edu/programs-academics/academic-departments/workforce-development/career-pathways/pathways-opportunity> (Accessed June 3, 2024).

<sup>2</sup> McKibben, Wu, Abselson, "New Federal Data Confirms that College Students Face Significant-and Unacceptable-Basic Needs Insecurity," *The Hope Blog | The Hope Center | Temple University*, August 3, 2023, <https://hope.temple.edu/npsas> (Accessed June 3, 2024).



*“LCCEA engages in collective action to ensure an equitable learning and working environment and advocates for social justice and systemic change for the public good.”*

The plan for their “College Our Community Deserves” campaign includes enhanced member engagement through faculty surveys and forums; solidarity building and community outreach through existing connections with the Lane County Education Workers Coalition of local unions representing workers from pre-K through university; student engagement through forums and outreach to student government and identity group organizations; faculty organizing; and bargaining to achieve common good goals.

As of the end of the 2022-23 grant period, LCCEA had a tremendous number of accomplishments and successes while facing some challenges. The Association engaged in solidarity and collaborative actions with internal constituencies, such as the [LCC Employee Federation \(LCCEF\)](#) and student groups including the [Associated Students of LCC \(ASLCC\)](#) and the [Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán \(MEChA\)](#). They also continue to work with external labor partners such as the [Oregon Nurses Association \(ONA\)](#) and [Lane County Central Labor Chapter \(AFL-CIO\)](#), along with joining the [Higher Education Labor United \(HELU\)](#) national coalition of unions. LCCEA recruited new leaders to serve as faculty representatives and members of the bargaining and action teams. The Racial Equity and Social Justice Committee held regular meetings as they focused on revising and updating their goals for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) faculty recruitment and retention. The Association also secured two agreements with the LCC, providing for compensation or release time for participation in statewide collaboration on common course numbering and funded curriculum development time. These agreements set a precedent for other community college faculty associations across the state that have no formal agreement.

As with any ambitious campaign, especially a first foray utilizing a common good strategy, one could expect bumps in the road. One challenge the Association encountered were faculty workloads and time demands as a barrier to active engagement. The LCCEA plans to address this by securing release time for bargaining and action team members and stipends for organizers. Another challenge is statewide and collegewide budgetary constraints stemming from a 26% drop in enrollment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Administrative turnover and institutional mismanagement, leading to the exhaustion of most of LCC’s general fund reserves in one year, is another challenge. Fortunately, they have a new progressive majority on the Board of Education they can work with to ensure the limited available funding is allocated to critical mission-centric services that benefit the faculty and students.

Throughout last summer, LCCEA continued to establish and solidify their internal structures and capacity. They researched and analyzed their compiled data to establish goals and develop a bargaining platform and ultimately their proposals. The Association maintained their efforts to deepen external relationships with other unions, organizations, and students. As they headed into 2024, LCCEA prepared to go to the bargaining table to begin negotiations for a successor agreement and follow their strategic plan, which includes research, communications, structure testing, and other collective action, escalating as necessary.



LCCEA's bargaining platform will likely include:

- Supports for faculty that improve student success
  - o Class size maximums and minimum full-time staffing
  - o Pay parity increases for part-time
  - o Increased paid professional development for part-time
  - o Established fund for infusion of climate change issues into curriculum
- Direct supports for students
  - o Reduced price mark-up on textbooks
  - o Expanded campus food pantry hours and locations
  - o Established ratio of counselors to students, thereby increasing staffing
  - o Reduced rent or subsidy to low-income, housing-insecure students in college-owned housing
  - o Tuition-free classes for indigenous and undocumented students
- Equity and social justice
  - o Make permanent the curriculum development fund for course design or redesign to support marginalized student populations and increase understanding of diversity, equity, inclusion, and understanding systems of oppression
  - o Strengthen sanctuary campus provisions
  - o Establish gender-neutral restrooms in every building
  - o Ensure equitable distribution of resources to departments serving underrepresented minority groups and LGBTQIA+ students
- Sustain the Association's long-term capacity
  - o Employer-paid release time for key Association roles

## **Fight to Save the Clinic**

Amid all these efforts, LCCEA, in collaboration with ASLCC and LCCEF, fought to keep the student health clinic open and maintain student access to reproductive and gender-affirming health care. The LCC was recommending the closure to the Board due to an annual deficit because many of their students have transitioned to remote learning since the pandemic. While only a small percentage of students paid for and utilized the clinic, it was extremely vital to those who did.

Mitsuki Takeuchi said that as an international student, "It is even harder for us to seek medical care in a foreign country with international student insurance. They helped me see nurses or write a referral to the proper facility as needed. I learned how the American medical system works step by step by a health clinic person in school. I would say I couldn't survive without their



help.” She went on to describe a time when she may not have been able to fulfill the volunteer hours for her pre-nursing major requirement because of her lack of citizenship<sup>3</sup>. The health clinic enabled her to do so. There were other student stories just like hers.

Together, they held rallies, spoke at Board meetings, sent emails, secured local media coverage, and worked with legislators. They were able to stave off the closure, at least for the time being.



## Maryland

### A Battle on Two Fronts

As the Montgomery County Education Association (MCEA) prepared to kick off their campaign and head to the bargaining table, members knew the road ahead was long and bumpy. Most NEA affiliates collectively bargain with a local school district that also has fiscal authority to fund the bargaining agreement. But in Maryland, local school districts do not have such authority. The authority to negotiate a contract and the authority to fund that contract are vested with two different decision-making bodies. The Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Board of Education negotiates the contract, and the County Council controls the funding. So, winning a strong contract is only part of the fight. When it comes to organizing and leveraging power, MCEA must target both MCPS and the County Council – a battle on two fronts.

The Association’s strategic plan revolved around “We Love Our Moco Public Schools,” a public-facing campaign to build support for contract priorities and the willingness to increase funding to pay for them. MCEA’s priorities, gathered from members, students, parents, and community allies, included competitive wages to recruit and retain high-quality educators, a lower student to teacher ratio, extra learning time to address students’ well-being, equitable funding at every school, school safety, and free lunches and food pantries at schools in high-need areas.

<sup>3</sup> Collin Orser, “Rally goers urge LCC Board to not close the Health Clinic,” *the Torch*, May 5, 2023, <https://lcctorch.com/rally-goers-urge-lcc-board-to-not-close-the-health-clinic/> (accessed April 15, 2024).



*“Turnover and resignation rates for educators continue to skyrocket, resulting in staffing shortages, disruptive teacher transfers, and less-than-optimal conditions for students. This educator exodus points to fundamental flaws in the way teachers are treated. Let’s make MCPS a top-notch destination for educators again, by coming together to negotiate a contract that addresses those issues. Attrition and teacher shortages are due to inadequate wages, substitute teacher shortages, lack of autonomy and unreasonable workloads.”*

—Latechia Mitchell, staff development teacher and MCEA Bargaining Chair<sup>4</sup>

To execute their plan, MCEA would increase member activism and engagement. They pushed local legislation to create long-term funding at the county level. Externally, they joined a coalition of other MCPS unions, such as SEIU Local 500 and UFCW Local MCGEO, and launched a “[United for Our Kids, Our Communities, Our Future](#)” campaign to push for increased funding. They also worked with their education justice coalition partners and community members to mobilize and escalate at key points as the campaign advanced. To share information and drive the public narrative, they created a campaign website (no longer available), ran ads on the radio and on public transportation, did door-to-door lit-drops and shared flyers with parents as they did student drop-off and pick-up, utilized social media, and wrote op-eds in local publications.

To run a very public campaign, MCEA also planned to hold open and transparent bargaining sessions. However, this became a very contentious issue with the school board. Unfair labor practice (ULP) charges were filed by both sides, and educators picketed. Eventually, the two sides were able to agree on ground rules that allowed open bargaining at a limited number of sessions. While they certainly took advantage of those opportunities, MCEA also got creative and found a way to shine some light into the room when the rules seemingly said they could not. They invited members to join the bargaining team, expanding their numbers to 60-100 people at times, forcing the district to find a larger space to accommodate the crowd.

MCEA, along with its partners and allies, accomplished the first part of what they set out to do and were able to secure a four-year tentative agreement (TA). Highlights of the settlement included:

#### Compensation/Economics

- 23-24: \$5,602 (10-month)/\$6,583 (12-month) increase + step; new wage range \$59,640 - \$124,416 (10-month)/\$70,078 - \$146,189 (12-month)
- 24-25: \$2,918/\$3,428 + step; new wage range \$62,558 - \$127,334/\$73,506 - \$149,617
- Increased coverage rate and expanded eligibility to include counselors, non-classroom-based unit members, and related service providers

<sup>4</sup> Suzanne Pollak, “MCEA Calls Board of Education Out for ‘Unfair Labor Practice,’ *Montgomery Community Media*, October 18, 2022, <https://www.mymcmedia.org/mcea-calls-board-of-education-out-for-unfair-labor-practice/> (accessed April 22, 2024).



- Highly Impacted Schools: new supplement for Community School Liaison and \$250,000 for staff professional development
- Expanded eligibility for tuition reimbursement

#### Workload/Planning Time

- Pilot to expand elementary planning time through expansion of art, music, physical education, and health in select schools
- Permanent substitute pilot program to decrease need for internal coverage
- Commitment to address staffing ratios and workload, including paperwork requirements, through labor-management committee

#### Equity and Access

- Incorporation of restorative practices in the whole-school behavioral management plan
- Committee to implement and sustain a restorative justice program at each school
- Improved and guaranteed professional development for educators to obtain necessary skills to implement whole child/restorative practices and trauma-informed teaching and learning

Although MCEA achieved so much with the TA, there was still more work to be done. It was time to escalate their efforts to push the County to fund the much-needed resources and supports that they won in bargaining. And that is just what they did. They attended the County Council Teacher Recognition event and, following forceful comments from MCEA President Jennifer Martin, they staged a sit-in (sit-in begins around 1:04:00 mark). When members of the Council attempted to read their teacher appreciation proclamation, they were shouted down by educators who knew better than to sit idly by and listen to those hollow words.

They issued strongly worded press releases, such as:

Our Communities Deserve the 10-Cent Investment 5/4/2023

*If not now, then when?*

*If we want to create whole communities, we need to do everything we can to support the development of children. We need to stop short-changing the future of our County: this is a down payment for our kids, our communities, and our future, and it is long overdue.*

Montgomery County Council votes to starve our school system 5/18/2023

*No more platitudes and proclamations about the importance of educators and our public schools. The educators of MCEA call for the council to reconsider their actions today and fully fund our schools.*

The County Council finally passed a property tax increase. While MCPS received \$74.3 million less than it had requested, it was still the most money ever from the County. Even with the increase, additional funds are needed due to increasing enrollment, inflation, and salary increases. The school board honored the negotiated agreement and fully funded the contract for the 2023-2024 school year, using one-time Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to bridge the gap. However, as the federal grants expire before the FY 2025 budget, a “fiscal cliff is looming on the horizon,” according to former MCPS Superintendent Monifa McKnight,<sup>5</sup> and further battles loom for MCEA as they will have to continue to fight for more funding.



While MCEA was not successful in winning their contract housing stabilization contract demands, they were instrumental in helping to pass the [Home Act](#), a rent stabilization law. Under the Act, annual rent increases are limited to 3% plus inflation, with a hard cap of 6%.

## A Multifaceted Campaign

Heading into the 2023-2024 school year, the Teachers Association of Baltimore County (TABCO) headed back to the table to negotiate a successor collective bargaining agreement. As in many school districts across the country, educators are leaving Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS) for another district where they can potentially find better compensation and/or working conditions, or just leaving the profession altogether. This was something TABCO knew they had to address and make a central issue in their campaign. To do so, they needed to identify the specific causes fueling the exodus to support their arguments. They knew that the best learning environment for students is a consistent one, and that starts with educators feeling supported and respected in their classrooms, receiving the compensation they deserve as professionals, and feeling secure in their careers. Just as they titled their campaign, TABCO was bargaining for the future of education in Baltimore County.

<sup>5</sup> Suzanne Pollak, “Schools Will Honor Raises, Won’t Raise Class Size in ‘Difficult’ Budget,” *Montgomery Community Media*, May 26, 2023, <https://www.mymcmedia.org/schools-will-honor-raises-wont-raise-class-size-in-difficult-budget/> (Accessed April 22, 2024).



They prepared by expanding the size of their bargaining team to 20-30 members and developing their campaign plan. Utilizing the NEA grant award funds, they hired a strategic researcher to gather and analyze the necessary data and a communications expert to strategically release and highlight their findings in support of their bargaining demands. The larger bargaining team enabled more opportunity for members to get involved and take on leadership roles to drive the campaign and ensured a diverse representation of the entire bargaining unit. The research and communication support provided more openness and transparency, thereby increasing activism and engagement within the membership ranks.

TABCO researched and analyzed multiple years of vacancy trends throughout the district and at each individual school, employee advancement on the pay scale, administration bloat at the central office, and student discipline. For their communications plan, they developed a calendar that ran parallel with their campaign calendar, designed new templates for member emails and social media updates, and created a public bargaining platform.

Some of the key findings from their strategic research included:

- Turnover
  - o Overall three-year turnover rate was 28% and steadily increasing year-to-year (2,710 bargaining unit employees)
  - o Of the 20 schools with the highest three-year turnover rates, half were in high-need schools
  - o Average length of service for those on BA grade who left – 3.6 years; nearly three-quarters who left were within first 5 steps
  - o They found a correlation between TABCO's school climate survey and turnover rates
- BCPS Administrative Staffing and Spending
  - o More administrators on payroll than any district in the state although Montgomery and Prince George's counties both have higher enrollment
  - o Overall increase in administrative staffing since 2018 despite enrollment decline, including 15% increase between 2021 and 2022
  - o If BCPS spent at the state average on administration and mid-level administration expenses, they could save more than \$10 million

To make BCPS a place that attracts and retains high-quality educators, TABCO knew things had to change. Over the previous two years, they bargained for substantial raises and adjustments to the pay scale. Now, their focus would shift to working and learning conditions. This meant improving working conditions so that educators could not only stay in Baltimore County, but also in the profession. They needed better supports for student behavior and reduced workloads. They wanted increased access to additional higher education, including reduced costs, to continue to grow throughout their career. They also would continue to demand respect via competitive compensation and enabling the time to plan, grade, and serve students.



TABCO set out to change the narrative in BCPS. The wins they secured in their contract have begun to do just that.

Some of their wins include:

#### Increased Pay

- Over \$100 million towards a salary increase
- Pay for afterschool duties

#### Student Discipline

- Mandatory support around student behavior management before educators can be held accountable
- Better supports when students pose a danger to themselves or others
- Multi-union discipline committee to address student behavior issues

#### Reduced Workload

- Educator autonomy for comments on student report cards and work
- Restrictions on monthly faculty meetings
- Increased collaborative planning time without loss to individual planning time
- Increased compensation for additional assignments and class coverage; potential for compensation for counselor caseload coverage

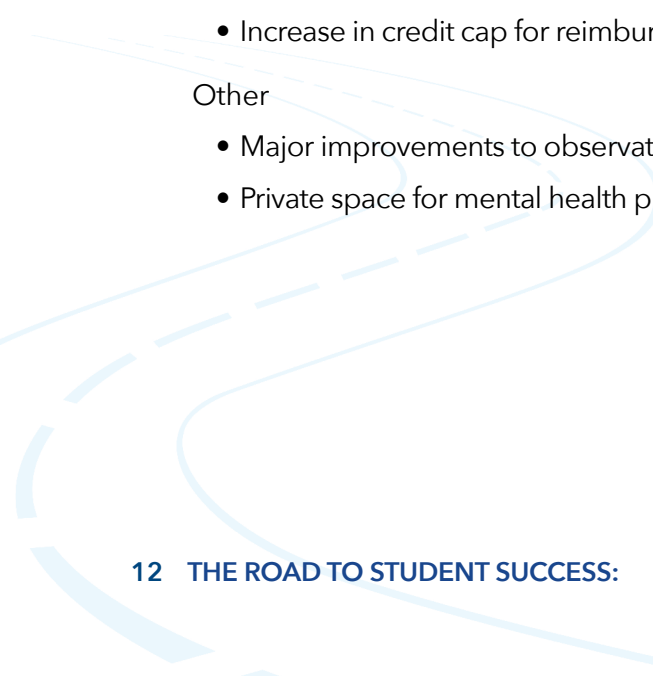
#### Leave Time

- Additional personal days
- More latitude with bereavement leave usage, including utilization for pregnancy loss
- Improvements to birth and bonding leave

#### Tuition Reimbursement

- Increase in credit cap for reimbursement

#### Other

- Major improvements to observation and evaluation process
  - Private space for mental health providers
- 



# Washington

## A Movement, Not a Moment

In 2022 and fresh off their weeklong strike and new three-year agreement, the Seattle Education Association (SEA), understood that there was still much work to be done to achieve educational and racial justice in their community. They continue to focus on developing stronger relationships with members of the 6,000 strong SEA and members of the community around shared interests to strengthen and amplify the voices of students, educators, parents, and community to improve public education in Seattle Public Schools (SPS). SEA's campaign wins included more nurses and social workers, the creation of a new racial equity advancement specialist position, increased funding for libraries, additional special education supports, and compensation.

As is traditionally understood when it comes to collective bargaining or advocacy campaigns, not everything a union hopes to achieve happens in one round of negotiations. The SEA educated the membership on the new contract provisions and emphasized how important it was to assure that the contract language was implemented and enforced. And to build off their wins and continue their fight for racial and social justice in education, they established three goals:

1. Build on the organizing that took place during the campaign at the SPS headquarters building, with a focus on education support professionals (ESP)
2. Increase and maintain activism and messaging within SEA through member-driven communications content
3. Strengthen relationships developed with community during the campaign

## Organizing the SPS HQ

More than 600 SEA members work in the district's headquarters building. Primarily comprised of paraprofessionals and office professionals – positions that were deemed critical when the COVID-19 pandemic hit – these members handle things like payroll, accounting, transportation logistics, human resources, customer service, and professional development administration. Getting back to the fundamentals of organizing, they conducted building mapping, surveyed members, gathered information from the district, and utilized NEA 360. All these efforts culminated in a building blitz where they held one-on-one conversations, worked to identify potential leaders, and talked about the PAC fund.

These efforts proved to be challenging. They had difficulty obtaining employee information, dealt with inaccurate work schedules, found that many employees have continued to work remotely, struggled to navigate a large building that is the work location of many other employees outside of their targeted bargaining unit employees, and found it difficult to

hold meaningful one-on-one conversations due to the lack of privacy and close proximity to management staff. To overcome these challenges, they identified safe spaces away from the main work areas, narrowed the scope of their mapping to smaller areas, and provided support to association representatives (AR) to hold conversations with other departments that did not have a designated AR.

Building off the organizing efforts, ESP members conducted home visits of their ESP colleagues to have meaningful conversations about their daily work, the union, and to recruit those who are not yet members with the goal of reaching 90% density.

### **Member-driven Communication**

SEA members played a key role in the development and execution of the survey utilized to prepare for the blitz at the SPS HQ building. In addition, multiple communications on various platforms in a variety of formats were crafted to boost their March Madness event. March Madness is a conference for ESP, taught by ESP, and run by ESP and is jam-packed with a full day of professional development workshops.

### **Continue to Engage Community**

NEA grant funding helped support SEA's efforts to cultivate community partnerships that have benefited stakeholders throughout the community and has the potential to bear many fruits into the future. With a vision to continue to build a more robust, member-driven curriculum, SEA designed their initial professional development to be responsive to members' needs. They also developed a curriculum for race and labor to be delivered in existing Ethnic Studies programs. This was done in response to students who desired to learn more about the history of the broader labor movement that is reflective of their lived experiences.

Some of their partnerships include:

- **Kandelina**

This community organization addresses systemic inequities so immigrant and refugee families and communities can thrive without having to compromise values, heritage, or ethnicity. Kandelina serves as SEA's community voice on their Multilingual Task Force, which is responsible for ensuring equitable inclusion for multilingual students across SPS.

- **Restorative Practices Community Coalition (RPCC)**

The RPCC's goal is to collaborate with and support the SPS in the development and implementation of Restorative Practice/Justice policies and programs within the Seattle School District. The RPCC enables SEA to connect with community partners to help support professional development programming and grow their collective racial equity literacy while providing members with affordable clock hours to meet educators' continuing certification requirements.



- [Seattle Parks and Recreation](#) and [350 Seattle](#)

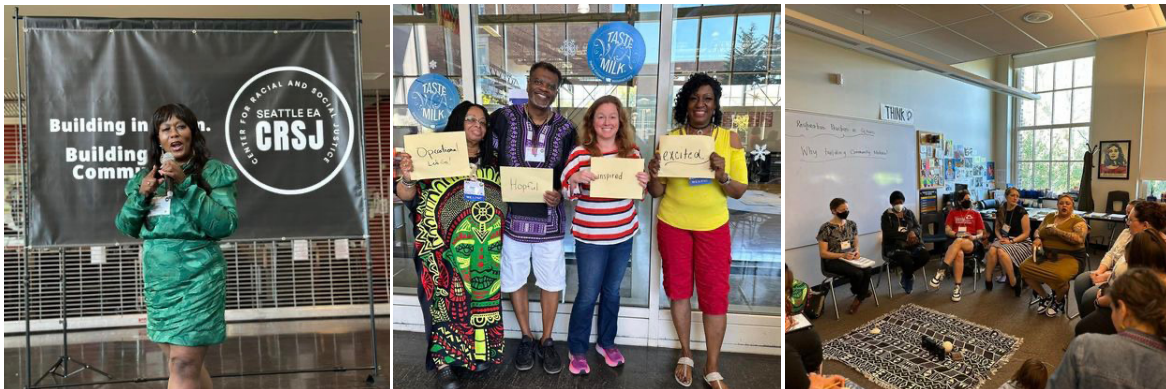
Seattle Parks and Recreation equips employees and the public for well-being as they support healthy people, a thriving environment, and a vibrant community. 350 Seattle is a grassroots-led community organization confronting the root causes of the climate crisis. These partnerships allowed SEA to complete their pilot Community Orchard and Pollinator Garden on a formerly redlined area turned public land. Since many students are passionate advocates for intersectional environmentalism and equity-minded climate justice, SEA previously negotiated strong language related to air quality in SPS buildings and programs. This language served as inspiration for launching the pilot.

- [FEEST](#)

With roots originating in food justice, they have expanded their campaign goals, and today FEEST trains youth of color and working-class youth to build collective power and organize for transformative and systemic change in their schools. Together, they are advocating for systemic mental health supports. Also planned is a pre-apprenticeship program for students who wish to pursue careers in public health and the trades.


- [Seattle Council PTSA](#)

Representing over 80 PTAs and PTSAs in SPS, their partnership with SEA has resulted in their collaboration on the Special Education Task Force that collaborates with SPS on inclusion and the implementation of Universal Design for Learning systemic Practices. These relationships and this work will be crucial heading into future bargaining.



## Bargaining:Organizing: Education:Democracy

A central element of student-centered bargaining and advocacy is that success comes from both strong bargaining and organizing. It is very difficult to win big at the table without organizing, no matter how skilled the people are who are doing the bargaining. The same goes for organizing. A strong organizing campaign can exist with bargaining demands, but without skilled bargainers who know how to utilize power dynamics to get the other side to capitulate, sealing the deal could be tough. Whether engaging in student-centered bargaining, Bargaining for the Common Good, or other similar strategies, you can't have one without the other and expect to achieve success.



That is why the Washington Education Association set out to develop a new training series to support local bargaining. With a student-centered approach in mind, the training was designed to include enhancing preparation skills to take to the bargaining table all the way to ratifying the tentative agreement and beyond. Trainings were held regionally and locally around the state and targeted bargaining teams, local presidents, and bargaining support teams. Sessions covered topics such as:

- Planning and preparation (e.g., surveys, 1-on-1 conversations)
- Roles and responsibilities for key individuals and teams
- Phases of a 12-month bargaining cycle, such as timeline, leader identification, and escalation
- Research, organizing, and communication
- WEA resources available

One of the goals of the training was to have locals identify at least one student-centered issue to include in their bargaining proposals. Additionally, these trainings were utilized as part of a train-the-trainer exercise so that new WEA staff could enhance their skills, learn new strategies, and prepare them to be able to deliver the training to other local leaders and teams. WEA will continue to hold trainings as other local affiliates prepare to negotiate successor agreements in the future.

## Minnesota

### A Paradigm Shift for the Future

Anoka Hennepin Education Minnesota (AHM), in preparation for negotiating their new agreement, decided to do things differently this time. This would not be a one-off event, as it has been in the past, but rather a culture shift when it comes to how they approach bargaining and advocacy.

To win a settlement that truly represented the needs of students, educators, and members of the community, they understood the importance of being united around their demands and building strong structures to increase their capacity. They wanted to instill increased transparency and share more information with stakeholders. They also intended to be strike-ready, should it be necessary, in April 2024.

AHM held conversations and engaged members and the community more than a year before going to the bargaining table. Internally, they held a membership campaign drive, where they talked about the value of belonging to their union and recruited educators to become members while also working to identify new leaders and activists. Their goal was to have a member engagement coordinator at each site, and, along with their building representatives, hold trainings to educate them about the culture changes of the union and their role in implementation. They created a contract action team (CAT) with a 1:10 ratio of leaders to members in each building to establish an effective communication structure. Their building



leaders held 10-minute meetings and member listening sessions along with distributing member surveys to share the new bargaining goals, connect the importance of elections, identify priorities and bold demands that were critical to student and educator success, and ask members to get involved.

AHEM identified potential community allies and organized within the community. They listened to their allies' needs by conducting a community survey and holding listening sessions. They identified ways that the union could support community efforts, and when their beliefs and values aligned, they learned how to partner together to support students and the schools. They utilized public news sources, such as the Minneapolis Labor Review and Anoka County Union Herald, social media, and data used to send out emails and text messages through Hustle to share information widely. Some of their early partners included the Duck Cup Memorial Fund to provide additional mental health supports to students, staff, and community, and Hope for the Community, who placed food shelves into Anoka Hennepin schools and worked together with AHEM to identify sites to host food banks in the community. They also reached out to existing PTO/PTA groups and identified other education-friendly groups, such as childcare providers, to support their students and families in case they had to go on strike.

After eight bargaining sessions, two mediation sessions, and a marathon 18-hour session into the wee hours of the morning, AHEM educators finally reached a 2-year agreement in January 2024. This followed weeks of educator walk-outs, rallies at school board meetings, and other collective action.

*"I'm convinced it was because of our actions that we got what we got."<sup>6</sup>*

—Val Holthus, AHEM President

Terms of the agreement included:

- 8% increase, with starting salaries raised to \$50,000
- Increased employer contributions to health insurance: 5% single and 10% family
- Increased sick days payout upon retirement, bringing better equity to female employees who had to utilize tremendous amounts of leave for pregnancy
- Increased compensation for:
  - o Elementary art, physical education, music, media, and other specialists who have large class sizes or additional sections
  - o Teaching early childhood and family education, adult basic education, or substituting during lunch and prep time
  - o Special education teachers to complete paperwork outside of regular work hours

<sup>6</sup> "Anoka Hennepin Education Minnesota: Tentative Agreement reached, goes to members for a vote," *Minneapolis Labor Review*, February 17, 2024, <https://minneapolisunions.org/news/anoka-hennepin-education-minnesota-tentative> (accessed April 29, 2024).

Much of this funding came from the nearly \$70 million received from the state last year, part of a \$2.2 billion influx of support for public education.<sup>7</sup> According to the district, this is the largest contract settlement they've ever agreed to.<sup>8</sup>

AHEM will continue to build off their efforts and accomplishments, further striving to solidify their new culture of rank-and-file activism and partnerships with the community to win big at the bargaining table for students, educators, and community. One of their biggest ongoing priorities will be smaller class sizes.

## Colorado

### Camp Bargain!

Striving to build on their year-round bargaining program, the Colorado Education Association (CEA) sought to integrate coordinated bargaining across school districts and local affiliates to increase power, something the state had done in the past but had gotten away from. They used the grant to add a summer planning session where local affiliates came together to debrief the previous round of bargaining and establish shared goals for the upcoming negotiation session.

This summer program became the inaugural "Camp Bargain!" held amidst the beautiful scenery of the Rocky Mountains in Estes Park, Colorado. Attended by almost 70 local leaders and bargaining chairs from nearly 20 school districts, they represented bargaining units that include nearly half of the CEA membership and more than half who are covered by a collective bargaining agreement. During the two-day meeting, they discussed:

- Introduction to coordinated bargaining
- Building more transparent and democratic bargaining processes
- Debrief of the past year (highlighting compensation and language wins)
- Shared examples of successful coordination across the country
- Assessment of the current process
- Coordinated bargaining components and strategy
- Mapping members' issues

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey Meitrodt, "Tentative deal with teachers could result in staff cuts at Anoka-Hennepin," *Star Tribune*, January 26, 2024, <https://www.startribune.com/tentative-deal-with-teachers-could-result-in-staff-cuts-at-anoka-hennepin/600338922/> (accessed April 29, 2024).

<sup>8</sup> Ian Wreisner, "Anoka-Hennepin reaches tentative agreement," *Anoka County Union Herald*, February 8, 2024, [https://www.hometownsource.com/press\\_and\\_news/news/education/anoka-hennepin-reaches-tentative-agreement/article\\_2ac6bae6-c5da-11ee-b86c-eb51a4b16268.html](https://www.hometownsource.com/press_and_news/news/education/anoka-hennepin-reaches-tentative-agreement/article_2ac6bae6-c5da-11ee-b86c-eb51a4b16268.html) (accessed April 29, 2024).



During the gathering, participants committed to implementing a coordinated bargaining strategy and began to plan and develop the necessary structures for statewide coordination in the coming year. By the end of Camp Bargain!, everyone agreed on a set of common issues/ goals and left excited to begin the work. Looking ahead, they hope to make this an annual tradition along with adding regional meetings and continuing to increase participation amongst other local affiliates throughout the state.

## **End the BS!**

Continuing to maintain the momentum of Red for Ed, the Jefferson County Education Association (JCEA) entered the 2022-2023 school year with two goals:


- 1) Increase their capacity to fully fund education in Colorado, [end the Budget Stabilization \(BS\) Factor](#), and be strike-ready as they headed into their next round of bargaining in 2024
- 2) Build the capacity of their leadership to be knowledgeable of and enforce their collective bargaining agreement

Following the passage of a constitutional amendment to increase state K-12 education funding in 2000 and in the midst of the Great Recession in 2009, lawmakers established what they called the “negative factor,” which later became known as the BS Factor. The BS Factor is the amount of school funding that the state failed to meet to maintain the required level of funding in accordance with the constitution. It essentially became a loophole to ignore those requirements. And since 2010, the state has cut more than \$10 billion in education funding.

JCEA, through collective action and in coordination with the state affiliate and other local affiliates across Colorado, was able to move one step closer to ending the controversial BS Factor. Not only did the legislature pay down the biggest amount of their debt created since the inception of the negative factor, but also they passed a bill with a commitment to end the BS Factor altogether and fully fund education by 2024.

Thanks to the passage of the [Public School Finance Act \(SB24-188\)](#), the BS factor will finally be eliminated this year. The bill will provide Colorado schools with approximately \$10 billion, increasing per-pupil funding to \$419.97.

JCEA held three joint sessions on contract enforcement for Association Representatives (AR) and principals. Together, they received education on the most important contract provisions, enabling both sides to have a common understanding. Additionally, the ARs learned about contract enforcement to uphold their negotiated rights when it is believed a violation has occurred. They ordered badges that JCEA members could wear with a QR code that brings up the contract on one side and Weingarten Rights with a QR code on the other.



Finally, JCEA successfully negotiated a contract reopener and secured a 5.25% cost of living increase and other wins related to increased compensation, class size, and plan time. They continued to engage and activate members through actions such as letters to the school board, gathering petition signatures, open bargaining, expansion of their bargaining team, house visits, and one-on-one conversations. They also increased their focus on tracking data and strengthening their AR structure.

Their full contract expires July 31, 2024. They hope to be strike-ready as they advocate for compensation that will keep them competitive with neighboring districts and allow members to afford to live in an increasingly expensive Denver metro area, improve school safety and respect, and ensure the recruitment and retention of high-quality educators.

*“Our goal is always to ensure we can keep the best educators in Jeffco to serve our students. Though we were hopeful to secure a deal that would keep our district more competitive among others in the Denver metro area, we are not done fighting for the competitive compensation loyal educators deserve.”*

– Brooke Williams, JCEA President

## The Fruits of Labor

The work of building the union isn’t always glamorous. It doesn’t typically make news headlines. Quite frankly, except for those involved in the effort, the blood, sweat, and tears that go into it all is invisible. But much like the philosophical question about whether a tree that falls in a forest makes a sound or not, if a group of leaders and activists organize to build the capacity and power of their union and nobody is around to notice it, does it actually happen? In this case, the answer is without a doubt, yes.

The Pueblo Education Association (PEA) developed a multi-year plan to shift the culture of their local to one that was member-driven, transparent, and aligned with partners and allies in the community to advocate for social justice in education and create the schools their students deserve. To start down that path, their focus was on systemic improvements to attract and retain high-quality educators and establish a district and a union where they are respected, valued, listened to, and supported.

They focused on developing their internal structures, community mapping and engagement, and establishing community schools within the district as they headed towards contract bargaining in Spring 2023. However, developing a plan and establishing goals is one thing; understanding how to get there is another. One of the main challenges when it comes to building the union is that it takes capacity to build capacity. To do this, PEA combined funding from multiple NEA grants, including the Student-Centered Bargaining and Advocacy grant. They utilized these funds to add a second full-time release union leader who could help drive the work. Combined with participation in the NEA Community Schools Institute and training and support from NEA organizers, they were able to begin.

### **Developing Internal Structures**

PEA began to build internal capacity by first examining and strengthening their association representative (AR) structure and establishing leadership groups within. This enabled the union to empower members to lead the effort to engage other members by holding 1-on-1 conversations, developing transformational relationships, identifying new leaders, and ultimately helping more educators become active and involved. With bargaining approaching soon, they conducted surveys, held listening tours, and formed action groups around common issues. The visibility of the union increased across all 29 schools in the district.

### **Community Mapping and Engagement**

PEA set out to develop relationships and partnerships within the community and build a coalition with other organizations. They gathered data, charted information about member relationships, and mapped community ties to influential organizations and their positions on priority issues related to their fight for safe and healthy schools. They also increased mental health supports and equity in education.

### **Community Schools**

The grant-funded release time also secured the time necessary for PEA to continue to be active and involved partners with the school district and become champions of a [Community Schools Model](#). This included on-boarding their community schools coordinators, planning and implementation of a needs and assets assessment, and deep engagement with the school communities as they looked to [pilot two community schools initially](#).

In Spring 2023, PEA achieved a big win at the bargaining table, tangible results that clearly displayed evidence that their hard work paid off. In fact, they utilized open bargaining to increase member engagement and leverage their power at the table and had more members participate than ever before. They won 12.5% salary increases for teachers, nurses, and counselors and brought the starting teacher salary up to \$45,000, likely their biggest increase ever.

## **Alaska**

### **Crisis Breeds Opportunity**

For quite some time, members of NEA-Alaska (NEAAK) have been interested in establishing a structure to support coordinated bargaining efforts. When several local affiliates, including many of NEAAK's largest locals, faced difficult negotiations simultaneously, it seemed as perfect a time as any to work together.

The multiple crises were fueled by the fact that education funding has been stagnant since 2016. On top of the flat funding, Alaska also does not provide a secure retirement for educators. Currently, the state only provides a 401(k)-type plan known as defined contribution. These issues have contributed to a statewide educator shortage.



The seven local affiliates, all within five school districts, that had reached a crisis in bargaining were:

- Fairbanks Education Association (FEA)
- Education Support Staff Association (ESSA)
- Matanuska-Susitna Education Association (MSEA)
- Matanuska-Susitna Classified Employees' Association (CEA)
- North Slope Borough Education Association (NSBEA)
- Northwest Arctic Education Association (NAEA)
- Juneau Education Association (JEA)

At the time that NEAAK applied for the grant, these locals were far apart from school management on several major issues – salary, health insurance, and many issues impacting working and learning conditions – and all seven locals were either in mediation, heading to interest arbitration, or awaiting the arbitrator's ruling. They used the grant funds to develop a coordinated bargaining structure that served as a pilot to solidify a framework that could be used across the state in the future. In doing so, they engaged leaders and strengthened relationships to build local capacity. They also established communication pipelines between locals, and compiled data for union members, non-members, partners, and potential partners within the community.

To kick things off, NEAAK hosted a Coordinated Bargaining Conference. Local presidents and bargaining, membership, and organizing committee chairs came together to collaborate, share experiences and information, and work together to develop a strategic plan. After the conference, they virtually reconnected bi-monthly to share progress, coordinate efforts, and learn from each other.

They went on to create a coordinated local plan and a plan for statewide action, though both would be intertwined. Coordination encompassed communications, student-centered bargaining demands, and external partnerships.

Some of their demands included:

- Mandatory training for classified employees to enhance skills to work with students
- Timely and appropriate feedback for educator improvement
- Flexibility and safety for parent-educators when remote learning occurs
- Safe learning and working environments
- More supports for special educators

Their partnerships were made up of parents, labor unions, and other community organizations as part of a [coalition](#) including the AFL-CIO, Children's Trust, Great Alaska Schools, Growing Alaska Leaders, and others.

On the statewide front, NEAAK locals and their coalition partners would take action to push the legislature to increase school funding by raising the [Base Student Allocation \(BSA\)](#) and pass [Senate Bill 88](#), which would restore a defined benefit pension plan for educators, thus establishing a pathway to a secure retirement.

For the most part, the coordinated efforts helped the seven locals stave off the worst of the crisis situations. Most locals were able to secure good compensation packages, and while some fought off major changes to health care, others were not so fortunate. When the district imposed a change in health insurance providers and plans, the MatSu EA overwhelmingly authorized a strike. While they were not successful in avoiding the health insurance changes, they did win salary increases and were able to avoid walking out.

Though the seven locals locked up their new agreements, the battle was not yet over. From 2012 to 2022, the BSA only increased by \$250 per student, a 4.2% increase, while inflation went up by at least 24%, resulting in major staff shortages, school closures, and other budgetary cuts. To compromise, the legislature passed an education spending package, increasing the BSA by \$680 per student and putting millions of dollars of much-needed funding into schools across the state. Unfortunately, the governor vetoed the bill because it did not include his priority of increasing charter schools, and the legislature fell one vote short of an override.

NEAAK, with the support of the national union, [National Institute on Retirement Security \(NIRS\)](#), and the [National Public Pension Coalition \(NPPC\)](#), pushed hard to pass [SB88](#), which would have brought the DB pension plan option back to the state. Unfortunately, the bill was narrowly defeated, but hope remains for the near future.

As of May 2024, there were three unsettled contracts from previous years and 26 expiring at the end of June.


## Connecticut

### Two Becomes One: Build a Contract by Building Community

Rarely do educators experience the complex process of having to take two separate collective bargaining agreements from two separate local affiliates and merge them together into a single contract. But that is just what the Region No. 6 Wamogo Education Association and Litchfield Education Association had to do when the decision was made to merge their school districts.

Preparing to bargain a new merged contract, the newly formed local, the Region No. 20 Education Association, saw opportunity both in uniting their respective memberships together and to focus on student and community needs. Their slogan was based on the classic mantra, Good Working Conditions Impact Good Learning Conditions.

Merging two local associations together proved to be complex. They had to determine how to handle two sets of leadership, unique local governing documents, varying history and culture, and new constituents and stakeholders in the community. Of all the changes they had to face,



the most challenging was the disparate pay and benefits between the two contracts. The salary schedules alone were thousands of dollars apart at certain steps. It was vital that no member felt they were being shortchanged because other members' raises were much larger. Their work was surely cut out for them.

So, they developed a plan. They approached negotiations with the mindset of "Build a Contract by Building Community." They established a diverse 20-member bargaining team, to ensure that everyone in the bargaining unit was represented when they negotiated the new contract. Bargaining team members were responsible for surveying the membership as well as communicating throughout the entire process. They held community events leading up to a celebration honoring the hard work and unity of the campaign. And, to address the compensation and benefit disparity they faced between the two contracts, they organized for months with the goal of talking with every single educator. In doing so, they were able to solidify community and a sense of solidarity within the ranks of the union.

The Region No. 20 Education Association successfully accomplished the contract merger, securing a more than 16% wage increase over three years, additional prep time, local president release time, and much more.











