



# Foundations for Winning Campaigns



## Pre Attendance Package

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## **Why Pre-Attendance Assignments?**

The resources compiled here are short, relevant and intended to help you shift from the day to day cognitive load of work to the thinking you will use as a learner at the academy. We rely on a number of popular education strategies that involve the use of texts and scenarios for group work. Many participants find it difficult to do a “first read” in the classroom so we have provided those items here in case you would like to review them.

### **Read and Reflect: (Please Do Before Arriving)**

Please take the time before arriving to read our community agreements. on pg. 4-5. We will engage you in a discussion at the very start of our time together around these agreements and your commitment to them.

### **Resources for Group Work: (Please Do Before Arriving)**

The resources on pages 15-30 and 31-47 are for group work. They will require some familiarity with each "case" but not memorization of every one of the details. You should set aside some time to read and review these prior to coming especially if you are not comfortable doing a “first read” amongst others.

**Resources You Need to Bring: (Please Have as ONE Electronic Copy that can be shared via email)** The intention of this two and half day event is to provide ample time to focus on your actual work. To do that well, we are asking you to bring two work related items.

- **One-** Please bring a written description or plan (electronic copy) of an actual campaign that you are, have, or will be leading. These need not be lengthy, just your typical work product.
- **Two –** Please bring a short summary of a problem of practice that you are experiencing and would like to discuss. We are going to explore a coaching protocol around this. See the next page for criteria that help you define a problem of practice.

### **Articles for Thinking: (Optional Food for Thought)**

The resources included on pages 6-14 and 48-58 are primarily designed to help frame “why” we are offering this academy. We may reference them in our work together. They may cause you to generate questions that you will want to explore while we are together. Consider these options to read prior to attending.

## **What is a problem of practice?**

A Problem of Practice (POP) is a situation that exists in your place of work. It revolves around a specific workplace problem. The issue is a problem because values/goals are not, or might not be entirely, met. In other words, there is a gap between the goal state and the current state of the organization. A POP is “as a persistent, contextualized, and specific issue embedded in your work, the addressing of which has the potential to result in improved understanding, experience, and outcomes.”

The problem is not usually based on individual cases but involves a group of people or a particular population. It may initially have been identified through interactions with one person, but must relate to more than just one person or an individual relationship with a person. Organizational problems of practice tend to be complex and are therefore related to many overlapping problems.

A problem of practice and the cause of the problem are not the same thing. Often, an issue is considered a problem of practice when the actual problem and the causes of it are not well understood. Failing to understand the essence of the problem and the underlying causes can lead to well-meaning solutions that do not address the issue and, in some cases, may exacerbate it or cause additional problems or complications. Actual problems of practice can be difficult to understand, but the signs of a problem can sometimes be relatively easy to see.

You are asked to determine a problem of practice that you have some control over and can be improved upon within the work you and your colleagues do. This problem is meant to be actionable or within one’s control or the control of colleagues, management, governance, members, etc. For example, if this problem were acted upon you would be able to make a significant difference for a local, not just one individual. These problems generally surround opportunities to improve the lives of members (broadly defined).

For example, you might have groups of workers in your local who are not as engaged as others and do not seem to believe that they can act collectively to improve their own and their co-workers’ situations. (*This is an outcome of the problem of practice*) Upon further investigation, you determine some of the possible causes for the lack of engagement – an over reliance on how union work has always been done, not enough colleague to colleague connection, not enough leadership structure, not enough union visibility on worker issues, not enough representation of the rank and file within the current leadership. (*These are problems of practice*) You then implement improvements in your practice such as: differentiation of the types of agitation, education, and member to member recruitment that build a greater sense of solidarity. You also work to identify trusted and respected leaders that are representative of the “disengaged” and build a worksite team that is diverse, representative, and dedicated to collectively acting to improve worker issues with the boss.

# **Community Agreements for Our Time**

## **Awareness and Self-Knowledge**

This requires self-knowledge and self-awareness. Self-knowledge allows you to see what causes you pain and conflict and enables you to embrace your contradictions and inconsistencies. It allows the space to work on things about yourself that you are not happy with. In turn, self-knowledge helps to prevent you from projecting your negative aspects onto other people. Bringing your best self also requires that you have a positive attitude, are willing to deeply explore your perspectives and remain open to the perspectives and experiences of others.

## **Listening for Understanding**

Be an active listener. Active listening involves paying full and careful attention to the other person, looking him or her in the eye, avoiding interruptions, reflecting your understanding, clarifying information, summarizing the other person's perspectives and sharing your own. Remember that most people need time to open up and might not be willing to immediately share their personal stories, hopes, fears and/or concerns.

## **Being Gracious**

Being kind is a vital way of bringing meaning to our own lives, as well as the lives of others. Kindness is about caring genuinely for others around you, wanting the best for them and recognizing in them the same wants, needs, aspirations and even fears that you may have. Being kind and generous allows us to communicate better with others, to be more self-compassionate and to be a positive force in other people's lives. We are gracious when we accept and genuinely work to use the pronouns that others ask us to use. Being gracious includes following the COVID protocols that are in place to protect the health of this learning community.

## **Staying Engaged**

Staying engaged requires you to be morally, emotionally, intellectually and socially involved in the conversation. Staying engaged means that you are listening with curiosity and willing to deepen your understanding. Staying engaged might also require you to sustain the conversation even when it gets uncomfortable or diverted. This means a commitment to keeping your electronic communications to a minimum with folks not present in this learning community. This also means being present for all portions of the learning agenda.

## **Being Open and Suspending Judgment**

Listening with an open mind includes being receptive to the influence of others. You can suspend judgment by becoming aware of preconceived notions and listening to everything someone has to say before jumping to conclusions. Most importantly, suspending judgment also means listening to what the speaker has to say for understanding, not just to determine whether the speaker is right or wrong. This means that we recognize each of us will make mistakes and that we have the capacity to grow. We should expect imperfections.

## **Saying "I" - tell your truth**

Speaking your truth in authentic and courageous conversations about race and other issues where experiences/perspectives may differ widely from yours requires a willingness to take risks. It means that you will be absolutely honest and candid about your own thoughts, feelings, experiences and opinions and not just saying what you perceive others want to hear. Speaking your truth will require you to speak from the "first person" and use "I" statements.

## **Seeking Discomfort**

Leaning in to discomfort will require you to let go of understandings and stereotypes that you may be holding onto in order to move forward. Leaning in means that you will avoid pre-judgment and be open to the kernel of wisdom in each individual's experiences. Leaning in to discomfort will require you to sit through moments of embarrassment, confusion, anxiety, and/or fear.

### **Reaching Empathy**

Empathy and compassion allow you to understand the other person's point of view. When you are empathetic, you are more understanding, patient and kind. Expanding your capacity to feel empathy will also allow others to enter your circle of human concern. Sharing, using, and respecting pronouns is a very simple form of empathy.

### **Expecting Non-Resolution and Non-Closure**

Expect and accept that there may not be closure. It is not likely that you will resolve your personal understanding about race or another person's racial experience in a single conversation. The more you talk about race or other issues with another person, the more you learn and the more they will learn. Authentic and productive conversations about race and other issues where experiences/perspectives may differ widely from yours are continuous and always evolving. This means that sometimes we will have unfinished, unexplored, and shortened conversations about some concepts.

*\*Adapted from "Embracing equity and inclusion", Annie E. Casey Foundation*

What questions do you want to ask about any of the ideas in these agreements?

What additional agreements do you need in order to be a fully participating member of our learning community?

Can you commit to these agreements? IF not, what would it take for you to be able to commit?

# The Forge



Getty Images

July 22, 2022

## Letter to a Young Organizer #2

**George Goehl**

*Editor's Note: This article was originally published in **Fundamentals of Organizing***

If it feels like you have the weight of the world on your shoulders, it makes sense. These are heavy times, and you are an organizer. Still, this weight is not yours alone, I hope you know that.

Our responsibility is to build a base, develop people, win things, and contribute to something larger. That is not easy, and it is more than

enough. Doing this, along with lots of others doing the same, is exactly what we need.

In the introduction to *The Populist Moment*, the historian Lawrence Goodwin names a handful of qualities of impactful social movements. One that always struck me was reaching a state of “collective self-confidence,” where a large enough group of people believe we are in fact going to win.

It’s no secret that we do not have that feeling now. That’s ok. We have had it before, and will have it again.

I believe we rebuild that confidence by winning and winning often. You have come of age amidst vibrant social movements, stunning shifts in our broader culture, and a live fight for the heart and soul of both major political parties.

You and your generation are not here to win the best thing possible in the existing landscape, but to remake that landscape all together. It is a beautiful thing.

If you have not already, I want you to have the chance to run campaigns to turn cultural change into wins that people can touch and feel. We chant “I believe that we will win,” but the truth is, most people don’t. A good campaign can change that. People need a reason to believe and winning some shit, even if imperfect, is one antidote to cynicism. We are not responsible for the weight of the world, but we are responsible for giving more people a reason to believe.

The federal landscape is tough, and possibly about to get tougher. We build collective self-confidence by moving to higher ground, where we have a stronger hand. I believe we are entering a return to corporate campaigns, of going local, of making demands of federal and state agencies. Places where we can fight, win, and restore hope.

We are in the dawn of an **organizing revival**. As we enter what I believe will be a period of great campaigning, I want to share some things I have learned along the way. I hope they can be of help.

**Campaign on Issues that are Widely and Deeply Felt.** An issue that only a handful of people care about will not build much power. An issue that everyone agrees on but no one is passionate about will not provide the fight needed to win. We listen for issues that are widely and deeply felt. One without the other will not get it done.

There are lots of ways to listen for what issues meet this test. You can knock on doors, do one on ones, or track and test what's most resonant using the digital tools we have today.

Regardless of the method, figure out what is most widely and deeply felt, and then figure out how to pay for the campaign. Always in this order. Let the listening lead the way and the campaigns will be better for it.

**Learn to cut an issue.** When I started organizing in Southern Indiana we had no training or books to show us the way. Still, we did some things right. We listened for problems. The lack of affordable housing topped the list.

We had rallies, got some media, and raised awareness about housing problems. We did **not** have a specific demand or a clear target. And so, absolutely nothing changed. Even if the Mayor or City Council were tracking what we were doing, they felt no direct pressure to do anything. We were stuck.

Around this time I got invited to a tenant organizing meeting in Indianapolis. There was a guy there, Mike Evans, who seemed to know this organizing thing. After I drove back home, I called him up and said we didn't have money to pay him, but we could cover his gas and feed

him if he would come down and teach us about organizing. It was Mike who first taught us how to cut an issue.

One of the things we learned is that we don't organize on problems, we organize on issues. Organizing works in part because we turn problems into specific and actionable solutions and then demand people with power agree to enact them.

Problems feel overwhelming. Facing them, we often feel defeated before we have started. Examples of problems might be poverty, climate change, or racism. So, we "cut out" a more discreet part of the problem, identify a solution, and use that as a stepping stone toward larger structural progress.

"Come to a meeting to talk about the problem of all the abandoned buildings in the neighborhood." This sounds familiar and tired. We've had that meeting many times. "Come to the meeting about how we pressure the Mayor to demolish the dilapidated abandoned buildings in our neighborhood and turn them into community gardens," sounds more clear and inspiring.

There's a reason Frederick Douglass' "Power concedes nothing without a demand" is among our most enduring organizing axioms. We are not just putting forth broad wishes, or generalizations, but clear demands to specific people with power, names, and addresses.

Learn how to cut an issue, and you will build a base, win things, and soon be ready to take on an even larger cut of the problem.

**We organize to get to the table.** That is our job. Yes, we need to flip the table, reorganize the table, reimagine the table, but we have to be at it if we are serious about winning. Otherwise we will not win shit, or, maybe worse, we will have set the table for some operative to be sitting at it, settling for a lesser win, and taking credit all the same.

If we are not at the table, our members are not at the table, and our members are missing out on a chance to win, and a chance to grow. We do not develop ourselves or others by sitting at the bar bragging of how we are too pure to be at the table.

Recently me and a couple of staff from **People's Action**, which I used to direct, were going through our archives. For decades we had a national newspaper that went out to a hundred thousand people in neighborhoods that had been touched by organizing. As we looked through past issues, one team member said, "I expected more photos to be of direct action, but so many are of a group of neighborhood leaders meeting with a few guys in suits."

It's true. That's because we organize to win things, and that means being at the table. The table is complicated. We often leave the table and go back to the streets, but we are always trying to get there. At the table people not only win, but they develop. They get tougher. They learn lessons that will be essential as we move into demands that are more transformative, and targets more powerful.

**Power analysis first, strategy second.** Your strategy is never better than your power analysis. When you have a good power analysis it is hard to win. Without one, it's not even a thing.

When doing a power analysis of a decision maker you need to know these things: 1) what they have power over, 2) who has power over them, 3) what they most want, and 4) what they most do not want.

Let's say the person you need to move is the Mayor. You first have to understand what they have power over. This includes what decisions, what bodies, what individuals – especially as it relates to your demand.

You also want to know who has power over the Mayor. When you get stuck and can't move them, these secondary targets could, if properly

motivated, push the Mayor to say yes to your demands. Also, these people with power over the Mayor may have a vested interest in blocking your demands. You want to know all of this.

You want to know what motivates the decision-maker. People in power often want one thing, more power. Their aspiration might be re-election, a governing majority, a merger or acquisition they are trying to finalize.

You also need to know what decision-makers most don't want. Do they most want to avoid bad press, a falling out with a specific constituency, a drop in quarterly earnings?

If they are someone you are not able to align with, and are in fact an adversary, you need to be seen as an organization that can block what they want, or bring closer what they don't. If you are able to do either and they recognize that, their motivation to negotiate increases, as does your chance of winning.

This can sound combative. It often is, but it doesn't have to be. If the decision-maker you seek to move is willing to come to the table, you will still want to know all of these things, but you will be more likely to deliver exactly what is is they want to land a win. That might be votes, good press, a needed constituency.

Regardless, develop your power analysis, then your strategy, then your tactics.

**The Action is the Reaction.** We do actions to spur a reaction. That can be one that we intend, or some random ass shit.

When devising tactics we organizers have a tendency to focus on our action. What we should be most concerned with is the reaction to our action. The reaction we seek could be for the decision-maker to agree to a meeting, a media hit that strengthens our hand, or the decision-maker

overreacting and weakening theirs. Our tactics are more effective when we are clear on the reaction we want.

We've all been in situations where we don't know what to do next, so we just come up with some shit to keep the campaign in motion. I get it, and have done my share of this. But if you can step back and get clear on the reaction you want, you will find the answer, and you will develop more strategic actions.

Sometimes the reaction we seek might be within ourselves. Fifteen years or so ago, eight-hundred National People's Action members did an action on Dan Stein, the head of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, an anti-immigrant organization. They were leading the charge against the DREAM Act, which would have provided a pathway to citizenship for undocumented youth. We did not think we would win anything from Dan Stein. We also knew we had not built the multi-racial, multi-immigration status solidarity needed for the long fight ahead. So, the reaction we wanted was for our immigrant members to experience a new sense of power and to build multi-racial solidarity. So, we packed 20 school buses, went to the FAIR offices, got past security, and took over the organization's board room.

There, a multi-racial leadership team supported undocumented youth who shared testimony in a tense encounter with one of the nation's most prominent anti-immigrant leaders. One undocumented teen from Kansas told her story of being brought to the US by her parents as a toddler, and how this was the only country she knew. She could not receive in state tuition and lived in constant fear of being deported. Stein then said there was a simple solution – for her to go back to Mexico. The leadership team erupted, and the room got hot, very hot. Me and Sulma Arias, who now directs People's Action, looked at each other and thought, we better get out of here.

But that moment, when Dan Stein was such a shit to this young woman, awakened native-born members of the organization to the challenges faced by undocumented youth, and the cold-heartedness of the anti-immigrant movement. As we gathered outside, it felt as if our immigrant members were all but walking on air. They had just gone face to face with a man hell-bent on removing them from the country, and for a moment, they had the power, and they were not alone.

**When we win, tell the story.** Your organization's members have little time, and more choices than ever of what to do with it. You need them to decide the campaign is something to prioritize. One way we do that is by telling the story. Our story needs to become binge worthy.

People love a story. A strong campaign has all the elements of a good one. We have a protagonist. That's us. An antagonist. The bad guy. We have the initial action. That is the shitty stuff the bad guy did to start the whole thing. We then have conflict – the people fighting back. And if all goes well, we have the resolution we want.

Having all the elements of a good story doesn't mean much if we aren't telling it. Telling the story is especially important when we win. People are hunting for hope, and every win is a chance to help them find it.

I first learned to organize in a time when we had flyers, printed newsletters, and word of mouth as the means of telling our story. So, we worked with what we had.

In the lead up to a meeting or action we had a theory that people needed to hear about the event at least five times. Flyers, a door knock, signs in the neighborhood, a phone call, and another door knock. If you didn't come to the action it was not for lack of hearing about it.

The same goes for when we won. Following a victory, big or small, we'd be up the next day making flyers, and that afternoon walking the

neighborhood with members to spread the word.

Don't be precious about it. It's easy to overthink things. Hugh Espey, longtime organizer with Iowa CCI, often sends out two sentence personalized emails sharing news of a recent win. These are down and dirty, but they go the job done. In fact, their brevity is part of what works.

As we launch new campaigns from higher ground, let's tell the story of the fight, and the wins.

The right in on the attack. They are coming hard, and will come harder. These are dark times and the opposition thrives on cynicism, is counting on defeatism. We counter that not by scouring the web for bad news, throwing hail Marys, or being too pure to be in the fight. We counter by listening, organizing, and rebuilding from the ground up.

I just did 40 one-on-ones with working class folks in the Midwest and I met people who were ready to fight, who wanted to win, and who did not have their head in the clouds, or in the sand. They all felt there was too much at stake for either.

You are not a passive observer, but an organizer. An organizer in one of the most consequential periods in our history. Carve out a piece of the work, build campaigns around that, and help more people get out of their heads, into the streets and to the table.

You are here to stir the pot. To take the crisis to those who created it. To transform hearts and minds, on the way toward transforming how the whole thing works.

An organizing revival requires campaigns. If we launch a period of great campaigns that start with listening, teach people how to cut an issue, to do a good power analysis, and to design actions to spur the reactions we want and need, I like our chances.

## NEA News

**Don't Junk Your Old School Bus, Repurpose it!**

A unique school bus renovation project becomes a showcase for the skills and accomplishments available through career tech education.

neaToday

By: Cecil Cahoon Published: 09/03/2019

- Birmingham City Schools Transportation Shop Foreman Anthony Gary with Alabama Education Association UniServ Director LaMonica Harris.



When Birmingham City Schools decommissioned Bus 90-36 after more than 25 years of service, [BCS Transportation Shop](#) Foreman Anthony Gary proposed a new idea.

"Once a bus gets past a certain age, the district would junk it. But we said, 'Let us take it and do something good with it'," Gary recalls. The district agreed, and a unique project got under way, led by Gary and his whole team at the district's transportation shop.

"All the fellows decided to come together and take on this project, to use this bus as a dropout recovery program," he explains. "Everybody's not going to go to college, so we promote [career technology](#). We want to show students that they can do anything they want to do with their hands."

The project plan was simple: to renovate and modify the bus (nicknamed "Shorty") in the various ways that would illustrate the skills and accomplishments available through studies in career technology.

"What we wanted to do is promote career technology, demonstrate to children in the Birmingham schools that there's another option -- if they're not going to college -- besides doing nothing," Gary says.

A video plays on a screen inside the bus, showing the evolution of the bus. "We did it from the inside-out, upside-down, painted it right here -- and did it all for free," he declares. "It didn't cost the board anything. Our vendors got on board because they understood what we were trying to do with career technology."

Among the renovations, the team installed hardwood floors, nearly a dozen flat-screen video monitors, and a state-of-the-art sound system. Every surface, from floor to ceiling, was repainted and polished to a high shine. New LED lighting was mounted on the walls and ceiling, even under the hood and below the engine.

**"Shorty" now has hardwood floors, nearly a dozen flat-screen video monitors, and a state-of-the-art sound system.**

When Shorty was finished in 2017, district recognized the transportation department's achievement and initiative with a luncheon, and its debut was captured in a published collection of photographs.



"We had a ball," Gary says. "The career tech folks came over, brought the kids. We did a lot of training here in the shop, let them have hands-on opportunities, showed them we need skilled people in this world."

"We show that you can paint if you want to, be a mechanic, lay hardwood flooring, install a sound system, install video equipment and all, if you put your mind to it," he adds.

This year, the team showed Shorty in the "World of Wheels," a regional car show that comes to Birmingham annually.

"We're definitely very proud of Shorty," Gary explains. "We entered Shorty in the show, so we could show everyone what Birmingham City Schools is all about, that we could get together and do something positive for our kids."

When the day's trophies were awarded, Shorty won first place in its category. The trophy now stands in the shop's office, and a sign announcing the award hangs over the office door.

For now, only mechanics are allowed to drive Shorty, in part because its drivers must have CDL licenses. Due to its modifications, the state won't allow it to be used for its original purpose: transporting students. "We chopped the seats, lowered it four inches. But we can carry the bus to schools, set it up, and let students see what they have the opportunity to do if they decide not to go to college.

Offering a tour of Shorty in the center of the shop, Gary opens wide its rear door to reveal a video monitor mounted on the inside, facing rearward.

"Now it's an outdoor classroom," he says. "You can seat 15 or 16 children inside, put more seats outside, and use the USB ports to plug in your technology and show lessons on the video screens if you want."

Students have responded positively. "They love it. They climb in and out of it, look it over, sit down. We're definitely real proud of it."

The district is forward-thinking about preparing students and educators for the digital age.

"[Birmingham City Schools](#) has always been innovative when it comes to advancing educators to the technology age," says [Alabama Education Association](#) President Sherry Tucker. "Our members have learned through technology how to balance and create financial reports, enroll students, create lunch numbers, create class schedules, allow students to take tests on computers and now they have made technology mobile. BSC is a pacesetter and model for all schools in the State of Alabama when advancing technology.

# How a diverse coalition in a red state shut down anti-CRT legislation

By Giselle Rhoden, CNN

Published 4:00 AM EDT, Sun April 3, 2022

Protesters carry signs at a rally held in opposition to bills being considered at the Statehouse in Indianapolis, February 16, 2022.

Michael Conroy/AP



CNN —

Parents and teachers were shocked after an Indiana state senator introduced a bill requiring that teachers remain neutral when teaching about Nazism. And in less than two days, a coalition to defeat the bill was born.

“Within 36 hours, we had organized over a dozen community members and partners to testify against the bill,” Jennifer Smith-Margraf, the vice president of the Indiana State Teachers Association, told CNN in March.

Members of the Indiana community spoke at hearings, met with legislators and posted on social media to speak out against [Sen. Scott Baldwin](#)’s support of [Senate Bill 167](#).

The bill was later pulled from the education committee’s schedule in the Senate, however, its successor – [House Bill 1134](#) – created even more of an uproar, not just among Indiana educators, but among a wide range of interest groups in the state.



Mississippi governor signs into law prohibition on schools teaching critical race theory

The bill, which some Republicans called anti-CRT (critical race theory) legislation, prohibited “teachers or other employees to use supplemental learning materials to promote certain concepts regarding sex, race, ethnicity, religion, color, or national origin.”

Supporters said the bill would give parents more say on what their children learn in school, but critics saw it as censorship.

The Indiana bill caught the attention of a diverse group of educators, business owners, parents and community leaders from across the state, and that coalition successfully defeated it in February. However, more than a dozen other red states have passed similar legislation.

Since January 2021, 42 states have introduced bills or taken other steps that would restrict teaching critical race theory or limit how teachers can discuss racism and sexism, [according to an Education Week analysis](#).

Across the country, Republican lawmakers are pushing legislation banning CRT in public schools even though it is not taught in K-12. CRT is an academic concept that is usually offered

in graduate-level courses, but in the past year, it has been conflated with diversity and inclusion efforts as well as with debates on how to teach race and history.

[Last month](#), Mississippi's Republican Gov. Tate Reeves signed into law a bill described as a prohibition on CRT. [Senate Bill 2113](#) prohibits teaching "that any sex, race, ethnicity, religion or national origin is inherently superior or inferior" in public schools. Mississippi became the 15th state to pass legislation limiting how teachers can discuss racism and sexism. The bill does not explicitly mention CRT in its language, but Gov. Reeves said in a statement that CRT was a threat to public school education which inspired him to sign the bill.

[And in South Dakota](#), Gov. Kristi Noem recently signed legislation banning the state's public universities from using training and orientation materials that could cause racially based "discomfort."

## **A movement grows**

Indiana public policy adviser Marshawn Wolley said the coalition to fight HB 1134 was unlike anything Indiana had seen before.

"We had nearly 200 speakers signed up to testify against the bill – members and community partners," Margraf said. "The Senate Education Committee limited testimony on the bill during that hearing to just over 2 hours, so only 20 some of the folks signed up to testify were called to speak."

The coalition represented a variety of views. Wolley, who is a parent, told CNN that he could not imagine letting his son go through a system "where teaching is impartial."

Although the bill did not explicitly mention CRT, Wolley said it attacked the principle of teaching about race in the classroom.

Nationwide, [Black parents have said](#) that their voices and the concerns of their children have been lost in the partisan debate about CRT. So the Indianapolis Urban League, the Indy Black Expo, and African American Coalition of Indianapolis helped devise strategies to bring Black parents to the Senate floor during the hearing.

Keith Gambill, president of the Indiana State Teachers Association, speaks at a rally in opposition to bills being considered at the Statehouse in Indianapolis in February.

Indiana teachers were also on the offensive. Margraf said teachers, having fought lawmakers on [other policies](#), knew what they had to do to advocate against the bill.

"We had been building relationships with legislators before that ... now all of sudden (they're) attacking us about everything we do and everything we believe in," she said.



As an Indiana high school teacher, Margraf said she believes in teaching the truth to her students. She said the bill would have created a barrier for her to do her job as an educator if she was not allowed to teach important concepts on race, sex, ethnicity and religion.

The Indiana business community shared a similar concern, Taylor Hughes, the Indy Chamber's director of strategy, policy and special projects, told CNN. He and other business leaders also spoke out at the legislative hearing.

"It was to respond to an issue that isn't real because we know CRT is not taught in school, but if you create a chilling effect of teachers not teaching the truth ... it's gonna harm us now and in the future."



Hughes said the bill had the potential to disrupt "future talent" in the Indiana workforce. He mentioned the bill disrupted teaching about diversity, equity and inclusion to young people, a lesson he said is important in the workforce. Last month, the bill was shut down in the Senate after the coalition's work.

"We could not be prouder of everyone stepping up and working together and standing up for our children," Margraf said.

Wolley said he expects more bills to appear soon, but he believes the coalition and others like it can use their power to defeat these bills. He said building coalitions is an important part of shutting down more anti-CRT legislation.

[HTTPS://CEA.ORG/WITH-CEA-GRANTS-TEACHERS-TAKE-ON-PROJECTS-TO-ENHANCE-STUDENTS-PRIDE-IN-THEIR-SCHOOLS/](https://cea.org/with-cea-grants-teachers-take-on-projects-to-enhance-students-pride-in-their-schools/)

## WITH CEA GRANTS, TEACHERS TAKE ON PROJECTS TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' PRIDE IN THEIR SCHOOLS



From murals and shiny new bulletin boards to power-washed exteriors and flowerbeds, schools around Connecticut will be more welcoming for students and staff this fall, thanks to grants from CEA. Each spring, the CEA Aspiring Educators (CEA AE) Program typically organizes beautification projects at underresourced Connecticut schools. College students who are pre-service educators take on painting, cleaning, and gardening, among other projects, to give schools a brighter, more welcoming feel for students and staff. (In the 2017 photo above right, CEA AE members work to paint murals, posters, and kindness rocks at Langford Elementary School in East Hartford.) Due to COVID restrictions this spring, the CEA AE decided to instead offer grants to CEA members seeking to improve the look of their schools.

The CEA AE initially offered \$3,000 grants to two Connecticut schools in need of sprucing up. When applications came in from CEA members around the state, however, aspiring educators saw that the need was much greater. CEA's Board of Directors stepped up and authorized additional funding so that two second-place winners could receive grants of \$2,500 and 13 third-place winners would receive \$1,000 grants.

One of the first-place winners, Anchor School at Harbor Landing in Stamford, is an alternative school moving into a building of its own for the first time this fall. The school had previously rented space in an office building, and teachers were very limited in their ability to decorate classrooms and modify the space to make it feel welcoming to students.

"Now that we have our own space, we want to make it truly our own," says grant recipient Ryan Perkins, an English teacher at the school. "When I saw the application for the grant from the CEA AE, I saw a unique opportunity to make our environment student-centered."

Anchor School at Harbor Landing serves middle and high school students who have previously struggled in a traditional school setting. The school offers smaller class sizes and a greater focus on social and emotional needs and community than most traditional secondary schools.

Perkins and the other teachers have not yet had a chance to visit their new space. They plan to get a feel for the building and decide after the first few weeks of school how best to use the grant money to enhance students' pride in their space. Ideas include new bulletin boards and painting projects, including working with students on creating murals of their own design.

"Our school is very diverse, and I'd love to use some of the money to allow students to culturally develop the school and make sure they feel represented in the space," Perkins says. "Enhancing their feelings of connectedness to the school will only help them want to come to school and be there every day."

Also receiving a first-place award was Kelly Shea at Enfield's Prudence Crandall Elementary School. Second-place grant awards went to Maureen Curran at West Hartford's Louise Duffy Elementary School and Kevin Arita at Stamford's Davenport Ridge Elementary School. Third-place awards went to schools in the CREC district, Cromwell, Danbury, East Windsor, Enfield, and Stamford.

Photos and descriptions of completed grant projects will be posted to [CEA's blog](#).

Categories: [CEA News](#), [CEAdailyAugust 6, 2021](#)

## NEA News

**Educators Fight for Clean Water in Jackson, Mississippi**

Think clean water isn't an educational issue? Think again. Schools in Jackson, Mississippi, are physically closed (again!) due to the city's water issues, while the Mississippi Association of Educators leads a coalition to find solutions.

Charles A Smith

neaToday

By: Mary Ellen Flannery, Senior Writer

Published: 08/30/2022

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- 1. This is a capital city in the United States—and, when schools are open, teachers have to take their students to portapotties. Every day, they lose hours of instructional time to Jackson's water crisis.**
- 2. School cafeteria workers have to boil every drop of water they use. School custodians have to keep schools clean and safe—even when toilets don't flush and water doesn't flow.**
- 3. Clean water is a basic, human right—and Jackson's children and families don't have it. But, by working together, Mississippi Association of Educators is determined that community leaders can find a solution.**

Jackson, Mississippi, is a capital city in the United States—and today, more than 150,000 of its residents can't drink the water that comes out of their taps.

Due to the most recent collapse of the city's water system, not one Jackson student—from pre-K to college—is sitting in a physical classroom. Instead, they're attempting to log into virtual lessons that educators prepared with scant notice. On Monday, the state's governor issued an emergency order whereby the state will be taking over the water plant and the National Guard distributing safe water to Jackson residents.

For weeks, Mississippi Association of Educators leaders have been sounding the alarm about Jackson's increasing lack of safe water, and leading a community effort to find solutions for children and families. "I taught in Jackson Public Schools for 14 years, and in each of those years, there was an issue with water. Maybe it was one day, two days. Now it's weeks," said MAE President Erica Jones.

This past Saturday marked Day 32 of the latest boil-water alert in the city, and also the day that local educators, parents, elected officials, faith leaders, and businesspeople stood up together at the MAE-hosted Rally for Safe Drinking Water. "We're going to work together" to fix the problem, Jones promised.

[Clean water is a human right](#), says Jones—and a "water crisis is an education crisis." Not only does Jackson's failing water system regularly limit students' access to clean tap water, a majority of the city's water pipes also contain dangerous levels of lead and copper, which are proven to cause lifelong learning and behavioral issues.

“Our students deserve better. Our community deserves better,” says Jones. And that’s why MAE is leading the way to make sure its students and schools, as well as Jackson’s homes and families, have clean water.

## **SAFE WATER = SAFE SCHOOLS**

“The other day, someone asked me, ‘Why is MAE, why is JAE, talking about water? What does safe water have to do with education?’ It has everything to do with education,” said George Stewart, a middle-school teacher in Jackson and president of the Jackson Association of Educators, during Saturday’s rally.

Picture this: A Jackson second-grade teacher, like Jones was for 14 years, needs to take her students to the toilet. But the toilet in her part of the school building doesn’t work. “When your toilets don’t flush and you have to take your class to another part of the building to get to a working toilet or drinking fountain, or you have to go outside to a port-a-potty, what would normally be a 10-minute break from instruction becomes a 30-minute, or 45-minute break from instruction,” Jones points out.

Two or three times a day, every day—the wasted time quickly adds up and it has serious consequences for student learning. Sometimes, Jackson public schools simply close.



George Stewart and Erica Jones Credit: Charles A Smith

“If this isn’t an educational issue, I don’t know what is!” said Stewart.

Last year, Stewart and his Whitten Middle School students stayed home for two weeks because of a lack of water, a situation that forced teachers and students “to shift very quickly to remote learning, which we know doesn’t serve every student well,” he added.

Meanwhile, the city’s boil-water alerts have become so common that Jackson residents have had to boil their water for more days this summer than they didn’t, and the number of alerts grows each year. During those times, school cafeteria workers struggle to prepare safe, healthy meals, Jones said. Custodians must work twice as hard to keep schools clean, especially bathrooms.

Educators and students must rely on bottled water, which can be expensive. This past weekend, MAE members and volunteers distributed 22,176 bottles of water to local families and residents.

## **RALLY FOR SAFE DRINKING WATER!**

During this past weekend’s MAE-led rally, guest speakers included Jackson parents, a restaurant owner who has to boil every drop of water used in his kitchen, and a local Millsaps College student, Jakob Heldt, who recalled what it was like to study in Jackson last winter, in the aftermath of ice storms.

“In the weeks leading up to winter, I didn’t realize why everybody was so scared. I didn’t know what people meant when they said the city would be shut down,” he recalled. As a new student, Heldt hadn’t lived in Jackson during the winter storms of 2010, 2014, and 2018, which crashed the water system.

He soon realized. When temps dropped, the system collapsed: water wasn't going into the city's treatment facilities, and it wasn't leaving, either. Tens of thousands of residents—especially those in Jackson's predominantly Black neighborhoods—were left without running water for up to a month.

“For three weeks, we had no water. We had to shovel snow into buckets so that we could flush our toilets with melted snow,” said Heldt. “When the snow was gone, we couldn't flush the toilets at all.”

In the wake of the 2021 storms, state lawmakers pledged a scant \$3 million to the city's water issues, a fraction of the amount necessary. Meanwhile, this year the Biden administration sent \$1.8 billion in American Rescue Plans (ARP) funds to Mississippi. Of that, state officials have allocated a possible \$25 million to Jackson's water system, provided the city applies for it with a comprehensive plan and \$25 million in matching funds. The application period opens in September.

#### **WHAT'S NEXT?**

The money is there, say MAE leaders. The need is there, too.

In a recent MAE-led survey of Jackson residents, 93 percent said they experienced issues with their tap water; a stunning 96 percent said they felt their water was unsafe. And yet, every single student—every single person—deserves safe water, says MAE Executive Director Antonio Castañon Luna.

With that in mind, a MAE-led coalition of community, faith, and health organizations are calling on Jackson's mayor to share a fully developed, comprehensive plan to fix Jackson's water system—including costs and a timeline—by September 1.

MAE leaders and their partners also have been meeting with Mississippi's lawmakers, pressing them to allocate more money to Jackson's water system during the 2023 legislative session.

“We are going to stand together for our city, for our children, for our schools—because we believe every kid deserves safe water,” Castañon Luna told rally-goers Saturday.

“Today, we are moving the needle toward a more just future, a future that our children deserve and that our children's children deserve. We are standing together today, saying that the schools our children attend, that our neighbor's children attend, need to be safe.”

## Educators Rally Against Gun Violence

Teachers who survived school shootings join NEA Becky Pringle in calling for common sense legislation

Patrick G. Ryan

neaToday

By: Mary Ellen Flannery, Senior Writer

Published: 06/11/2022



### KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Today, more children die in the U.S. from gun violence than any other cause. It doesn't have to be this way.
2. On Saturday, at March for Our Lives, NEA President Becky Pringle called on lawmakers to take action—now—to protect children.
3. Pringle was joined by Columbine teachers, who survived the shooting as students 23 years ago, and by teachers who survived November's school shooting in Oxford, Michigan

*[Editor's note: On June 24, after hearing from nearly 60,000 NEA members, Congress passed the bipartisan Safer Communities Act, a bill that includes universal background checks for gun buyers under 21, state funding for extreme risk protection, and funding for mental health services. It's a "good first step," said NEA President Becky Pringle. "The bill will absolutely help save lives, but we cannot stop here."]*

Twenty-three years ago, when the violence at Columbine High School began, Zach Martin was a sophomore, sitting in a Columbine math class. In another wing of the building, freshman Cris Welch was in art. Today, Martin and Welch are teachers at the rebuilt Columbine High. They joined NEA President Becky Pringle at Saturday's March for Our Lives, alongside two NEA members who survived November's school shooting in Oxford, Michigan, in demanding more be done to keep students and educators safe from gun violence.

"The time is now. The time is always now. The time is now to stand up for our students. The time is now to hold our legislators accountable," Pringle told the mothers, fathers, grandparents, children, friends, and educators who gathered in front of the Washington Monument on Saturday. "The time is now to tell them that if they don't do their jobs, we're coming for their jobs in November."

Text "NOW" to 48744, or visit [nea.org/gunviolence](https://nea.org/gunviolence), to get involved with NEA's movement for safe schools.

### "WE NEED TO DO SOMETHING."

Columbine was nearly a quarter-century ago. The Sandy Hook massacre, which cost the lives of 20 children and six educators, was more than a decade ago. [Parkland](#)? Five years ago. Oxford? Six months. And [Uvalde](#)? Just 18 days.

"A few weeks ago, when the shooting in Texas happened, I felt nothing but angry. And then I understood that we need to do something about it," said Lauren Rambo, a biology teacher at Oxford High School, where four students were killed in November, including one who had left Rambo's class to use the bathroom.

“After Uvalde, I’m more angry that this keeps happening,” said Melissa Gibbons, an Oxford High teacher and parent, who secured her students behind a double-locked door—and then agonized whether her own children were safe, too.

So many students and educators know the terror of locked doors, of darkened classrooms, of frantic checks of cell phones. Nearly four years ago in California, Saugus High School choir teacher Kaitlin Holt was listening to an audio recording with her students when a group of terrified students burst in. Minutes later, in a small office adjacent to her classroom, Holt was holding a maxipad to a student’s bleeding gunshot wound, while keeping nearly 40 students calm and quiet.

“It was terrifying,” she says.

## **A CALL TO ACTION**



Becky Pringle back stage with Life Camp founder Erica Ford and March for Our Lives co-founder David Hogg .

NEA President Becky Pringle addresses an estimated 40,000 students, educators, and activists at the March for Our Lives.

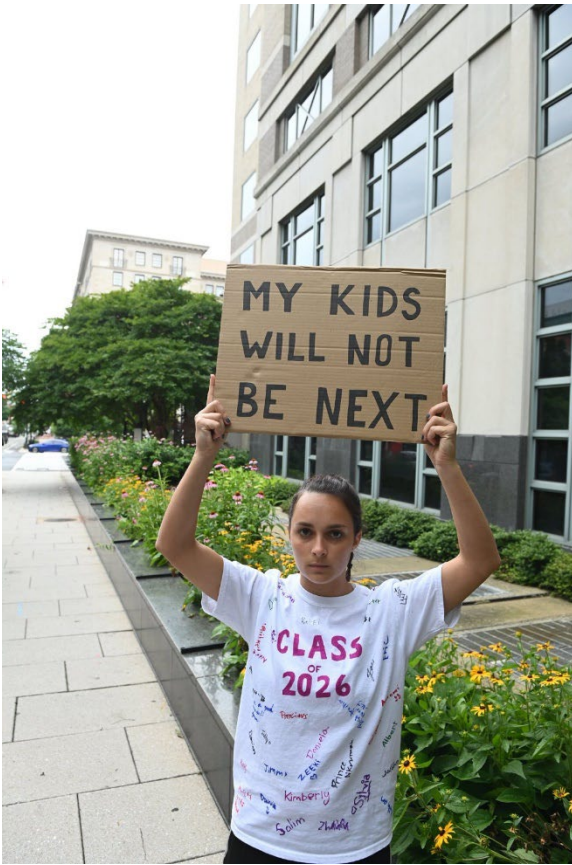
Patrick G. Ryan



Becky Pringle back stage with Life Camp founder Erica Ford and March for Our Lives co-founder David Hogg .

## **WE NEED COMMON SENSE LEGISLATION NOW**

Today, as lawmakers debate legislation on guns, “it’s very frustrating to hear people say, ‘it’s not about the guns,’” says Holt. “This person, the shooter, killed six people on my campus in 16 seconds. Sixteen seconds! ... It’s discouraging to keep hearing these arguments from people who haven’t experienced this. They have no clue. The only thing that will help is less guns.”



Earlier this week, on Wednesday, alongside the mother of 10-year-old Lexi Rubio, a fourth grader murdered in Uvalde, Pringle addressed a House of Representatives committee, urging them to act now to adopt common-sense legislation.

“Every single day that politicians fail to take meaningful action, every single day that politicians ignore the [majority of Americans who want stricter gun laws](#), you are telling our children:

Protecting your lives matters less to us than protecting the status quo,” Pringle said.

The majority of Americans support background checks on gun buyers, a ban on semi-automatic weapons, and raising the purchasing age to 21. Mental-health supports also would be helpful—[educators have been calling for more school counselors and psychologists for many years](#), and have received scant funding from most state legislatures—but mental health is not the only answer.

And arming educators is not the answer at all. “We cannot ask educators, who enter this profession to help children soar, to carry weapons and wear body armor while teaching addition or the Pythagorean Theorem,” Pringle told lawmakers. “Because by the time someone has shown up at the school or the store or the hospital or the house of worship with a military weapon, it is already too late.”

## SHOWING UP AND STANDING UP

Every day, in our stores, our streets, our churches, our movie theaters, 111 people are killed by guns. Gun violence affects everyone, but more often it affects Black and Latino communities, where more than two thirds of adults or someone they care for has experienced gun violence.

Ali Iannuci from Whitman Middle School, Fairfax Virginia Credit: Patrick G. Ryan

Today, [more children die in the U.S. from gunshots than any other cause](#).

“As a parent, I feel like I have to do anything I can, everything in my power to make my daughter’s future as safe as possible,” said Welch, who flew from Colorado with his wife Larissa, also a Columbine teacher, and their baby daughter, who turned 1 three days ago. “When deciding to come out to Washington, she was the prime motivating factor. I want her to have a safer environment than I ended up having—and a safer environment than students have today.”

The fight is not over—not even close. Change is possible, said Martin. “After 23 years, there has been some change and some progress, clearly not enough, and I understand how it can be hard for people to maintain hope. For me, March for Our Lives fills me with hope,” he said.

Gibbons had students who told her they might not go to a local march in Oxford this weekend, she said. They didn’t think it would make a difference. But, as lawmakers in D.C., and around the country consider legislative and policy solutions to gun violence, Gibbons believes they need to hear from educators and students.

“I want to show my students that it matters for us to stand up and show up,” she said.

<https://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/local/silverton/2019/06/19/silverton-teachers-tough-grades-issue-settlement-agreement-district-administrators/1451122001/>

## **Two Silverton teachers give tough grades, get demoted, win grievance**

**Christena Brooks**



SILVERTON, OR – A fight between high school teachers and administrators that began over low grades and plagiarism in a college-level writing course has ended with a finding against the school district and a settlement agreement.

Former Silverton High School teachers Ben Hynes-Stone and Travis Woodside won't get money from the Silver Falls School District. Rather, the settlement agreement calls for the district to recall letters of reprimand it sent to the state agency that credentials teachers, and to issue them neutral letters of recommendation.

An arbitrator ruled the district was “engaging in a pattern of retaliation and reprisal” against the pair when they filed grievances during the 2017-18 school year.

“Having all of this legally documented with evidence from district administrators’ emails and their own testimony is a tremendous win for teachers and unions across the United States,” Hynes-Stone said.

### **Grading**

Hynes-Stone and Woodside came to the Silver Falls School District in 2014 and 2015, respectively. They began the 2017-18 school year as co-teachers of an advanced writing course for “highly motivated and capable students” wanting to earn college credit, according to their complaint filed with Oregon’s Employment Relation Board last winter.

Not long after classes began, students and parents began to complain to administrators about the low grades awarded in the class, according to public documents. The teachers maintained their academic expectations fit the class description as a college-level course, but tensions over grading mounted as the weeks passed.

Woodside also complained that the high school principal and vice principals pressured him to blunt his response to plagiarism by students who were children of administrators or other parents “well-connected” in the community. In one case, one-third of a student’s paper appeared to have been written by a parent, he said.

As the fall semester drew to a close, Principal Wade Lockett opened an investigation into the pair’s grading practices that pulled in district administrators and union representation and resulted in letters of reprimand being sent to the Oregon Teacher and Standards Practices Commission.

With the union, Hynes-Stone and Woodside filed a grievance, asking that the letters be rescinded. That spring, the district disciplined Hynes-Stone for raising his middle finger in a photo with a student; he responded with another grievance.

Then Lockett didn’t allow an Albany high school’s administrator interested in hiring Hynes-Stone to visit the teacher’s class, and he gave Hynes-Stone’s a poor end-of-the-year evaluation.

When administrators told both teachers they were being transferred to lower-grade schools for 2018-19, they resigned. Since then, they’ve been teaching elsewhere and awaiting the results of arbitration and the settlement processes.

**Arbitration**

“In this case, there were very little facts that were in dispute,” said Lisa Freily, the district’s attorney. “What was in question was why the actions happened. I don’t think anyone intended that 'because (the teachers) filed a grievance, (we’re) going to give you a penalty.' But, in some cases, intent doesn’t count.”

Administrators’ emails, a teaching evaluation, and the involuntary transfer of both teachers to lower-grade schools at year’s end combined to convince Minnesota-based arbitrator Richard J. Miller, hired jointly by the district and union, that the teachers were penalized for formally disputing the actions of their principal, Wade Lockett, and other administrators.

“(After the grievances were filed) the relationship between them changed so dramatically that it established a pattern by the school district (of) animus and intent to retaliate,” the arbitrator wrote in his 39-page decision.

**MORE:**[Senate GOP threatens walkout, Gov. Brown responds with threat of state police](#)

Now, in a letter signed by Supt. Andy Bellando and union president Michelle Stadel, administrators and union leaders pledged to participate in joint training about the “appropriate roles and responsibilities for both labor and management.”

“The parties agree that, going forward, both sides will focus on building a more positive relationship and will assume a positive intent until it is demonstrated otherwise,” read the last item in the settlement agreement. “The association and district agree that there must be mutual respect for the rights and obligations of both the union and the employer, and the representatives of each organization.”

Although Hynes-Stone and Woodside are still teaching, both left the district in 2018. Hynes-Stone is now an English teacher at Central High School in Independence, and Woodside is a reading specialist, instructional coach and PE teacher at Eagle Charter School in Salem.

“For me, this decision has been very much a weight off the shoulders in my personal life,” Woodside said. “How we were treated doesn’t sit very well with me. I’m really hoping somebody out there sees this and decides this is something that needs to change.”

<https://www.seiu99.org/2022/03/25/were-fighting-to-pass-sb-830-equitable-funding-of-schools/>

## We're Fighting to Pass SB 830 – Equitable Funding of Schools

For over five decades, California has been inequitable in the funding of our public schools, benefiting those in more affluent communities, all while placing those in poorer communities at a disadvantage.



During this time, California has been utilizing the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) method for calculating school funding.

**ADA is calculated by taking the total attendance and dividing it by the number of school days in session.** Only days in which a student is under the guidance and direction of certificated teachers are counted. ADA is always equal to or less than enrollment because students may be absent (whether excused or unexcused).

**This severely impacts schools that serve children from low-income families by financially penalizing schools and it's students for poor attendance.** Families in these communities are far more likely to suffer from [health related issues](#), including asthma, dental disease, obesity, and other chronic illnesses that may lead to absences.

**Lack of reliable transportation also leads to absenteeism.** Instead of helping these schools and students with additional support to address the absentee issues, ADA punishes these students, further holding them back at achieving the kind of life a life a good education can provide.

SEIU Local 99 will be doing more to move legislators and the governor on SB 830. For now, [subscribe to our emails](#) to stay up-to-date on the bill and actions you can take to move it forward.

# The Forge



Courtesy of Jackson Potter

March 4, 2021

## The Resurgence of Teachers Unions

**Jackson Potter *and* Arlene Inouye**

Two members of the Chicago Teachers Union's (CTU) big bargaining team visited Los Angeles in the summer of 2018, months into the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) contract campaign, to share lessons from their historic 2012 strike. Their presentation received a standing ovation. However, the contract demands that garnered the most applause and energy were for green spaces and community gardens at schools, affordable housing for students and their families, and efforts to expand a new union/community model for sustainable community schools with wraparound supports and culturally-relevant curriculum.

A renewed orientation toward social justice unionism has transformed contract bargaining for teachers unions over the past decade. In the five years

leading up to the 2018 contract campaign and subsequent strike, UTLA organizers held thousands of conversations — in person, on the phone, at rallies, in groups, and one on one — with members, allies, and parents. Through this spadework, the union built broad consensus around demands that would have an impact outside the classrooms, as well as inside.

Putting these kinds of common good demands at the core of our bargaining is no small part of the story behind the resurgence of teachers unions over the last decade. No less than twenty teacher strikes in the past eight years have injected hope and momentum into the labor movement's landscape. From Arizona to West Virginia to St. Paul, teachers waged strikes that led to unprecedented victories in school investment, class sizes, staffing formulas, and common good demands after decades of underfunding, privatization, and demonization of public school teachers and staff. In most of these efforts, teachers have won because they've run strong contract campaigns focused on what organizer and author Jane McAlevey has referred to as "structure tests." Organizers engaged every member to take part in escalating actions that advanced a clear set of public good demands.

In this essay, we look at two case studies: the 2019 UTLA and CTU strikes. We hope that by detailing the methods we used to prepare and launch our largely successful contract campaigns, we can help revive a labor movement that has remained largely dormant, even in the midst of historic teacher strikes. Now is the time to build on the grassroots organizing of teachers unions and grow a more militant labor movement across the country.

## **Los Angeles 2019, by Arlene Inouye**

UTLA's six-day strike in January 2019 was only the third strike in our union's fifty-year history. UTLA is the second-largest teachers union in the country, with 35,000 educators in a school district with ninety percent students of color, 85 percent low-income students, and large populations of foster,

homeless, and special needs students. Because there are over 1,000 schools spread across the district, we had to be intentional about each step of our organizing plan. We knew that to win, our members needed to feel connected to each other and to the union and receive clear and consistent information (e.g. infographics on the key issues). We also needed to build union structures that engaged and empowered workers by recruiting leaders at every school and supporting them with UTLA staff.

UTLA was a testing ground for how to build a strong union. In the five years leading up to the strike, a group of progressive leaders had transformed UTLA from a service model with a backlog of 3,000 grievances to an organized, fighting union. We won all officer positions and a majority of the Board of Director positions with a commitment to take on the fundamental issues facing teachers and schools: institutional racism, declining public school funding, the expansion of charter schools, and weak relationships with parents and community organizations.

To accomplish this, we shifted our staffing to support an organizing culture, identified and engaged new member leaders, began organizing parents, students, and community members, and created a research department to support an expanded communications team. We looked at the necessary and sequential steps to gain the confidence and trust of our membership. First, we needed to win a salary increase, as we hadn't had one in eight years; then, we needed to raise dues so we could invest in organizing to become a fighting union; finally, we needed to build school site structures to prepare to strike.

## **Building School Site Structures**

The heart of our organizing program was centered at the school sites. We needed all 34,000 members to receive union information, engage personally on the issues, and take sequential actions that required greater investment

and risk. To do this, we had to build the relationships and structures that could deliver this ambitious program.

Because of the sheer size and spread of our members, our UTLA structure divides the city into eight areas with four elected Board of Directors members and a steering committee from each area responsible for supporting school sites. One of our initial steps was to make it a priority for every school site to have a chapter chair and regular school site meetings. The UTLA area leaders, along with two staff organizers, recruited chapter leaders and trained them in how to have one-on-one conversations and build Chapter Action Teams (CATs).

Ideally, one CAT leader took responsibility for ten members with whom they engaged regularly on union issues, including members who worked at multiple schools, such as counselors, psychologists, therapists, and nurses. The CAT training included how to identify leaders, map your school site, and have difficult one-on-one conversations, including techniques such as redirecting and inoculating members. When the district put out memos saying that our members couldn't talk to parents or that special education teachers couldn't strike, the CAT leaders helped members work through their fear, uncertainty, and doubt (FUD). The CAT leader training also addressed how members could walk each other through FUD. Initially, members would give a million reasons why they couldn't strike. Many of their concerns were compelling, such as, "I'm a single Mom; I can't afford to strike." Members would allay these fears by reminding each other what we were striking for, and how the gains were greater than the risks.

We heard from many new leaders who stepped up to be the chapter leader at their school that, for the first time, they felt that the union needed them. At a citywide meeting for all of our chapter leaders during the winter break in 2018, we had over 1,000 school site chapter leaders — nearly double what we usually had. We passed out picket signs and told the assembled leaders about the latest district roadblocks to keep us from striking. The leaders yelled, "Strike! Strike Strike!" While we weren't able to get CAT leaders at every

school in the district, it is an ongoing and critical effort. Building Chapter Action Teams requires members to take an active role in the union and creates a school culture of accountability and community — essential when organizing for a strike.

## **Structure Tests**

One of the first things we had to do to build an engaged and strike-ready membership was to clean up our data. In past years, we did not have the correct contact information for most members, making the kind of one-on-one organizing we set out to do nearly impossible. To remedy this, we launched a union-wide outreach campaign to secure accurate information from our members through our chapter chairs, CAT teams, and staff. Our new research team designed and created a database with thousands of updated emails and cell phone numbers, which allowed us to track every action members took on our cell phones and computers.

Each action was a structure test to see where we were strong and where we needed to focus our organizing efforts. We started with regional rallies in November 2014 and planned our first citywide rally in February 2015. 15,000 members attended, making it the largest action since the 1989 strike.

A pivotal structure test was the membership-wide union election vote in February 2016. The “Build the Future, Fund the Fight” campaign, including a thirty percent dues increase, was on the ballot. A majority of the UTLA members voted, and a resounding 82 percent voted yes, giving us confidence that the members supported the direction the union was taking. Other structure tests included petitions about members’ willingness to take actions and to put themselves on the line. While effective at first, petitions eventually became routine and less of a gauge of commitment and involvement. These structure tests need to be adapted so they are most effective at any given time.

In another powerful structure test, we called upon UTLA members to wear red on Tuesdays — moving our members to publicly identify with UTLA and sparking conversations with colleagues, parents, and school administration about union issues. The simple act of wearing red affirmed members' identity as part of a union collective and allowed us to see how strong we were at each school site. We then used this information to direct our organizing efforts — recruiting more CAT leaders or offering additional support to existing leaders.

We used social media to publicize all of our organizing efforts as well as members' stories about their working conditions, from having forty students in a class to not having a nurse at the school site. We also had weekly (later daily) videos explaining where we were in contract bargaining so that our members had up-to-date information leading up to the strike. Finally, we featured parents, students, community, and union members as they expressed their solidarity with us, underscoring the broad coalition we were building around our common good demands.

### **Forging Strong Relationships with Parents and Students**

For our strike to be successful, UTLA needed to gain the trust of community, civil rights, and advocacy organizations, some of whom we had strained relationships with. In the past, some community groups disagreed with the union over issues such as seniority, curriculum reform, and suspension and other harsh discipline policies that disproportionately impacted Black and brown students. Other progressive organizations resented UTLA because they never heard from us unless we needed their support.

This changed in 2014 when the new UTLA leadership reached out to progressive organizations across the city to repair the harms of the past and build mutually respectful relationships. We also hired an experienced community organizer to work with rank-and-file educators to build a school-

based infrastructure through which teachers could organize parents and students around broader public education and community challenges.

We started with an educational roundtable with community organizations and advocacy groups. But instead of building unity and consensus, the meetings brought out deep fundamental differences, particularly around the expansion of charter schools. Some of the local progressive groups relied on funding from charter school corporations, making it extremely difficult if not impossible to work together. So we pivoted, forging a coalition modeled after the national AFT and NEA Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools (AROS), which had generated enthusiasm across the country in 2013 and 2014 for its coordinated national fight against corporate educational reform by teachers unions, community organizations, and youth-led networks.

After months of discussion, we formed a new coalition called Reclaim our Schools LA, or ROSLA. The coalition brought together four anchor groups: The Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE), the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE), Students Deserve, and UTLA. Together we agreed to build a movement for broad-based education reform that would engage teachers, students, parents, and community members. As **Leigh Dingerson wrote** in a 2019 report on ROSLA, “The cornerstone of the campaign was the agreement by each anchor group on several key practices: the development of a shared analysis, strategy, and platform; a commitment to leadership development and grassroots voice; a systematic and scientific approach to organizing; and bold, escalating action.”

The coalition was key to building for our strike and expanding our set of demands beyond wages, hours, and working conditions. We held regular meetings to discuss the priority issues to take into negotiations, including expanding green space on campus and stopping independent charter schools from co-locating on our public school campuses. The students were most concerned with the demeaning school district policy of wand-ing students and their belongings for weapons; they wanted to replace the police presence on campus with restorative justice programs and student supports,

such as counselors. We also introduced other issues that we weren't able to get an agreement on, such as repurposing vacant buildings that the district owned as low-income housing. The students mounted their own campaign leading up to the strike, including a button campaign, one-on-one conversations, and Black Lives Matter in Schools events. During the strike, the students were leaders and speakers on the picket line and at rallies. ROSLA also created its own strike school, "La Escuelita de Lideres," where community members learned the latest information about the strike and practiced how to speak to the media. Parents, students, and community members of ROSLA held picketing actions at school board members' homes in the evening and were leaders on the picket line. Each action contributed to the strength and momentum of the strike.

In the end, sixty-to-seventy thousand parents, community members, students, and teachers took to the streets of L.A., demanding not just smaller class sizes, nurses at every school, and more counselors, librarians, special education programs, and ethnic studies programs but also green spaces, an immigrant support fund, an end to the discriminatory practice of wandering, funding for community schools, and support for a statewide legislative charter school accountability measure. The power we built within our schools and the broader community allowed us to make gains in all of these critical areas, not just the narrow wages and working conditions typically negotiated over in union contracts. We have continued to build on these wins over the past two years. For example, the Board of Education recently put forward a resolution funding more green space and community schools.

We won because we systematically built up our union to be a collective power — engaging the public and empowering new and dedicated chapter leaders, who continue to lead us forward today.



## Chicago 2019, by Jackson Potter

The Chicago Teachers Union members were inspired by the historic wins in the L.A. contract and UTLA's successful engagement with the public to win green space, class size reductions, sustainable community schools, and affordable housing. Labor's decline since WWII is in no small part a function of our tendency to focus on the thousands of members inside our bargaining units rather than the millions who can benefit from our advocacy outside of them. UTLA's wins made it clear that winning more is both possible and necessary.

A number of people on CTU staff and in the rank and file made regular pilgrimages to L.A. to learn from and expand upon shared tactics, organizational forms, and movement goals. When it was our turn to strike, we had incorporated many of the lessons from their strike, such as:

- **Organizing all leaders of the union on common good demands.** These demands had to be seen as integral to the entire contract package by union leaders and members. In L.A., every speaker repeated these community-based priorities to joyous applause from their member leaders, who clearly had talked about them plenty and integrated them as their own key demands.
- **Tracking member data.** UTLA tracked all organizing conversations, attendance at rallies, mock votes, actual votes, and wear red Fridays. We fortified some of our systems trying to emulate them.
- **Using social media.** UTLA's excellent use of social media and member profiles in explaining key contract demands, bargaining updates, and actions was something we stole hook, line, and sinker.

## **Slow and Steady Organizing**

In the last months of 2018, the Chicago Teachers Union collected hundreds of proposals from our 27,000 members. We intentionally built our big bargaining team to include key member leaders in special education,

bilingual education, early childhood programs, as well as among members who work primarily with homeless students and paraprofessionals (the lowest-paid group in our bargaining unit, school clerks and teacher assistants who are 84 percent Black and Latinx women). This ensured that there were strong advocates within the bargaining process on the key issues identified by members.

In the end, we developed a democratically-determined list of four hundred proposals, which we then whittled down to a more concise and manageable bargaining submission. We demanded that the city prohibit coordination between the school district and ICE in locating or identifying undocumented students and families and called for the dissolution of the city's gang database, which overwhelmingly targeted students of color and perpetuated the school-to-prison pipeline.

We also demanded the school district provide affordable housing for all 18,000 homeless students through a real estate transfer tax, corporate head tax, and/or surplus from the city's ubiquitous tax increment financing program (TIF). TIF dollars are diverted from libraries, schools, and parks, mainly to fund the vanity projects of the rich in downtown Chicago. We were the first group in the city to force the Mayor to release TIF funds back to schools and other taxing bodies. Our ability to fund many of the programs and staff models of all our contracts from 2012 to the present has been dependent on our ability to win new revenue, like that from TIF surpluses, into our schools. Each of our proposals explicitly referenced new revenue, to the chagrin of management.

To popularize these common good demands, we built on a decade of slow and steady organizing. Since 2011, the CTU has run a summer organizing institute. The program provides thirty-to-forty emerging leaders with high-level organizing training, political education, and campaign planning skills. We encourage applications from key groups in the union — that is, members who work in areas that lend themselves to critical struggles, such as special education teachers, clerks and teacher assistants, bilingual educators, and

members working directly with immigrant communities, clinicians, or Black neighborhoods targeted for school closures. This new crop of leaders was able to lead committee work and campaigns that morphed into contract demands relevant to those key areas of work.

Many of the members who attended our organizing institute became new school delegates, members of the union's executive board, and district organizers who, for a small stipend, helped CTU identify and mobilize delegates. They were key presenters and advocates in city-wide trainings CTU hosted to prepare for upcoming fights. Eventually, we innovated our annual delegate workshops to include a weekend version that welcomed any and all members to learn the same skills for mapping their schools, leading building-level campaigns, and identifying key contract issues.

In the buildup to the strike, this wave of new delegates, summer organizing grads, and other emerging leaders was charged with strengthening Contract Action Teams (strike teams) in all five hundred of our buildings, recruiting to key union committees that helped draft contract language and related campaigns, and helping coordinate city-wide actions and coalition work, from wearing red on Fridays to mobilizing downtown.

Prior to the expiration of our contract, we asked delegates and school leaders to assemble a broader group of members, from every department in their buildings, to act as branches of the phone tree as we mobilized towards a strike. Delegates were prodded by the union's governing bodies to recruit new members to existing CAT teams to expand leadership and capacity. Once we went on strike, these teams also led pickets, food and flyer distribution, marches, and afternoon city-wide action mobilizations by getting their school staff to join in union-wide protests downtown and at various places across the city that could illustrate our demands. One afternoon, we sent all 30,000 members to a construction site where the city was subsidizing a luxury residential development with \$1 billion, half of which would otherwise go to schools.

We also held monthly meetings to educate members around the importance of affordable housing demands and sanctuary protections for students of color. Prominent leaders in the Grassroots Collaborative and Grassroots Education Movement (coalitions for educational, racial, and social justice in Chicago, of which CTU is a member) addressed multiple House of Delegates meetings and linked the fight against school closings with the need to advance more affordable housing.

Nevertheless, it was difficult to make these common good positions resonate as contract priorities because most members did not see them as critical for contract settlement. Unlike UTLA, we did not integrate these demands as early in our process. Therefore, we lost precious time helping members connect broader community demands to their own pressing, school-based issues in organizing conversations, summer outreach, and member training. However, once our governing bodies did approve the entire proposal in December 2018, leadership, staff, and key member leaders consistently and systematically lifted up common good areas in every membership meeting, communication, organizing discussion, and officer speech — a necessary level of engagement to elevate proposals that go beyond traditional bargaining experiences and the legal constraints of bargaining law.

Still, there were occasions when members of our own executive board would ask, “Are we just saying these things, or do we mean to implement them?” This is a critical issue, and one we set about addressing in the 2019 contract. Unlike in 2012, the 2019 contract resulted in a robust set of member-led, community-directed committees prioritized by leadership to monitor the implementation of these transformative demands and expand their reach beyond the confines of contract language. In the aftermath of the 2019 strike, the CTU launched committees on housing, environmental justice, sustainable community schools, and racial justice to enact and monitor our progress in these crucial areas.

As this work suggests, common good contract wins require tremendous staffing, organizational resources, and time to implement and enact.

Therefore, we must do a better job of considering the implications of our proposals, the commitments implied, and the ongoing involvement required to properly implement and realize the intent of common good demands, including establishing member committees and hosting trainings to maintain member commitment. Anything less risks creating the dynamic that occurred in our e-board: members see the propagandistic value of common good demands but doubt the intention of the union to follow through. While we did a better job after the 2019 strike than we had in previous years, with the district losing 60,000 students over the last decade from housing displacement and immigration restrictions, our advocacy in these areas will have to exponentially increase in future contract cycles. In fact, I would argue that our primary demands must center around making Chicago a livable city for our students and their families if our union is to continue to flourish.

Once CTU went on strike on October 17th, Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot played to our members' concerns, arguing that the contract was not the "appropriate place" to address the needs of homeless students. Lightfoot claimed she would add more social workers and nurses to the school budget but refused to put it in the collective bargaining agreement.

By the end of the strike, we had definitive wins in both areas. For the first time, our contract established a guaranteed staffing formula to put social workers and nurses in all schools as well as a method for school communities to vote out police officers in their buildings. We won dedicated staff and resources for homeless students, case manager positions for diverse learner populations, sanctuary language to protect undocumented students from ICE, and living wages for our lowest-paid paraprofessional members.

Still, we did not secure any additional units of affordable housing. In hindsight, to win on these demands, we would need more robust political education and careful analysis of how our power is intimately linked to student wellbeing and enrollment levels, as many Black and Latinx families leave the city because of insufficient economic opportunity and high levels of

violence. We have to make the case to our members more consistently that their jobs are tied to student enrollment — and the factors that push students and families out of the city — in order for them to fight for housing as a contract priority.

Lightfoot ultimately adopted the majority of our agenda to curry favor with voters who had rejected school closings, undemocratic school boards, and privatization, in no small part due to CTU's advocacy over the preceding ten years. While it eventually took an 11-day strike to force the Mayor to adopt many of those demands, our prior success at broadening the expectations of members, allies, and the public about what a collective bargaining agreement could achieve made gains in common good areas more possible than ever. In particular, CTU's previous district and charter school strikes established a more experienced, strike-ready, and well-organized membership.

## **Labor Solidarity**

Another key to the CTU victory in 2019 was labor solidarity. Chicago teachers struck alongside the 7,000-plus school employees in SEIU local 73, a bargaining unit composed overwhelmingly of Black and Latinx workers who do the custodial, security, and special education assistant work in the schools. The alignment between the two unions was years in the making; the union's leadership change in 2010 created the conditions to go out on strike together for the first time ever in 2018. It was also critical for us to lift up the demands of our paraprofessional members who have much in common with their SEIU counterparts; by bringing the two unions together, we were able to align contract demands for the lowest paid union members for the first time..

Both SEIU and CTU developed differentiated organizing raps and psychometrics to better engage these members and center their interests as key priorities for the entire union. This initially involved a clerks campaign in the immediate aftermath of our 2016 contract fight when the district

attempted to eliminate school clerk positions and force teachers to submit their own timecards. We launched online petitions and social media actions to “Save Our Clerks.” Teacher members submitted letters to their principals to express concern for the district plan and solidarity for our clerk colleagues. We even had a raucous bargaining session where delegates from all over the city laid into the district’s head of labor relations about the clerk plan, to the point that he walked out of the room fuming. This was hugely important in building the confidence of our PSRP (Paraprofessionals and School-Related Personnel) leaders that the union would fight for them and signaled to the rest of the membership that the demands of these workers would take priority. The result was that we won the biggest salary increase for PSRPs and the members of SEIU 73 of any single cycle in the history of both unions.

In addition, both the CTU and UTLA strikes were preceded by wildly successful, visible, and historic strikes in our charter divisions. The success of the 2019 strike in Chicago required years of campaigning to merge CTU with the Chicago charter school teacher local and to align the 11 charter school contracts with the CTU contracts. The successful merger between the CTU and Chicago ACTS set the stage for the first strike by charter school teachers in U.S. history, when teachers at the United Neighborhood Organization (now called Acero and the largest charter school operator in the state) led a four-day work stoppage during the winter of 2018. The strike allowed CTU members to see charter teachers as strategic partners in stopping the privatization movement. As a result of the strike, for instance, UNO had to pay its teachers more — and was thereby prevented from opening eight additional schools.

To win more, public sector unions must find ways to align with private sector unions and tap into the hopes and dreams of workers who have not yet unionized. Successful private-public sector organizing experiments take considerable time and resources. The charter merger and contract alignment fight in Chicago took almost a decade, with many hits and misses in between. But until we can develop the conditions for these kinds of class-wide contract fights, labor’s victories will eventually meet their limits.

# Conclusion

The trajectory of the CTU victory in 2019 was characterized by protracted struggle, punctuated by strikes but continued in between contracts with pitched political fights, charter school organizing, and school closing battles that kept the membership engaged and mobilized. We built upon victories in the first charter school strike in U.S. history, the L.A. teacher strikes, and the Boston teacher contract campaign, which also won language on class size restrictions.

In no small way, both the CTU and UTLA 2019 strikes were connected to a rising movement of teachers who have permanently altered the political and labor landscape across the country. A clear focus on wealth redistribution to address racial and economic disparities in the city and the schools has been absolutely indispensable in creating a vision, organizing raps, public support, and membership commitment to policies that are capable of creating transformational change. Hopefully, we will look back on the 2018-2020 strikes in Arizona, Chicago, West Virginia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, North Carolina, Oakland, Denver, St. Paul, and Los Angeles as the moment when **#RedForEd** began to supplant austerity and corporate education reform with educational equity and investments in our BIPOC school communities. While we are far from matching the school funding received by wealthy white suburban districts, our innovative bargaining approach — centered around common good demands to advance racial justice and halt privatization — has positioned CTU and UTLA to win unprecedented victories.

**Read the issue: Debriefing the Resistance**

# When Agreement is Not Consent

Appeasement is the trauma response no one is talking about. |

By

[Rae Johnson](#)

and

[Nkem Ndefo](#)

A familiar story of Black people and police officers. On April 30, 2018, in a Southern California suburb, a White woman watched as three Black women, packing suitcases into the trunk of their car, left her neighbor's home. She didn't recognize them and when she waved, they didn't wave back. So she called 911. The Black women were simply leaving an Airbnb rental and quickly found themselves surrounded by seven police cars with a helicopter circling above because, in the words of the Airbnb homeowner, of "their rudeness and lack of good nature" to the neighbor's wave. Unlike many recent incidents of Black people encountering police officers, no one was injured or killed here, but it *was* recorded.

Watching the videos on social media, we see the women laughing, joking, and expressing mild exasperation. The police officers insisted that the incident was indeed friendly, with the police chief stating that body cameras show police "handled the situation with professionalism, dignity, and respect." In telling the story afterward, however, the [women's words](#) belie the levity in the images. "The trauma is real.

I've been angry, frustrated, and sad," said filmmaker Kelly Fyffe-Marshall.



**So, what is going on here?** How can people experience the same event — with all the laughing and joking — and yet have such different experiences? One frequently overlooked answer is appeasement. The

Black women were appeasing the White officers. And the reason the police were called in the first place was because the Black women had originally failed to appease the White neighbor with the socially requisite deference to Whiteness. To be Black in the United States is to face a racial hierarchy that is very dangerous to challenge, especially when that hierarchy takes the form of an armed police officer. Impulses to overtly defend oneself by fleeing or fighting are suppressed and hidden behind socially acceptable behaviors that defuse the danger, making the appeaser smaller, weaker, and less threatening. These women laughed and joked their way out of danger while their internal traumatic experience was invisible to the officers they appeased.

**What do we mean by appeasement, exactly?** Simply put, appeasement is any relational behavior designed to pacify interpersonal threat. Although it exists on a larger continuum of strategies that help us get along with others, these behaviors vary according to the amount of perceived power held by the parties involved. For example, when the power imbalance between people is relatively small, both parties might usefully and comfortably employ negotiation to come to a satisfactory resolution to a disagreement. When we have less power than the other person, we might feel forced to engage in some kind of compromise in the face of competing demands — not a win-win, but the next best thing given the circumstances. Only when the power differences are experienced as significant does appeasement come into play. Appeasement asks for nothing from the person holding power except that they do not harm

us. When we have no hope of winning or getting what we want, appeasement is designed to at least let us live to fight another day.

**Where does appeasement originate?** Appeasement is more than a culturally conditioned response to social hierarchy; its roots stretch deep into our shared biology with other animals, especially mammals. Fight-and-flight defense responses are protective against predators, but they are less useful when the aggressor is a member of your own species or especially when exile or escape from the group can be perilous. Dogs, non-human primates, and even bears have all been studied and shown to display appeasement behavior. It's common to witness [two dogs](#) sizing each other up until one drops to the ground showing its belly in submission to avert a fight.

Subordinate [chimpanzees](#) not only reduce their size to appear less threatening to dominant apes but have been witnessed seeking comfort from their aggressors to avoid provoking further violence. Field observations of [bears](#) show a repertoire of appeasement behaviors to prevent and de-escalate conflict, some of which are so taxing that appeasing bears need extensive rest periods to recover. Although there is little research on the physiological mechanisms involved in appeasement, there is likely a substantial activation of the fight/flight stress systems. However, this system is not externally expressed — in essence, put on hold by a freeze response — as if hitting the gas and brakes at the same time. The metabolic cost of high dual stress system activation may explain bear and other appeasing animals' exhaustion and need for active stress-reducing behaviors.

According to researchers, the social basis for appeasement in humans is not unlike that of our animal kin — the bears, dogs, and chimpanzees. While there is no straight line between animal and human biology, the automatic nature and widespread prevalence of appeasement among social animals hints that underneath social conditioning lies a biological stress response with a potentially heavy energetic cost. The study of animals makes it possible to consider appeasement as a natural part of our human response repertoire, especially when confronted with social situations in which none of the other stress response options are seen as viable.

In other words, we appease when the nature of the relationship makes escape impossible, defensive attack is not prudent, and playing dead is not realistic. More specifically, we appease in situations where the unequal power relationship is embedded in the lifeworld of the victim. Called “traumatic entrapment,” this dynamic is a key feature of childhood sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, schoolyard bullying, and working for a tyrannical boss. In these contexts, it’s fairly easy to see appeasement as a trauma response and survival strategy. So, the appeaser faces a double bind of sorts. If they fully express the defense response, they risk potential violence or exclusion from the group, but if they simultaneously freeze the defense response in an act of appeasement, then they pay the heavy metabolic price of high dual stress system activation. Biology and cultural conditioning influence one another in both the response and the outcome.

**Does appeasement extend beyond individual**

**interactions?** We have only recently begun to expand our understanding of trauma to consider how trauma responses like appeasement might play out in social situations beyond one-to-one interactions. For example, what does appeasement look like when these abusive power dynamics extend to whole groups of people, not just individuals? In the narrative above, the Black women were not treated as individuals but instead seen as members of their social group. And although their behavior that Sunday morning was unremarkably benign, it was assumed they were “up to no good,” requiring high-stakes police intervention. Like the women in this event, many members of oppressed social groups deal with these kinds of threats, intimidations, and negative assumptions on an everyday basis. And the impact often goes far beyond feeling hassled or irritated; research demonstrates that daily microaggressions can result in lasting traumatic effects which can include serious physical and mental health consequences. The impact is compounded by the fact that escape is largely impossible; most oppressed people must regularly interact with the dominant social group as a matter of practical survival. To understand what’s going on when a member of a subordinated social group engages in appeasement, it’s critical that we see oppression as continuously traumatic and the abusive inter-group dynamics of oppression (e.g. racism, sexism, ableism, etc.) as social contexts in which traumatic entrapment can be experienced and trauma responses should be expected. Viewed within this larger frame, we argue for a critical appraisal of the role of appeasement in navigating the sociopolitical realities in which we currently live.

**What does appeasement look like?** In describing appeasement, it's important to distinguish it from another term — fawning — with which it is sometimes used interchangeably. Although the scant literature does not offer a consensus definition, fawning has been posited as the fourth “F” in the fight-flight-freeze sequence of responses to threat. Used mostly in reference to childhood abuse, fawning tends to refer to co-dependent behavior between two people that is suggestive of an inability to set interpersonal boundaries. Although fawning can be understood as a form of appeasement because it functions to defuse threat, not all appeasement is fawning.

Appeasement is most easily recognized in frankly submissive behaviors — making oneself smaller, head bowed, averted gaze — but a closer look shows a much wider range of actions. To defuse a threat, an appeaser may not speak out or may instead take the blame by apologizing. Appeasement can emerge as friendly behavior like the laughing and joking of the Black women in the Airbnb story or as physical touch and sexual advances, the latter of which can also cross over into the submission category.

Grace (pseudonym), a 22-year old photographer, was excited for her date with Aziz Ansari, a celebrated comedic actor known for his insightful and generally enlightened take on relationships in his book *Modern Romance* and Netflix show *Master of None*. She willingly went back to his apartment, but when Ansari became sexually aggressive, she subtly and repeatedly rebuffed him by moving away, not responding to his entreaties and demands, and even asking for him

to slow down. “Most of my discomfort was expressed in me pulling away and mumbling.” At one point, she said, “I don’t want to feel forced because then I’ll hate you, and I’d rather not hate you.” Ansari slowed his pursuit only momentarily and eventually Grace performed oral sex because she felt “really pressured.” Ansari commented that it “doesn’t look like you hate me.” Grace eventually extricated herself, breaking down in tears on the cab ride home. When she shared her feelings of violation with him, Ansari was surprised that he had “misread the situation” and apologized. Her entire experience was chronicled in a much-discussed [Babe article](#) several months later. What was not named though in those ensuing discussions was the explicit role of appeasement in Grace’s experience.

Striking in the #MeToo Movement’s spotlight on survivors’ experiences of sexual violence was the shock of accused perpetrators at how differently survivors interpreted the events in question. Just like Ansari, the accused often reported that the survivor was affable and unbothered in the moment. But as Canadian equine therapist [Sarah Schlote](#) states, “Not all stillness is calm, not all compliance is consent.” And herein lies one of the key features of appeasement: its invisibility to the appeased. While overt capitulation is easy to spot, most appeasement behavior is marked by its superficial invisibility. The display of a seemingly casual smile or a nod of the head can look like consent to the person who holds more power, but the appeaser’s internal experience is dramatically different. By masking their fear and distress, the appeaser avoids calling more attention to the perceived or actual danger of their situation — the threat of physical harm, social

shaming, or economic damage. After the interaction, the divergent perspectives become obvious. The appeased reads that all is clear and fine, business as usual. The appeaser has the dual and conflicting experience of internal distress and outwardly calm acquiescence.

While appeasement is at heart a self-defensive behavior, there can be a sense of shame for not having acted in visible protest. Not being loud enough in their objections may lead the appeaser to question their own distressing experience. It took Grace a long time to validate her experience. “I was debating if this was an awkward sexual experience or sexual assault.” An appeaser’s self-doubt is magnified by the invisibility of their experience to others, especially considering that the appeased holds more power and often defines the narrative privately and publicly. Accepting that dominant narrative forcibly calms the internal tensions of confusion and doubt in the appeaser as they see themselves as wrong in their original self-appraisal and apologizes for having distress. The appeaser is now “fine” with the situation and — in an ultimate act of appeasement — now identifies with the appeased person’s perspective.

### **What are the implications of appeasement for everyday**

**life?** According to psychology researcher [Dacher Keltner](#),

“Appeasement begins when the conditions of social relations lead one individual to anticipate aggression from others.” For members of oppressed social groups, this means that expressions of modesty, politeness, agreeableness, shyness, uncertainty, or deference may instead be an attempt to deflect or prevent aggression from members

of the dominant social group. When one lives in close and direct contact with members of a dominant social group, appeasing may become so automatic that the appeaser may not even feel distressed in the moment. Instead, the cost comes later — as exhaustion, demoralization, and an erosion of one's sense of dignity and self-worth.

On the other hand, members of dominant social groups may fail to recognize appeasement from others for what it is (an attempt to defuse anticipated aggression) and instead mistake it as sincere and unforced consent. Because the appeasing behavior is not genuine agreement but false agreeableness, not voluntary respect but expected deference, the authenticity of relationships between members of dominant and subordinated social groups is compromised. [Research](#) also suggests that social power can result in a diminished capacity to read the nonverbal cues of dissent or discomfort in those with less power — as appears to have been the case for Aziz Ansari. Conversely, folks who are socialized to expect appeasing behaviors from others may come to view a failure to appease as disrespect, unfriendliness, or insolence — like the White woman in the Airbnb example at the beginning of this article.

**So what can we do?** To dismantle the mechanisms that perpetuate and enforce abusive social hierarchies, it's not enough to simply become more aware of appeasing behavior. We must act on our awareness. However, when oppressed social groups stop appeasing — individually or en masse — there are real and often dangerous consequences. While these consequences are often worth enduring in

the struggle for liberation, there are some situations where the risks of standing up are too great and the bodymind's decision to appease is the wiser choice. And there are still other contexts where, because of strong social and biological conditioning, we appease even in places where the stakes are low and we actually could object without much consequence.

These calculations are happening in our physiology and psychology simultaneously and are amenable to some conscious control. If we can be more aware (and perhaps more understanding) of our appeasement, we can begin to appraise the usefulness of our defense responses in a given situation. When appeasing is adaptive and protects us from harm, knowing that can relieve the shame and self-doubt of inaction. When appeasing is merely habitual and nonadaptive, we might want to use trauma-informed, body-based approaches to settle any unnecessary defense response. In either case, we are choosing a path to minimize the harm of living in abusive social hierarchies while saving our energy for the bigger battles; those places where we simply won't appease.

