



NEA Directors' Report to the WEAC Representative Assembly – April 2021



Wisconsin's NEA Directors

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Learning Beyond COVID Survey Brief

Executive Committee member, Hannah Vaandering, and Daaiyah Bilal-Threats, Special Assistant to the Executive Director and Senior Advisor, presented NEA's recent learning beyond COVID survey. The survey reiterated our work reclaiming public education as a common good and focused on six areas:

Equity: The COVID pandemic compounded impact on students with disabilities, students of color, and students with economic challenges. The role of educators in creating a just society requires changes in the content and delivery of curriculum. Content must be accessible to all and reflect the contribution of ethnic and racial minorities in society. Educators can mitigate the impact of COVID by providing equitable, quality instruction via distance learning.

Family and Community Engagement: The recovery process from the pandemic must occur both in our schools and communities. Establishing and maintaining consistent communication with parents is critical. There was consensus around the notion that social-emotional supports are— and will continue to be— necessary for students and their families. Responses also highlighted the importance of teachers and administrators who reflect the diversity of the communities in which they work.

Responsibility for and Assessment of Students' Academic and Social-Emotional Learning: The pandemic shed light on the impact our current assessment system has on BIPOC students and students with disabilities. The goal is to build a system that focuses on equity, student academic, and social-emotional learning and provides educators flexibility and authority to use student learning time effectively. The system must build trust with families and provide the appropriate data to all stakeholders. There is concern about the fairness, usefulness, and appropriateness of standardized assessments. Suggestions included reimagining assessments to be authentic and to considering social-emotional learning as a component. Many suggested holistically designed district-level or classroom-based assessments closely aligned with learning standards.

Systems Change: The pandemic severely disrupted students' access to educational resources. An excellent public education system provides quality conditions for teaching and learning, is equitably and inclusively designed, supports resilience, addresses trauma, and has a diverse and prepared workforce. Systems change can include calendar, time, schedule, or curriculum adjustments. Responses considered schedules, extended instructional time, and school calendar (year-round school models, summer school, four-day classroom week), and advocated for smaller class sizes.

Resources and Funding: This includes course offerings, class size, human resourcing: tutors, counselors, nurses, ESP, classroom teachers, technology equipment, and internet access resourcing. Responses emphasized the importance of non-instructional staff in creating environments that facilitate student learning.

Any extension or enhancement to the school day would require “extra hands”. Additional funding is vital to make this happen. The allocation of resources a gateway to providing equitable access to education.

Educator Voice/Role of our Union: Reimagine and transforming schools post-pandemic will require bold leadership and tough decision-making. Our communities need public schools that can powerfully serve, be inclusive of, and create a caring, respectful learning environment for every student. Our schools must fully engage students and educators in a way that support educational excellence, resilience, student trauma. Educators must be active participants in all aspects of decision making, including policy development and implementation. Educators need autonomy so they can do what they know is best for students, Professional respect and public perception of educators must improve. Specific actions by state and affiliates can foster collaborative relationships that might prove to be key in transforming public schools after the COVID pandemic. Through collaboration and building relationships with the community and legislators, the union can elevate the voices of educators.

Bilal-Threats discussed opportunity the pandemic presented -- a chance to relook and reimagine the educational system. “We can create working environments that rejuvenate students and replenish our educators,” declared Bilal-Threats. This survey outlines the resources we need to do it. However, it takes more than funding for education to secure our students’ needs; it takes each of us. Hanna Vandering added, “This last question is the crux of our work: What are you going to do to help your members, your locals, and the NEA move to a more safe and just post-pandemic future?” President Becky Pringle concluded the presentation with encouragement to all members “I need you to be at those tables in your school districts. Our voices need to be at the table to say what we need to spend that money on. Nothing is more powerful than when you say specifically ‘This is what we need; this is how much it will cost, and this is how we will make it happen over time.’ I need YOU - our practitioners, our teachers, our ESP, our higher ed, all hands on deck. I expect the NEA to LEAD on how we will bridge the gaps for our students.”

Changes to Uniserv Program Proposed

Over the last several months, the Uniserv Committee met virtually to make improvements to the Uniserv program. The committee met with the Center for Organizing to review and provide input on the Uniserv Core Competencies. The goal was to ensure NEA's commitment to racial and social justice was fully embedded within the document which had been reviewed before the pandemic. The Center for Organizing then met with Uniserv managers to solicit additional input and then finally with the cadre of Uniserv staff trainers at the state affiliate level. Finally, staff from the Center for Organizing compiled the feedback and met with The Human and Civil Rights Department to refine the changes.

The committee is also developing recommendations about how NEA can support affiliates in advancing diversity in hiring goals. The group met with Chaka Donaldson, NEA's Director of Human Resources, to discuss strategies relating to the hiring process. The suggestions were compiled and will be refined and made into a “best practices” document about hiring for diversity that will be shared with affiliates and used in training. While the committee hopes to have the document ready for the full board to vote on in the spring it felt that the importance of “getting it right” justified possibly extending the timeline.

The committee also met with Michael McPherson, NEA’s CFO, to review membership projections and possible Uniserv rebates. While the committee stressed that its projections are preliminary and final numbers would be available during the May board meeting, they projected the Uniserv grant amounts would increase by 1.63% from \$40,481.00 to \$41,141.00. Overall, this represents an increase in the amount that NEA will be returning to its affiliates by \$1,111,440.

NEA Legal Landscape

NEA Chief Counsel Alice O’Brien informed the board that the United States Supreme Court declined to take up six cases regarding recovery of “fair share” fees before the Janus case. This is good news for members.

For the last three years, NEA lawyers have been litigating post-Janus cases. In March of 2018, the first post-Janus case was filed against the Washington Education Association, and over the next few years, a total of 28 cases were filed against NEA and its affiliates. Many of these cases sought awards for agency fees that NEA and its affiliates had collected in good faith before the Janus ruling. Had they been successful, plaintiffs' awards would have cost the Association million dollars. NEA spent hundreds of hours making sure that it was in lockstep with other labor unions making exactly the right arguments to the right courts by the right advocates.

NEA won all of the cases against in district court and all on appeal. Finally, this past month the Supreme Court declined to take up the only two NEA cases that have reached the Supreme Court at this point. This, along with previous victories in the courts by NEA and its affiliates, will help end post Janus litigation once and for all. Additional cases are pending, but it seems less likely that any will result in judgments against NEA, its affiliates, or other public sector unions. The full court participated in the denials, including Trump's final Supreme Court nominee, Justice Barrett. It sent an extremely strong signal to the lower courts, that all the decisions to date have been correct. Other Janus related litigation continues, focused on membership cards and drop protocols. It remains critical for a successful defense against those attacks that NEA and its affiliates follow best practices in our membership sign-up and drop procedures.

O'Brien then discussed NEA's legal work on COVID related mandates, including guidance distributed to affiliates on bargaining obligations and liability issues. Specifically, she referenced *GAE v. Kemp*, in which a district has failed to enforce masking and distancing requirements. The lawsuit contends that the state has a Constitutional obligation to provide a safe school system.

On February 3, the New Jersey Supreme Court unanimously ruled that public school districts do have authority to enter into agreements with unions for release time. The agreements serve a public purpose since it provides better opportunities for labor disputes to be resolved effectively and efficiently. There is a similar case being litigated in Minnesota, but this victory gives NEA and its affiliates some firm legal footing to move forward.

NEA has also submitted an amicus brief in *Jones v. Becarra*, which challenges the constitutionality of California's laws restricting firearms sales to individuals younger than 21. O'Brien said the brief explains the devastating effects of gun violence on children and how it affects their ability to learn.

NEA and its partners are continuing to work on helping members find student debt relief. As of the board meeting, approximately \$1 million in student debt has been forgiven, with another \$232 million on track to be forgiven. Many NEA members with significant student debt have been unable to get relief due to barriers put in place by loan servicers as well as by the Department of Education. Over the past few years, NEA has worked with NEA Member Benefits to develop broad systematic approaches to the problem, including the development of the SAVI tool, which helps individuals get into the right loan programs to bring their loan repayments down and to qualify for loan forgiveness More than 15,000 members have benefitted from the work done by staff in multiple departments, and NEA continues to provide webinars to all interested affiliates and members to help members eliminate their student debt

Dues Action

In his presentation of the expected 2021-2022 dues adjustment, Secretary-Treasurer Noel Candelaria defined what it means to unify members "It's how we organize people and how we organize money because we have an agenda." Candelaria shared how the preliminary numbers were based on estimates and that the current change was determined after considering the increase in the average salary from the 19-20 and the 20-21 school year, the estimated salary averages of teachers and ESPs across the nation, and the states with the largest impacts. "We use the average salary to calculate dues, adjusting to remove the unusually high salary outliers," explained Candelaria. "We also look at data from a bit of historical perspective since that data lags by one year." For example, the data from the 19-20 and 20-21 school years reflect the impact of the Red for Ed movement.

The NEA Bylaws state that the dues amount is determined by contributions to the general budget (average salary multiplied by .00225), Uniserv (average salary multiplied by .00055), the NEA Foundation, the Great Public Schools Fund, and the Media/Ballot Fund. The current proposals are a decrease from the preliminary amounts for teachers and ESP members for the 2021- 2022 school year. Secretary-Treasurer Candelaria moved the 2021-2022 dues structure, and the Board of Directors approved it, under the provisions in the bylaws.

Election 2020

Election 2020 was a big win and a lot of work for NEA and its affiliates! NEA leaders and staff worked tirelessly to elect Joe Biden, Kamala Harris, and a host of other pro-public education candidates. NEA coordinated with states and locals to campaign for Biden/Harris as well as promote Get Out the Vote activities. This coordination included financial support, staff time, and member outreach. WEAC and WEAC members received extra support in electing pro-public candidates up and down the ballot. WEAC Executive Director Baxter includes this information from NEA/WEAC:

- This election cycle brought into focus the new Independent Expenditure platforms run via A Better Wisconsin Together (ABWT) and the polling expertise of Badger State Research (BSR). Learning how to leverage information sharing through these partnerships is essential to securing pro-public education electoral victories. This is essential for all state legislative and state-wide election efforts.
- Our partnerships with ABWT and BSR for the fall 2020 election cycle built the framework in place for the 2021 spring state-wide election cycle.
- Through these partnerships the Democratic Party of Wisconsin engaged by making a significant resource allocation for the first time in the DPI State Superintendent of Public Instruction race.
- These arrangements create the pathway for substantial NEA staff and financial resources to be leveraged across electoral and legislative initiatives.
- The electoral and legislative cycles are intertwined as we continue our efforts to restore democracy in our state.

NEA's Racial and Social Justice Work

When racially and ethnically motivated hate crimes strike U.S. communities, educators can play a powerful role in helping to reduce or eliminate hate-motivated crime and violence. NEA President Becky Pringle has made racial justice and black lives high priorities for our Union. Please take the pledge of Justice for Black Lives.

OUR PLEDGE

For many Black students and families, our public schools are the heart of our communities. But far too many have been overlooked, neglected and forgotten by those in power who choose to bail out greedy corporations and line the pockets of privatizers. We must hold decision makers accountable to the people by reinvesting in policies and systems to achieve healthy and strong schools and communities.

Whether, Black, brown or white, native or newcomer, we will work together to not only address the cruel and unjust policies of the past, but to move forward to make our values of justice, safety, equity, and inclusion a reality for all of us...

Together, we make the future, and we will rewrite the rules to make this a country where all of us can prosper. The future is the sum of the changes we demand, the courage we display, and how we stand with and for each other.

WE DEMAND

1 – Transforming Policing Policies for Safe and Just Communities: We demand that decision makers at all levels re-examine the role of the law enforcement in our communities and our public schools to ensure public safety, while dismantling unjust policies designed to disproportionately impact Black and Brown people, such as mass incarceration, militarization of law enforcement, unlawful separation and detention of immigrant children and families and the excessive use of force.

2 – Healthy and Strong Communities and Schools: We demand a transformative investment in the physical, mental and economic health and growth of Black, Brown and Indigenous communities. That means addressing the clear and consistent ways that corporations have exploited, stymied and stolen the wealth of communities of color — resulting in a frayed network of public services in communities of color, including school buildings lacking clean water, asbestos-free and lead-free facilities, proper heating and cooling and more.

3 – Empowering Communities and Schools: We demand Black educators and student voices be integral to the decisions that impact their schools and communities. Whether Black, Brown, Indigenous or white, when students, families and educators come together to ensure racial justice in public schools — from pre-K to higher education — it strengthens the whole community.

4 – Ensuring the Right to Vote for Black, Brown, Native and AAPI Voters: We demand free, fair, and accessible elections that address the long-standing practices of voter suppression and discrimination in Black and Brown communities. While the right to vote is enshrined in the U.S. Constitution, politicians have used policies and voter suppression tactics to limit the participation of Black, Brown, AAPI and Native American communities impeding their ability to have a voice in our government.

[Justice for Black Lives](#)