

# STUDENT-CENTERED BARGAINING AND ADVOCACY



2023-2024

**“Importantly, as an institution of higher education, the free exchange of ideas is central both to our mission and to the quintessential function of our beloved community college. Freedom of expression and academic freedom are important bulwarks against authoritarianism and are a bedrock of our democracy—all the more important in the current national political climate.”**

–Adrienne Mitchell, LCCEA President

# SINCE 2015, NEA'S COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AND MEMBER ADVOCACY DEPARTMENT (CBMA) HAS AWARDED 115 STUDENT-CENTERED BARGAINING AND ADVOCACY (SCBA) GRANTS TO STATE AND LOCAL AFFILIATES, PROVIDING MORE THAN \$3.5 MILLION IN TOTAL FUNDING.

## Affiliates have used these grants to:

# 1

**Unite educators with parents,** communities, and students to advocate and bargain for the schools that students deserve

# 2

**Open negotiations** and make collective bargaining a more transparent process

# 3

**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

# 4

**Bargain for the Common Good,** and much more

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## THIS REPORT HIGHLIGHTS THE TREMENDOUS ADVOCACY OF OUR 2023-2024 SCBA GRANTEES. CLICK ON THE LINKS BELOW TO JUMP TO A SPECIFIC STORY.

- San Antonio Alliance of Teachers and Support Personnel (SAA), Texas
- NEA-New Hampshire (NEA-NH)
- United Teachers Richmond (UTR), California
- Lane Community College Education Association (LCCEA), Oregon
- Salem Keizer Education Association (SKEA), Oregon
- Colorado Education Association (CEA)
  - Mountain Valley Education Association (MVEA)
  - Roaring Fork Community Education Association (RFCEA)
  - Paraeducators Association of Cherry Creek (PACC)
- Jefferson County Education Association (JCEA), Colorado
- Jefferson County Education Support Professionals Association (JESPA), Colorado
- Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association (MTEA), Wisconsin
- Teachers Association of Baltimore County (TABCO), Maryland
- Vermont-NEA (VT-NEA)
- Illinois Education Association (IEA)
- NEA Pension Member Trustees (National)



**TEXAS**

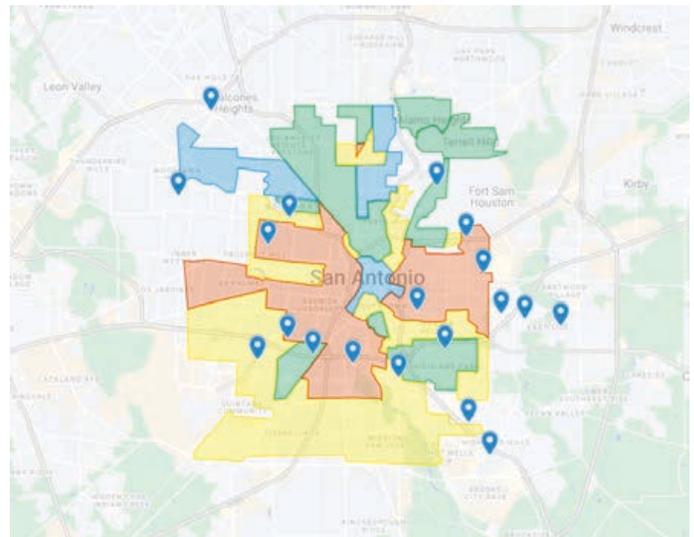
# SAN ANTONIO ALLIANCE OF TEACHERS AND SUPPORT PERSONNEL (SAA)

## A BATTLE BETWEEN “RIGHT[SIZING]” AND WRONG

Faced with significant challenges including declining enrollment, underutilized facilities, equity concerns, and the need for better operational efficiency, the San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD) initiated its plan to “rightsize,” a euphemism for its plan to shutdown 30 schools over the next two years. While there were many contributing factors to the challenges, some of the main causes have been disinvestment in public education from the state, the establishment of alternative school options like charter schools, and a lack and further reduction of affordable housing options.

While a number of concerns arose opposing the closings under the guise of rightsizing, one of the immediate red flags was that most of the schools slated for closure under the plan were located in historically underserved communities on San Antonio’s Eastside, Westside, and Southside. District 5 Councilmember Teri Castillo said in a statement, “When the proposed school closures are plotted on a map that include [San Antonio’s Home Owners’ Loan Corporation \(HOLC\)](#) redlining overlay, many of the proposed school closures are in areas of San Antonio that were systematically denied banking, housing, and economic opportunities.”<sup>1</sup>

When SAISD announced the planned closure of schools across the city, the San Antonio Alliance of Teachers and Support Personnel (SAA) were not going to allow the so-called rightsizing to happen without a fight, and so they went to work. Together, with their allies and partners



within [The Schools Our Students Deserve Coalition](#), they developed a comprehensive position and prepared to push back on the closures. Written into a Solidarity Commitment for members and community to sign and support, the Coalition believed that if there were going to be school closures, a robust, community-centered process should include:

1. **Democratic decision-making:** School communities should vote for whether to close their schools, with at least 67% needed in favor, in line with SAISD requirements for creating in-district charter partnerships.

<sup>1</sup> City of San Antonio website, <https://www.sa.gov/Directory/News-Releases/District-5-Councilmember-reacts-to-preliminary-list-of-San-Antonio-ISD-schools-set-to-close> (accessed 10/4/25).

2. **Minimum possible impact on staff, students, and families:** The minimum number of schools possible should be impacted—original discussions were as many as 30 schools, or one-third of all district campuses, which would have much too great of an impact on everyone involved; additionally, there should be a guarantee that no SAISD worker loses their job as a result.

3. **Extended timeline for community engagement:** SAISD should commit to a longer, yearlong process that can engage the community in a deeper way that truly centers community voice and shared decision-making.

4. **Clear metrics for success:** SAISD leadership should make clear, measurable commitments for improved student, family, worker, and community outcomes, including:

- a. Specific details of improved services for students at all schools
- b. Specific, measurable commitments to decreased class sizes
- c. Specific, measurable commitments to increased planning and preparation time for workers
- d. Specific, measurable commitments to improved enrollment, attendance, and graduation rates

5. **Community Schools:** Receiving schools should become Community Schools, offering increased wraparound services for students and families.

6. **Green, healthy schools:** SAISD should commit to making green and health-centric improvements including lead and asbestos removal, installation of solar panels, reductions in nonrenewable energy and water use, air quality improvements, and investment in green transportation.

7. **Worker standards for construction projects:** SAISD should commit to binding worker standards for construction on all campus projects including guaranteed rest breaks for workers, and adopt prevailing or living wages.

8. **Clear, funded plans prior to school closures:** There should be clear plans for future use of every building, with total projected costs of projects and explanation of sources of capital investment for renovation.

9. **Community votes on new use:** There should be community decision-making on proposed new uses for all closed school buildings.

10. **Clear breakdown of costs:** SAISD should provide comprehensive breakdown of cost for every closure, consolidation, or renovation project prior to public vote.

The Coalition comprises [SA Stands](#); SAISD Student Coalition; [San Antonio Youth Scholars Collective](#); [Esperanza Peace & Justice Center](#); [San Antonio AFL-CIO](#); [Our Schools Coalition](#); [San Antonio DSA](#); [Laborers Local #1095 \(LiUNA\)](#); [Texas Organizing Project](#); [MOVE Texas](#); [PODER](#); [CWA Local 6143](#); and [Texas Climate Jobs Project](#).

**“We remain steadfast in our position that school communities should be allowed to vote to determine their future. Public schools belong to the people, and the people should decide what happens to them.”**

—Alejandra Lopez, SAA President

Additionally, the Coalition demanded that an equity audit be conducted. While SAISD conceded to their demand, the process was delayed so much that a process that would normally take six to nine months, was only allowed less than a month of time. Though the condensed time frame didn’t allow for the thorough audit that this decision deserved, the results were enough to validate some concerns shared by the Coalition. One such concern was the stark reality that many families would consider leaving SAISD if their neighborhood campus was among the closures, further exacerbating the enrollment problem. Another concern raised through the audit was that when SAISD made the decision to close schools in the past, impacted students did not yield better educational equity of outcomes and, in fact, sometimes produced worse outcomes.

SAA focused on building power internally. They trained member organizers, recruited new members, held association representative (AR) trainings, identified and developed leaders, engaged and activated educators in

**“Divesting and school closure is not a path towards equity. We must invest in our communities, and that starts by ensuring that we allow the public to have further conversations and engagement on these school closures.”**

—Councilmember Castillo

*Por las escuelas que nuestros estudiantes merecen...*



support of the Coalition’s position around the closures, focused on ensuring that the rights and well-being of impacted workers were protected, and educated members and potential members about the meet and confer process that they planned to leverage in this fight. They continued to engage families, students, and community organizations, holding rallies and demonstrations, and pushing for a democratic voice in district decisions.

Amid the fight over “rightsizing,” they continued to make demands on other important issues that mattered to their members. They won a 2% raise, even after SAISD was adamant that there would be no money on the table, as well as “the most compassionate” bereavement leave policy among all San Antonio school districts. They ran a successful campaign and also won job protection guarantees and retention stipends for all staff impacted by school closures.

SAA, the Coalition, and the many students, parents, and community supporters never stopped fighting.

In the end (at least of this chapter of the story), while they were able to stave off the possibility of 30 school closures, the SAISD Board voted to close 15 schools while consolidating others. For many who organized tirelessly and devoted their invaluable time and energy in this fight, it may have felt like defeat. But what they accomplished, reducing what could have been 30 school closures to 15, was a victory for so many workers, students, families, and communities, and that can’t be emphasized enough. Furthermore, what they’ve built, the unwavering commitment to equity, education justice, community-centered decision-making, and solidarity throughout San Antonio, is something that can last forever.



**NEW HAMPSHIRE**

## NEA-NEW HAMPSHIRE (NEA-NH) TA, RATIFY, GET OUT THE VOTE?!

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Each year across New Hampshire, taxpayers from more than 90 communities go to the polls or Town Meetings to vote on education union collective bargaining agreements (CBA) and school budgets. Wait, what? Yes, you're reading that right. You see, New Hampshire state law requires that each CBA is funded by local voters through agreement during an annual school district meeting. Now ask yourself, what better reason could there be for a union to engage members of the community during a contract campaign?

Like all elections, getting your message out, organizing supporters, and getting out the vote is a necessary way to win. In New Hampshire, achieving a tentative agreement (TA) that is ratified by the membership and approved by the school board is only half the battle. And, as anti-public education funding forces grow within the state, it has become imperative that NEA-New Hampshire (NEA-NH) provide the resources to support their local leaders during negotiations.

That's why NEA-NH created the M.O.M. Program, which stands for Messaging, Organizing, and Mobilizing. M.O.M. is designed to help local affiliates craft effective messages and cultivate positive community relations

with the goal of securing passage of contracts through funding approval. The idea of the program is to develop and execute targeted, community-specific plans that authentically engage members, potential members, and stakeholders, such as PTAs and other parent groups, to put pressure on decision-makers to build a stronger union and stronger schools. Through this process, leaders received organizing training, new leaders were identified, non-members were recruited to become members, and contract action teams (CAT) were created, helping to engage the community. A subsequent goal is to elect pro-education school boards.

Now that the M.O.M. Program has been implemented, NEA-NH has an established process along with momentum that can be built upon to promote community-based projects and political efforts in the future. The program can be expanded to include other student-centered programs, such as school budgets and building warrants. And, ideally, locals will continue to harness their power through strengthening internal capacity and deepening their relationships with the community. NEA-NH should be a well-oiled machine when it comes to get-out-the-vote!



**CALIFORNIA**

# UNITED TEACHERS RICHMOND (UTR)

## WHEN YOU'RE LOST IN THE DARKNESS, LOOK FOR THE LIGHT

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Following historic wins during their 2022-2023 campaign, the United Teachers Richmond (UTR) were ready to take their organizing and advocacy efforts to the next level, with an eye toward increased collective power and bigger and bolder wins. The focus of their next step in the evolution of their journey aimed to increase openness and transparency as well as activism and engagement throughout the union and community. They sought to do this through open bargaining. Their vision was to create a space for members and community members to share stories that could help shape the union's priorities. Following in the footsteps of the legendary labor leader, Dolores Huerta, they also saw open bargaining as a vehicle to empower members who had been kept in the dark when it came to bargaining and the work of the union.

The idea of being more open and transparent around the work of the union, whether that involves the strategic decision-making processes, member rights advocacy and contract enforcement, or the collective bargaining process itself, revolves around a few key points:

1. It allows union members and/or the community to see and hear firsthand what is happening at the table, or otherwise, creating trust and buy-in; whereas the traditional alternative of private, closed-door processes can create distrust, thereby pushing people further away.
2. That trust and buy-in, especially when people see how the issues that they care about are being advocated for so forcefully, stimulate activism and engagement—people want to be involved!
3. Having people in the room creates power—in many cases, you'll see the boss all of a sudden become respectful, clearly afraid to make the insulting comments they may be more willing to make behind closed doors in smaller groups. If that isn't the case, well, then the insulting, disrespectful comments are great fodder for agitating union members and the community!



Photo by Brooke Anderson / @movementphotographer

While there certainly are other reasons, these are three major ones.

UTR’s approach to making this strategic decision was conducted in a very methodical and democratic manner. They conducted research, including interviewing leaders of other California Teachers Association (CTA) affiliates to learn about their experience engaging in open bargaining. From there, they pivoted to an education campaign, discussing with members their vision and goals as well as the possible challenges that could exist in making this transition. And finally, they created a plan for the Rep Council to approve, which consisted of a goal of having at least 25 members consistently show up for bargaining meetings. The plan was approved and the newly formed “big bargaining team” held meetings to start to plan and strategize.

Some of the benefits became evident almost immediately, as they witnessed firsthand the level of discussion they engaged in, considering the vast knowledge that was brought into the room with members of different specialties and experiences. There were also challenges. Though not directly related to open bargaining, some members struggled with expanding the issues that the union advocated for beyond traditional “bread and butter,” which are wages, benefits, and working conditions. This was a part of UTR’s Bargaining for the Common Good strategy. However, there was consensus on many

of the issues that impact students, such as class sizes, caseloads, inadequate facilities, and ensuring that every student has access to highly qualified educators.

#### **WE CAN’T WAIT**

Earlier this year, multiple unions including United Educators of San Francisco (UESF), Oakland Education Association (OEA), San José Teachers Association (SJTA), UTR, and more kicked off a statewide campaign titled “We Can’t Wait.” More than 77,000 educators coordinated and aligned their campaigns to demand smaller class sizes, more resources, better wages and benefits, and improved mental health support for students.

UTR, has a tough road ahead. They have faced the threat of layoffs, school closures, and budget cuts, along with the school district stonewalling at the bargaining table by bringing little to no proposals, aside from no wage increases and wage freezes for some. Though they have not called a strike, their members have been out on the picket lines calling attention to their student- and community-centered demands and the district’s unwillingness to do what is necessary to give the students the schools they deserve. The campaign will carry through the summer and bargaining (or lack thereof when it comes to the district) will resume in the new 2025-2026 school year.

We Can’t Wait...





**OREGON**

# LANE COMMUNITY COLLEGE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (LCCEA)

## THE COLLEGE OUR COMMUNITY DESERVES

### PART II

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In 2023, the Lane Community College Education Association (LCCEA) kicked off an ambitious Bargaining for the Common Good (BCG) campaign centered around improving learning and working conditions for a safe, racially and socially just campus for everyone. They not only sought to build a stronger union through increased member engagement and leadership development, but also to build a movement through solidarity with other workers, community members, and the students they serve. The start of their campaign began with both multiple wins and significant challenges. This is the continuation of their story. (Read more about their story [here](#).)

A union is only as strong as each individual member working together toward a common goal. So having a highly active and engaged membership that is leading the work of the union is essential to building internal strength. LCCEA is building that internal strength. In 2023-2024, they achieved a 100% membership rate for all full-time new hires. Overall, their membership rate is higher now than before Janus. And not only are faculty joining LCCEA, but they're also getting involved.

Thirty-seven percent of all full-time faculty serve on a committee or hold other roles within the union, including 18% of faculty hired since the pandemic. The increased involvement included the expansion of their Racial Equity and Social Justice Committee, where their advocacy resulted in new agreements with Lane Community College's (LCC) HR department to increase the recruitment and retention of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) faculty. This incorporated the blind screening of all applicant materials for new hires and the establishment of search advocates who focused on equity within all full-time employee search processes. Additionally, member activists and leaders took part in strategic planning and union training and education, including organizing workshops and critical discussions and forums, as they sought to identify key issues and potential solutions.

Unity and solidarity beyond the union membership breeds power. LCCEA continued to deepen their ties with other unions through the Lane County Education Workers Coalition. They further strengthened their relationship with the LCC Student Government by identifying

mutual common good goals, sharing survey results and discussing issues, and following up on students' needs. And they held student forums and connected with student identity group organizations to find out more about their concerns and the issues they care about.

Through their internal and external efforts, LCCEA established their platform (see below), which was endorsed by 99% of the membership. Their multi-pronged approach focused both on wins through collective bargaining and legislation, evidenced by multiple meetings with House Representatives to lobby support for their common good issues including:

- **Fair pay**

- Competitive salaries for all faculty, including steps, COLAs, and other increases
- Pay parity for part-time faculty including coaches and Flight Tech (e.g., equal pay for equal work)
- Increase paid time (e.g., payout of unused personal days, prep time for subs, class prep time for contracted faculty, more in-service and meeting hours for part-time faculty)
- Maintain excellent health benefits and college contributions

- **Reasonable workload**

- Increase the TLC workload factor for labs and lecture labs, decreasing full-time faculty workload and increasing part-time faculty pay for these courses
- Limit class sizes
- Maintain reasonable overall workloads for all faculty

- **Essentials for faculty working conditions**

- Sufficient allocation of funds for LCC's instructional and student services mission
- Job security
- Private offices
- Up-to-date computer hardware, software, and equipment
- Investment in professional development
- Ethics and integrity in search processes
- Academic freedom protections
- Restorative justice model to address bias incidents

- **Necessities for student success**

- Appropriate staffing for student services (e.g., counseling, mental health, advising, tutoring)
- Support for student basic needs (e.g., food, housing)



- Reduced student costs (e.g., funding for faculty to develop/adopt open educational resources (OERs), reduce textbook cost markup)

- **Safe, healthy campus**

- Promote safety in the event of a lockdown (e.g., classroom doors with functional locks)
- Follow public health guidelines when applicable
- Allow remote meetings
- Improve physical accessibility and safety on campus

- **Association rights and legal compliance**

- Make updates to align with changes in state law, requiring employer support
- Align union dues deduction calendar with the rest of Oregon (lowering monthly dues amount)
- Enhance new hire orientation provisions

### BUMPS IN THE ROAD

However, as was the case in the beginning of this story, LCCEA's path to achieve a more just campus was not going to be easy. When they started to focus their advocacy toward the LCC Board of Education (Board), they began to see several very concerning policies and actions being undertaken by the college. In a letter sent by the LCCEA leadership to the Board, they identified numerous parallels between policies that are rooted in dismantling public higher education and undermining democracy in Florida and recent events at LCC. The [letter](#) read:

“We are concerned about policies enacted in states such as Florida and Texas, which undermine academic freedom and the role of higher education in our democracy and devalue and oppress women, people of color, and LGBTQIA communities. These policies recall those of the McCarthy era, which ultimately spurred the U.S. Supreme Court to recognize academic freedom as ‘a special concern of the First Amendment.’

**“Scheduling a vote without ample notice to both the campus and community at large of the planned program and service cuts undermines the public trust in our beloved community college. We are also worried about the disparate impact on faculty of color who have been identified for layoff and the identification of several faculty for layoff who have engaged in legally protected activities such as racial discrimination complaints and/or union representation.”**

–Adrienne Mitchell, LCCEA President

To illustrate our concerns, we offer a comparison of the concerning parallels we observe between recent events at LCC and policies enacted in Florida.

We seek to raise your awareness of these issues, and we ask you to carefully consider the implications for the communities of Lane County whom you represent.

And we ask you to take action to intervene.”

The parallels they identified included:

- Defunding DEI efforts
- Bullying against educators supportive of LGBTQ+ communities, women and gender studies, and racial equity
- Undermining voting rights and public oversight
- Targeting access to reproductive health care, including abortions, and targeting transgender rights
- Targeting immigrants
- Undermining school board membership and role
- Targeting/banning protests
- Undermining academic freedom
- Reducing or eliminating general education disciplines that further students’ understanding of civic engagement and/or their own experience and systems of oppression
- Attacks on unions

Dozens of LCCEA members provided public comments, calling on the Board to affirm the values of a healthy democracy and raising concerns about the impacts of

budget allocations and the cuts to services that students depend on, among other issues.

In response to their visible organizing power and passionate public advocacy, they began to face strong opposition from the LCC administration. Both union officers and member activists of color, who had recently filed complaints against the college alleging racial and gender discrimination, were targeted for layoff, as the administration attempted to completely skirt the contractual reduction in force (RIF) language. LCC proposed a \$3.8 million budget cut, suggesting that it was necessary to make up for a budget shortfall due to declining enrollment exacerbated by the pandemic.

Not only did the union file unfair labor practice (ULP) charges against the employer, but they also organized a massive rally, gaining local and national media attention. More than 50 LCCEA members, students, and community members attended the Board meeting where they announced the proposed cuts, deriding board members for their lack of transparency and public notice, and failing to include faculty and staff in the discussion where they could’ve attempted to identify other avenues to close the budget gap. The meeting lasted nearly five hours. Ultimately, caving to pressure, the college backed off from executing the RIF and agreed to a “no layoff” clause for the entire bargaining unit for a year.

Although the administration backed down from the RIF, LCCEA maintained their ULP. Recently reaching a decision, an administrative law judge at the Employment Relations Board issued a recommended order finding that LCC engaged in several unfair labor practices by violating the Public Employees Collective Bargaining



Act (PECBA)—the law that protects the rights of public employees to bargain collectively and to engage in union activities—further cementing the union’s victory and upholding the rights of its leadership and members.

Though they won the battle, the fight isn’t over. In a [letter](#) to the Board on April 1, 2025, Adrienne Mitchell, LCCEA President, expressed concerns about proposed limitations on public comments by members of the union. In it, President Mitchell stated:

“I ask that you honor the critical importance of public fora in our broader democracy and welcome divergent viewpoints by hearing all voices. It is critical to provide ample opportunities for campus and community stakeholders to make public comment as you help guide the institution and so that, together, we can continue to strive for excellence in service of our students and community beyond.



Importantly, as an institution of higher education, the free exchange of ideas is central both to our mission and to the quintessential function of our beloved community college. Freedom of expression and academic freedom are important bulwarks against authoritarianism and are a bedrock of our democracy—all the more important in the current national political climate.”

## FUTURE WE STAND FOR

On April 17, 2024, a coalition of campus workers, educators, researchers, students, community members, and other allies and stakeholders held a one-day [action](#) on more than 100 campuses across the country to renew the vision of higher education as a bastion of democracy, social equality, and the common good. With a shared “Future We Stand For” statement, LCCEA used its event to raise awareness about cuts to DEI, student debt, academic freedom, shared governance, and more.

## WHAT’S NEXT?

LCCEA continues their growth, striving to strengthen member leaders and develop new ones. Their newly established Gold Dinner and Workshop series, focused on Growth, Organizing, Leadership, and Democracy, will enable the union to maximize their organizing potential and engagement as they prepare for the next bargaining campaign slated to kick off in 2025. They are also utilizing this series as an opportunity to celebrate 50 years of organizing success as they look to continue to build power for the future.

The Lane Community College Education Association will organize to build an active and engaged member-driven union. They’ll continue to deepen their community roots and strengthen their external partnerships. They will continue to build power. Because that’s what Bargaining for the Common Good is all about. Until the next chapter of the story...



## SKEA ADVOCATES

Our bargaining team worked tirelessly to fight for a 2023-2025 contract educators deserve.

On & off the team, our members taught during the day & fought for members at night. We appreciate your knowledge, dedication, passion, and hard work. Thank you!



# SALEM KEIZER EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (SKEA) S-K-E-A, SOLIDARITAY! (IT KIND OF RHYMES...)

In 2021, the Salem Keizer Education Association (SKEA) set out to transform their union (download the 2021-2022 grant report [here](#)). To build power, they sought to rebuild internally while developing partnerships with students and the community externally. Fast-forward to 2023, their effort continues, and they are Bargaining for the Common Good.

SKEA achieved more member activism and engagement than they envisioned they ever could. They described their campaign as a “truly member-owned bargain.” It was groups of members who worked together to draft their contract proposals. Members did their part by completing surveys, attending membership meetings, and staying tuned in by reading all the union’s communications. For the first time, they utilized open bargaining and hundreds of members packed each bargaining session. Potential members also witnessed something different about this bargain. No longer was it just another bargain for the union, it was becoming something more, and educators wanted to be a part of it. SKEA’s membership shot up from 82% to just shy of 100%!

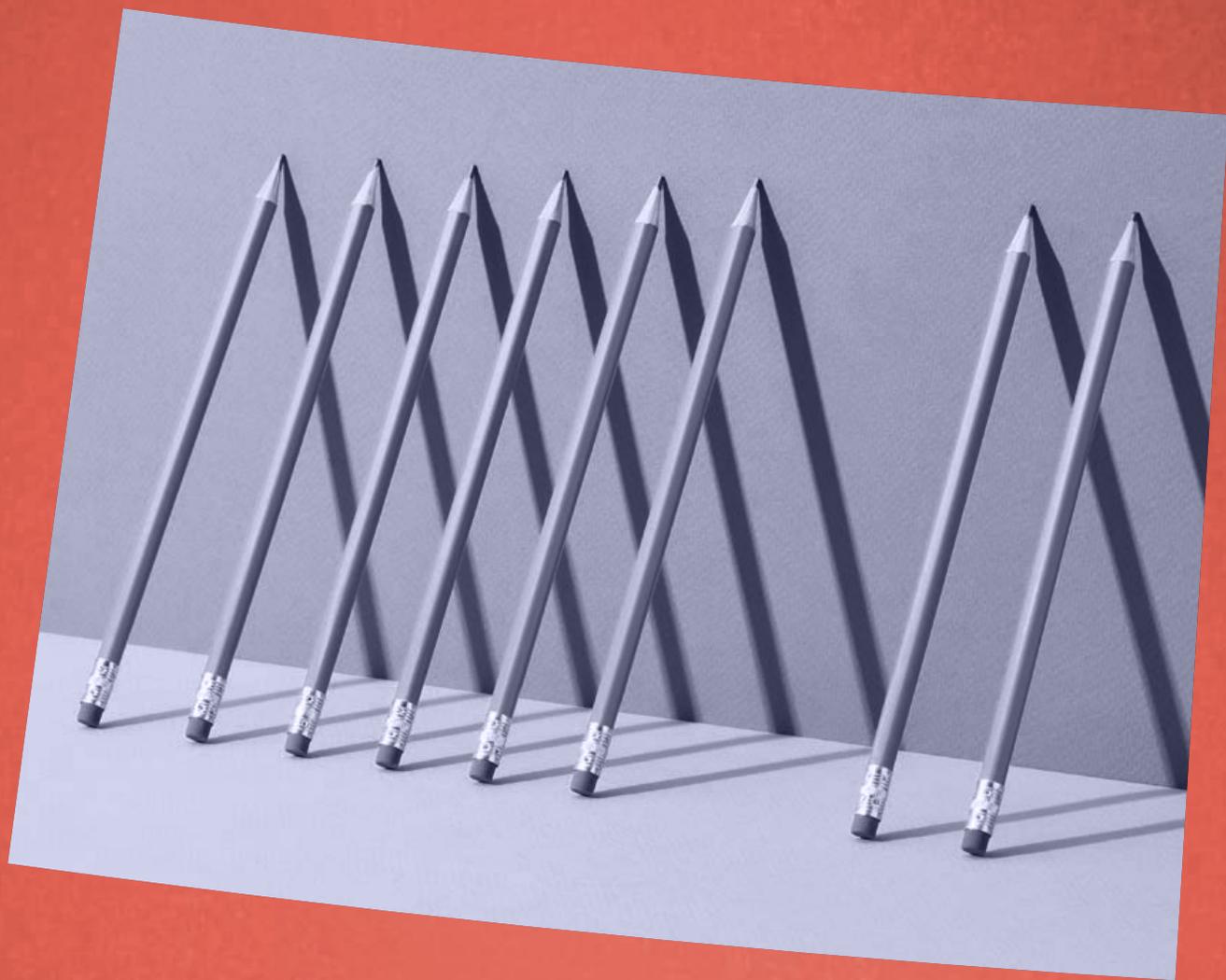
They also expanded their external involvement and support, further deepening their ties with students and the community. Families and students organized their own rallies in support of SKEA’s bargaining campaign and attended open bargaining sessions. Students even initiated and organized the first student-led public listening session, where they built support by discussing the

contract issues and demands and explaining how they would impact students and their learning conditions. And during the campaign, if one were to take a stroll around town, they likely would’ve come across a few of the 300+ signs in the windows of local businesses that read “We Stand with Salem Keizer Educators.” One thing was for certain, SKEA’s demands were widely felt.

It took every ounce of the organizing and support that SKEA garnered to achieve the historic win in the end. Following the first-ever strike authorization, supported by 99.7% of the membership, their [contract](#) now includes substantial gains made regarding workplace safety, support for student behaviors, wage increases, more preparation time, and another first, restrictions around class size.

Back at the table during spring 2025, SKEA looks to build on their success and they are especially focused on increasing student and community involvement. Since this campaign ended, students have reached out to SKEA wanting to be more involved (pulls at your heart strings, doesn’t it?!). Though they finally were able to get class size into the contract, it is still not the class size that students deserve, and educators know it. Due to the inadequacy of its funding formula, Oregon has some of the largest class sizes in the United States. Because of this problem, SKEA will have to flex their member-community muscles legislatively as well.

**Update:** Just prior to the 2025 summer break, SKEA won a tentative agreement. Read more about it in the 2024-2025 grant report coming soon!



**COLORADO**

# COLORADO EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (CEA) BARGAINING FOR ALL, ONE STEP (OR LOCAL) AT A TIME

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The Colorado Education Association (CEA) is implementing a statewide organizing plan that engages the community in its fight for union recognition and first contracts in multiple school districts across the state. Rooted in a Bargaining for the Common Good strategy, the CEA's vision is that this campaign will create model pathways to collective bargaining agreements that center the needs of the community while also displaying the power of organizing.

Colorado is one of a handful of permissive bargaining states, meaning there is no statute granting collective bargaining rights for public school employees, but there is also no prohibition, so some bargaining takes place when an employer agrees to grant such rights. States that are similar to Colorado, where bargaining is permissive for both K-12 certificated and education support professionals (ESPs), are Alabama, Arizona, Kentucky, Louisiana, Virginia (just eliminated the prohibition in 2020), West Virginia, and Wyoming. Utah was on this list until a law was recently signed in 2025, making bargaining pro-

hibited effective on July 1, 2025. A referendum campaign is currently underway to overturn that law. There are also a few additional states where bargaining is permissive and/or prohibited for ESPs and higher education faculty.

CEA is approaching this campaign with two goals in mind. On a micro level, campaigns are being waged on the ground with workers, activists, and community members to create enough momentum and leverage to win a pathway to achieve collective bargaining one district at a time. But on a macro level, the strategy is to utilize this momentum in multiple locals across the state to apply pressure to the state legislature to pass a law that creates a clear, fair, and timely process for both recognition and collective bargaining, something Colorado labor has been on the brink of achieving in recent years but hasn't quite gotten over the hump.

Having a statute that governs collective bargaining rights would ensure that the decisions to grant public sector workers such rights would not be vested under the

**“With heavy staff turnover in the district leadership office, the district has lost some ‘institutional memory’ of those policies and processes. Some policies that had been agreed upon previously with staff were changed without consultation. So having this master agreement really codifies a lot of what we’ve been doing in the district for 25 years now.”**

—Rob Norville, RFCEA President

sole authority of employers to decide. Instead, having a statute in place would likely establish a system where workers would go through a card check process and, if a certain percentage of workers expressed a desire to have a union and to collectively bargain with their employer, a secret ballot election could take place or the employer can simply voluntarily recognize the union—a much more fair and democratic process that levels the playing field for workers and their employers. Inching toward fairness for workers in Colorado, in 2023, CEA, along with labor partners and allies, won the [Protections for Public Workers Act](#) (PROPWA). This law protects workers against retaliation for speaking out against workplace issues, similar to private sector worker protections under the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), which state public sector laws are traditionally modeled after.

The three affiliates that were part of these initial organizing efforts were Mountain Valley Education Association (MVEA), located southwest of Denver along the Rio Grande National Forest; Roaring Fork Community Education Association (RFCEA), located west of Denver near Aspen and the White River National Forest; and the Paraeducators Association of Cherry Creek (PACC), located within the southeastern beltway of the greater Denver metro area.

## **MOUNTAIN VALLEY EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (MVEA)**

The MVEA, a small wall-to-wall bargaining unit (includes both certificated and ESPs) of just over 30 employees, won recognition for collective bargaining following a two-year fight that involved overcoming “boss tactics,” like attempting to remove the local union president from the bargaining unit via promotion and electing new school board members who actually respected educators and were willing to negotiate a contract in good faith. In fact,

the Mountain Valley School District No. Re 1 was specifically targeted by the union to highlight the need for a clear pathway in a small community rather than a rogue school board slate who fights against their newly won policy granting bargaining rights. While their campaign began in fall 2024, MVEA is still hard at work to win not only their first contract, but the best contract for their members and community. Their resonating issues go well beyond traditional subjects like pay and benefits—they are demanding transparency and professional respect.

## **ROARING FORK COMMUNITY EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (RFCEA)**

Previously a relatively “quiet” local, the RFCEA, a bargaining unit made up of certificated employees, won both recognition and their first contract. In a contentious campaign where the district almost walked away from the bargaining table, the union continued to organize, stand strong together in solidarity, and hold the district accountable. In May 2024, their first “collaborative bargaining contract” was officially ratified. In addition to guaranteed salary adjustments and insurance benefits, RFCEA secured compensation for additional work, protected planning time, professional development, academic



freedom, just cause for discipline, enforcement through a grievance procedure, non-probationary status for special service providers (SSPs), flexible scheduling and working conditions, and the establishment of a joint labor-management committee.

*“With heavy staff turnover in the district leadership office, the district has lost some ‘institutional memory’ of those policies and processes. Some policies that had been agreed upon previously with staff were changed without consultation. So having this master agreement really codifies a lot of what we’ve been doing in the district for 25 years now.”*

–Rob Norville, RFCEA President<sup>2</sup>

## PARAEDUCATORS ASSOCIATION OF CHERRY CREEK (PACC)

On November 22, 2024, the almost 1,000-strong PACC made history when, in near-unanimous fashion, they voted to form a union to collectively bargain their first contract. For years, they had endured low wages, constant turnover, and little respect or value for the work that they did to try to create safe, consistent learning environments for their students. Following the path that was blazed back in 2022 by the Cherry Creek Bus Assistants, this group of paraeducators were fearless organizers. With a 64-person organizing committee and more than 90% of their work sites represented, the PACC will be ready to negotiate in the spring 2025. *“This has been a long time coming and life-changing for so many. By unionizing the Cherry Creek paraeducators, a movement has been ignited by passion, purpose, and a commitment to a brighter tomorrow. Our schools are the foundation of our community, and this is our opportunity to step up and elevate Cherry Creek’s excellence for all the students. We must aspire to reach higher; our first step is to raise the bar for the paraeducator position.”*

–Barrie Alpert, severe needs paraeducator, Fox Hollow Elementary School, Cherry Creek Schools

**“Paras are the unsung heroes in our schools—the ones who lift up students with disabilities, helping them find their voice, their confidence, and their place in the world. When paraprofessionals are part of a union, they gain respect, training, and the support they need to continue to do this life changing work.”**

–Nikki Wing, parent of a Cherry Creek Schools elementary student<sup>3</sup>



<sup>2</sup>Rich Allen, “RFSD board to vote on union contract this week,” Aspen Daily News, May 21, 2024, [https://www.aspendailynews.com/news/rfsd-board-to-vote-on-union-contract-this-week/article\\_dd02fb4-173a-11ef-97be-b73ac8ca4f2f.html](https://www.aspendailynews.com/news/rfsd-board-to-vote-on-union-contract-this-week/article_dd02fb4-173a-11ef-97be-b73ac8ca4f2f.html) (accessed April 10, 2025).

<sup>3</sup>“Cherry Creek Paraeducators Win Union Election With Landslide Vote,” Colorado Education Association, Nov. 22, 2024, <https://coloradoea.org/news-updates/cherry-creek-paraeducators-win-union-election-with-landslide-vote/> (accessed 10/5/25).

# JEFFERSON COUNTY EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (JCEA) STRIVING TO BECOME A POWERFUL FORCE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND ANTI-RACISM



The Jefferson County Education Association (JCEA) doesn't just talk the talk when it comes to their efforts to become a stalwart advocate and give voice to marginalized educators, students, and their community. They walk the walk. This is evidenced by the language they won in the 2021-2024 contract in an article titled "Equity in the School District" (you can see the language under Article 22 in their current agreement [here](#)). This language established:

- An Equity Accountability Committee, made up of stakeholders across the district, including community members, tasked with working toward equity (racial, sexual orientation, sex, gender identity/expression, age, access to learning in relation to socio-economic concerns, etc.)
- Staffing and Classroom Diversity
  - Implement programs to recruit and retain staff, educators and administrators that more closely reflect the racial, ethnic and linguistic diversity of the student body
  - Provide training, such as implicit bias
  - Create a safe space for educators of color to meet and support each other
  - Establish a mentorship program for educators of color by educators of color
  - Implement programs to support current educators of color in obtaining leadership licenses and take on leadership roles
  - Provide education and tools to understand racial identity and its impact

- An Equity Ombuds Program to serve as an independent liaison to employees of color and those who identify as LGBTQ+ to address discrimination and bias-motivated harassment claims
- Stronger non-discrimination standards and protections for protected classes

JCEA's efforts include viewing their work through a lens of social and racial justice. When it came to their goal of winning a fair contract that reflects the deeply and widely felt issues of the membership and improves teaching and learning conditions for all, they put a special emphasis on how important these wins would be for the marginalized groups that they were fighting for. So, when they won a 5% increase to the salary schedule and a one-time 2% payment, they didn't just look at this as a win for their members and a positive step to improve recruitment and retention of high-quality educators, they also saw how it would impact their ability to continue to recruit educators of color to the district.

They also won:

- Additional educator-directed planning time
- Access to an improved leave management system
- Stronger school safety
- And much more!

Though the effort to recruit educators of color to the district hasn't been easy, JCEA did increase the number on their Executive Board, thereby creating a stronger voice within the leadership of the union.

JCEA continues to grow and deepen their community partnerships in this work as well. They've created an ally group for educators and community members. They've been heavily involved in local elections to ensure they maintain a school board that is supportive and welcoming of all voices throughout the district. And they've joined together with community partners to support efforts that positively impact students and other members of the community beyond the work that goes on in school.

While there is much more work to be done, JCEA continues to be a powerful force and a strong voice for those who are marginalized in their community.

# JEFFERSON COUNTY EDUCATION SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS ASSOCIATION (JESPA)

## ESPS FOR THE COMMON GOOD: FIGHTING CORPORATE INFLUENCE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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The Jefferson County ESP Association (JESPA) has been leading the way in Colorado and across the country when it comes to Bargaining for the Common Good (BCG). Building off past victories and efforts (download 2021-2022 Student-Centered Bargaining and Advocacy Report [here](#) to read more about their story), they sought to deepen their advocacy and efforts in collective bargaining. Faced with threats to collective bargaining rights and district challenges, JESPA prepared for the upcoming expiration of their contract. Focused on leadership development and community engagement, their aim was to take on several critical issues impacting union members and students including privatization, educational equity, and food justice.

### LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

In preparation for their upcoming bargaining campaign, JESPA bolstered their leadership team by providing release time to key members for leadership development workshops. These workshops focused on skills around contract negotiations, member and issue advocacy, and direct-action training. Direct actions refer to the use of strikes, demonstrations, or other public forms of protest rather than negotiation to achieve one's demands. Strengthening their internal capacity and aiming to increase power, they expanded the role of their organizing committee and recruited five new committee members, recruited 20 new Association Representatives (AR) at the work sites, performed work-site visits and organizing blitzes, recruited new leaders through one-on-one conversations, and engaged workers at employee trainings

and events. By creating additional opportunities for members to step into leadership roles and take ownership of the work of the union, they expanded their bargaining committee and established supporting subcommittees, allowing more members to engage directly in the bargaining process.

### COMBATING PRIVATIZATION

Working with their community partner, [Coloradans for the Common Good \(CCG\)](#), they organized several community forums and town halls to raise awareness about the harmful effects of privatizing public services, which is exactly what they were facing in transportation and food service. It was through these events that they were able to engage both JESPA members and the community to ignite their mobilization against these privatization efforts, helping to align this fight with their broader public education advocacy campaigns.

JESPA also fought privatization by enforcing a provision in their contract that they won just the year prior. The section of the contract, titled "Reclassification," states that the district "shall prioritize hiring and seek to avoid the use of contracted or outsourced services unless there is a compelling need to contract or outsource services to maintain the operations of the district." It goes on to state that JESPA may request a meeting to "review current contracts for outsourcing functions traditionally performed by employees in ESP positions" and that the district will "engage in discussions with the [collaborative working group] for long-term solutions to staffing shortages..." The language also requires the district to meet with JESPA to "discuss potential solutions to address job positions that have a high vacancy rate and may include a market analysis of job titles, wage adjustments, and/or other viable solutions..." They didn't rely on just filing a grievance. Rather, through mobilizing their members to sign petitions and other actions, they were able to win the reclassification for two highly outsourced departments, paraeducators and bus drivers. The reclassification led to large pay increases and, when combined with the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) and steps, resulted in \$4/hour raises for everyone.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND FOOD JUSTICE ADVOCACY

JESPA also sought to strengthen their external capacity through new and existing community partnerships in continuing their fight for healthy foods, an issue felt deeply and widely throughout the community. In partnership with the [Jefferson County Food Policy Council](#), they hosted nutrition education workshops and continued to push to implement healthy food pilot programs in schools, ensuring that students have access to nutritious meals, especially those who are most vulnerable to inequities in school nutrition.

JESPA continued to broaden their community outreach. They held a May Day action in partnership with the Jefferson County Food Policy Council, [Edgewater Collective](#), [Hunger Free Colorado](#), Jefferson County Education Association (JCEA), and United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW). And, in bargaining, they invited parents from the JeffCo Food Policy Council to join them to discuss the Healthy Food Pilot at the table with the district. They also organized a joint bargaining action with JCEA, with members from CCG in attendance, and continued those efforts by expanding their bargaining caucus to community members, where they discussed campaign strategies. Subsequently, they organized a major event over the summer, where 50 JESPA leaders strategized with other unions. During the fall, they would continue to hold house meetings with community and partner organizations.



## MEMBER ENGAGEMENT AND GROWTH

In the past, JESPA struggled to maintain membership growth due to consistently high turnover. However, after launching their latest membership drive that included one-on-one conversations, increased member engage-

ment, and new leader identification and participation, they were able to recruit 642 new members, a net increase of 225 new members.

## BARGAINING, DIRECT-ACTION MOBILIZATION, AND OTHER CAMPAIGNS

After the district began to utilize union-busting tactics, JESPA shifted its focus to direct-action training for members. They organized protests, rallies, and strategic planning sessions, empowering members to take a collective stand while building momentum to resist anti-union activities.

Their fight took place on multiple fronts, including:

- Reclassification campaign (yes, another one) where they won significant pay increases for health technicians and bus assistants after marching on the boss with signed petitions at bargaining sessions and school board meetings
- Several class action grievances and complaints, notably winning a settlement after the district tried to classify paraeducators as temporary employees and winning a back pay settlement after the district failed to pay custodians premium compensation for snow removal
- Multiple complaints with the state and two complaints under the new PROPWA after the district failed to properly post vacancies; unfortunately, the laws are not sufficiently enforced and JESPA has been waiting for more than a year to have their complaints investigated

They dug in in preparation for bargaining, holding contract and steward trainings, and a leadership retreat. They secured release time for members to do site visits and conducted assessments for action leading up to a potential strike at key work sites. And they utilized their newly formed subcommittees to prepare for what was certain to be a tough negotiation.

Early on, bargaining was marred by heavy resistance and union-busting tactics by the district. For a district that claims to prioritize equity, it seemed surprising that there would be so much opposition to JESPA's equal pay complaint or their engagement with Spanish-speaking parents about the healthy food initiatives, but there was. However, JESPA didn't back down. Instead, they expanded their bargaining team to 60 members and actively resisted the district's pressure tactics by insisting that they bargain in good faith. Their big bargaining team was yet another reflection of JESPA's commitment to building a robust membership and community alliance, which they viewed as essential to confront the district's inconsistency around equity.

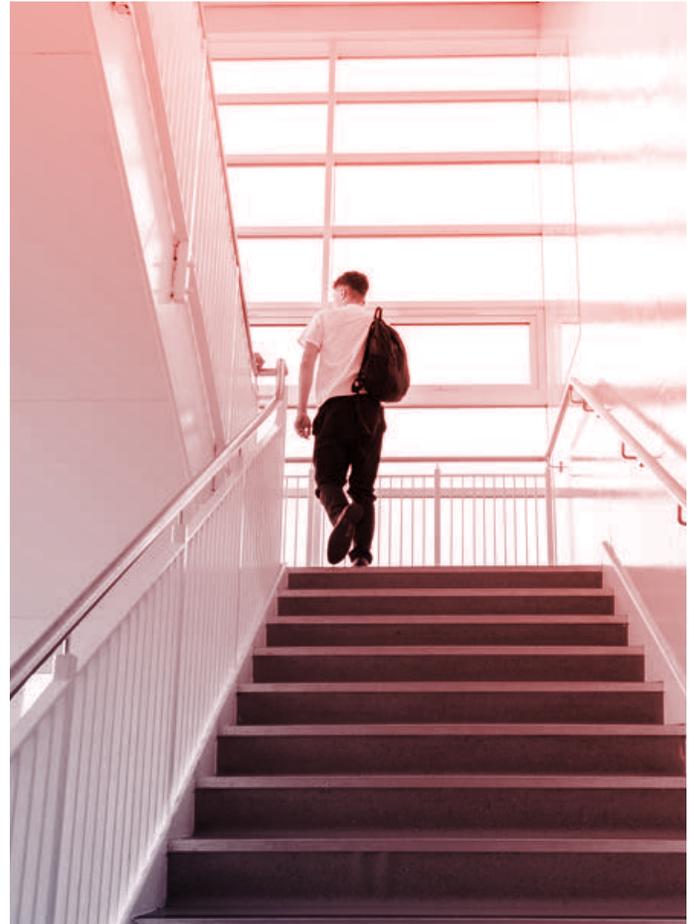


When the district refused to bargain in good faith, they used a direct action to declare impasse. Though the fight was tough and at times a win seemed unachievable, the members and newly developed leaders of JESPA and their many community allies and partners never backed down. They stood together in solidarity, avoided a strike, and they won for everyone in the JeffCo community.

Wins included:

- What used to be top pay for special education par-aeducators after 20 years just a few years ago is now starting pay
  - In just a few years, JESPA has pushed the ESP minimum wage up by 56%, increasing from \$12.49 in 2021 to \$19.50 in 2024!
- Bilingual compensation is now in the contract
- Bus driver compensation has been greatly impacted, as well as pay in other job classifications in short-staffed departments, while decreasing vacancy rates
- Disrupted business with contracted rideshare companies
  - The district is buying vehicles to transport students and ending the reliance on companies like HopSkip-Drive
- Though the fight for healthy school meals continues, the quality of school meals has improved, and community involvement has increased
  - They continue to work hard to expand the healthy scratch-cooked meals pilot

There are positive signs for the future for JESPA. They've confirmed that the district's union-busting attorney will not be back, and major changes to their bargaining team are occurring. And though JESPA's status as a union was close to folding shortly before the pandemic, their tireless effort and huge wins for the common good have saved them. JESPA, along with CCG and all of their partners, will be a powerful force to reckon with for their members, students, and community for many, many years to come.





**WISCONSIN**

# MILWAUKEE TEACHERS' EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (MTEA) WITH OR WITHOUT ACT 10, WE WIN (THAT DEFINITELY RHYMES)

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Ever since Scott Walker's complete frontal assault on workers' rights via [Act 10](#) in 2011, the Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association (MTEA) has never wavered. In fact, they've been so relentless in their continued fight for educators and students, their project title for their grant proposal read like a news headline that foretold the future—*MTEA Wins Back Pro Student, Pro Public Education, and Pro Worker Policies Without Collective Bargaining*. Did someone jump into a DeLorean after discovering time travel? Likely not. But the educators of MTEA believed so much in the solidarity and power of their union that they knew they would win, and win they did.

MTEA won:

- Grievance/discipline process with timelines
  - Educators previously had been subjected to lengthy, dragged-out processes devoid of any time parameters
- Fair and equitable high school student extracurriculars
  - A joint workgroup began meeting to address this issue in fall 2024; it has been dependent on student enrollment, a factor beyond control of the students who were not given the opportunity to participate
- Funding for resources and materials to implement high school extracurriculars
- Fair and equitable inclement weather compensation
  - Members in some of the lowest paid positions will now receive paid leave up to three times/year
- District policy to solicit, compile, track, and publish data related to the return of students to Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) from a private charter school or voucher program

- Meeting with School Board and Administration to develop a method; this data is important because of its impact on per pupil funding

MTEA was able to achieve all of this despite quite a bit of flux within MPS. Both the superintendent and CFO stepped down unexpectedly. Through this tumultuous period, they attribute much of their success to these best practices:

- Fight for issues that are widely and deeply felt by members
- Include all members on issues to show solidarity
- Relentless and disciplined communication to members, administration, and the school board
- Escalation tactics including phone calls, emails, petitions, and testifying

Though MTEA has continued to fight for their members and students without bargaining rights since 2011, it is becoming increasingly possible that their rights could be restored. A December 2024 court ruling declared Act 10 [unconstitutional](#). While it is still in place after a temporary [stay](#) on the ruling by the judge who made the decision, it is currently being heard in the appeals court following a denial to [fast-track](#) it to the Wisconsin Supreme Court. At the beginning of April 2025, a union-backed liberal candidate [defeated](#) a challenger supported by President Donald Trump and billionaire Elon Musk for a seat on the high court in the most expensive judicial race in American history.



**MARYLAND**

# TEACHERS ASSOCIATION OF BALTIMORE COUNTY (TABCO) SAFER TOGETHER

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, more and more we're hearing educators sound the alarm when it comes to student conduct and school safety. Education unions are searching for answers to a pervasive issue by bringing proposals to the bargaining table and policy changes to school boards. Demands commonly consist of administrative support for educators, mental health support for students, frameworks such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), restorative practices, and parent and family engagement. Restrictions around the use of cell phones and other electronic devices are also being discussed in districts across the country.

Things are no different for the Teachers Association of Baltimore County (TABCO). Like many other districts nationwide, these rampant problems are continually disrupting classrooms, making it more difficult than it already is to recruit and retain educators. The union took a methodical approach to finding a fix. They researched data-based practices and approaches that would inform their proposals, sought increased communications expertise and support, and developed a plan for their Safer Together campaign that kicked off in the fall of 2024. The campaign calendar was mapped out with monthly actions and #RedForEd days that would engage and activate TABCO members, parents and community, and other stakeholders who were passionate about safe schools and maintaining the promise of a transformative school experience for both students and educators.

TABCO's research led them to the conclusion that, despite having numerous tools at their disposal, the approach to improving climate and conduct lacked integration and consistency. If they could turn the page on the fragmented use of initiatives, which they found continuously hindered any progress, and use the tools in their toolbelt more cohesively and consistently, they could significantly enhance school climate and equity. And when referring to "they," it means all stakeholders involved, including all school staff, students, parents, administrators, community, and the school board. These are complex issues, meaning there is no single panacea. It takes a village.

The Safer Together campaign is anchored in research-backed tools and interventions, such as PBIS, social-emotional learning (SEL), teacher coaching, student mentoring, and cell phone control. To prove the effectiveness of their comprehensive, integrated program, TABCO proposed a pilot in a diverse group of schools at all grade levels across the county. To guarantee success, all educators in the pilot would receive training directly from Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS)—identified experts, moving away from the "train-the-trainer" model and ensuring that every educator is equipped to implement the program effectively. And to ensure continuous improvement and consistency in implementation, the pilot would be closely monitored and assessed using discipline data, climate and perception surveys, and unique surveys exclusive to pilot and control schools.

For TABCO, the Safer Together campaign is not just a program, but rather a collaborative effort involving all stakeholders within the school community. Together, they're dedicated to creating a supportive and equitable environment for all students and educators. Could this be a model for other NEA affiliates and school districts sharing in the same struggles? Time will tell.





**VERMONT**

# VERMONT-NEA (VT-NEA)

## FINDING OPPORTUNITIES IN CHALLENGES THROUGH STATEWIDE HEALTH CARE BARGAINING

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In 2018, a change in Vermont law meant that instead of local unions negotiating over health insurance at the bargaining table, bargaining took place statewide for all public school employees. The statutory process for statewide health care bargaining is very different from the traditional, locally based collective bargaining that Vermont-NEA (VT-NEA) affiliates had been accustomed to, presenting some unique challenges. First, the decision-making is more concentrated at the top and the process is farther removed from the rank-and-file membership. Additionally, the scope of bargaining is both narrow, limited to premium sharing and out-of-pocket expenses among a handful of other items, and also incredibly consequential for members and their families. Finally, unlike local bargaining, the statewide health care process ends in binding arbitration.

Following up on their first round of statewide health care bargaining since passage of the law, VT-NEA's challenge was to find creative ways to open up the process to rank-and-file members, making it more participatory, transparent, and democratic. This campaign focused on finding ways to bring VT-NEA members' collective voice and power to bear on the process and to influence key decision-makers in strategic ways. While the new way of bargaining for health care presented many challenges, they also saw opportunities.

One big opportunity that existed was to establish a model for how affiliates can organize and engage members in an effective local contract campaign to win key bargaining demands. In this campaign, VT-NEA had its sights set on winning affordable, accessible, high-quality health care for all Vermont public school employees. To accomplish this, they developed three strategic goals:

1. Leverage member power through collective action to achieve the best possible bargaining outcome
2. Educate members about the bargaining process and issues
3. Build their internal organizing capacity through the established local liaison structure (with a goal to have at least one liaison for each of their 72 locals) and VT-NEA's Health Care Council

Through this process, VT-NEA identified new member leaders to step into roles within the liaison and Council structures. The liaison structure could be likened to a contract action team (CAT), as their primary role focused on communicating with other members and coordinating monthly meetings. The Council members helped coordinate the campaign by developing organizing strategies and working with the liaisons to carry out those efforts. They were able to utilize their improved internal capacity to increase member engagement and activism. With the increased member engagement, they were able to execute their strategy to leverage the collective power of their members to influence the employer commissioners' decision-making through direct and indirect pressure. They would also look to apply indirect pressure on the Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA) Board of Directors, local school board members, legislative allies, and constituents of employer commissioners serving on school boards.

VT-NEA's strategy proved to be successful! Not only did they accomplish their goals in statewide bargaining, but they also had three major legislative wins:

1. Passage of S.98 to establish a quasi-prescription drug affordability board (PDAB)
2. Passage of a \$15,000 appropriation to fund a reference-based pricing (RBP) analysis, an approach aimed at controlling costs for services
3. Expansion of the state's Medicare Savings Program, which offers substantial financial benefits for low-income Vermonters

VT-NEA continues to work on pursuing health care reform to support their members and their families, especially those in lower income brackets, as well as cutting costs and increasing access to care for students. And with an established model of member organizing and building collective power, affiliates have the tools they need to continue advocating for their members, students, and community through their own local bargaining efforts.



**ILLINOIS**

# ILLINOIS EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (IEA) OVERLOOKED NO MORE: STRENGTHENING THE UNION THROUGH ESP AND ADJUNCT FACULTY LEADERSHIP

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Because education support professionals (ESPs) and adjunct faculty are typically ranked as low influencers in their work environments, it results in default exclusions from strategic planning, goal setting, and access to information and professional development opportunities. Work schedules and assignments further compound this silo effect. Though the isolation may be unintentional, the consequences have very real impacts on leadership development and organizational capacity for both employers and the respective labor unions.

The Illinois Education Association (IEA) sees significant untapped potential within this under-represented group. IEA's belief is that by developing the leadership and communication capacities of new and emerging leaders, local associations can influence their work environment and society in extraordinary ways. It is with this in mind that they established a professional development program titled "Strategic Communication Skills for Education Leaders."

Strategic Communication Skills for Education Leaders is an equitable professional development program designed to support the growth of ESP and adjunct faculty leadership and communication skills for the enhancement of student-centered bargaining and advocacy. The

program builds internal and external labor partnerships through the creation of leadership communities that connect local associations, employers, and the state and national affiliates, IEA and the National Education Association (NEA).

Demographic and cultural differences exist between student and employee communities that create uncertainty, which triggers unease and conflict. Conflict manifests via numerous outlets, including problematic relationships with staff, students, parents, and community members. This professional development program provides a platform for employees to foster understanding and collaboration. By developing personal intercultural competency supported through paced coaching, experiential learning, and mindfulness and adult brain theory, participants are prepared to identify and utilize practices that foster authentic dialogue and understanding within their communities. Research identifies intercultural competence as a key capability for working and living effectively with people from diverse cultures and backgrounds. It is essential for establishing effective, positive relationships and it supports these outcomes:

- Disparity elimination between dominant/non-dominant cultures

- Improved community relations
- Achievement of DEI goals
- Professional effectiveness

The program consisted of three cadres with a total of 72 members comprising higher education ESPs and adjunct faculty and pre-K–12 ESPs from a coalition of six unions representing more than 2,000 bargaining unit members, including:

- HS 214 ESP Association
- CCSD 15 ESP Association
- CCSD 15 Transportation Union
- CUSD 220 School Employee Organization
- Harper 512 Association
- Harper College Adjunct Faculty Association

The program, which reinforced NEA’s core initiative of supporting leadership and professional excellence to create and sustain a just world, and supported IEA’s “Respect” and “Stronger United for Higher Education” campaigns, provided for 24 hours of professional development, 3 hours of individual coaching, and 5 hours of self-selected intercultural service-learning experiences over a six-month period. It also happened to be recognized by the Illinois State Board of Education and therefore also provided for 36 professional development hours. In the trainings, participants learned how to:

- Identify beliefs, values, and norms in their own culture
- Recognize and articulate differences and commonalities in dominant cultural patterns with implications on organizational climate
- Recognize verbal/non-verbal, direct/indirect communication styles, pacing, tone and physical gestures
- Debrief group Intercultural Development Inventory® and Individual Intercultural Developmental Plans®
- Explore how brain dynamics impact communications
- Identify how culture and experiences impact and resolve conflict
- Utilize a reflective framework that maximizes personal understanding of intercultural communication with others who have different values, beliefs, worldviews, or communication styles
- Navigate change and unfamiliar circumstances
- Reflect upon and share community service learning experiences

Since the training program began, IEA affiliates have seen a boost in new member recruitment; integration of a newly recognized pre-K–12 ESP unit, Lake Zurich ESP, into the IEA-NEA leadership support program; and organizing support for a new higher education ESP certified staff bargaining unit of more than 200 employees at Harper College.





# NEA PENSION MEMBER TRUSTEES BUILDING SOLIDARITY: TRUSTEE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, MUTUALISM AND THE COMMON GOOD

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When NEA member pension trustees from across the country applied for a Student-Centered Bargaining and Advocacy grant, the grant review team had to do somewhat of a double take. In almost 10 years since the grant program was established, this was likely one of the most unique submissions. But it is this type of outside-the-box thinking that the grant is meant for, and so it was approved.

Led by a team of trustee leaders from Georgia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, California, and Illinois, they saw opportunities to both develop other trustees and leaders in all NEA affiliates as well as integrate into and support campaigns to protect and defend public pensions and public education.

**Goal 1: Empower current and future NEA trustees and member leaders with effective public leadership knowledge, skills, and attitudes using the [NEA Leadership Competencies Framework](#).**

To accomplish this goal, grant team members trained and presented at multiple events including the Harvard Trustee Leadership Forum (TLF), NEA Member Trustee Annual Meeting, and the 2025 NEA Leadership Summit. During these sessions, they shared grant-related opportunities such as the Peer Mentoring Program, along with concrete examples of actions that could be taken for the common good. While at the Summit, they began to develop a plan to propose and pass a retirement security New Business Item (NBI) at the 2025 NEA Representative Assembly.

They also utilized grant funding to enable NEA member trustees to join the Harvard TLF's Peer Mentoring Program. In doing so, the NEA trustees became the largest cohort of any other union in the entire country! The program allows members to build the relationships, trust, and sense of common purpose needed to support their work around the common good.

Additionally, moving ahead with two educational projects, they established a mini course in collaboration with the [Center for Labor and a Just Economy](#) at the Harvard Law School and a mini-series for NEA member trustees around issues related to proxy voting. The first of the two was even offered with a micro-credential.

Lastly, the team launched a pilot Public Leadership Forum for members of the Illinois Education Association (IEA). Through the pilot, they intend to test, develop, and refine structures that can be replicated with other state affiliates. The launch event of the new pilot program included a panel consisting of a Democratic State Senator, Republican State Representative, and an IEA/NEA Director, who also serves as the president of their local school district's Board of Education. In support of the IEA Public Leadership Forum, a pilot Peer Mentoring Program was created.

**Goal 2: Develop and implement policies that reflect the principles of mutualism and solidarity in defense of both public pension and public education and that support effective collective bargaining campaigns.**

Through their efforts, progress was made on developing and implementing policies that promote the common good. The trustees took advantage of the many opportunities they had related to Goal 1 to share about their policy victories. They began to compile survey data from member trustees regarding policy priorities and areas of interest and expertise existing within individual trustee networks. And with respect to the work around proxy voting, they facilitated member trustee discussions and were able to create *Proxy Voting 101*, a permanent educational resource developed in collaboration with the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). Their work around proxy voting has already caused a few retirement systems to update their policies as a result.

Within the first six months of this project, they were able to engage more than 500 members and allies across the country!

**SWOT ANALYSIS**

**Strengths:** A strong leadership team exists that encompasses decades of Association and public leadership experience representing members across the country.

**Weaknesses:** Initially, there were some growing pains related to solidifying a common vision, which was expected considering they were attempting to establish an organizing project that is national in scope.

**Opportunities:** Having access to fewer resources for members who are or aspire to be public leaders, there is no shortage of talent among the membership nationwide to run for positions of leadership and advocate for the common good.

**PUBLIC LEADERSHIP FORUM**  
ILLINOIS EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

**VIRTUAL LAUNCH EVENT**

PLEASE JOIN US  
**THURSDAY | JULY 18 AT 4PM**

**PURPOSE**  
The purpose of the IEA Public Leadership Forum is to convene spaces for IEA members with an interest in public leadership and provide support throughout their tenure. Examples of public leadership include serving on a local Board of Education, Board of Trustees, city council, Park District Board of Commissioners or Board of Library trustees. Public leadership roles can be elected by voters or appointed by a leader.

**PANELISTS INCLUDE:**

- ELIZABETH OJEDA-JIMENEZ**  
NEA Director  
Local Board of Education President
- CHRISTOPHER BELT**  
Illinois State Senator  
Former local Board of Education President
- MARY BETH CANTY**  
Illinois State Representative  
House District 54

**SCAN TO JOIN**

**IEA ILLINOIS EDUCATION ASSOCIATION**

**Threats:** In a politically divided country, with member leaders representing all 50 states, there is a danger of losing sight of a shared vision of the “common good,” which may make it difficult to determine consensus related to identifying projects that are able to unite everyone involved.









