



Powerful Failure:

How the National Education Association fails to use its influence for education

The National Center for Education Information conducted a series of surveys over the last twenty years finding that the number one reason teachers teach is “because they want to help young people learn and develop.”¹

**Teachers focus on what matters most:
children.**



The National Education Association (NEA)* is America's oldest education association, and it has become one of America's most powerful unions. It boasts 3.2 million members nationwide and is comprised of more than half of the public school teachers in the United States. Its annual reported receipts in 2009 totaled more than \$377 million.² The NEA's nationwide network and vast financial resources make it the single most powerful force in education.

Although it purports to serve teachers and meet their professional needs, the NEA does not use its resources exclusively to help educators meet their number one goal of helping children learn. It lacks the focus to fulfill its mission of "a great public school for every student."³

Individual teachers pay hundreds and even thousands of dollars year after year in NEA dues. These dues are used in activities that many members find offensive and infuriating. This booklet outlines the NEA's history, how it spends its money, how it works to control teachers and politicians, and what you can do about it.

Educators who opt against joining the NEA can obtain benefits such as liability insurance and legal assistance from other professional educator associations. Resources to help educators explore their options are listed at the end of this booklet.

**Unless otherwise noted, "NEA" refers exclusively to the national union, and not to the state or local NEA union affiliates.*

Mission & Values

The NEA's stated mission is "to advocate for professionals and to unite our members and the nation to fulfill the promise of public education to prepare every student to succeed in a diverse and interdependent world."⁴

Although the NEA touts a mission devoted to professionals and children, its leadership has, for decades, pursued different goals. In 1982, former NEA president Mary Hatwood Futrell candidly outlined the NEA's priorities:

““ The *major purpose of our association* is not the education of children, it is or ought to be the extension and/or preservation of our *members' rights*. We earnestly care about the kids' learning, but that is secondary to the other goals. ””⁵

This was not an isolated statement. In 1997, former NEA president Bob Chase stated,

““ [NEA has] used our power to block uncomfortable changes, to protect the narrow interest of its members, and *not to advance the interests of students* and schools. ””⁶

The theme of putting members' rights ahead of children for the sake of power continues even today. On July 6, 2009, retiring NEA General Counsel Robert Chanin explained why the NEA and its affiliates are effective advocates:

“ Despite what some among us would like to believe, it is not because of our creative ideas, it is not because of the merit of our position, it is *not because we care about children*, and it is not because we have a vision for a great public school for every child. NEA and its affiliates are effective advocates *because we have power*. And we have power because there are more than 3.2 million people who are willing to pay us hundreds of millions of dollars a year in dues each year. ”⁷

Educators across America pay union dues under the assumption that the NEA will work on their behalf to help them achieve their goals. However, the statements of the NEA's leadership do not align with teachers' number one priority or with the organization's stated mission. The NEA's priority is maintaining what it values most — *power*.

History

The evolution of the NEA as an institution shows its increasingly progressive agenda focused on unionizing teachers and consolidating power rather than assisting teachers in helping students learn.

Building The Association

1857

The National Teachers' Association organizes in Philadelphia with 43 members.⁸

1906

NEA is incorporated by an act of Congress.¹⁰

1870

NTA becomes the National Education Association by absorbing the American Normal School Association, National Association of School Superintendents, and Central College Association.⁹

1907

NEA celebrates its 50th Anniversary with 5,044 members.¹¹

Becoming A Union

1944

"Oregon adopted a policy of unification [of dues] with a single enrollment in all three levels of the professional organization [local, state, and national]." All states are unified by 1976.¹²

1962

NEA becomes a union as it passes the first "Professional Negotiation" resolution and unveils the first "model bill" for professional negotiation.¹⁴

1957

NEA celebrates its 100th Anniversary with more than 700,000 members.¹³

Gaining Political Power

1972

NEA's Political Action Committee, the Fund for Children and Education, is established and funded by member contributions.¹⁵

1976

NEA becomes active in national politics for the first time endorsing candidates for the presidency and other national offices and supporting the endorsements with cash and manpower.¹⁶

1979

NEA successfully lobbies Congress to make the Secretary of Education a Cabinet-level position and unify education programs within the Department of Education.¹⁷

1988

NEA proclaims, "We have succeeded in building one of the most powerful political networks in the nation. There are literally thousands of organized and motivated NEA members in each congressional district in America."¹⁸

2006

AFL-CIO/NEA Labor Solidarity Partnership is formed allowing NEA members to sit on local AFL-CIO labor councils.¹⁹



Structure & Governance

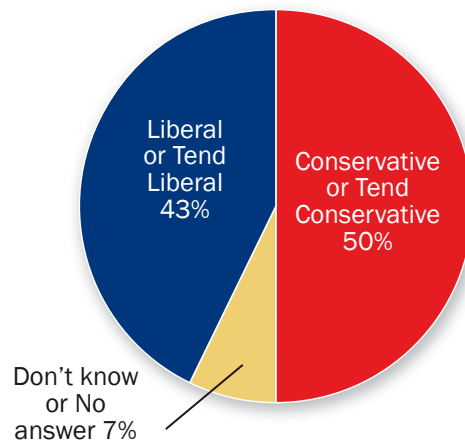
The NEA's highest officers are its president, vice president, and secretary-treasurer. These individuals are part of the nine-member executive committee that works to carry out the administration of the national union. They oversee the operations of various committees, advisory boards, and the Representative Assembly (RA) that develop and manage rules, bylaws, resolutions, legislation, membership, and standards.

The RA is a body of over 9,000 delegates representing NEA members from all parts of America. Each year the RA votes on the budget, resolutions, and legislative agenda that the NEA will implement in the following year. RA representatives are nominated and elected according to local union regulations.

The NEA touts its RA as the largest democratic body in operation in the world and is purported to be comprised of delegates who represent the larger NEA population. However, the various policies promoted by the RA conflict with the breakdown of the political affiliations of NEA members.

According to a survey of members conducted by the NEA in 2005, 50% of reporting members said they were “conservative” or “tend conservative,” while only 40% claimed to be “liberal” or “tend liberal,” and 10% claimed “don’t know” or did not answer.²⁰ Despite this decidedly conservative bias, the NEA’s leadership and the RA continually vote in favor of liberal policies unrelated to education issues such as same-sex marriage and statehood for the District of Columbia.

How would you classify yourself in regard to your political philosophy?



General Counsel Bob Chanin said in 2009, “When all is said and done, NEA and its affiliates must never lose sight of the fact that they are a union, and what unions do first and foremost is represent their members.”²¹

The NEA does not accurately represent its members in the political arena. This can be seen by examining the NEA’s legislative agenda, resolutions, and budget.



Legislative Agenda

The NEA's legislative agenda is broad, encompassing some issues unrelated and even detrimental to teachers' primary goal of helping students learn. This agenda must be scrutinized because it is advanced by *the* powerhouse in education lobbying with extensive membership, vast financial resources, and centralized power.

The agenda is not a new method of influence—it is an old one, carefully crafted for decades to result in adding power to the NEA, even regarding non-educational issues.

As far back as the 1970s, the NEA's executive director Terry Herndon said that:

“*The ultimate goal of the NEA is to tap the legal, political, and economic power of the U.S. Congress. We want leaders and staff with sufficient clout that they may roam the halls of Congress and collect votes to **reorder the priorities of the United States of America.***”²²

Here are just a few of the policies unrelated to education that the NEA supported as a part of its 2009 Legislative Agenda:

NEA Supports

- ▶ “Strict federal standards for staffing, safety, health care, and nutrition services provided by **nursing homes**.”²³
- ▶ “Legislation to preserve and expand **Native Hawaiian land ownership**.”²⁴
- ▶ “Equity in **tax policies** for spousal benefits and domestic partner benefits.”²⁵
- ▶ “Development and implementation of a long-range **national energy policy**.”²⁶
- ▶ “Full **veterans’ benefits** for Filipinos who fought alongside the United States during World War II.”²⁷

Even when the NEA addresses educational issues in its legislative agenda, often these initiatives are not focused on assisting teachers in helping students learn. Here are a few educational policies the NEA opposed in 2009:

NEA Opposes

- ▶ “Federal initiatives that mandate or promote traditionally defined **merit pay** or incentive pay schemes or other pay-for-performance systems that link teacher compensation to student achievement.”²⁸
- ▶ “Use of **student test scores** as an evaluative measure for education employee performance appraisal, job assignment, job retention, promotion, tenure, salary increments, and/or school performance.”²⁹
- ▶ “Federal legislation giving **financial incentives** or pay to teachers based solely on the subjects or fields in which they teach.”³⁰

Resolutions

Along with its annual legislative agenda, the RA votes each year on a series of resolutions supported by the NEA. Resolutions have been a part of the NEA since its founding in 1856 as a way for the NEA to make unified statements regarding specific issues.

The resolutions listed are just some of the NEA's goals, purposes, and plans. These serve neither the NEA's mission of "advocating for professionals" and "prepar[ing] every student to succeed" nor teachers' number one goal of helping students learn.



Education Issues:

- ▶ “The Association believes that. . .funds must be provided for programs to alleviate race, gender, and sexual orientation discrimination and to eliminate the portrayal of **race, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identification** stereotypes in public schools.” (1997, 2004)³¹
- ▶ “The Association believes that services in the schools should include. . . **family-planning**, counseling, and access to **birth control methods** with instruction of their use.” (1969, 2003)³²
- ▶ “The National Education Association believes that communications between all education employees and students must be **legally privileged.**” (1974, 1996)³³
- ▶ “The National Education Association believes in a drug- and alcohol-free workplace. However, the Association believes that mandatory and/or random **drug and alcohol testing of employees** and job applicants is an unwarranted and unconstitutional invasion of privacy and opposes such testing.” (1987, 1994)³⁴

Non-Education Issues:

- ▶ “The Association supports efforts to achieve **statehood for the District of Columbia.**” (1969, 1997)³⁵
- ▶ “The National Education Association supports family planning, including the right to **reproductive freedom.** The Association urges the government to give high priority to making available all methods of family planning to women and men unable to take advantage of private facilities.” (1985, 1986)³⁶
- ▶ “The Association also opposes the exploitation of women as **mail-order brides.**” (1984, 1999)³⁷

Budget & PAC

The NEA uses member dues to pursue a decidedly slanted agenda that is not representative of its members. Its budgeted Political Activities and Lobbying (PAL), as reported to the Department of Labor, uses member dues to promote the NEA's resolutions and legislative agenda.

Year	PAL budget
2009	\$50.4 million ³⁸
2008	\$29.4 million ³⁹
2007	\$32.2 million ⁴⁰
2006	\$26.9 million ⁴¹

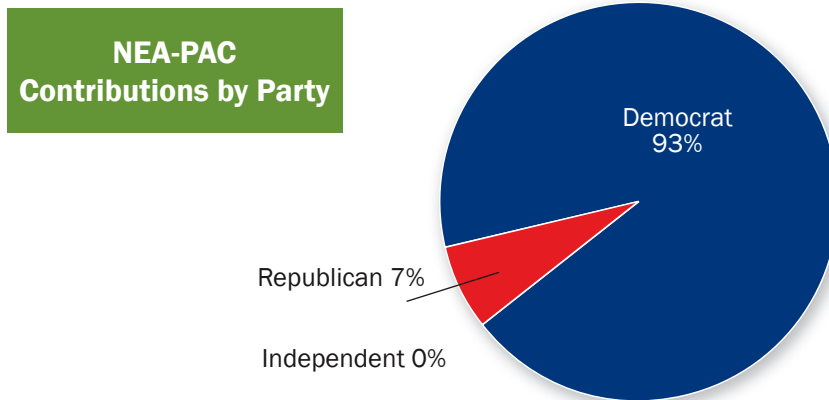
During these years, members' dues have been distributed to organizations such as the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN); Rainbow Push Coalition; and ACORN.

Along with its generous PAL expenditures, the NEA established a political action committee (PAC) to increase its political power. All 9,000 Representative Assembly delegates are strongly "encouraged" to personally contribute or raise \$180 for the PAC each year, which totals more than \$1.6 million annually.⁴² In the 2008 reporting cycle, the PAC reported total receipts of over \$6.2 million consisting of voluntarily contributed funds.⁴³

Upon the establishment of the PAC in 1972, NEA president Helen Wise stated,

“One thing is certain – the NEA will never again sit out a national election. In fact, *we will build NEA’s political force* over the next two years to the point where the Presidential candidates will seek NEA endorsement.”⁴⁴

The *NEA’s Handbook 2008–2009* claims, “The NEA Fund for Children and Public Education works to ensure that pro-public education candidates are elected to public office.”⁴⁵



The NEA-PAC gave Democratic candidates 13 times the amount they gave Republican candidates in the 2008 election, despite the generally evenly divided political persuasions of NEA members.⁴⁶ The expenditures of the PAC funds indicate a strong liberal bias in use of NEA resources straying from both the NEA’s stated mission to advocate for its teachers and teachers’ number one goal of helping kids learn.



Recruitment

The NEA is powerful in part because it has large sums of money and in part because it has hundreds of thousands of members. It gains members and money by using unrelenting recruiting techniques and aggressive retention practices that create a seemingly inescapable monopoly.

The NEA's recruitment manuals encourage members to:

“*Contact* each potential member until he or she joins the Association.”⁴⁷

“People are most likely to join when they are *asked and asked and asked*.”⁴⁸

“Many of those who are reluctant now will join if we *continue to ask* them.”⁴⁹

“Reluctant prospects have often joined when recruiters *continue to ask* them.”⁵⁰

“*Keep asking*. Make the potential member your project until he or she joins.”⁵¹

When NEA recruiters approach a potential member who has specific objections to union actions, recruiters are advised to respond, “Even if that [objection] were true, what better option do we have?”⁵² The NEA does not want educators to know that they have other options regarding their professional association.

Along with its unrelenting recruiting techniques, the NEA encourages members to see teaching as only part of what they do. NEA President Dennis Van Roekel wrote in 2008,

““One of my mentors told me that being an educator means that you have to be active, because ‘you can’t do half a job.’ What you do during the day at school is one half; *the other half is being part of the NEA.*”⁵³

The NEA does not cultivate a professional association. It promotes membership over professionalism so it can gain and maintain **power**.

becoming an agency-fee-only payer, becoming a religious objector, and/or joining an alternative local, state, or national non-union educator association.

It is important for educators to know that upon union resignation, an educator loses legal and liability insurance protection provided by the union. These benefits can be obtained from a non-union educator association at a fraction of the cost of union dues.

Educators in Right-to-Work States: Neither your employment contract nor state law requires you to join a union or pay agency fees.*

- ▶ New teachers can join an non-union educator association or a union.
- ▶ Union members, after resigning, have no obligation to the union and can join an non-union educator association.

Educators in non-Right-to-Work States: Your contract or state law contains a provision requiring you to join a union or pay union fees. You may have the option to become an agency-fee-only payer or a religious objector.*

- ▶ Agency-fee-only payers can resign from the union and pay only the portion of union dues that goes toward collective bargaining. As a non-member, agency-fee-only payers are not subject to union rules and discipline; however, they do not have the right to vote on contract ratification, election of union officers, or other potential opportunities provided for in the union constitution or bylaws.
- ▶ Religious objectors can resign from the union by submitting a letter to the union explaining the nature of the religious belief and how union positions or activities conflict with that belief. Compulsory dues are then contributed to a mutually-agreed-upon charity.

**Educators interested in further information regarding union laws in their state should contact AAE for state-specific information.*

Association of American Educators

Educators have many other options to gain the benefits of being part of a local, state, or national union without contributing to the questionable or offensive practices of the NEA.

Non-union educator associations like the [Association of American Educators \(AAE\)](#) provide affordable liability insurance and other member benefits without being involved in political or non-educational issues. Members of AAE have access to professional development resources, scholarships, classroom mini-grants, and updates on current education issues. Members also join a national network of educators committed to helping young people learn and develop.

As a non-union educator association, AAE is committed, along with the vast majority of educators, to what matters most: [children](#).



For information regarding your options, visit the Association of American Educators' website:

www.aaeteachers.org

Or contact AAE at:

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