

Pre-Attendance Assignments



Building Effective Worksite Leadership Systems

UniServ Directors are responsible for supporting the growth and development of strong local affiliates. Strong affiliates have a high ratio of engaged leaders to rank and file members and structures that allow for rapid response, relationship development and collective action. This NEA Center for Organizing training is designed to build participants' skills around leadership identification and development. They will learn how to establish differentiated and innovative structures that can increase member engagement and union presence within and across worksites.

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Why pre-attendance reading?

In the short time we are together, we will explore several examples of effective worksite leadership systems and support the tougher work of applying examples in your own contexts. Learning like this depends on participants' willingness to be open to seeing how new ideas or structures developed in one context and scale can work with "adjusted implementation" in your own specific context. It also means that we will depend not just on the trainers for content delivery or expertise – but will also structure the learning so that each person's own expertise can add to the learning. This reading package is designed to get you thinking about ways that unions of various size and needs have implemented leadership structures designed to build power and engagement. We believe that this set of pre-reading will help you transition away from the day to day responsibilities of UniServ Director work and move into the role of adult learner.

What are you asking me to do?

In this package you will find several articles that **we will use in our training**. Based on past-participant feedback, we are providing them in advance so that you can be prepared for our conversations. Each of the articles are an example of how leadership and structures have been designed and used to the benefit of the union. We have selected these because we think that they outline important issues and themes we will be exploring that intersect with your work. We ask that you complete this PRIOR to attending the Building Effective Leadership and Worksite Structures event. They have been curated to show a range of starting points and development.

As you read each article the following set of framing questions should help you make connections:

- What are the ways this example intersects with my daily work as a UniServ Director?
- As a UniServ Director, what would be my role in supporting the development of this example?
- What would I need to know to implement this example?

What should I come prepared to do?

The purpose of this focused academy is more than providing content. It is also a place for you to bring a problem of practice that the development of effective leadership and worksite structures could address. In UniServ work, we don't always get an opportunity to work and learn together. A portion of this academy will be devoted to providing a space for you to do that so that you return ready to apply your new learning.

What are the Scenarios ?

Scenarios are a strong adult learning tool that allow diverse groups to apply new learning. Scenarios we will use have been included here so that you can read them ahead of time – if that is your style. We recognize that some people prefer materials like this in advance.

INTRODUCTION TO ENGAGEMENT ORGANIZING

Organizing and Leadership Practices that Lead to People-Powered Change

OBJECTIVES:

- Think critically about organizing, leadership, and relational power
- Understand the basics of interdependent leadership in contrast to other leadership models
- Overview the 5 organizing practices of interdependent leadership: Story, Relationships, Structure, Strategy and Action

ORGANIZING IS:

Identifying leaders and coordinating them in leadership teams,
Building community and commitment around that leadership,
Building power from the resources of that community,
Using that power strategically to make concrete change in the world.

WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?

“Leaders are those who take responsibility for enabling others to achieve shared purpose in the face of uncertainty”

In order to launch a new campaign, or strengthen an existing one, your job as an organizer is to identify and recruit others to work with you to build a campaign powerful enough to win change.

But what type of leader should you be, and what are you looking for in others? Sometimes we think the leader is the person everyone goes to, like this “I’m the leader!” approach.

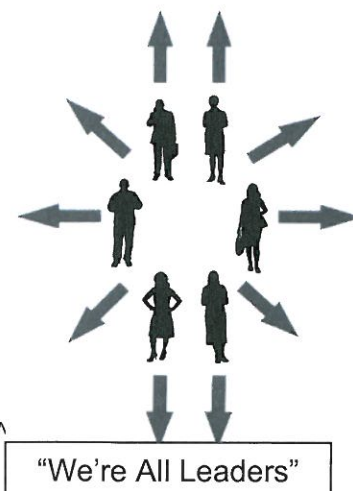
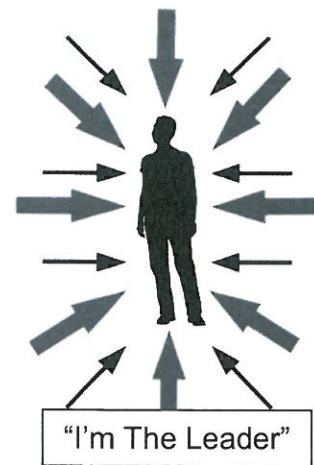
But what does it feel like to be the “leader” in the middle? What does it feel like to be the arrow that can’t get through? What happens if the “leader” in the middle drops out?

Sometimes we go to the other extreme and think we don’t need a “leader.” We can all lead, because “we’re all leaders!”

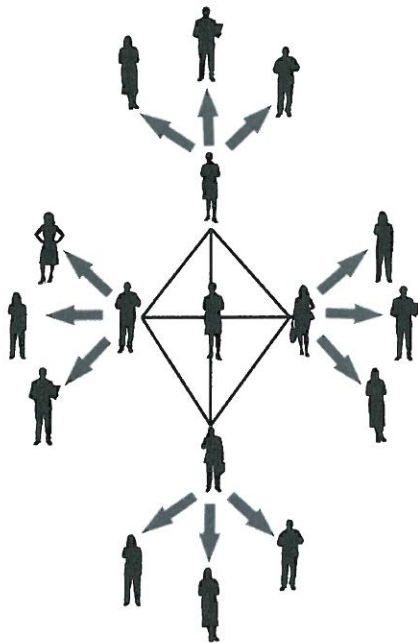
Sometimes this works. But who’s responsible for coordinating everyone? And who’s responsible for pushing the whole group forward when you can’t reach a decision? Who takes ultimate responsibility for the outcome?

Organizers are those who ultimately are held accountable for meeting campaign goals. However, organizers are also

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responsible for coordinating and enabling others to take leadership. This requires delegating responsibility (rather than tasks), holding others accountable for carrying out that responsibility, and supporting them in their work.



Interdependent Leadership

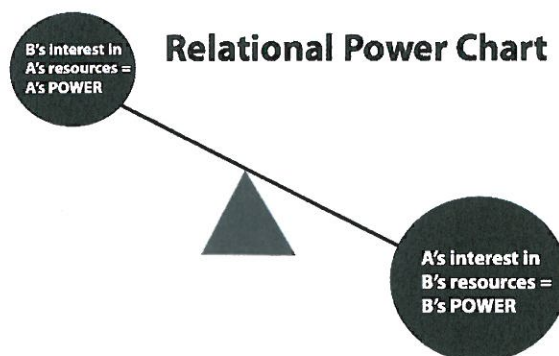
Remember, we don't yet have all the leadership we need in order to win the change we want to see. An organizer's job is to reach out and develop leaders in your community who can help you recruit and coordinate others. They may not be people others usually see as leaders, but they are people committed to change, willing to invite others to join them in the hard work of moving a campaign forward.

These leaders will be the backbone of your local campaign. You must be able to trust them to delegate responsibility to other dedicated, reliable people, and to follow through on commitments. You may be the leader in the middle, or part of a leadership team in the middle, guiding others' efforts and being held accountable for outcomes, but you will be deeply reliant on your relationships with others for success.

WHAT IS POWER?

Organizing is about turning the resources we have into the power we need to win the change we want. So what is power?

Richard Emerson argues that power is not a thing, an attribute, a quality, a characteristic or a trait -- it is a relationship. Power is the influence you have if my interest in your resources is greater than your interest in my resources: you have power over me if I need you more than you need me.



You can uncover the power relations by asking, and getting the answers to, four questions to “help track down the power”:

- What are YOUR interests? What change do you want?
- Who holds the decision-making power or resources you need to meet your interests?
- What are THEIR interests?
- How do THEY need YOU? What resources do you hold which other actors need to meet their own interests?

Our power comes from relationships with people. When we organize to build power we do so with the belief that the same people who need change can organize their own resources into the power they need to create change. Marshall Ganz says, “The unique role of organizing is to enable the people who need or want the change to be the authors of the change, because that addresses the causes of the problem (powerlessness in one form or another), not only the problem.”

So organizing is not only a commitment to identify more leaders, but also a commitment to engage those leaders in a particular type of fight: in nonviolent action to build the power to create the change we need in our lives. Organizing power begins with the choice and commitment made by the first person who wants to make something happen. Without this commitment, there are no resources with which to begin. Commitment is only observable through action. The work of organizers begins with their acceptance of their responsibility to challenge others to join them in action.

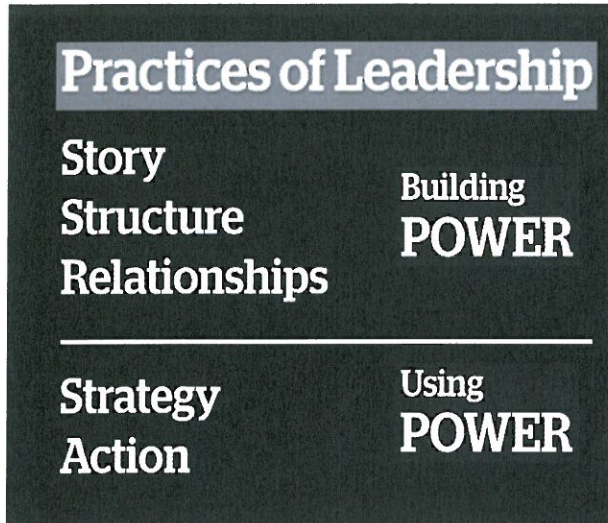
WHAT IS CHANGE?

Change is not inherently good or bad—it’s a break in routine that sends us in a new direction. We all have regular routines in our daily lives. However, sometimes those routines are inherently problematic, like sending our kids to schools that aren’t good enough for them, or working for less pay than we deserve, or putting deadly chemicals in our air and water.

It takes motivation, focused application of resources, and mobilization of others to break these routines and forge a new path forward. The purpose of organizing is to build that focus, the collective resources, and the community to make change.

The challenge of making change is to always measure its concrete impact in our lives. At the end of our campaign have we only changed policy or opinion? Or have we actually improved our schools, do we actually have safer workplaces, do we really have cleaner air, soil and water? And do we have new capacity within our community to win further change?

WHICH ORGANIZING AND LEADERSHIP PRACTICES LEAD TO CHANGE?



Building power requires learning the craft of organizing. The five practices of organizing listed below create change in individuals, in how groups operate, and in how the world looks, feels, and is. As leaders, we can use these key practices to enable others in our organizations to act together with clear purpose, active participation, understanding and initiative, and accomplish shared goals towards creating the measurable change we seek.

1. Creating Shared Story

Organizing is rooted in shared values expressed as public narrative. Public narrative is how we communicate our values through stories, bringing alive the motivation that is a necessary precondition for changing the world. Through public narrative, we tell the story of why we are called to leadership. Public Narrative has three elements:

“Story of Self” illustrates the values that move YOU to act—what calls you to leadership.

“Story of Us” illustrates the values and shared experiences embedded in our community calling us to collective action

“Story of Now” illustrates the urgent challenges to those values and clarifies why action must be taken NOW (not tomorrow, not the next day). The Story of Now also paints a picture of the hopeful vision of what we can achieve together and invites others to join us in taking specific action towards that vision immediately.

2. Creating Shared Relational Commitment

Organizing is based on relationships and creating mutual commitments to work together. It is the process of association—not simply aggregation—that makes a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Through association we can learn to recast our individual interests as common interests, allowing us to envision objectives that we can use our combined resources to achieve. And because it makes us more likely to act to assert those interests, relationship building goes far beyond delivering a message, extracting a contribution, or soliciting a vote. Relationships built as a result of one-to-one and small group meetings create the foundation for local campaign teams, and they are rooted in commitments people make to each other, not simply commitment to an idea, task, or issue.

3. Creating Shared Structure

A team leadership structure leads to effective local organizing that integrates local action with broader regional or national purpose. Volunteer efforts often flounder due to a failure to develop reliable, consistent, and creative local leaders. Structured leadership teams encourage stability, motivation, creativity, and accountability – and use volunteer time, skills, and effort

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effectively. They create the structure within which energized volunteers can accomplish challenging work. Effective teams strive to achieve three criteria of effectiveness: meeting the change objectives of those they serve, learning how to be more effective at meeting outcomes over time, and enhancing the learning and growth of individuals on the team. Team members work to put in place five conditions that will lead to effectiveness: real team (bounded, stable and interdependent), engaging direction, enabling roles, clear ground rules, and a diverse team with the skills and talents needed to do the work.

4. Creating Shared Strategy

Although based on broad values, effective organizing campaigns learn to focus on a clear strategic objective, a way to turn those values into action and to unleash creative deliberation (for example elect a President; desegregate buses in Montgomery, Alabama; getto 100% clean electricity). Statewide campaigns locate responsibility for statewide strategy at the top (or at the center), but are able to “chunk out” strategic objectives in time (deadlines) and space (local areas) as a campaign, allowing significant local responsibility for figuring out how to achieve those objectives. Responsibility for strategizing local objectives empowers, motivates and invests local teams. This dual structure allows the movement as a whole to be relentlessly well oriented and fosters the personal motivation of volunteers to be fully engaged.

5. Creating Shared Measurable Action

Organizing outcomes must be clear, measurable, and specific if progress is to be evaluated, accountability practiced, and strategy adapted based on experience. Such measures include: volunteers recruited, money raised, people at a meeting, voters contacted, pledge cards signed, laws passed, etc. Although electoral campaigns enjoy the advantage of very clear outcome measures, any effective organizing drive must come up with the equivalent. Regular reporting of progress to goal creates opportunity for feedback, learning, and adaptation. Training is provided for all skills (holding house meetings, phone banking, canvassing, etc) to carry out the program. New media may help enable reporting, feedback, and coordination. Transparency exists as to how individuals, groups, and the campaign as a whole are doing on progress to goal.

Have you ever been part of an organization or “disorganization” described by the words on the left? The difference between that and the organization described on the right is not any particular issue, any particular demographic or any particular geography. It’s about the practice of leadership from the inside out. This training is structured around teaching these practices, and supporting you in practicing them.

DISORGANIZATION	INTERDEPENDENT LEADERSHIP CREATES	ORGANIZATION
Drift	Shared Story	Purpose
Passive	Shared Relational Commitment	Participation
Confused	Shared Structure	Understanding
Reactive	Shared Strategy	Initiative
Inaction	Shared Measurable Action	Change

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LABOR NOTES

Indiana Teachers 'Go Green' To Track Member Sign-Up

April 13, 2018 / [Samantha Winslowenlarge](#) or [shrink](#) text [login](#) or [register](#) to comment



Indiana teachers have developed a new system to track member sign-up.

What will happen to public sector unions after the Supreme Court rules on the Janus v. AFSCME case this spring? Indiana teachers are already there. Slammed by a “right to work” law in 1996 and a new barrage of attacks in 2011, the teachers experienced what many unions are afraid of—a big drop in membership.

But the Indiana State Teachers Association didn’t roll over and give up after that. The union developed a tracking system called “Go Green” to help local leaders get membership back up.

It’s working. The first year of the program, the union narrowed its deficit between existing members lost to retirement and new members gained. The second year, it broke even. The third year, statewide membership increased.

This is in a legal environment that’s worse than right to work. Budget cuts in 2011 were paired with sweeping restrictions that kneecapped unions. Teachers bargain over only wages and benefits, and only between September and November of each year. Past that, impasse is declared and a third-party factfinder decides the final agreement.

Even under these circumstances, membership rates matter. “You will have a superintendent tell you, ‘You don’t even represent 50 percent of the teachers, why should I care what you are asking for?’” said ISTA representative Heidi Miller.

Case in point: the union local in Maconaquah was able to fight off a benefits cut after increasing its membership from 58 to 70 percent in two years.

MANY HANDS, LIGHT WORK

So how does it work? The heart of the “Go Green” program is getting teachers in every school involved in signing up members.

Schools below 50 percent union membership are flagged as red. Schools at 50 percent or higher are coded yellow, and those at 70 percent or higher are green. The color scheme helps officers and association reps (stewards) prioritize which schools, and even which parts of buildings, need the most help.

Miller coaches local leaders on the system. “We’ve encouraged them not to put the burden on the elected leaders, not just the association reps or officers, but to spread it throughout the membership,” she said.

Eastern Howard Education Association, which represents a small cluster of schools north of Indianapolis, was at 56 percent membership when it launched the program. “That was a little scary,” said President Shawn Carpenter.

So a handful of officers and reps formed a membership committee and divided up the list of nonmembers. Each person took a first assignment—two or three people to talk to—based on years of experience, department, and who they knew best.

They’ve kept following up and working their lists ever since. A year in, Eastern Howard’s membership is up to 70 percent.

Carpenter said this success comes from tapping into existing relationships—who’s friends with who. One-on-one conversations are key, she said: “Asking in person, it’s harder to say no.”

The committee doesn’t leave people with assignments for long. Members text each other, “How’d it go?” When someone declines to sign, they talk it over: “What was holding this person back? Is it something we can fix?” The committee builds in a second and third attempt, often sending back another member with a different relationship or approach.

Through member sign-up conversations, the Eastern Howard union discovered a unifying issue: a point system required teachers to meet a bunch of unrealistic criteria based on attendance and degrees in order to get a raise. In last year’s bargaining, the union won a pay scale instead.

LIVING WITHOUT DUES DEDUCTION

A popular line of anti-union attack by state legislators is to ban employers from deducting dues from members’ paychecks. Dues deduction is banned for Michigan teachers, for instance, and for the whole public sector in Wisconsin.

Indiana has no such law at this point—but the teachers union opted to stop payroll deduction anyway. When new members sign up, they give the union their bank or credit card information to process dues directly.

This preempts a fight with hostile legislators and keeps the union's focus on talking to teachers. It also takes control of union funds out of the hands of employers.

EARLY AND OFTEN

To create an environment where people want to join, you have to stay in constant communication, said Brad Bennett, president of the local in the Western School District.

The goal is to draw in potential members by "making them feel like they are missing out in not being in our association," Bennett said. For instance, members get updates about bargaining and about meetings with the principal to address problems.

When the Western district wanted to extend the school day without added compensation, the union packed 80 members (out of 180 district teachers) into a school board meeting and won a pay raise.

New teachers are particularly important to reach, to frame the importance of joining the union from day one. Ideally the first ask comes from someone on the membership committee who is also relatively new, "so they see other people like themselves as members," said Miller. "Are they getting ready to buy their first house or have their first child, versus a teacher who is close to retirement?"

Carpenter says her union also tries to match up each new teacher with someone from the same department who can act as a lasting bridge to the union and perhaps offer ongoing mentorship.

In larger districts, teachers set up a separate membership committee for each school. Each year there's a big beginning-of-the-school-year membership push, because the state calculates local membership percentages on September 15. Under a law passed in 2017, members in any district below 50 percent get a mailing describing how to initiate the process to decertify their union.

But the focus on building membership continues year-round. "We don't let it die after the beginning of the year," said Sue Ellen Sopher, local president for the Maconaquah district.

A version of this article appeared in [Labor Notes #468](#). Don't miss an issue, [subscribe today](#).



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<http://www.labornotes.org/2018/04/indiana-teachers-%E2%80%98go-green%E2%80%99-track-member-sign>

Uncommon CORE

BY

MICAH UETRICH

The 2012 Chicago Teachers Union strike would have never come to be without the patient building of a radical formation within the union, the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators.

This article is from *Class Action: An Activist Teacher's Handbook*, a joint project of *Jacobin* and the Chicago Teachers Union's CORE. The booklet can be downloaded for free, and print copies are available for a limited time.

More on CORE and the CTU can be found in Micah Uetrict's *Strike for America: Chicago Teachers Against Austerity*, part of Verso's *Jacobin* Series.

The Chicago Teachers Union has become recognized as vibrant, democratic, and militant in a country where many unions are more likely to be engaged in the organizational equivalent of curling up into the fetal position. Unions have been battered by decades of attacks from big business and both political parties, yet they've been largely unwilling to remake themselves into key players in a broader social movement nor to educate and empower their membership.

But more attention has been paid to the union's recent struggles than how the CTU became the kind of union that it is — one that could take on the right flank of the Democratic Party and free market reformers, go on strike when such a tactic was largely seen as alienating and counterproductive, and lead a movement for educational justice alongside parents and community members in a city long known as an incubator for neoliberal education reform. This transformation was accomplished through the rise of a radical rank-and-file caucus — the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE).

Unlike previous CTU leaderships and the current national union leadership, the CTU under CORE adopted an uncompromisingly confrontational stance against free market education reform. They refused to enter into a

partnership with neoliberal Democrats like Mayor Emanuel and foundations like the Gates Foundations, which have used seemingly benevolent nonprofit donations to aggressively pursue a free market agenda in public schools.

CORE also made good on Lewis's campaign promise to "change this into a democratic union responsive to its members" — a transformation that lies at the heart of the union's ability to push for a broad educational justice agenda in Chicago.

The union educated and activated its membership, involving them in an internal democratic process to an extent that, for the CTU, was unprecedented. Leadership broadened the rights and responsibilities of members in the governing House of Delegates, and fourteen member-led committees were tasked with central roles in the union's day-to-day functioning. Contract committees were set up at each school, and each committee member was responsible for communicating with ten other educators face-to-face, including school employees like cafeteria workers who were members of other unions.

The creation of an organizing department, which had never before existed in the union, was one of the most crucial changes CORE instituted. The department was tasked with continued organizing alongside community groups and expanding the union's work with community members. Through it, the CTU transformed itself from a service-model union — where the union's primary purpose is to provide services for their members like representing them in grievances against school management — to a union where the staff's principal task is facilitating the development of members so they can be at the helm of the union themselves and advance a broadly progressive agenda, in tandem with organized communities.

The difference could be seen in the way union members began interacting with parents. In one school on the Northwest Side, for example, CPS administration attempted to co-locate a charter school in the same building as a middle school. In past years, according to union organizer Matt Luskin, the union would have mounted a legal battle with CPS to halt the co-location and hoped for the best; the fight would have been largely in the union's hands rather than parents' and teachers'. But CTU staff "encouraged the teachers themselves to take control of the situation by organizing with parents," Luskin says.

Teachers and parents organized together to reach out to other schools in the neighborhood, meeting with their Local School Councils, democratically elected bodies of parents and community members in every Chicago school. Eventually, they held a protest opposing the charter's opening that drew several hundred people.

"The parents didn't see themselves as particularly anti-charter school, or even pro-union, on the front end," Luskin says. But parents realized the charter's construction would interrupt their children's education, and, once built, the charter would undercut their neighborhood school. "And then by the end of it, they were very anti-charter and very pro-union."

In another case, three elementary teachers worked closely with parents around increasing special education funding for their children, pointing out potential violations of laws around special ed students. The school's principal, threatened by such agitation that cast her management in a poor light, gave unsatisfactory ratings to all three teachers — putting their future teaching careers in serious jeopardy.

"In the past," Luskin says, "the union would have said, 'Well, you can file a grievance'" — leaving the teachers to passively await the outcome while union staff handled the fight. Instead, teachers organized house meetings with parents, who strongly supported the teachers. Soon, the teachers accompanied a group of forty parents to a meeting of the Local School Council to issue an official rebuke of the principal. The teachers' ratings were eventually restored, and the principal transferred to another school.

The union's organizing department also trained rank-and-file members in organizing tactics and educated them on the city's major public policy issues. Members of the House of Delegates, the union's representative body of teachers, received training in "bread-and-butter" issues like enforcing the contract's provisions, but also subjects beyond the classroom like fighting school closures. The department started a summer internship organizing program where teachers learned about the city's tax increment financing (TIF) program, a shadowy financing scheme controlled by the mayor that has been used to divert public funds from public institutions like schools and libraries to major corporations in the city. The teachers then knocked on educators' doors across the city, teaching them about TIFs.

Critical to the CTU's success have been the centrality of rank-and-file members increasingly carrying out the union's work and their organizing with parents for a mutually beneficial agenda. The former helped lead to 90 percent of all CTU members voting to strike and a city awash in red-shirted CTU educators during the strike; the latter helped lead to overwhelming numbers of public school parents and the Chicago population as a whole siding with the teachers during the strike rather than Mayor Emanuel.

Chicago is the birthplace of American teacher unionism — Local 1 of the American Federation of Teachers — as well as an historic home of rank-and-file teacher activism stretching back to the early twentieth century. The United Progressive Caucus (UPC) was a part of that history, formed as a combination of several racial justice caucuses by rank-and-file educators of color in the early 1970s. The UPC ran the union nearly uninterrupted from 1972 to 2010, leading the union through five strikes over the course of a decade and a half and winning sizable wage and benefit gains for CTU members — even at times when much of labor was losing ground — due to the leadership's close collaboration with the city's mayors. The caucus's leadership eventually drifted towards narrower goals of improving pay and working conditions for teachers (without engaging significantly with parents and community groups) and a top-down style of governance. Taking up an agenda that could be beneficial to students and teachers was nowhere on the table.

As with the rest of the American labor movement, the returns on that strategy eventually disappeared. Economic gains eroded as the city dug its heels in at the bargaining table in the 1990s, demanding concessions and changes that would weaken the union, while power (and pay) remained congealed at the union's top. Similar stories could be found throughout the American labor movement in that era, but the CTU's history of rank-and-file agitation and relatively open internal structures would lead to a successful challenge from liberal educators.

In the 2001 union election, Chicago teachers, fed up with several poor contracts in a row, voted the Proactive Chicago Teachers (PACT) caucus into power, unseating UPC president Tom Reece. Debbie Lynch, an elementary school teacher and longtime UPC critic, ran on a platform of ending corruption within the union, increasing the union's role in training teachers, and restoring bargaining rights over issues like class sizes that had been lost in the 1990s.

PACT's election brought a shift toward more liberal concerns, but the longtime top-down governing style, with the union's power seen as coming from its shrewd leaders rather than engaged members, remained unchanged. Support for Lynch quickly waned after she, too, negotiated a concessionary contract: teachers ousted her after only one term, reelecting a UPC slate.

As their power and compensation eroded, many Chicago teachers were angry with their union; like any angry electorate, they again tossed the bums out. But like Lynch and Reece, newly elected UPC president Marilyn Stewart also oversaw

the negotiation of an unpopular contract in 2007. Membership again rebelled, with some members actually burning copies of the contract outside a press conference after, according to several accounts, Stewart asked for the “yeses” in a contract vote at a House of Delegates meeting, then ran out of the meeting before the “no” vote could be called to declare to reporters that a contract had been settled.

Throughout this period, Chicago teachers expressed their anger by replacing and re-replacing union leaders. But none of the various leadership shifts changed the union’s engagement strategy toward members or the broader community. There was no bottom-up approach, centered on the members themselves and allied strongly with a citywide movement for educational justice.

During the union’s leadership upheavals, Chicago had become a testing ground for free market education reform. CPS CEO Arne Duncan (now Secretary of Education under President Obama) and Mayor Richard M. Daley introduced Renaissance 2010, a 2004 program to shut down and “turn around” sixty to seventy schools deemed low-performing and under-utilized by firing the entire staff and converting the majority into charter schools. A small group of rank-and-file teachers began organizing against Renaissance 2010.

Community groups in neighborhoods of color had been organizing against the closures and turnarounds, but the union would not. The leadership appeared resigned to the implementation of free market education reform, still unwilling to mount a fight but continuing to reap the benefits of elected office. Jackson Potter and Jesse Sharkey, history teachers at South and North Side high schools, respectively, took matters into their own hands, making presentations to teachers and community members about the plan, recruiting teachers to join them, and joining the community-led organizing already underway.

They and a growing group of educators attended closure hearings and recruited parents and other teachers for the citywide movement against corporate reform.

The teachers were a loose group hoping to push their leadership to take action, but through organizing alongside community groups, momentum began to build for the teachers to form a formal caucus to run in union elections. Community members were the first to encourage teacher activists to seriously consider running for office. The teachers’ deep connections to the organizing initiated by community groups would ultimately legitimize the union in the eyes of community members — they understood the teachers did not simply aim to take power for themselves, but wished to make the union’s agenda mutually beneficial for students and teachers alike.

As the organization grew larger, union action against closings remained lackluster. At one point, CTU leadership publicly endorsed a plan designed by Toledo’s teachers union leadership to fire 10 percent of all teachers in the system — confirming to many that working within the existing leadership would get the activist teachers nowhere. Rather than confront free market education reformers, the union’s leadership had adopted much of the reformers’ rhetoric.

The teachers pushed forward, now calling themselves the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators. They held community forums on anti-public education attacks and continued working with community organizations. They held study groups on texts like Naomi Klein’s *The Shock Doctrine*, which one staffer described as “a light bulb going off” for teachers. At a nominating convention in August 2009, the caucus chose longtime chemistry teacher Karen Lewis as their presidential candidate. Shortly before the election, CORE organized a massive rally in downtown Chicago with thousands of teachers. Union leadership attempted to take credit, but teachers knew who had organized it. In the May 2010 union elections, CORE triumphed.

Immediately after the news of the victory, president-elect Karen Lewis outlined her and her caucus’s vision of a unionism that would confront the forces of neoliberal education reform.

“Corporate America sees K–12 public education as a \$380 billion trust that, up until the last ten or fifteen years, they haven’t had a sizable piece of,” Lewis said. Referencing the CTU’s leaders, she said, “Our union . . . didn’t point out this simple reality: what drives school reform is a singular focus on profit. Not teaching, not learning — profit.” That profit motive would be directly confronted by the union: “This election shows the unity of 30,000 educators standing strong to put business in its place: out of our schools,” Lewis said.

Through a radical caucus of rank-and-file teachers in strong partnership with community organizations, the CTU became a totally different kind of union. That transformation was years in the making — indicating that there probably are not any shortcuts to building fighting unions like the one the CTU has become in recent years. No teachers would have walked off the job, shut down downtown Chicago in a sea of 30,000 strikers and supporters, or confronted the neoliberal consensus on education without years of patient internal organizing and educating. And if that organizing had remained limited to Chicago educators, rather than being rooted in community-based fights by parents and community members against free market education reform, the union would never have been able to successfully fight back.

The 2012 strike was a victory for the teachers and against free market reform, but the Chicago Public Schools have still suffered. The contract negotiated during the strike contained numerous concessions (though less than the Board of Education wanted). Immediately after the strike, Mayor Emanuel and the Board of Education ignored massive public protest and shut down fifty schools, the largest spate of school closures in American history. And a crushing round of budget cuts swept the district last summer as the district switched to per-pupil funding — leading to \$162 million in classroom-level budget cuts and over 3,000 teacher layoffs.

Rank-and-file caucuses like CORE aren’t panaceas for all that ails Chicago teachers and students, of course. But teachers should look to Chicago for some ideas about how to transform their unions. Fending off the attacks on public education will require more than new faces in union leadership — it will take a transformation from the bottom up that fosters genuine alliances with community members and parents.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Chicago teachers and support staff held a rally at Columbus Park next to DePriest Elementary School on October 22 in the South Austin neighborhood of Chicago. Photo by Joeff Davis.

How Chicago Teachers Built Power Between Strikes

It's easy to glamorize the seeming spontaneity of a "strike wave" and miss the long processes of union organizing.

by Sarah Jaffe
October 22, 2019

The Chicago Teachers Union's 2012 strike changed the labor movement in the United States. Not only did it revive the strike—years before the [current "wave"](#) of public school walkouts began—but it brought to us a new vocabulary for how to think about public schools, public sector unions, and collective bargaining. Now that CTU is once again striking in 2019, one can see how the ground has shifted. Way back in 2011, as protests rippled around the world and landed in Wisconsin, where public sector workers fought against Scott Walker's anti-union bill, political analyst Matt Stoller [suggested](#) that "People might only like unions when they see strikes, otherwise all they hear about is backroom negotiations." Years later, unions in the United States are at their highest approval rating in years, [up 16 points](#) since 2009 to 64 percent, after multiple teachers strikes, the Fight for \$15, major strikes at Verizon and now General Motors, and more. The strike

major strikes at Verizon and now General Motors, and more. The strike matters, and the CTU deserves credit for reviving it, as [I wrote recently](#). As of this writing, the 2019 Chicago Teachers Union strike has entered its sixth day. On the picket lines, [32,500 teachers](#) and support staff—including bus aides, custodians, and special education classroom aides represented by the Service Employees International Union, SEIU Local 73—are once again demanding improvements to the schools that go far beyond raises.

But we should also take a close look at what CTU has done in-between strikes, because it's been far more than just backroom negotiations. We should remember the hard work of organizing to become a fighting union with a razor-sharp political analysis—a yearslong process that saw the union overcome setbacks to defeat a popular mayor (Rahm Emanuel) linked to a popular President (Barack Obama).

Before the CTU strike, teachers were often pilloried as greedy, selfish, and lazy, demanding raises while their students suffered. After 2012, we became accustomed to hearing teachers say they were fighting for the schools their students deserve, directly challenging the language of “care” put forth by hand-wringing mayors and school board officials.

We should remember the hard work of organizing to become a fighting union with a razor-sharp political analysis.

“Teachers have been an easy target, primarily because we’re not used to fighting,” then-CTU president Karen Lewis [told](#) Josh Eidelson and me in 2013. “We’re used to saying, ‘Whatever you want me to do, I’ll do it because we all care about what’s best for kids.’” But the CTU turned that message on its head, Lewis explained, arguing that, in fact, it cared much more about public school students than wealthy elites who didn’t bother to send their own children to Chicago’s public schools. According to Illinois state law the only [“mandatory”](#) things the CTU can

According to Illinois state law, the only [mandatory](#) things the CTU can bring to the bargaining table are wages, benefits, and working time. Yet from the moment that the Caucus of Rank and File Educators took power within the union in 2010—spurring other reform caucuses within unions around the country, many of which also took power—they knew that their fight was [not just for raises](#) but against neoliberalism itself. It was a fight to change politics in Chicago and in the country; it was big, and it was going to require allies. That meant figuring out a way to bring the community's issues to the bargaining table, in what we [now call](#) “bargaining for the common good.”

This year, the union's fight is explicitly around [housing justice](#). In a district with 17,000 homeless students, this is not, as the teachers have repeatedly pointed out, an issue that can be separated from that of education. Students whose home situations are unstable show up in no shape to learn, and the teacher might be the only one who knows what a kid is going through. Yet that same teacher will be held accountable for the student's failure to ace a state test. So the CTU, as teacher and bargaining team member Kenzo Shibata says, wants the district to do more for those kids. And they want it in their contract.

New Mayor Lori Lightfoot, though, doesn't want to do that. “She was quoted as saying ‘I told them that I was going to put it in writing,’ in terms of hiring more nurses and counselors, but she actually didn't present us anything in writing,” Shibata tells me in a phone interview.

The union's demands, in other words, are about much more than what are often called “common-denominator issues” for the working class. While there are still some on the left and in the labor movement who argue for such an approach, common-denominator issues often become least-common-denominator issues, meaning anything that won't

offend a perceived white working-class Trump voter.

Organizing is slow and messy, and most of the CTU's between-strikes work has not garnered national headlines.

The CTU explicitly rejects such an approach, placing race and gender in the center of its fight. When, after the 2012 strike, Rahm Emanuel struck back by closing [forty-nine schools](#), most with predominantly black student populations, the union focused on the historic inequities in the schools, noting that again and again, “reforms” to Chicago schools come on the backs of black and brown students. The union fought alongside parents to keep those schools open. And it remembers those moments in the current fight.

“We’re really trying to use the contract negotiations to right the historical wrongs of the Chicago Public Schools,” Shibata says.

The union did that not by creating a cult of personality around the charismatic Lewis, but by delegating and distributing power and leadership across the union, spending money on an [organizing department](#) to make sure members were all involved in making decisions. It’s an approach adopted by other reformers around the country, in places like Los Angeles, where the United Teachers Los Angeles successfully [won its strike](#) earlier this year. It’s an approach that has rooted the union in neighborhoods around the city, with rank-and-file members working with the parents and students to make demands.

And it’s work. Organizing is slow and messy; that most of the CTU’s between-strikes work has not garnered national headlines the way the 2012 strike and now today’s strike have means that a lot of it has been overlooked.

It’s easy to glamorize the seeming spontaneity of a “strike wave” and miss the long processes of rebuilding that have gone into making the

MCEA Members -- Leading in Our Schools

A Vision for Teacher Leadership

A Broader Mission for the Union

Public support for – and expectations of – public education continue to change rapidly. Public school teachers and their unions are being attacked in the media and in statehouses throughout the country. State associations that had fought hard for bargaining and representation rights have had them stripped by adversarial governors and legislatures.

The way we have always done things will no longer be sufficient to meet the new challenges we face in our public schools. For MCEA, this means putting the quality of teaching and learning at the center of our agenda. We understand that our members' futures depend on the success of our schools.

The Role of Teacher Leadership

MCEA believes that *teacher leadership* is an indispensable ingredient both for school success and to ensure quality in our profession. We believe that those who teach every day are in the best position to define and guide decisions about teaching and learning in schools. When teachers lead, it should not be for the purpose of being promoted into school administration but rather to grow the capacity of the teacher workforce to improve teaching and learning. There must be opportunities for teachers to guide, direct and influence other teachers to achieve a common vision of effective teaching—and to be acknowledged, affirmed and compensated for their leadership as *teachers*.

Teacher leadership means that teachers are empowered to take responsibility for the quality of their work, the profession and the school. To accept these responsibilities, teacher leaders must be enabled and trained to participate in school decision-making processes, to represent the interests of their colleagues, and to organize others to help advocate for change.

MCEA has worked hard to establish and enhance a range of teacher leadership opportunities within MCPS. Through contract negotiations we created the Elementary Team Leader position. We have continued to improve the salary supplements for it, as well as for secondary Resource Teachers. MCEA led the way in defining and establishing the positions of Staff Development Teacher and Consulting Teacher. And now (through development of a 'Career Lattice'), we are working to expand opportunities for teachers to take on responsibilities in their schools beyond their own classroom - without having to leave the teaching profession for administration.

Traditional teacher leadership roles include those of Resource Teachers (RTs) and Team Leaders (TLs). The best RTs and TLs are effective advocates for school improvement and for the needs of their departments and teams.

The roles of Elected Faculty Reps and MCEA Building Reps broaden the opportunities for teacher leadership and bring with them an increased level of accountability and responsibility to staff, since both positions are ultimately elected by and accountable to, their teaching colleagues.

Teacher Leaders as Union Leaders

Certain teacher leadership roles are naturally more aligned with union leadership than others. For instance, the position of Elected Faculty Representative (EFR) was created through

negotiations over the MCEA contract in order to improve faculty involvement in local school decision-making. While not officially part of MCEA's governance structure, EFRs are critically important teacher leaders with responsibilities to their colleagues, their school and their profession.

Elected Faculty Reps to School Leadership Teams are unique teacher leadership opportunities because these positions are elected by — and accountable to — their colleagues on a school faculty. At its core, the EFR position is accountable to the faculty in ways that other teacher leadership roles are not.

The role of the EFR has been further enhanced by the creation of *Triads* in each school. A triad is composed of the principal, EFR, and Elected Supporting Services Rep (ESR). Each triad is charged with developing a communications plan and feedback loop to ensure that all staff have input to the decision-making process. They also jointly identify topics for the leadership team to consider, something that had been missing from previous descriptions of the collaborative processes.

The Triad is not simply a problem-solving process. Rather, their regular meetings are intended to be “protected time” for co-planning, relationship building and improving communications.

MCEA's *Union Reps* (also know as building reps or delegates) remain at the heart of union leadership in schools. However, even Union Reps must begin to re-conceptualize their role in the schools. MCEA Reps must represent not only individual members, but also the best interests of the faculty as a whole. They must be advocates not only for the improvement of teaching and learning conditions, but also for the teaching profession itself and for school improvement.

The Elected Faculty Rep and the MCEA Building Rep can be the same person or can be different people. Both are elected and that decision is up to the faculty. Both need to be respected by their colleagues and by the administration. In some schools, the faculty chooses the same person. In other schools the focus on sharing leadership responsibilities results in the election of different people.

Elected Faculty Representatives To School Leadership Teams

Background

The EFR position was established by the 2004 contract negotiations between MCEA and the Board of Education. It is an outgrowth of many years of work by MCEA and the Board to improve labor-management relations within local schools and provide for faculty involvement in school-level decision-making.

Previously, "issues and matters of concern" to school faculties were addressed through negotiated structures known as first as "Liaison Committees" and later as "Faculty-Administration Collaboration Committees (FACCs). But confusion persisted over the role and responsibilities of FACCs compared to school leadership teams (Instructional Councils, etc.). Ultimately, in the 2004 negotiations, the bargaining teams agreed to transcend this dual process and to fully align labor-management problem solving as an integral part of the work of school leadership teams. The result was the new EFR position, complete with salary supplement and summer supplemental employment days.

Official MCPS Position Description of EFRs

"As a full member of the school's leadership team (the core leadership group involved in local school decision-making), the Faculty Representative works with other leadership team members collaborating with school administrators. In this role, the Faculty Representative, along with other leadership team members, serves as a communicator and liaison with the school's faculty. The Faculty Representative helps to facilitate and solve problems through the leadership team. In addition, the Faculty Representative shares responsibility for ensuring effective communication between the administration and the faculty and for increasing faculty involvement in, and ownership of, local school improvement. Faculty Representatives are selected annually by the faculty, and receive a salary supplement and summer planning day(s), in accordance with the Agreement between the Montgomery County Education Association and the Board of Education.

Knowledge, Abilities, and Skills:

- Has the respect of both one's teaching colleagues and the school administration
- Demonstrates skill in working effectively with people
- Demonstrates effective problem-solving skills
- Is committed to improving student learning
- Is committed to continuous improvement and the development of a professional learning community
- Is willing to participate fully in the Leadership Team and its activities
- Is reflective and able to see multiple perspectives
- Sees the big picture
- Understands countywide policies and procedures as they apply to the school
- Has the ability to work collaboratively with a diverse group of individuals

The Faculty Representative is expected to participate fully and equally in the work of the Leadership Team. This will require that the representative understand and support the collaborative decision making process of the team, including the decisions of the team, and the selection of decisions to be made by the team as well as those delegated to other groups.

Examples of Duties & Responsibilities of EFRs

School Leadership

As a member of the Leadership Team, the Faculty Representative may

- a. Represent the staff as a full participating member on the School Leadership Team, including designated summer planning days
- b. Participate in the design and implementation of the School Improvement Plan and the Baldrige School Improvement Process
- c. Assist in developing agendas for Leadership Team meetings
- d. Assist with the development of school schedules and calendars, including the testing schedule
- e. Assist in identifying teachers to participate on school committees and to be involved in school wide planning
- f. Assist in the evaluation and improvement of school programs
- g. Participate with the school staff in data analysis activities
- h. Assist with the identification of needs related to instructional technologies

Communications

As a member of the Leadership Team, the Faculty Representative may

- i. Ensure that there is good two-way communication between the school administration and Leadership Team with the rest of the school faculty
- j. Assist with planning and conducting of faculty meetings
- k. Help build faculty ownership in local school instructional decision-making
- l. Help foster cohesive, cooperative patterns of interpersonal relationships within the faculty
- m. Keep informed about new trends and programs relevant to the school

Representation

As a member of the Leadership Team, the Faculty Representative may

- n. Serve as a liaison between the faculty as a whole and the school administration
- o. Network with other schools and with the Councils on Teaching and Learning
- p. Meet monthly with the principal
- q. Work with the principal, ESR, and the leadership team to address matters of concern or interest to the faculty

MCEA Perspective on the Elected Faculty Rep Job

As is stated in the official Position Description, the EFR is *“a full member of the school leadership team”*. S/he is a *“facilitator”*, a *“communicator”*, a *“problem-solver”*, and a *“liaison with the school’s faculty.”* Success in this position requires a fundamental commitment to collaborative decision-making, problem-solving, advocacy for - and accountability to - one’s colleagues.

S/he “has responsibility for ensuring good communication between the administration and the faculty and for increasing faculty involvement in, and ownership of, local school improvement.”

For MCEA, this means several things:

- **Ensuring that the full faculty is knowledgeable about the work of the leadership team – both before and after decisions are made**
- **Ensuring that the views and needs of the faculty are taken into consideration in the decision-making process**
- **Developing processes through which the views and needs of the faculty can be developed, sorted out, assessed, and expressed**
- **Ensuring that the concerns of the faculty are addressed**
- **Networking with EFRs at other schools to explore effective practices and opportunities for continuous improvement**
- **Being well informed about relevant countywide issues such as changes in curriculum, instruction, and assessment**
- **Understanding the parameters of relevant countywide policies and contractual provisions**

Role of the Triad

In 2012, the following language was added to the contract to establish expectations for the “Triad”:

Article 8 Section A (1)

Principal, Elected Faculty Representative, Elected Support Representative Team

It is important that the elected staff representatives and the principal of each school form a team that works together to enhance the collaborative decision-making processes in the school. At the beginning of each year, these three meet and agree how they will work together, and this information is shared with staff in the school for their agreement and understanding. It also is suggested that this team meets at least once a month. These meetings provide an opportunity to discuss the school climate and address issues that are of concern to school staff.

The expectations of the elected representatives and these teams include, but are not limited to the following:

- The elected staff representatives are expected to be members of and participate on the school leadership team.*
- The elected staff representatives establish a feedback and input loop with their respective constituencies to identify ideas and concerns that are important to them.*
- These ideas and concerns will be shared with the principal. The elected staff representatives and the principal will discuss them and determine how and in what venue they should be addressed.*
- The team jointly decides how to communicate decisions, resolutions, and actions that have been taken.*
- Based on feedback that is received, the elected staff representatives and the principal identify topics that are important for the leadership team to address.*
- The team identifies communications plans for sharing important information with staff about school system or school-based decisions.*
- The team participates in MCPS training offered to build its capacity to operate effectively.*

MCEA (Building) Union Representatives

MCEA Union Reps are the heart and soul of the association. They are our grassroots leaders, selected by colleagues, to represent them in the creation of an effective organization that advances the interests of educators and public education. MCEA Reps are leaders, organizers, and problem-solvers.

The ideal MCEA Rep should:

- ☐ Be an instructional leader in your school
- ☐ Have the respect of your colleagues – and the administration
- ☐ Be self-aware about your role as a leader – earning respect by the way you exercise your judgment, treat other people, and work to solve problems, and
- ☐ Do what is right for teachers and students.

Responsibility of Reps

Your primary responsibility as a Rep is to *provide union leadership* for MCEA members at your school or worksite by

- ☐ **helping them solve problems arising from their work as educators in their school(or other worksite).**
- ☐ **advocating for and representing their collective interests and needs as education employees.**
- ☐ **mobilizing collective action when necessary, and**
- ☐ **getting other members involved in the work of the union**

The most effective Reps develop a core of colleagues to share in the many tasks involved. The ability to recruit volunteers can be the most valuable skill for a Rep to develop.

Rep Structure

- Your school/worksite is entitled to at least one MCEA Rep, and additional Reps on the basis of 1 for every 15 MCEA members (or major fraction thereof). This works out as follows:

How Many MCEA Union Reps Should Your School/Worksite Have?

<u>Number of MCEA Members</u>	<u>Number of Union Reps</u>	<u>Number of MCEA Members</u>	<u>Number of Union Reps</u>
7 - 22	1	98 – 112	7
23 – 37	2	113 – 127	8
38 – 52	3	128 – 142	9
53 – 67	4	143 – 157	10
68 – 82	5	158 – 165	11
83 – 97	6	166 – 187	12
		188 – 202	13

- Reps should be elected at a meeting of the MCEA members at your school or worksite. Traditionally this is done during the pre-service week in August. Some schools do it in the spring, so planning can be done over the summer.
- MCEA sends out pre-service Rep Packets to all prior year's Reps to assist with conducting the first meeting.
- In sites with more than one Rep, one should be designated as the Head Rep.
- MCEA *strongly* encourages worksites to elect full complements of Reps, so that the responsibilities can be shared.

The Representative Assembly

- MCEA's Union Reps are a critical link in the communications between members and the elected Board of Directors.
- MCEA holds a countywide Representative Assembly (RA) the first Wednesday of every month (Sept.-June). The RA is held at the MCEA Conference Center at 12 Taft Ct in Rockville.
- The RA is a policy making body within the organization. It operates under Roberts Rules of Orders and its own Standing Rules.
- The RA is open to all members, although voting is limited to duly elected Reps.

Effective Building Level Organization

There are many tasks involved in developing an effective building level organization. No one person can do it all; **developing a core of volunteers is essential**. By distributing leadership and building the leadership skills of others, you will accomplish much more. A well functioning team of Union Reps shares the responsibility for:

- ✓ **Ensuring that your school/worksite is represented at every Rep Assembly**
 - Some Reps attend every RA themselves. Others rotate the responsibility among several Reps. The key outcome is to ensure that your school is represented.
- ✓ **Promoting communication about issues**
 - All Reps should be on MCEA's Rep email list to receive important news & updates.
 - The RA is a vehicle for two-way communications. Reps should share feedback from and to their colleagues about issues at the RAs.
 - Reps are encouraged to regularly read – and contribute to – discussions on the *MCEA Forum* and *Discussion Room* on Outlook. Reps should take a lead role in advancing thoughtful discussions about the issues that matter to our members.
 - Reps should regularly copy MCEA's postings from the *MCEA Forum* to their own school's private folders in order to keep their members informed, and should be encouraging their colleagues to regularly read and participate in the Forum discussions.
 - Reps should encourage members to read MCEA's blog (www.mceaschoolnotes.blogspot.com), join MCEA's Facebook community (www.facebook.com/montgomeryteachers), and follow us on Twitter (@mceanea).

✓ **Helping members solve individual and school-wide problems**

- You should establish a way for teachers in your building to communicate directly with MCEA Union Reps about any concerns or problems they face (individual or collective).
- A Rep or Reps should be designated to follow up on concerns by learning more about the problem, determining its scope, suggesting appropriate means of resolving the problem, involving others when necessary and helping the member(s) get a solution that works for everyone involved.
- It is appropriate for Reps to support individual teachers when meeting with administration.
- When problems are broad-based (affecting many teachers at the school), they should be brought to the attention of the Elected Faculty Rep to put on the Leadership Team agenda. You should work closely with the EFR to prepare the agenda item for Leadership Team and be available to speak with the LT about the issue.
- Remember, MCEA staff and officers are available to help you solve problems.

✓ **Organizing MCEA membership meetings in your building as needed**

- Some schools meet every month, others less frequently. But regular, short, informative membership meetings are critical to keeping your colleagues informed and staying in touch with their concerns.
- In other schools, Reps regularly provide updates during or immediately following regular staff meetings.
- MCEA staff are always available to assist with worksite level membership meetings. They can come to answer questions and/or provide updates on current issues.

✓ **Promoting involvement in decision-making at your school**

- Ensure that your school elects its “Elected Faculty Representative(s) to the School Leadership Team”.
- Help members understand and interpret the contract provisions about staff involvement in decision-making.
- Serve as a representative of the faculty in resolving problems with the school administration and with the school leadership team.
- Ensure the faculty has good communication with the leadership of the school’s PTA.

✓ **Distributing MCEA materials as needed**

- One member should be designated as the PONY contact. It can be the Head Rep, but this is a discreet responsibility that is often taken on by a member willing to help out on a specific, defined task. Most communications is now online, but there are still occasionally materials sent out for distribution into members’ mailboxes.

✓ **Conducting MCEA elections**

- MCEA is a democratically run organization. In addition to electing their own Union Reps, MCEA members elect the MCEA Board of Directors, the Board of the Maryland State Education Association (MSEA), and delegates to the annual convention of the National Education Association (NEA). All elections are conducted at schools and worksites. Many elections are now online, but to be successful there

must be a Rep in the building to encourage and assist members in voting. This is another concrete, specific task that can easily be assumed by a volunteer other than the Head Rep.

✓ **Involving members in Association activities**

- There are always opportunities for member involvement: be it by enrolling in trainings or workshops, participating in forums or conferences, serving on committees or joint work groups, or participating in rallies or other collective actions. Reps play a critical role in encouraging members to participate. Reps should always be thinking about opportunities for involvement and what might appeal to specific colleagues. As with membership (see *below*) the only way people get involved is if they are personally asked.

✓ **Recruiting new members to the Association**

- Recruitment of new teachers is critical to the vitality of the organization. An MCEA Rep in each building should contact every new teacher personally.
- Early in each year, MCEA provides Reps with rosters to identify who is a member and who is not. Either the MCEA Rep or another designated “recruiter/welcomer” should both contact each new teacher and encourage those who have not yet joined to become MCEA members.
- All new teachers are required to either join the Association as a member or become a “representation fee payer” for the services MCEA is legally required to provide to them.

✓ **Promoting involvement in political action**

- As public employees, much of our work lives are influenced by the decisions of elected officials. Involvement in political action is essential to our ability to improve the compensation and working conditions of our members and the quality of public education.
- MCEA regularly works to mobilize its members to get involved in key political races, to work the polls, and to financially support political action through the *Fund for Children and Public Education*.
- The most important role Union Reps can play is recruiting colleagues to distribute the MCEA “Apple Ballot” at the polls on election days.
- This is another great opportunity to recruit one or more volunteers to take on discrete tasks that help build the organization and win improvements in the lives of our members.

Support for Reps

A primary responsibility of the leadership and staff of MCEA is to help Union Reps be successful. MCEA’s president, board of directors and field staff are all regularly engaged in helping reps organize their schools effectively. They are available to speak at membership or faculty meetings; to meet with reps, teams or departments to plan and organize; and to assist in problem-solving. The entire MCEA staff is available to help you as an MCEA Rep.

For more information about how to contact MCEA leadership and staff, and for the latest news, visit the MCEA Forum on Outlook or the MCEA website at www.mceanea.org.



A meeting on what to do about the stalled bargaining attracted a big turnout, nearly 95 percent of members. Leaders presented a routine motion to symbolically reject the imposition and move forward to bargain the next contract.

But members had had enough. They felt mistreated by the board, outraged over their frozen wages and the uncertain status of their

health care, and disrespected after months of working with no contract. Members amended the motion to call for an immediate strike. It passed with 87 percent of the vote. The yes voters included many bus drivers.

Shocked, union staff and local leaders scrambled to build the basic infrastructure for a strike. A week later, the school board caved and settled a contract, replacing the imposed terms.

- **Lesson #1: Trust democratic decision-making.** Trust members. They're not a blank slate; they can analyze risks and make complicated decisions. Local officers and union staff should avoid presenting members with a pre-scripted decision or plan. If we really want stronger unions, we must allow room for it to get messy and unpredictable.

DISUNITY WITH TEACHERS

Undeterred, the board pushed similar proposals even harder the next year. With a new state mandate requiring major changes to insurance terms and costs, every school district and union lined up contracts to expire in June 2017.

The new plans offered cheaper premiums—but for the first time, employees would face out-of-pocket expenses and high deductibles. Some expenses would be reimbursed, but for support staff already living on tight budgets, paying upfront would be tough.

This time the union tried to get organized earlier. Leaders sought out the most respected members among bus drivers and paraeducators in underrepresented schools to join the organizing team, and adjusted meeting times to accommodate members' shifts and second jobs.

Paraeducators and bus drivers showed up at school board meetings and told their personal stories of economic struggle. Photo: Emma Mulvaney-Stanak

The team tried out brand new tactics untested by Vermont-NEA. For instance, members held informational pickets on their own—without teachers. They phonebanked NEA-generated lists of likely parents and pro-education voters to talk about paraeducators and bus drivers' role in the schools and the status of bargaining. They asked parents to show up at board meetings and urge the board to settle. They also mobilized their own members to attend board meetings and tell their personal stories of economic struggle.

The organizing team decided to delay its efforts, to wait for the teachers' bargaining to catch up. If the board imposed again, unifying the two unions would build power. Sure enough, in June the board did impose again.

But when the time came to unite forces that fall, the teachers avoided merging organizing teams and declined to actively support the staff's tactics. Some teachers continued to believe the board would ultimately favor them—and even if not, that they would be better off organizing on their own.

- **Lesson #2: Solidarity takes time and conscious relationship-building.** Solidarity is not a machine that can be reliably turned on or off, nor can it be assumed. Though these teachers and support staff are in locals of the same state union, building a stronger relationship requires regular cultivation, something the RNEA is continuing to work on. Later, as they built toward a second strike deadline, the local unions began to attend each other's leadership meetings, communicate regularly, and present a more unified front to the board and superintendent. To sustain these new relationships, those practices must become everyday norms, not just what happens when either union is in crisis.

BRING THE KIDS TO THE MEETING

RNEA pushed on with its organizing. "We experienced unprecedented member attendance at meetings and solidarity actions," said Johnson, "mainly because they were extremely frustrated due to delays, bargaining dynamics and a second imposition. They were ready to be more aggressive."

To handle complicated shift schedules, RNEA began scheduling duplicate meetings—one after school and another in the evening, with pizza and a standing invitation to bring kids along. After every meeting, the union sent out updates via home emails, mailings, and handouts in school mailboxes, repeating the key points and the "asks" for how members could participate. Eventually the organizing team phoned every member and non-member.

The mailing and phone lists also included rank-and-file teachers who lived in the district. This direct communication generated some teacher support.

Bus drivers and paraeducators attended local events such as the family-oriented Harvest Festival. They called high-profile community members—faith leaders, business owners, heads of the Parent Teacher Organization—to ask for support. As a result of these calls, the union teamed up with the Vermont Workers' Center, the local nurses union, and the lieutenant governor to organize a town hall on the need for health care reform.

By Thanksgiving, the organizing team was divided. Some had felt ready to strike for months—while others still feared the risks: How long could members go without wages? Have we built enough power to win? After much deliberation, leaders agreed the full membership should decide the next step.

Members met in December. Tension filled the room as drivers and paraeducators weighed the risks. With 85 percent of the members present, the vote was 82 percent yes authorize a strike.

- **Lesson #3: Challenge assumptions.** The organizing team used time-tested tactics, but also broke the mold by taking seriously the possibility of a strike. Union staff and local leaders worked through many fears about whether a support-staff-only strike would be viable. By the second time they voted to authorize a strike, members felt ready to act.

‘WE’RE YOUR NEIGHBORS’

In the days leading up to the strike, the superintendent prepared to hire temporary replacements. The union accepted that schools would remain open. Still, members worked to make hiring scabs as difficult as possible.

They reached out to education unions within a 100-mile radius to request that substitutes refuse extra work in the Brandon area. They asked local teachers to lend support by refusing to work outside of their teaching duties.

The union knew its strongest leverage points: student transportation and special education rules. The organizing team proudly confirmed that half the bus drivers in the bargaining unit had agreed not to cross a picket line, whether they were union members or not.

Vermont has a shortage of certified bus drivers, even for private bus companies. Legally every employee must submit to a criminal background check, which takes days. The district struggled to find, train, and screen enough drivers before the strike—though it denied this publicly.

Scab drivers would be strangers to students and unfamiliar with the routes, raising safety concerns. Special education teacher caseloads would skyrocket, and students would suffer without paraeducators. The organizing team made sure to share this critical information with parents before the strike.

Union members leafleted door to door, sent letters, and phoned parents and voters. They focused on affordable health care, living wages, and the message, “We’re your neighbors,” since 80 percent of members lived within the district. These arguments resonated with people—especially when they learned that the board was looking for scabs, and that the union’s settlement proposal would cost less than one-third of one percent of the school budget.

The teachers union was finally becoming more supportive, as its own negotiations heated up. Teachers began to donate supplies for strike headquarters. They held meetings to

prepare members to identify potential grievances if they were asked to do staff work during a strike.

In the end, a federal mediator intervened. The union and the district signed a settlement two days before the strike date. Staff won a decent wage increase and a fair split on employer-employee out-of-pocket expenses, including a debit card that workers could use upfront for health expenses.

- **Lesson #4: Rural organizing presents challenges and unique strengths.** Members in small towns can be hesitant to share their stories of economic hardship with their neighbors, but direct contact with neighbors and parents proved to be the most powerful tool. Also, it's tough for the boss to replace school employees in a rural area on short notice. Keeping schools open during a strike would have meant understaffed classrooms, gaps in bus schedules, unfamiliar drivers, and special-ed staffing shortages—which could all spark public outrage.

Emma Mulvaney-Stanak is a former Vermont-NEA statewide organizer.

http://labornotes.org/2018/11/what-vermont-paraeducators-and-school-bus-drivers-learned-when-they-almost-went-strike?fbclid=IwAR2nNNr_VNH4PjsuiVwKSdb5vu1nL1QZTJQiBnqerXy8IM8xhI2hxQl4rPo

LABOR NOTES: What Vermont Paraeducators and School Bus Drivers Learned When They Almost Went on Strike

November 09, 2018 / Emma Mulvaney-Stanak



Paraeducators and school bus drivers rebuilt a formerly passive union, changed the power dynamics in bargaining, and built towards a successful strike—and learned four key lessons along the way. Photo: Emma Mulvaney-Stanak

What do you do when your employer suddenly turns hostile? After years of relatively friendly labor relations, in 2015 the school board in rural Brandon, Vermont, shut down

negotiations and imposed its terms: higher health care costs and minimal raises.

The school board assumed that support staff would never strike. No school staff union in Vermont had ever struck on its own, without teachers. Meanwhile the sister union representing teachers agreed to a rollover contract. The teachers kept their distance from staff negotiations, not wanting to hurt their own relationship with the board.

The union of 100 paraeducators and school bus drivers was caught off guard. On top of “open hostility from the community,” said Loretta Johnson, a paraeducator and the union president at the time, internally the union was dealing with “a lot of fear and minimal member involvement.”

Another obstacle: the bargaining unit included two groups of workers, paraeducators and bus drivers, who had diverging interests. Fewer than half of the bus drivers were union members. Health insurance was the largest sticking point in negotiations, but most drivers didn’t take the district’s insurance. Meanwhile the paraeducators, who offer specialized support for students with behavioral and learning challenges, were nearly all union members.

But school support staff didn’t let these challenges stop them. This is the story of how they rebuilt a formerly passive union, changed the power dynamics in bargaining, and built towards a successful strike—and learned four key lessons along the way.

SURPRISE STRIKE VOTE

Nearly two years after bargaining began, the Rutland Northeast Education Association finally formed an organizing team that set out to mobilize members and save face in negotiations—short of striking.

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Under new leadership, Nashville's teachers union hopes to use leverage gained after protests over pay

Jason Gonzales, Nashville Tennessean Published 10:00 p.m. CT Oct. 20, 2019

Spread throughout the warehouse-like building housing Nashville's teachers union hang photos of last school year's [teacher pay protests \(/story/news/2019/05/16/nashville-teachers-absent-again-part-mnps-sick-out/3691484002/\)](#).

At the time, the protests where educators marched and called out sick were led by union and non-union members. But they weren't backed by Metro Nashville Education Association leadership, the city's educators union.

Now, a group that helped spearhead the city's teacher demonstrations leads the association.

And it is determined not to just memorialize the protests in the South Nashville building that overlooks Metro Nashville Public Schools headquarters, but use the recent action — and future action, if necessary — to better the conditions for educators in Music City.

"I think that we came in with a pretty clear mandate from the people who voted for us to go out there and make some big changes," MNEA President Amanda Kail said.

The goals so far are uncomplicated: Get teachers more involved in the union, elevate the voice of teachers, push for better working conditions, and fight for increased pay.



Amanda Kail leads a protest of teachers demanding higher wages May 16 at City Hall in Nashville. (Photo: George Walker IV / The Tennessean)

If they feel they are not heard, Kail said the new leadership knows what it means to take to the streets. That's a major change for a union in a state where [teacher strikes are illegal \(/story/news/education/2019/03/12/tn-teachers-united-public-education-funding-school-testing-union/3131729002/\)](#) and

But Kail said teachers have leverage.

"I think we kind of shook the city up a little bit (through the protests), and that needed to happen," Kail said. "And I think that going forward when we talk to people at (Metro Nashville Public Schools), when we talk to people at the city, when we talk to the mayor, they know we have that in our back pocket."

Teacher pay and planning time

A goal to increase wages is central to the union. The new leadership wants to renegotiate the union's memorandum of understanding with the district to prioritize teacher step raises, or pay based on experience.

But there are other issues besides pay. One sticking point for Kail and MNEA Vice President Michele Sheriff since taking over the union this summer is to ensure teachers have time to plan.

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As teachers recently serving in the classroom, they said it is important to ensure teachers can prepare for students. They said interim Director of Schools Adrienne Battle has been receptive to their asks.

The hope is their advocacy makes the climate better for teachers and, in turn, better for students.

"We want teachers to know they're not just a teacher in a classroom," Sheriff said. "They're an integral part of the district, and all the decisions that the district makes affect teachers directly."



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METRO NASHVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

inside **MNPS**

SEPT. 26, 2019

2019-20 Planning Days

Earlier this week, we released information intended to clarify the non-instructional days on the [2019-20 district calendar](#) listed below:

- » **October 18 | Planning/Records Day**
» Per the MNEA MOU, these days "shall be seven hours in length including a one-hour duty-free lunch with the right to leave campus for lunch." Teachers are allowed to work in their classrooms the entire day planning, grading, and preparing for second quarter.*
- » **January 6 | Planning/Records Day**
» Per the MNEA MOU, these days "shall be seven hours in length including a one-hour duty-free lunch with the right to leave campus for lunch." Teachers are allowed to work in their classrooms the entire day planning, grading, and preparing for third quarter.
- » **February 17 | Stockpiled PD Day**
» Per the MNEA MOU, these "days will include three hours of individual planning

4 4:38 PM - Oct 16, 2019

[See MNEA's other Tweets](#)

Nashville's teachers union wins supporters

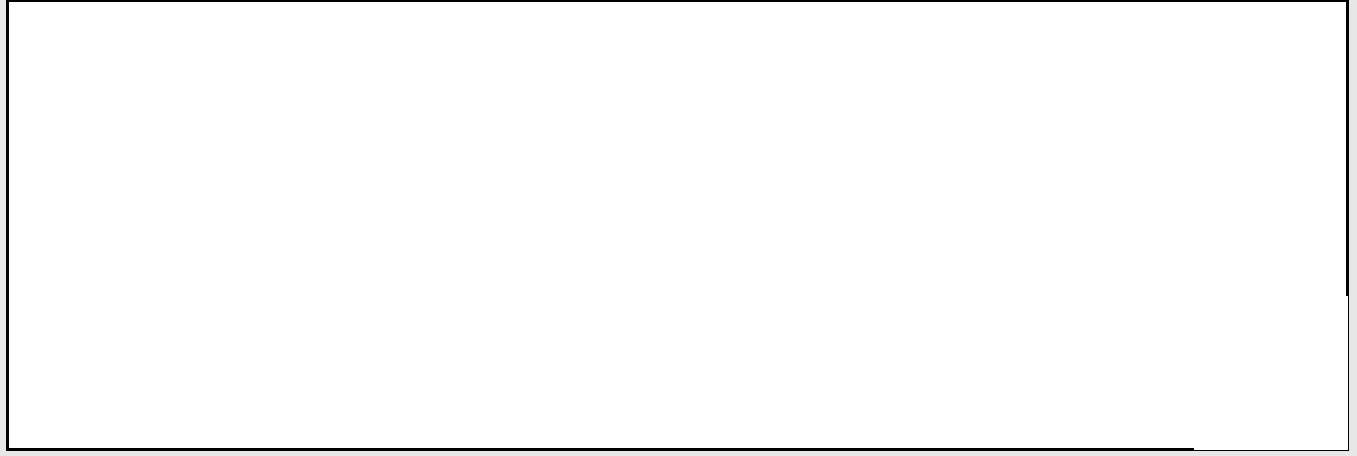
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The union's recent work is being noticed.

"I feel like they are going to do everything they can to help us," said Lillian Baird, a McGavock teacher and member of Sick Teachers.

The Sick Teachers group led "sick-outs" during which educators missed work to advocate for more money in the budget for schools and wages. Baird said Kail and Sheriff supported Sick Teachers even when previous MNEA leaders would not.

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Although not every Sick Teacher member is part of the union, Baird said she gets the feeling the association's new leadership stands for all teachers.

Meanwhile, school Board Chair Anna Shepherd said she's maintained a good relationship with MNEA leaders. But she sees where Kail and Sheriff are willing to rally teachers.

"After speaking with Amanda (Kail), I see how they are trying to get every school with a union representative, get active members organized and work as a change agent. I applaud that," Shepherd said.

Discontent spawns protests

Nashville teachers complained about problems with pay for years before protests in the 2018-19 school year. But the issue became center stage this past year.

Teachers argued pay is causing teachers to leave and exacerbating the issue of understaffed schools throughout the district in a recruitment climate where it is tough to hire educators.

Teachers organized a march, rallies and the "sick-outs."

The 4.5% cost of living raise is a minor victory, educators said. They received it in this year's budget.

Kail and Sheriff want the union to play a key role in whatever comes this year and beyond. The union's committee positions are fully filled for the first time in years, Kail said.

"Hopefully, we can put the systems in place where other people can come behind us, improve the union, and they can then continue to work to improve the climate and culture in the district so it is able to attract and retain great teachers," she said.

Reach Jason Gonzales (<https://www.tennessean.com/staff/33783/jason-gonzales/>) at jagonzales@tennessean.com and on Twitter [@ByJasonGonzales](https://twitter.com/ByJasonGonzales) (<https://twitter.com/ByJasonGonzales>).

Unions Need to Think Small to Get Big

Organized labor can reverse its decline by focusing on smaller workplaces—and using digital tools to organize them.

FEBRUARY 9, 2019

Mark Zuckerman President of The Century Foundation, a progressive think tank

ANDREW BURTON / REUTERS



Private-sector unions may be best known for large, high-stakes labor fights—the 2014 UAW–Volkswagen battle in Tennessee, for example, or the more recent effort by thousands of workers at a Nissan factory in Canton, Mississippi. Indeed, unions themselves have focused their organizing efforts at these large workplaces for decades, assuming it’s the easiest way to gain new dues-paying members.

But this conventional wisdom—that unions get the most bang for their organizing buck at large workplaces—is wrong. New research shows that most workers are unionized in smaller workplaces. Of the nearly 700,000 private-sector employees who joined a union in the past decade, almost two-thirds were unionized in shops with fewer than 250 workers.

In fact, labor groups are more likely to win elections for union representation in small workplaces. In a [study released this week by the Century Foundation](#), we analyzed microdata on every union election in the country from April 2007 to December 2018, more than 22,000 in total. We found that bargaining units of 24 or fewer employees were nearly 12 percent more likely to win a union than larger groups. Units with nine workers or under, for example, won 70 percent of their elections, compared with a win rate of 57 percent for units of 100 and 249 employees.

What’s more, the fewer employees in a workplace, the more likely they were to win elections by wider margins, underscoring that workers at smaller units are more consistent and cohesive in their support of unions. In the typical small-unit election, unions win 80 percent of the “yes” vote. For larger units, this number drops to under 60 percent.

Why, then, does organized labor focus its limited resources on organizing large workplaces, when evidence shows that it’d be more successful in smaller workplaces? A big reason is that unions continue to rely on retail organizing. Professional organizers are sent into one workplace at a time, and they try to convince a majority of workers to join a union. If a

workplace is too small, or if it's geographically isolated, or if it's in a state with strict anti-union laws, it's not worth most unions' time to organize there, and so they don't.

But what if there were a way for unions to greatly reduce the costs of organizing small workplaces, and bring that approach to scale at small and medium-sized workplaces across the country? There is—through online organizing and large-scale digital marketing to workers.

Organized labor can follow the lead of successful commercial and political campaigns, which have mastered the use of algorithms and data-mining tools to identify, engage, and influence customers and voters. Unions could use “big data” to target low-wage workers in specific locations who share traits commonly associated with union support. It's a path toward reversing the trend of declining unionization, and recruiting millions of new members.

Read: Can Millennials save unions?

Imagine a fast-food worker in Alabama who sees an ad on Facebook promoting higher wages at work by joining a union. The ad could then direct workers to a free or low-cost online organizing platform, empowering them to initiate organizing drives at their workplace by providing them with resources such as step-by-step guides to gather signatures and file petitions for union recognition.

Such a model would improve the economics of winning new members, given the relative cost-effectiveness of micro-targeting and digital marketing. Lowered acquisition costs would in turn allow unions to diversify the locations and types of workplaces at which they recruit, opening up regions of the country, like the South and the Great Plains, in which unions have historically struggled to make inroads.

Online organizing would be particularly effective with Millennials, who are not only the largest generation now in the labor force, but also the most supportive of unions, at 68 percent. Younger workers increasingly navigate workplace issues online, using tools like Glassdoor and Coworker.org to advocate for better workplace conditions. A digital organizing tool would build on this generation's growing willingness to assert rights at work, marrying it with young people's unique ability to use technology to mobilize for change.

Online organizing isn't a cure for all of labor's challenges; unions shouldn't abandon the approach of sending staffers in to organize workplaces directly. And a well-designed app won't stop companies from threatening or retaliating against workers when they express an interest in joining a union, conduct that serves as a leading deterrent to organizing today.

Read: The conservative case for unions

But a platform *can* provide easy access to assistance if and when workers face abuse, through tools like live-assistance help lines staffed by lawyers and volunteers at nearby union shops

who can share advice. Plus, research suggests that smaller groups of employees are better at staying united in the face of employer opposition. Workers at small establishments may face fewer legal challenges from their employers, who likely have fewer resources to resist an organizing drive.

While unions continue to have success winning elections when they do occur, the overall number of elections is rapidly declining. Last year, fewer than 1,600 petitions for union representation were filed with the National Labor Relations Board, the lowest number in more than 75 years. In the mid-1970s, when union activity was at its peak, some 9,000 elections were certified each year; in 2018, the number was one-tenth of that, with only 790 successful elections.

And while unions have more success with smaller bargaining units, the percentage of union density among smaller employees is much lower, underscoring the significant opportunities for unions to gain members at small and medium-size businesses. The unionization rate at workplaces with under 25 employees, for example, is under 5 percent, compared with more than 15 percent for employers with more than 250 employees.

By now, the struggles of the American labor movement are well known. But there's at least one big bright spot: Interest in joining a union is at a four-decade high. And with good reason: The average union household earns \$400 a week more than nonunion families, adding up to more than half a million dollars over a lifetime.

With inequality widening and public support for unions growing, organized labor has a real opportunity to turn the tide after decades of declining membership and dwindling power. But it requires a different approach—one that is driven by digital organizing and large-scale marketing, includes smaller workplaces and tech-savvy younger workers, and meets millions of workers online, where they already are.

We want to hear what you think about this article. Submit a letter to the editor or write to letters@theatlantic.com.

MARK ZUCKERMAN *is president of The Century Foundation (TCF), a leading progressive think tank, and author of the new report, "Finding Workers Where They Are: A New Business Model to Rebuild the Labor Movement."*

LABOR NOTES

How to Be a Staffer in a Democratic Union

June 05, 2014 / [Alexandra Bradburyenlarge](#)



If members run the local... what exactly is the union rep's job? We asked four experienced staffers how they approach their day-to-day tasks while keeping the rank and file in the driver's seat. Photo: Jim West/[jimwestphoto.com](#).

Suppose you're a union staff rep. (Or a business agent, an internal organizer, whatever the local lingo is.) And suppose you believe in union democracy: the members should run the fight against the boss.

Where do you come in, then? What exactly is your job, and how can you do it in a way that keeps the rank and file in the driver's seat?

The obvious danger: you work for the union all day, while members have their jobs to do. It can be all too easy for members and staffers alike to start thinking "the union" means the people who have desks at the union hall: the top brass and the reps they hire. That's not only undemocratic—it's a terrible foundation for building power.

We asked four experienced staffers how they see their jobs and how they translate the idea that the members run the union into their day-to-day tasks.

GOLDEN RULE

One union tackles the problem at its root by drawing a thick line around the role staffers play.

University Professional and Technical Employees "takes member-run to the nth degree," said Vice President Lisa Kermish. She was a research administrator at the University of California before coming to work for her union.

Stewards do all UPTE's representation, even arbitrations that pit them against management attorneys. Union staff do no direct grievance handling.

Staffers don't participate in bargaining; they're not even in the room during negotiations. Nor do they participate in discussions of the union's policies or direction. Instead, their job is to recruit and train members to do these tasks.

"Our golden rule is, don't do for members what they can do for themselves," Kermish said, "and its platinum corollary is, if there isn't a member to do it, it won't get done."

Holding fast to these rules isn't always easy. What's a staffer to do when the clock is ticking on a grievable situation and no steward is willing to take it on? Sometimes the union has to call in a "super steward" from Los Angeles to handle a case an hour away in Irvine, or throw a new steward "into the deep end of the pool"—with support from staff, but never with a staffer doing the task for the steward.

The policy, Kermish said, is "based on the premise that, if we're really a member-run union, we have to do more than talk the talk."

TEAM EFFORT

Part of a union rep's job, Joe Fahey says, "is to help people do things they're not used to doing. None of the big changes that we're trying to make in the labor movement, in our workplaces, in the world, are going to happen if we don't make small changes, like in how we talk to each other and how we run meetings."

Tips and Principles for Staffers

Democracy is a lot more than elections. A democratic union is "more about voices than votes," Joe Fahey says. Who gets to speak in meetings? Who has a say in the strategy? Make room for real debate.

Members make the decisions at every step of organizing, not just the end. It's not good enough if "some well-worked-out plan has been arrived at, and then members come to a meeting to give it their stamp of approval," says Ellen David Friedman.

UPTE's "golden rule": staffers shouldn't do for members what members can do for themselves—even if that means sometimes a task goes undone.

Get members talking and working with one another, not just with you. Fahey kept grievances in a stack on his desk. When someone brought a new one, he'd say, "If it's just you, it'll go in the pile, but if you can bring back two to three people who have similar problems, it'll go to the top."

Encourage people to connect their experiences to a bigger picture. When he organized home care workers, Matthew Luskin learned nearly all had faced abuse or sexual harassment from a client. Each story might feel personal, "but they also knew it was deeply linked to sexism in the industry," he said—a pervasive atmosphere, not just one abusive guy.

Members may not expect the union to deal with racism, sexism, or the economy until you open the door. When he did, Luskin found, "people had a lot to say."

Fahey, a retired Teamster, was a union staffer for two decades. He recalls a bottling plant where different groups of workers took out their tension and mistrust on the steward.

“The workers would have a steward election and then be extremely dissatisfied with the steward, whoever it was,” he said, “and so there would be a call to get rid of that damn steward and put somebody else in their place. It just looked like an impossible setup.”

So he called a meeting and asked all the workers to consider themselves potential stewards.

They went around the circle answering the question, “What qualities do you have that would make you a good steward?” Then they went around again to answer, “What would be difficult for you about the job?”

Some said they were shy, didn’t like conflict, or had trouble understanding the contract language. A couple of people said they’d be terrified to do something the old steward used to: stand up near the end of lunch break and yell that the union meeting was going to be on Tuesday.

“By then it was sort of self-evident: there’s no perfect steward,” Fahey said. “Everybody’s going to have parts of the job they could do more easily than other parts.”

He asked the group, “Is there anybody here for whom it wouldn’t be a difficulty to yell that at the end of lunch?” Most hands went up. “So, if someone else was otherwise the best steward, is there anybody here who would help do that part of the job?” The same hands went up again.

Members reached a consensus on the most important qualities of a steward, and agreed it would take a team effort to support whoever had the job. The next steward stayed on for years.

The staffer doesn’t have to be the idea person. In this instance Fahey guided the process, but didn’t supply his own opinions on who should be steward or which qualities were important.

Especially “being a white guy in a union full of mostly Mexican women, more often than not I didn’t have the best answer to the problem facing the group,” he said. “It’s easy for a group to recognize a good idea. My role was to ask the question that led to generating the most ideas, so the group could pick the best one.”

DON’T PRE-JUDGE

Ellen David Friedman, who organized for many years with the Vermont National Education Association, agrees: be careful not to pre-judge the solution.

Whatever the problem you’re setting out to confront, she said—member apathy, division inside the union, a bad boss, a contract campaign—it’s members who need to define it and plan what to do.

“It’s not authentically democratic,” she said, “if members are simply going out with a goal, like ‘we have to get so many signatures on a petition,’ or ‘get so many people to turn out at a rally.’”

Instead, begin by finding out who’s already aware of a workplace problem, and get them talking to each other.

Your job in the conversation is “to turn what looks like just a dead end or an endless cycle of wheel-spinning or pessimism—‘we’ve tried that, it hasn’t worked, no one cares’—into a frame-able, settable goal,” David Friedman said. “With some dose of, if not optimism, at least commitment to try something.”

Encourage members to figure out who else is likely affected by the problem and how to bring them into the conversation, she said. You can help them prepare and practice what to say to their co-workers.

MESSY, SLOW, UNEXPECTED

Maybe the group agrees to do a survey. When you come back together, she said, “now instead of five people concerned, we’ve talked to 50, and wow, 88 percent of them said their problem was x.” Maybe they write up the results, go back out to check in with people again, hold a meeting.

Again you might role-play or talk through how to frame the issue. The organizer’s task is “to prepare people for having their own conversations with each other,” David Friedman said. “Those are where the democratic process is going on.”

But “it’s not as if the organizer or staff person is invisible. They have a job to do: matching power to appropriate goals,” she said. “Members who are not experienced organizers might have an idea of what they want, but it bears no relationship to what can be achieved based on existing power.”

So your role is to point out, “If we really want to do that, we need to build up our power.

“The question is always, how detached can the organizer be from controlling the outcome? Things may go in a different direction than you expected. They may take a lot longer. They may be a lot messier. But the result is authentic and powerful.”

TALK ABOUT WHY

For Chicago Teachers Union organizer Matthew Luskin, a big part of the job is to put union strategy on the table for members to discuss.

“Organizing can’t just be about getting people to do things,” he said. “It has to be about getting people to believe in *why* we’re trying to do these things.”

The reformers who won leadership of CTU in 2010 believed it would be necessary to build towards a strike. They also knew many members weren’t yet thinking that way.

So organizers' job wasn't just to turn out members for this or that event. It was "winning people on the whys" of the strategy that officers were proposing. "We were engaging people in a very honest conversation," Luskin said: "here's what the challenges are, here's what the risks are, here's what we think we could win."

Organizers also talked with members about "what sorts of experiences would build people's confidence that these were strategies that could win," he said.

Members weren't just asked to wear red union T-shirts every Friday, for example. It was discussed: this will show the scared members at your school how much support the union has. Other activities aimed to prove the union could get parent support.

"I have a low tolerance for meetings where you pretend everybody can participate but really there's only one acceptable outcome," Luskin said. "I'm not saying we don't have a planned strategy we're trying to get people to agree to. I'm just saying they can say no to it."

Before and since the 2012 strike, dozens of members have gone through CTU's summer member-organizer program. There they receive much of the same training a new staff organizer would get: how to draw out a fellow member's issues and move that member to action.

They learn strategy and campaign planning, too. "It's important to push back against the ultra-professionalization of organizing work," Luskin said, "the idea that it requires a secret handshake and training that are not accessible to the rank and file.

"Are there skills and training that staff get, through experience and time? Sure. But the problem we have in the labor movement is not needing more brilliant strategists and tacticians. It's 'do we have huge numbers of people willing to take real risks to fight?'"

The point of CTU's member-organizer program isn't to boost a particular campaign. The point is how members are changed by the experience.

"We want members to come out of this able to organize their co-workers and community around a struggle in their neighborhood," he said. "We want to expand the number of fights the union can take on, and that can only happen if more members feel comfortable developing strategies themselves."



Alexandra Bradbury is editor and co-director of Labor Notes. al@labornotes.org

SCENARIOS

Campaign Design Opportunity 1- Eagle Nest Elementary

This is a Title 1 school with a high English Language Learner population. Because of concerns about low reading and math scores, students have very limited recess and almost no non-academic curriculum. There are 43 certified members with a 100% membership. This school is a low performing school and many types of school reform have been pushed into this school. Turnover of all staff is high. The certified building rep struggles to get people to come to meetings as they say they don't want the principal to retaliate against them for attending. The building rep attends every RA but does little on her own to solve small contract issues, relying on calling UniServ. She has been the building rep for at least 20 years and says she can't get anyone else to do the role.

There are a large number of new teachers – 14 in their first and second years of teaching. They each have mentor teachers and will need to complete three successful years at standard on the district's evaluation system before they can transfer. Many of them are not from the area and are not familiar with the culture of the students they serve. They struggle themselves to find affordable housing within Enchanted County. Teachers feel pressured to work through their lunch by the Title 1 Literacy Coach – especially new teachers. Due to the bullying, command and control nature of the administrator, teachers are not included in decision making and the leadership team reports that they are splintered between the two literacy coaches who are "principal favorites" and more senior teachers.

There is a large group – 18 - education support professionals (ESP) who work in the school. They are equally dissatisfied with the working conditions and they are just as fearful of the principal. They don't have any member willing to be the building rep and most don't know their contract rights. If there are any contract violations, either people are unaware of their rights or they are too timid to file the grievances. While the ESP group has 100% membership, they are not connected with each other well.

This school has a very strong Parent Teacher Organization and the school is used for a number of after-school and community programs. Two of the parents are connected with a community group focused on ensuring all residents know their voting rights. Two of the Support Staff are also parents of students at this school. The community loves this school and are very distressed that the principal wants to limit parent and community access to the building. Since becoming principal, the home and community coordinator position has been cut, popular evening music and art programs cut, the community garden paved over and new fees for building use by community groups have been assessed that are above what the district policy requires.

Problem Solving Scenario

You have received several voice messages about poor working conditions at Growing Tree Elementary – but no one will leave a name or contact – all are anonymous and they even state in their message that they are afraid they will be fired if the principal finds out the union has been called. You have repeatedly checked with the building rep – who corroborates the stories, but says she is not having any issues and cannot get anyone who is willing to meet with the UniServ Director. They don't want to be seen talking to the "Union."

From the multiple messages, here is the story you have pieced together. The Literacy Coaches are personal friends with the Principal. All three of them believe that the mostly Spanish speaking community is likely full of illegal immigrants. They have openly stated this and because of this – that is

why they have to crack down on these slackers so children will be able to read and score well on the district reading tests. This school was designated a dual language immersion school – meaning that white, English speaking families can choose to have their students attend in order to learn Spanish. These are the parents and students – in the faculty’s opinion, that these three cater to.

The real problem is a contract violation. Every new teacher is approached by the literacy coaches to sit during lunch in the staff lounge and go over their data – they call it data and dine. This request has never been put in writing, and the new teachers want to keep their “noses clean” so they can transfer after three years. The senior teachers know this is happening and never eat in the staff lounge – and are never asked by the data coaches to do so. The number one complaint of the new teachers – they don’t even have a chance throughout the day to get to the bathroom as lunchtime is their only break.

Some Context:

This principal has been investigated several times for bullying Spanish speaking staff – but none of the cases were ever completed as the employees dropped them.

The coaches are bargaining unit members but not active in the union.

The contract requires a 30 Minute duty free lunch for all employees.

Campaign Opportunity 2- Gate Keeper Middle School

This is middle school with a very high Free and Reduced Lunch rate. It is in a neighborhood that people from community say is, "in decline," with a number of the single family homes now converted to multi-family rentals. There is a newly elected head building rep at this building. She attended this school when the neighborhood was still very middle class. Her first job here was as support staff in the special education program. She went to school at night to get her teaching degree and is now striving to be a principal. She has worked to fill the other possible rep positions and held elections for the two open rep seats. Five people ran for the two openings. The head rep is respected by a strong portion of the staff and feels that she gets things done. This head rep reports a strong relationship with the principal – a man with a similar background as hers - and asks that the UniServ stay away – even though the other building reps don't trust that she supports their positions when meeting with the principal.

Because of this school's free and reduced lunch rate, the district has implemented a new curriculum for schools like this, that requires a placement exam to be passed by any student wishing to take Algebra. Many of the math teachers have reported that they don't feel that they were provided enough time to give all their students a fair and equitable chance to be successful. There are a large number of African American parents who are also upset by this policy as they feel it is unfairly keeping their students from taking Algebra.

There is a group of newer teachers who eat each day in one particular teacher's room. These teachers are mostly all African American and feel that the principal has some unconscious bias issues. Most of the people in this lunch bunch are not from Tip Top District and came here because of the pay scale and benefits. This teacher who is hosting this lunch bunch is not a building rep and we don't even know how she feels about the union - but most people agree that they go to her for good advice on working with the parents in the community and the students at this school. They trust her opinion and support. The people who eat in this room believe that ALL teachers should be treated with professional respect by the principal and that it is a problem regarding the inherent racial bias of some of this principal's policies and actions. Even though they have told their head building rep, she won't bring up to the administrator because of her aspirations to be a principal.

Three members of this lunch group have determined a set of actions they could take to improve the placement test problem. They have developed a set of 10 minute meetings, a building member survey and a draft administrative complaint. They have also reached out to their colleagues in other buildings to see if this is an issue in other middle schools and if those schools want to join them in correcting this condition.

Problem Solving Scenario

A new building rep from Bright Skies Middle school just sent you a very detailed email describing a situation that he is very concerned about.

Dear UniServ Director

I am writing to you because I have already spoken to our head rep, and I don't think she understands the situation – or she just does not want to deal with it. I have talked with Vice President Liberaling and he says I should run with any plans I can come up with to solve the problem. I thought I would run the issue by you to see what you think.

We have a policy at our school that before an eighth grader is allowed to take Algebra, they must pass an entrance exam at the end of 7th grade. As you know, Algebra is the gateway to entrance in most colleges and three additional math classes. The large number of requisite courses in this district for high school graduation, along with the number of math requirements, make it very hard to make up Algebra in high school AND take all the other “college ready” courses if Algebra is not taken in the eighth grade.

I am concerned because as an African American, I know that this policy is keeping almost all our black and brown students out of the 8th grade class. There are a number of my colleagues in the 7th grade that are telling the students to simply take pre-algebra in 8th grade because they will have a hard time passing algebra. This issue is compounded by the racially unaware no tolerance policies for attendance, homework, and tardiness put in place by our principal. I have asked our building rep to set up a meeting to discuss this, but she says she is uncomfortable discussing this topic with our principal. She says he is a good guy and just wants to do his best for “those kids.”

A number of us have been developing a plan for meeting with parents, maybe writing a letter of no confidence, or possibly attending a school board meeting to bring up these issues.

I am a new to this building rep work, but this seems like an issue we should be dealing with. What would you suggest that I do?

Sincerely,

Building Rep

Some context:

There is nothing about advancing racial justice issues in the Agreement

The district does have a Racial Equity Framework that is to be applied to all policy decision to ensure unintended consequences have been examined

There have been numerous claims of bias against this principal- but none have risen to official complaints

The neighborhood is known for having a strong activist personality

Campaign Opportunity 3- Higher Ground High School

One of the district's largest high schools has 95 employees with 35% of them in their first 5 years of teaching. There are 6 building reps and 4 of them have been in their position for as long as anyone can remember. One of them recently lost his bid for re-election as EA Vice-President. He was defeated by a new rep from this building. They hold regular monthly building meetings that are attended by about 20 of the most senior members and routinely pass out information from the state and national union. They often discuss problems – but almost never suggest or take action on solutions. The 4 long term reps routinely attend almost every event that their union offers and make full use of their professional and personal leave. These four plan their family vacation to coincide with their regular attendance at the NEA RA. The two newer reps have been engaged with their state and local union and would like to implement some new programs that would lead to more participation by rank and file in the work of the union. The long term reps see this as a way to take away the leadership that they have earned. The newer reps are also interested in getting a number of people to take action against some new, top down “rules” the new principal is putting in place. The long term reps just want to have the Union file a grievance and take care of the issues.

The long term reps say that the number one priority is that there were not large enough pay scale gains bargained into the last contract for those at the top of the scale and that there was an increase in the health insurance premium for single members. These leaders routinely ask the UniServ to come and lead their after school meetings and always include them in any member issue. There have been a number of member calls to the union help-line indicating issues with work-load, length of day, observation and evaluation, school discipline policies, and too much time out of the schedule for testing - but when the long term reps are asked, none are aware that there are any issues. Everything is fine. These reps all have a great relationship with the principal and with their UniServ.

The two new reps live in the same house. They became reps because a sizeable portion of the staff found them respectable and very credible after being participants in a program these new reps designed to help their colleagues better understand how to support LGBTQIA students. They are also co-trainers with a non-profit group that is providing race, equity and diversity training to the staff. These reps volunteer at the teen homeless shelter and want their union to be a place that seeks equity and justice for marginalized youth in the community.

Membership is at 70% with the number of non-members creeping up – especially with new and younger teachers.

Problem Solving Scenario

President Donna DeMiddle has called the Union Office looking for a UniServ Director. She starts the call by saying, “I know that I am supposed to be handling everything myself, but I really want your help with an issue. “

“There are a number of the new staff at Higher Ground High School who wants to file a grievance and they don’t have any one of their building reps that feels it is warranted. Of course, I have only heard from one of our long time reps – and I know he has his finger on the pulse. He says that a few of the new-type folks want to have some sort of uprising or file a grievance but the guys that know how things

work there – think they just need you to come calm the upstarts down. You know, explain that they have to put up with some challenges in the beginning.”

“Here’s what I am told their issue is - the Principal for the high school has asked the teachers that are still in their first three years of teaching or anyone that has a high rate of behavior issues or a below standard evaluation rating to turn in their lesson plans. Because it is mostly the new teachers who are struggling with student behavior – the principal – who is a good guy and always works with the union – just wants them to get their acts together. The members with seniority aren’t too concerned – except that two of our long time reps received poor evaluations last year – so they are going to have to do this new stuff. It’s really the newer folks who feel like this is an inequity in workload – but we all had to pay our dues when we were new, didn’t we?”

“The Principal and the Reps are also a little concerned that there is too much of this equity stuff and not enough attention to good old teaching.”

“So, they need you down there pronto to help bring the newbies into the fold. They need to understand that the role of the union is not to change the world – it is to get them a paycheck and benefits. I can't do the meeting with them because I have to be over at the middle school training. The reps can't do it because they don't want to upset the principal. I really don't know how I am supposed to do all this Union Staff work as the President. Thanks, and I know they will be happy to see you soon. “

Some context:

The state statute and district policy are silent on the issue of lesson plans.

The Agreement, in the section on "Evaluation" requires, " ... demonstration of the ability to plan," as a requisite criterion for successful teaching and it is the purview of the principal whether these plans are required to be turned in.

The other three high schools seem to have teachers doing these sorts of plans, at least nominally, without a peep from anyone.

The entire faculty gets a minimum of five planning periods per week, guaranteed, in the Agreement.

The newer teachers, who did not feel adequately prepared to teach the students in their class – have requested the training and have asked for support in crafting instruction that is equitable for all students.

Campaign Opportunity 4- Sunrise Elementary

There is a long time principal at this school – well liked. This is a heavily impacted school – high poverty, large class sizes, and high non-dominant English speakers. The staff recently unanimously voted to support an in-class breakfast program that causes them to give up 15 minutes of their contractually granted daily planning time. There is a high number of new teachers -20% in their first three years. Membership is at 80% in the certified unit. There is a new assistant principal who was a long time union leader and a National Board Certified Teacher. There is a new Head Building Rep who has been teaching for three years. She believes that it is every employee's responsibility to belong to the union. There are 3 building reps who have developed a system for doing one on ones in their building with a target of reaching all their contacts by mid-year. These leaders have surveyed their colleagues seeking input on issues and have identified three issues that colleagues want to improve – workload, coordination with special education and resource services, community connections. One of the reps is taking on the issue of helping parents understand curriculum requirements and is using her networks within the Latino community to set up meetings at local churches and the community center.

Attendance at the monthly RA from these reps is 100% and they have a 100% return from their building level colleagues on a recent Commitment to Vote campaign. This school has signed up to host a school board candidate at their next staff breakfast and invite them to see the breakfast in the classroom program. These members have increased their PAC contributions by 30%. They have sent three teams of 7 to the union led summer professional development and leadership programs. Members at this school have designed and led a number of professional learning groups based in what they determine is most useful for their students. Members at this building tend to contact their UniServ for information, resources and to “double-check” if actions they have planned make sense and are in keeping with sound practice.

The support staff in this building feel like they are invisible – especially to the classroom teachers. While the teachers are not particularly happy about the breakfast in the classroom program – it has been an enormous shift in the amount of work expected of the kitchen and office staff. The kitchen staff are expected to do more, within the same amount of hours with no down time for clean-up prior to getting ready for the early lunch wave. The office staff are in charge of delivering the breakfast to the classroom, doing lunch accountability and handling clean up – while still trying to cover phones and attend to access for the building via the front door and security sign-in. The one Support Staff building rep has a small group of members who want to do something – but they don't know who they can get to help them or join them in making a change.

Problem Solving Scenario

Velma Overly the Support Staff President wants to get some answers for her members – and potential members at Sunrise Elementary – specifically the kitchen and office staff. She is sitting in your office when you arrive in the morning and jumps right in ---

“Well, I think I have finally done it! I have found the issue that will get those non-members at Sunrise to sign-up. I am tired of having to do stuff for them when most of them are free-riders.”

“You know Sunrise, it is that huge elementary with all those before and after school programs and has both of the homeless shelters for families in its neighborhood. They also have a dual language and a Pre-K program – lots of Support Staff there along with a big lunch program. Due to all the services and rather transient family population – there is also quite a large office staff group. Anyways – I know the issue that is finally going to get them to see the value in the union!!”

“Sunrise got a federal grant to provide breakfast in the classrooms. No one is happy about it. It is a mess, teachers are losing 5 minutes off their morning planning time AND the kitchen staff have no down time between prepping and sending the breakfasts out to the classrooms and getting lunch ready – because of the size of the school, the first lunch wave for Pre-K is at 10:30. Of course – the principal will not give the kitchen staff more hours because then 5 of them would become eligible for health insurance.”

“The office staff are none too happy either – they have to deliver and pick up the breakfasts at each of the classrooms – it is a huge school and that means that it takes nearly all of them off the phones, the entry scanner and other front office issues. Mornings in that school’s office are a jungle.”

“I want the Union to lead the charge to get rid of breakfast in the classroom! I know the teachers would jump in on this issue too!”

Some context:

This neighborhood is the poorest most densely populated in the county and food insecurity is a top issue

It is true that the breakfast in the classroom program does infringe on the Certified Members contract – but not the Support Staff contract – as they are hourly and the building principal sets hours.

This is one of the hardest to staff buildings in the county, and this is the building with the lowest Support Staff membership density.

Campaign Opportunity 5- Tip Top District and the Tip Top Education Association

This is a mid-size school system consisting of 65 schools. There are about 3,700 employees that could be covered by either the Certified Employees Contract or the Support Staff Contract. There are 2,900 total members – 1,600 are certified members and 1,300 are support staff (bus drivers and custodians are represented by two other unions). There are 700 non-members in the certified unit, and 5 non-members in the support staff unit. The trend for both units has been membership declines especially in new to the profession certified employees and kitchen workers.

For the most part, most members tend to call the union staff or executive leaders directly with questions and problems instead of using their representative system. Union meetings are not well attended. Only about half of the building reps attend monthly meetings and engagement in actions is often driven by staff. On the last contract ratification vote only 28% of the members voted.

The district is facing a number of challenges. The long-term and popular Superintendent and a number of long time school board members have just changed. Their replacements are focused on raising expectations and holding educators responsible for student success. There have been substantial cuts coming from the state to support school budgets. This means that the school board is seeking a raise in property taxes. The most recent negotiations were closed and the final results contentious. There is a growing narrative from the public that the school system is only concerned in seeking higher wages and maintaining a rich benefit package. The educators in this district are some of the most well-paid employees in the community. This once, relatively middle-class and white district has transitioned in the past five years to majority non-white district with non-dominant English speakers making up the majority of K-3 students. Despite these changes in student population, the certified employees remain 95% white, mostly women and mostly English only speakers. Support staff tend to be more reflective of the county population, with large numbers of them living in the “affordable” neighborhoods.

The elected, executive leadership of the unions consists of:

President of Certified, Donna DeMiddle– a middle-aged, middle-class, suburban living, white woman that taught middle school for 22 years. She is a full-time release president. She is a native of Enchanted County and graduated from the district. She was chief negotiator for the new contract. She simply wants to return to the days when parents took responsibility for their children and sent them to school with proper values. She remembers when her UD came to her and did the work of the union that she paid for – bargained, talked to those in power and made sure her rights were protected. She has grown dissatisfied with the way that the newer union staff do their work. She would like to become a UD someday and feels she could do a better job.

Vice President of Certified, Stavon Liberaling– relatively new to the profession – 6 years of experience – high school teacher in one of the largest, poorest, most diverse schools in the city by choice. He has purposely purchased and is rehabilitating a home in the neighborhood of the school he teaches in. Stavon’s parents are immigrants and he wants to ensure that all immigrants and their children have access to the community resources they deserve. He wants the union to use its power in ways that allow members to fight the injustices that matter most to them and the community. He ran a slate with the newly elected Secretary and Treasurer who are on the newer end of the profession – both are elementary school teachers - and won

primarily because they have openly criticized the current contract bargained by the current President.

President of Support Staff Velma Overly – a long-time employee working out of the office of the districts' largest high school. Her native language is Spanish and she is known widely throughout the county's large Spanish, Catholic Church system. She is a leader in her church and she is widely respected by her members – but not the president of the certified union. She is not a full-time release like the certified president, and due to her work schedule often has to miss important organizational meetings due to the timing set by the Certified Union leadership. She wants to make sure that her members jobs are not contracted out and that they see their union as a place of connectivity. Velma a much loved and respected leader – but she does everything for her members. She has made it her life calling to serve her church community and her union. There is no vice president or other officers for the Support Staff Union – there could be, but members site limited time and that Velma does a great job for them anyways. She is a bit frightened at the thought of public actions – but knows these have been effective in other places.

Problem Solving Scenario and Context:

A salary schedule was recently settled with an 8% increase in salary, but the members did not completely understand what would be expected in return for this increase in salary. The school year was lengthened by five days as well as the school day by 40 minutes. Many of the newer members are increasingly unhappy with the district and especially with their elected union leadership. The more experienced members who remembered the previous collaborative relationship between union and district were neither as angry nor as vocal as the newer members - and they staunchly defended the district and its practices and labeled dissenters as unprofessional and not wanting the best for kids.

This local is in turmoil. The newer teachers have felt ignored by their association leaders for the last couple of years and feel that the new contract unfairly burdens younger, newer members who are trying to raise young families, work second jobs to afford mortgages and attend night courses to achieve permanent certifications. They have started calling the vice-president INSTEAD of the president and shared with him their deep unhappiness with their new work load. They want to take actions that would bring attention to their issue. Several long time members of the local, including the President feel that doing visible union actions is a negative for the profession, a feeling strongly shared and articulated by several key central office members.

The Support Staff Association is about to enter bargaining with the new superintendent and school board who have made it clear that they are looking at sub-contracting to cut costs. The President – Velma Overly is accustomed to doing most of her bargaining one on one with the superintendent and plans to approach this upcoming bargaining in the same manner. Velma has not reached out for any support or coaching about bargaining but you have heard from a number of building reps who attended the last meeting that there a lots of issues that members would like to address in bargaining and Velma seemed overwhelmed or dismissive.

union the powerhouse it is. And it might have been easy for Lightfoot to come to office on promises to change Chicago and think that the CTU's power had lessened in the interim. Lightfoot, Shibata says, "conflates power and authority, and she has a lot of authority but she really doesn't have any power right now."

The power the union has built is visible now in aldermen, elected in part [through CTU's organizing](#), showing up on [picket lines](#) and community members joining picket dance-offs, in mass marches [twice the size](#) of the ones in 2012. It shows in [glowing profiles](#) of the union's new leaders, like Stacy Davis Gates, even in the mainstream Chicago papers. It shows, Shibata says, at every school in Chicago, every day the union remains out.

Tags

LABOR / DISPATCHES / TEACHERS / STRIKES / CHICAGO

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