

Pre-Attendance Resources



Organizing Strategies for work with ESP Members

UniServ Directors who represent ESP locals are responsible for identifying and developing leaders, organizing issue campaigns, and understanding and advocating for the unique needs of ESP members. Strong ESP 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 skills around ESP 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 of the various job families within ESP.

Director

Tom Israel

tisrael@nea.org

Academy Coordinator

Ellen Holmes

eholmes@nea.org

Academy Logistics

Karla Medina

kmedina@nea.org

Community Agreements for Our Time

Awareness and Self-Knowledge

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

Listening for Understanding

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

Being Gracious

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

Staying Engaged

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

Being Open and Suspending Judgment

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

Saying "I" - tell your truth

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

Leaning into Discomfort

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

Reaching Empathy

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

Expecting Non-Resolution and Non-Closure

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

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

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

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

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

History and Background

Education Support Professionals: An essential part of One Education Workforce

<http://www.nea.org/home/41393.htm>

In early 2009, Education Support Professional (ESP) membership in the National Education Association topped half a million, reflecting a **3200% growth** since we gained full membership status in 1980.

Education Support Professionals were first recognized as Association members in 1967, when “Educational Secretaries” received membership. A category for “Auxiliary Personnel,” or paraprofessionals, was added in 1972. “Educational Support Personnel”—encompassing all non-teaching education employees— was established as a separate membership category in 1980. ESP won a position on the NEA Board of Directors in 1983, and we continued to expand our representation in governance throughout the 1980s.

In 1988, Education Support Personnel were included as active members rather than a separate membership category. ESP were recognized as “professionals” in 2001, and in 2002, we gained our own NEA department, Education Support Professionals Quality, charged with promoting professional quality for ESP.

Currently, there are more than 3 million education support staff in the nation’s school systems. Because nearly one half of the employees of any given school district are support professionals, we represent the biggest opportunity for NEA membership growth.

Our power can only increase as our numbers grow.

Issues of Importance for Education Support Professionals

To attract a skilled, dedicated and experienced Education Support Professionals workforce, and to be a full partner in a strong Association, ESPs need:

Respect

ESPs need to have our importance acknowledged by school districts, administrators, teachers, parents, and our Association.

Inclusion

ESP want to be treated as full partners in the education team at the school level and within the local, state and national Association.

Job Security

ESP need protection from layoffs and privatization.

Pay and Benefits

ESP need pay commensurate with the skills and responsibilities of our positions—no less than a living wage.

Training and Professional Development

ESP need opportunities and meaningful education that provides both for career path development (e.g. paras becoming teachers) and for continual improvement within our current jobs. We want training to bring our skills up to date with 21st century changes.

History of Education Support Professionals in NEA

mid-1960s Employment of auxiliary personnel in schools rises sharply in response to increases in the availability of federal funds from the Office of Economic Opportunity, the Office of Education, and the Labor Department as part of the congressional War on Poverty.

1965 The Elementary and Secondary Education School Act (ESEA) is signed in to law by President Lyndon B. Johnson. Title I of the ESEA grants funding to schools to improve the academic performance of low-income or disadvantaged children. The focus on raising student achievement requires additional resources in the educational setting, such as those provided by para-professionals and auxiliary personnel.

1967 The Representative Assembly (RA) adopts the new membership category, “Educational Secretary,” into the NEA Bylaws.

1972-1973 A membership category for “Auxiliary Personnel” is established at the 1972 RA. The membership categories adopted into the NEA Bylaws at the 1973 RA are Active, Life, Reserve, Associate, Educational Secretary, Auxiliary Personnel, Retired, Student, and Survivor.

1974 A task force is appointed at the 1974 RA to study the problems related to organizing and servicing substitute, part-time, and paraprofessional personnel, including examination of their “proper” professional and legal relationships with full-time teachers. As part of the motion, the RA also adopts the statement supporting the right of paraprofessionals to bargain collectively with their employers.

1975 At the 1975 RA, the membership category of “Auxiliary Personnel” is changed to “Paraprofessionals.” “Educational Secretary” remains as a separate membership category.

1979 NEA faces federal pressure to comply with the 1959 Landrum-Griffin Act, which requires that minority groups within an organization be granted rights of majority groups, including representation and voting. Amendments to the NEA Bylaws are passed at the 1979 RA to grant certain constituency groups, including ESP, the right to participate in governance, including the right to vote and to seek and hold elected and appointive offices. These rights were previously restricted to Active Members.

The 1979 RA also votes to collapse the membership categories for “Paraprofessionals” and “Educational Secretary” into a single membership category of “Educational Support Personnel,” which expands the membership category to include other non-teaching education employees.

1980 ESPs are voted full membership rights by the RA.

1982 A Special Committee on Educational Support Personnel (often referred to as the “ESP Committee”) is established at the RA. The ESP Committee is authorized to advise the Board of Directors and recommend policies related to educational support personnel.

1983 The RA establishes a number of at-large positions for ESP on the Board of Directors proportional to the number of NEA ESP members during election years. ESP members immediately

run for the new at-large positions at the Representative Assembly and Nancy Marrone from Maine is elected as the first ESP at-large member of the NEA Board of Directors.

1984-present ESP members increase their representation in governance through elected positions in both at-large and state-affiliate positions on the Board of Directors. ESP are also increasingly appointed to key policy committees, including the Resolutions Committee, the Committee on Women's Issues, and the Program and Budget Committee.

1986 The first annual NEA ESP Conference is held in Washington, D.C.

1987 NEA establishes National Educational Support Personnel Day

1988 The "Active" membership definition is expanded to include educational support personnel and the separate membership category for ESP is eliminated.

1990-1991 Resolutions are passed at the 1990 and 1991 RAs that highlight the essential role of ESP in enhancing the learning environment and education process and recognizes their contribution as positive role models.

1992 NEA ESP of the Year is established.

1993 NEA's entire committee structure is revamped at the 1993 RA to represent the diverse segments of the membership. The Special Committee on ESP is dissolved and replaced with the 7-7-7 structure of the Membership Advisory Committee, in which 7 members are teachers, 7 are ESPs, and 7 are Higher Education.

1995 The National Council for Educational Support Personnel (NCESP) is established, with an operational budget, a part-time staff member, and official observer status at Executive Committee, Board and budget meetings.

1997 Iona Holloway, an elementary school paraeducator from Louisiana, becomes the first ESP elected to the nine-member NEA Executive Committee.

1998 The 1998 RA adopts a resolution endorsing the professional development of ESP and recognizes a need for the ESP voice to be represented in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of their professional development programs.

2001-2002 A resolution is passed at the 2001 RA to officially change to the term "Educational Support Professional" to "Education Support Professional." The 2002 RA votes to adopt a new Education Support Professional Quality Department—separate from its original parent department, Affiliate Capacity Building—with an operational and staffing budget.

2007 Paula Monroe, a high school secretary in Redlands, Calif., was elected to the National Education Association's (NEA) Executive Committee in July 2007 for a three-year term.

2008 Four ESP are serving as vice presidents of their state Associations: Steve Cook (MI), Mike Hoffman (DE), Marty Meyer (ID), and Gail Rasmussen (OR).

2009 ESP membership tops 500,000 in February 2009. Gail Rasmussen is elected President of the Oregon Education Association. She is the first ESP to hold the top state affiliate position.

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Analyzing Everyday Oppressions in Union Work

Angel is a newly hired Educational Support Professional (ESP) at Rolling Seas Elementary School – a school that they attended as a child. They are an instructional aide in the special education resource room. This school is known for high poverty, large class sizes, and a high number of English language learners. Angel was the first person in their family to get a degree from the community college. Several generations of Angel's family are all from this community. Angel wanted to continue on at state college to become a certified teacher of students with special needs, but the cost of school was too much. They are a parent who works a second job to earn enough money to eventually move out of their mother's apartment. They are grateful for their family's overall support but wants their own place. Compounding the household budget issues, Angel's child fell off their trike a few years ago resulting in huge, uninsured medical bills. Despite working to pay them off, several are in collection, which is affecting Angel's applications for rental agreements.

Upon meeting the Lead Teacher, Phyllis, Angel is immediately complimented on how well they speak and their lovely, long hair. Phyllis makes sure to discuss how supportive they are of undocumented families and how Angel should feel comfortable in this room with them. As Angel helps Phyllis set up the room for the first day of school, they notice that for any child who has a "different" sounding name, Phyllis puts a bright yellow name sign on the child's desk. Curious, Angel asks about this. Phyllis lets Angel know that these students probably don't speak English and will always come to class without lunch money. All the teachers in the special education program use this as a signal for the lunch accountability tally. "It is just easier that way," says Phyllis.

Later in the day, the conversation turns to getting to know one another and Phyllis asks Angel, "What made you want to be an instructional aide?" Angel shares their story and their aspirations to get a teaching certificate. Phyllis does not have the heart to tell Angel that this dream will likely never come true. There are no reimbursements for professional development for ESP members in the district, and most of the courses required for the full certification program are at the state college in the evening. Phyllis just knows that people like Angel would never be able to overcome the issues of child-care, transportation and added debt, so they don't mention it. "It wouldn't be nice to get their hopes up," thinks Phyllis.

Angel is approached by Carol, the Union's Building Representative (a classroom teacher), and Carol asks them to join the local union. Angel asked about the cost, and Carol responded by saying, "Support staff don't pay much considering all that we have to do for you people. We used to be separate organizations. Now, I think we're more focused on professional issues instead of what matters. The dues are described in this flyer." Carol left a folder of information and a business card of a man that she said worked for the Union. He would help Angel when they got into trouble. Angel asked, "Are there any programs for getting a teaching certification?" "I'll check," says Carol. Angel took the information, but no one ever came to talk to them from the union again. They would have loved to know how to get professional development. Angel called the union office once, and when they asked for information was immediately told they had to be a member first and that they needed to contact the building rep or UniServ Director. "All I wanted was information," they thought, "and all I got was sent back to the people that did not contact me. I guess they really don't want people like me."

As the year went on, and Angel got to know more classroom teachers and instructional aides, they noticed that most of the classroom teachers were people who did not live in the neighborhood around the school, and that most of the instructional aides lived in the school's neighborhood or very close by. At lunch one day Angel shared with their co-worker and neighbor, Elise, their aspirations for becoming a classroom teacher. Overhearing their conversation, Becky, a new classroom teacher, shared her story. "I started here on a conditional certification with only a two-year degree. All I had to do was agree to get my four-year degree in the next three years. I love the state college, my colleagues in the second-grade wing watch my classroom so I can make the evening classes, and we have a babysitter who watches my son in the evenings while I am at class. It is an upfront investment, and the district reimburses up to nine credits a year. I just don't know why more of you don't take advantage of this!"

Analyzing Everyday Oppression in Union Work

Answer the five questions below.

1. Is Angel thriving in the institutions in this story (housing, healthcare, school/union)? What are examples from the story that leads you to this conclusion?	2. What are examples of missed opportunities for the Union with Angel? Why do you think that these misses are happening?
3. What are ways that the Union could engage with Angel?	4. What race and gender is Angel? What evidence from the story leads you to these conclusions?

5. As a staff member, what would you do to support the local leaders & members to engage with Angel in a meaningful, non-transactional way?

Race, Class, and Gender Justice Lens

1. Is this work race, class, or gender explicit?
Are materials, communications, work products from this work race, class, or explicit?
2. Who benefits from this work?
3. How many people of color, of different genders, and different classes are positively impacted by this work?
4. Is there a race, class, or gender justice disparity that is being addressed? Are conditions being improved?
5. Is the race, class, or gender equity practice being introduced? Can this practice be systematized?
6. How does this work build your organization's race, class, or gender justice muscle?

WHAT IS A DOMINANT NARRATIVE?

A dominant narrative is an explanation or story that is told in service of the dominant social group's interests and ideologies. It usually achieves dominance through repetition, the apparent authority of the speaker (often accorded to speakers who represent the dominant social groups), and the silencing of alternative accounts. Because dominant narratives are so normalized through their repetition and authority, they have the illusion of being objective and apolitical, when in fact they are neither.

In almost any topic you explore as a leader, there will likely be dominant narratives that others – or yourself- have encountered and may believe uncritically. The difficulty in dealing with Dominant Narratives is that they are often supported by “perfectly logical explanations.” This means that simply providing your own “perfectly logical explanation” will not shift the narrative. What follows are some guidelines for helping shift a dominant narrative towards your narrative.

GUIDELINES FOR SHIFTING THE DOMINANT NARRATIVE

DO

- **UNMASK**
 - Name the dominant narrative when you see it at work.
 - Point out that what you just saw on the news or heard from a friend, or the law that was just passed, was based on particular values and beliefs.
 - *“The way you are talking about the recent contract settlement sounds like you think teachers are pretty greedy and we’re only looking out for ourselves.”*
- **ELEVATE**
 - Name the values and beliefs from our new narrative that you want to see lived out in the world.
 - Connect it to places where your audience may see that happening already.
 - *“I really like it when parents come in and express their appreciation – especially when they acknowledge they don’t now how we do it – it helps me feel valued and respected”*
- **CONTRAST**
 - Lay out what might be different if your values/convictions were the ones shaping what happens in the world.
 - Be specific about how we have the choice to approach situations through a different belief system.
 - Invite a rethinking of the situation.
 - *“I guess we have to decide if we want to scapegoat teachers for the many challenges we face or accept teachers as willing and able partners in educating all kids.”*
- **DRAW ON YOUR OWN JOURNEY**

- While it's important to personalize this, it's also important to do it in a way that anyone can see themselves in it. Describing your own realizations and shifts will help others find their own way in the conversation.
- *"I can understand your reaction, there are times when I realize that I've been reacting to what others say and not putting forth my own beliefs – it gets discouraging – but I realize now I've only been making it worse."*
- **SUSTAIN YOUR EFFORTS AND CONNECT WITH OTHERS**
 - Shifting a dominant narrative does not happen quickly – it takes sustained effort, over time, with many people working at it.
- **DEMONSTRATE YOUR WORLDVIEW, DON'T JUST WRITE AND TALK ABOUT IT.**
 - Our actions say as much or more about our values and beliefs as our words.

DON'T

- **FOCUS ON CHALLENGING FACTS OR INTERPRETATIONS OF INFORMATION**
 - This will not shift the narrative. Your arguments, as convincing as they may be, will ultimately lose out to the dominant narrative.
- **ATTACK PEOPLE FOR THEIR WORLDVIEW**
 - Many people operate out of the dominant narrative, even if unconsciously. Shifting public narratives will take personal conversion and transformation. You cannot move people if you attack them.
- **NAME THE DOMINANT NARRATIVE AS "WRONG"**
 - Our assumption is that competing values & beliefs live within people. We want to provide people a chance to choose the ones they want to live out of and/or balance those competing narratives (e.g. accountability of and respect for teachers).
- **TRY TO CONVERT OR CONVINCE PEOPLE**
 - We are trying to bring out the best of what is already in people, help them find the resonance for themselves. This is, in part, an emotional journey and our usual approaches to argument and logic don't work so well in this arena.

Scenario #1

Consider the following scenario:

You are at a large staff meeting and a rather outspoken colleague says, “I can’t believe these ESP members! They get all of the same benefits of our certified members. They and take up the much more of our time in services and they are still complaining about the amount of their dues and the money they make! Why can’t they just be content with what we give them? Why don’t they just go join another union that better fits their needs?!”

- 1) How will you respond to **unmask** the dominant narrative?

- 2) What will you say to **elevate** our new narrative? What kind of **connections** can you draw your audience in?

- 3) How can you **contrast** what was said? What can be said to point out how things might be different if the new narrative was shaping education discussions?

- 4) What can you say to **draw on your own journey** with this world view? How can you draw on your own experience?

Scenario #2

Consider the following scenario:

While at a political fundraiser, your local elected representative, who you respect greatly, says, “I’m a strong labor supporter, but the hourly ESP workers in the “teachers union” are sure a different breed from the teachers. Their fight for raises and benefits are getting in the way of real educational investment in our schools. Their services cost us a lot and we could do a lot better if we used contract services. The cost of employing them keep the kids in this state from getting real benefit from better paid teachers. If we are ever going to have great schools, the union is going to have to stop being so focused on wages. Besides, all that union activity does not seem very professional to me.”

- 1) How will you respond to **unmask** the dominant narrative?
- 2) What will you say to **elevate** our new narrative? What kind of **connections** can you draw your audience in?
- 3) How can you **contrast** what was said? What can be said to point out how things might be different if the new narrative was shaping education discussions?
- 4) What can you say to **draw on your own journey** with this world view? How can you draw on your own experience?

Scenario #3

Consider the following scenario:

You are sitting at a local school board meeting with some members. A community member over hears you talking, comes over and says, “Why are you folks always asking for more from this community? Our schools already take the biggest portion of our taxes and they still don’t turn out graduates that can work or participate positively in our society. Employees at that school have more benefits and make more money than most of us here in this room. I mean you knew you were not going to get rich working at a school and it must be rough to summers have off. I’d love to be able to sit back all summer and relax.”

- 1) How will you respond to **unmask** the dominant narrative?
- 2) What will you say to **elevate** our new narrative? What kind of **connections** can you draw your audience in?
- 3) How can you **contrast** what was said? What can be said to point out how things might be different if the new narrative was shaping education discussions?
- 4) What can you say to **draw on your own journey** with this world view? How can you draw on your own experience?

Scenario #4

Consider the following scenario:

At a local community meeting, a neighbor who is discouraged about the increasing cost of property taxes says, “ They should just get rid of all those extra folks at that school. I mean the superintendent and principals have too many secretaries, kids could eat in their classroom with their teachers, and the way those buildings look, we sure aren’t getting our money’s worth out of all those folks who work there. It is clear that we just need to spend our tax dollars on learning. Maybe it should just be a charter school and run all that non learning stuff like a business.”

- 1) How will you respond to **unmask** the dominant narrative?

- 2) What will you say to **elevate** our new narrative? What kind of **connections** can you draw your audience in?

- 3) How can you **contrast** what was said? What can be said to point out how things might be different if the new narrative was shaping education discussions?

- 4) What can you say to **draw on your own journey** with this world view? How can you draw on your own experience?

Scenario #5

Consider the following scenario:

At a contract negotiations meeting with the certified employees a leader of the team who is struggling with the pace of bargaining with the district says, "You know that we need to settle our contract first. If we don't, the district will give our raise to the ESPs who are set to bargain next. I have already heard that the district approached them about entering bargaining asap. Our members put in more hours and have a lot more education and they deserve to do better in this bargain. We have to stick to our own and let the district know we want to settle, and settle fast."

- 2) How will you respond to **unmask** the dominant narrative?

- 3) What will you say to **elevate** our new narrative? What kind of **connections** can you draw your audience in?

- 4) How can you **contrast** what was said? What can be said to point out how things might be different if the new narrative was shaping education discussions?

- 5) What can you say to **draw on your own journey** with this world view? How can you draw on your own experience?

Scenario #6

You are at a membership meeting of the local Classroom Teachers Union. A rather outspoken leader says, “I can’t believe these ESP members! They are complaining about how they aren’t paid when we have breaks and snow-days. They could have gotten a degree just as I had to do. They choose to be an hourly worker. With this economy, they should just be glad they have a job!”

- 2) How will you respond to **unmask** the dominant narrative?

- 3) What will you say to **elevate** our new narrative? What kind of **connections** can you draw your audience in?

- 5) How can you **contrast** what was said? What can be said to point out how things might be different if the new narrative was shaping education discussions?

What can you say to **draw on your own journey** with this world view? How can you draw o



To: National Education Association

Re: Findings and Recommendations from NEA Recruitment Research

INTRODUCTION:

The following memo contains key findings and recommendations from a multi-phase research project of potential NEA member ESPs from November 2022 to February 2023. The research was designed to help NEA and its affiliates develop messaging to recruit potential member ESPs more effectively. The research was conducted in three phases:

1. We began by conducting **in-depth interviews with on-the-ground ESP organizers** across the country and with a range of positions within NEA's state and local affiliates. Each interviewee was selected because they had been identified as particularly experienced in recruiting ESPs. The purpose of the interviews was 1) to determine what's working and not working for organizers; 2) to understand what obstacles needed to be addressed; and 3) to gather ideas for future testing.
2. We then kicked off our research among potential member ESPs themselves, with extensive **focus groups among potential member ESPs**. This included six 90-minute online focus groups, which were segmented by career families, the collective bargaining status of the respondents' home state, and race.
3. Building off the findings of the qualitative research, we conducted a **large-scale online survey of 1,038 potential member ESPs** from across the country to verify and hone the findings and attitudes that emerged in the qualitative research, understand attitudinal differences across job classifications and other demographic groups, and test updated messaging and positioning, including how and whether to address the cost of membership and the "freeloader" argument.

The recommendations from this research are being used to expand on the insights from previous research among certified potential members and develop communications campaign and collateral, such as flyers, leave-behind brochures for potential ESP members, and a conversation guide for member organizers. Those materials and campaign will be ready ahead of back-to-school in 2023.

Executive Summary:

In short, the research shows that:

- As we saw in the research with certified members, we must do more to educate potential members that NEA and its affiliates are unions – and that unions are legal. And further, we must show how, as members, they can increase their collective power through advocacy and / or bargaining.
- The pitch to education support professionals does require another educational step. We must also be clear that NEA is a union for them, as well as certified members. Many potential member ESPs are aware of the collective power of teachers' unions but are uncertain of their eligibility for membership or may not feel welcome as full and equal members of NEA.
- We need to convince potential members that NEA's affiliates will strengthen their voice and improve their daily lives especially by improving wages. Using past wins to demonstrate potential for future wins is critical – even small improvements on salary and day-to-day issues like facility repairs can go a long way.
- The focus on wages is of particular importance to ESPs, more so than with certified educators.
- Relatedly, there is a lot concern about the cost of dues. Many perceive that union dues are higher than they actually are, but conversations about dues can easily backfire. Therefore, we should not speak proactively about dues. But we SHOULD be ready to respond to questions about dues by focusing on the monthly cost of \$21 per month (or the lower local rate) and NOT the annual \$250 cost.

- Meanwhile, it is imperative to address concerns about cost implicitly by demonstrating the value of membership – primarily the ability to achieve higher wages and better benefits through collective power.
- Similarly, it is counterproductive to address the freeloader issue proactively. Our research finds that it simply reinforces the idea that freeloaders is an option. Instead, we should address the issue implicitly with our message about the benefits of collective power.
- The actual words “education support professional” are not a widely used or well understood terms among potential members, who are more likely to identify themselves as “support staff.” These potential members also mostly do not consider themselves “educators.” Recruitment efforts should avoid using internal language until after potential members join the union and, instead, should use the term “support staff” and/or, better yet, talk about each potential recruit’s specific job classification.
- Many of the recommendations from the previous research with certified members are still applicable to ESPs. A transformational pitch that positions the union as member-driven vehicle for achieving collective power can significantly boost interest in joining, as opposed to a transactional approach that highlights how the union delivers services in exchange for dues.

OUR PITCH TO POTENTIAL MEMBERS:

What to tell them:	Why it works:
<u>1. Introduce and Educate</u> In CB states: <i>The [STATE AFFILIATE] has the legally protected right in your state to negotiate on behalf of workers like you. They regularly fight for improved contracts that win workers higher wages and better benefits, while also advocating for changes that improve the daily lives of workers.</i> In non-CB states: <i>(You may have been told that unions aren’t allowed in your state, but that isn’t true.) The [STATE AFFILIATE] is a union that regularly negotiates on behalf of workers like you. They fight for improved contracts that win workers higher wages and better benefits, while also advocating for changes that improve the daily lives of workers.</i>	▪ Highlights a state or local union in their area ▪ Clarifies unions are legal and/or active ▪ Talks about their daily life
<u>2. Demonstrate How The Union Will Get Results: Collective Power</u> <i>Workers like us are some of the most under-appreciated people in our schools. We’re rarely asked for our opinions or communicated with when big decisions are made. But when more members join the union and band together, administrators listen to us and we have a stronger voice to negotiate for better wages and benefits, along with changes that improve our daily lives.</i>	▪ Connects with their desire for respect ▪ Shows power in numbers, ideally locally
<u>3. Show Value: Improved Pay & Benefits</u> <i>Most people like us work in schools because we want to help kids. We’re not expecting to get rich, but far too often, people act like we’ve taken a vow of poverty. Banding together is the best way to get paid what we deserve. Our union has already successfully secured some increases in salaries and benefits, but it’s only a start because support staff deserve so much more. With more members, we’ll have an even stronger voice and be able to secure real pay increases, cost-of-living adjustments, and increases in retirement and healthcare benefits.</i>	▪ Points to past wins ▪ Shows you understand their goals (help students) and frustrations (not being able to connect with students) ▪ Name checks top priorities

CUSTOMIZING YOUR PITCH:

Collective Bargaining States

Short Pitch

We are a union that **has a legally protected right to negotiate** on behalf of support staff like you, so we can all get higher wages, better benefits, and improvements to our daily lives. When more people join the union, administrators listen to us. Our union has already secured wins, but it's only a start. With more members, like you, we'll have an even stronger voice and be able to secure real pay increases, cost of living adjustments, and increases in retirement and health care benefits.

Longer Pitch

We are a union that **has a legally protected right to negotiate** on behalf of support staff including paraprofessionals, transportation workers, librarians, food service workers [BE SURE TO LIST THE JOB OF THE PERSON YOU ARE RECRUITING] and teachers, so we can get higher wages, better benefits, and improvements to our daily lives.

Without a union, workers like us are underappreciated and often unheard. When more members join the union, administrators listen to us – giving us a stronger voice to negotiate.

We do this work because we want to help students. We're not expecting to get rich, but far too often our work is undervalued. Banding together is the best way to get paid what we deserve.

Our union has already won increases in salaries and benefits, but it's only a start because support staff deserve so much more. With more members, we'll have an even stronger voice and be able to secure real pay increases, cost of living adjustments, and increases in retirement and health care benefits.

Non-Collective Bargaining States

Short Pitch

Did you know you could be part of the union and that unions are allowed in [STATE]. We are a union that **regularly advocates** on behalf of support staff like you, so we can all get higher wages, better benefits, and improvements to our daily lives. When more people join the union, administrators listen to us. Our union has already secured wins, but it's only a start. With more members, like you, we'll have an even stronger voice and be able to secure real pay increases, cost of living adjustments, and increases in retirement and health care benefits.

Longer Pitch

You may have been told that unions aren't allowed in [STATE,] but that isn't true. We are a union that **regularly advocates** on behalf of support staff, including paraprofessionals, transportation workers, librarians, food service workers [BE SURE TO LIST THE JOB OF THE PERSON YOU ARE RECRUITING] and teachers, so we all can get higher wages, better benefits, and improvements to our daily lives.

Without a union, workers like us are underappreciated and often unheard. When members join the union and band together, administrators listen to us – giving us a stronger voice to advocate.

We do this work because we want to help kids. We're not expecting to get rich, but far too often our work is undervalued. Banding together is the best way to get paid what we deserve.

Our union has already won increases in salaries and benefits, but it's only a start because support staff deserve so much more. With more members, we'll have an even stronger voice and be able to secure real pay increases, cost of living adjustments, and increases in retirement and health care benefits.

Talking Points

These are the safest messages to use among any audience, regardless of the state's collective bargaining status or the ESP's job title.

- **We are a union** that regularly advocates on behalf of support staff.
- We advocate for **higher wages, better benefits**, and improvements to our daily lives.
- Our **voice is stronger** and more effective when we band together.
- Our union has a **proven track record of success**, but we need more members to amplify our voice so we can win higher salaries for workers like us.

Tailored Messaging

[non-collective bargaining states/collective bargaining states]

Paraeducators**Elevator Pitch**

We are a union that [regularly advocates/has a legally protected right to negotiate] on behalf of paraeducators, so we all can get higher wages, safety from physical abuse, and improvements to our daily lives.

When more people join the union, administrators listen to us. As paraeducators, we're always looking out for others, but at a time when schools are overwhelmed, who is looking out for us? Our union has already secured wins, but we need more members so we can amplify our voice and secure real pay increases, cost of living adjustments, and increases in retirement and health care benefits.

Messaging Guidance

- Focus even more heavily on wages relative to other messages.
- Safety from physical abuse and other forms of bodily harm is complementary message that resonates.
- Use teachers as a validator, along with other paraeducators.

Clerical, Technical, and Health Services**Elevator Pitch**

We are a union that [regularly advocates/has a legally protected right to negotiate] on behalf of support staff like you, so we all can get higher wages, better benefits, and professional development opportunities to support your career and improve your daily life.

Workers like us are rarely asked for our opinions or included when big decisions are made. But when more people join the union, administrators listen to us.

Our union has already secured wins, but we need more members so we can amplify our voice and secure real pay increases, cost of living adjustments, and increases in retirement and health care benefits.

Messaging Guidance

- Place a large emphasis on how the union can convince administrators to *listen* to workers like them.
- Highlight the union's work to provide professional development opportunities as a complementary message.
- It is even more important than with other classifications, to refer to these groups as "support staff." Do not use the term "ESP."

Custodial, Transportation, Skilled Trades, Security, and Food Service

Elevator Pitch

We are a union that [regularly advocates/has a legally protected right to negotiate] on behalf of support staff like you, so we all can get higher wages, better benefits, and improvements to our daily lives.

Our union has already secured wins, but we need more members so we can amplify our voice and secure real pay increases, cost of living adjustments, and increases in retirement and health care benefits.

School boards across the country are trying to privatize our jobs, but when we have a strong union, we are able to get communities, parents, and teachers on our side to help save our jobs.

Messaging Guidance

- Emphasize the union's work to stop privatization.
- Educate them on their right to join the union, because many support staff don't know they can join.
- Emphasize your local affiliate is a union, not an association.
- Do not use the term "ESP" and be intentional about using teachers as validators.

Guidance on Customization

Do	Don't
Say "support staff" or the specific job title of the person you are recruiting	Don't Say "ESPs" or "educators"
Demonstrate that the union is a good investment by lifting up the value and benefits of membership	Don't proactively bring up the cost of dues
Respond to questions about dues by talking about the monthly cost (\$21/month or local average cost)	Don't respond to questions about dues by talking about the annual cost (\$250/year)
Make the argument that the union will be more powerful and better able to win higher wages and benefits with more members	Don't accuse people of "freeloading" or proactively bring it up

CB vs. Non-CB States

In States with Collective Bargaining:

- Emphasize you have a *legally protected right* to negotiate on their behalf.

In States without Collective Bargaining:

- As needed, make it clear that, yes, unions are legal.
- Emphasize you *regularly advocate* on their behalf.

Localizing Your Message

- Learn the issues facing support staff in your district and be prepared to showcase how the union will help address those issues.
- Highlight the union's past wins in your district / state.
- Use people's specific roles / classifications when you talk to them.

Universal Messages

- Start by educating them about the fact there is a union they can join that will advocate on their behalf.
- Focus on the union's work to secure wage increases and better benefits through collective power.

LANDSCAPE FINDINGS:

The survey and qualitative research with potential members painted a comprehensive, nuanced picture on what motivates ESPs, what they know and think about NEA and its affiliates, and how they react to recruitment communications and messaging. These findings have informed the messaging guidance included above.

Many have not even been recruited. Some report they've received no communications or were never formally asked to join. There is an untapped market out there if we can find the right message and help locals build up recruiting capacity.

Education Support Professionals need to see themselves in NEA's membership. When ESPs hear the word "educators," they don't necessarily think it is referring to them, which leaves them unsure of their eligibility. Likewise, it's important to have messages (and messengers) tailored to goals and results that impact ESPs.

Awareness of the union's existence and potential benefits for member ESPs are both low. Some ESPs are aware of a union in their school, and remember being asked to join, but others are entirely unfamiliar and claim that there is no union in their school at all. Among those familiar with NEA, they are almost entirely unaware of what the union could do for them or already does do for them. They value their benefits but are unaware of the efforts made by the union to win those benefits. They don't know about discounts and programs available to them through union membership. For these ESPs, without a clear understanding of how joining the union could directly benefit them, and direct outreach so they are made aware of the union's presence and efforts on behalf of ESPs specifically, there will be little incentive for them to join at all. This is especially important given the lack of understanding of the true cost of union dues.

ESPs want a union to work towards higher salaries, better benefits, and workplace protection. The most important accomplishments a union could win across job categories included winning higher salaries, providing a safe workplace and protecting ESPs from additional duties outside their core responsibilities, and ensuring that the benefits that drew many ESPs to their job in the first place remain strong.

ESPs will be harder to reach and persuade than teachers. Compared to teachers, ESPs have lower interest in joining the union and more middling ratings of their state affiliate. And while we can increase interest in joining among ESPs, we don't get as much movement as we did with teachers. Part of the reason is that membership dues are more of a barrier for ESPs than for teachers. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't be targeting ESPs – there are still plenty that are open to joining. It does mean that NEA should be deliberate in how it allocates its resources for recruitment between teachers and ESPs given that ESPs are tougher.

Basic education about the union has tremendous value with ESPs, especially in non-collective bargaining states. As we saw in the teacher research, a significant minority of ESPs are unaware that there is a local union available to join. In non-collective bargaining states, just 41% know that there is a union to join. And just 49% of the ready to join – those that start out having significant interest in joining – know that there is (with 30% actively believing there is not). So, there are plenty of ESPs out there that would sign up right now if they knew that the union were an option. Moreover, we reach our apex of interest after a simple pitch that clarifies that unions are allowed (and have a legally protected right to bargain in CB states) and that the state affiliate is a union that advocates for higher wages, benefits, and changes that improve workers' daily lives.

Dues are a major obstacle for ESPs, and many believe they are higher than they really are. A monthly figure is much better for us than an annual figure, but any discussions that focus attention on dues COULD be counterproductive. As we saw in the focus groups, most ESPs believe the union is too expensive and that dues are significantly higher than they really are, though most are not willing to pay even that amount. The \$21 per month figure sounds much more reasonable to ESPs than the \$250 figure, but interest in joining the union declines after a discussion of either, because that discussion increases the salience of cost.

The perception that the union cares more about teachers is an obstacle, but teachers can also be good validators for the union – especially with paraeducators. There is a damaging perception among

ESPs that the union cares more about teachers than about ESPs. However, despite this perception, ESPs (especially our most important targets) have largely favorable views of teachers and generally say they would trust what teachers have to say about their local affiliate – with paraeducators especially showing trust in what teachers have to say.

Wages (and benefits) are relatively more important to ESPs than they were to teachers while items that impact their daily lives are relatively less important. Unsurprisingly, given what we saw in our focus groups, almost everything in this survey points to higher wages being of dominant importance to ESPs, with better benefits being not far behind. Meanwhile, day-to-day concerns like mandates for additional duties and reducing micro-managing are relatively less important for ESPs compared to teachers.

“Support staff” is the most unifying term for ESPs. As we heard when we spoke to ESP organizers, ESP is not a widely used term. Out of four potential identifiers, support staff rose to the top across job classifications. “Educator” was the least likely to be identified as best descriptor, with ESP second from the bottom (and “Classified Workers” in second).

This research confirms that labeling NEA (and each respective affiliate) as a “union” is a net positive. The reaction to the emphasis that these materials place on NEA’s and its affiliate’s status as a union is generally positive. This is consistent with both rounds of quantitative research which showed that there was limited negativity around the word ‘union.’ versus ‘association,’ even in non-CB states.

We need to prepare recruiters to demonstrate that NEA and their local union can achieve these kinds of wins. Many prospective member ESPs are drawn to the statements about higher salaries and better support and see these as relatively realistic things the union could accomplish. We knew going into this research that credentialing our message with examples of local wins would be important and that this would likely be a critical piece of the puzzle that recruiters and organizers would need to fill in around these pieces. This research confirmed these assumptions.

Based on both this and past research, we would recommend that state and local affiliates:

- Continue working to build up their lists of local wins, and arm their recruiters and organizers with this information.
- Where it makes sense, use small wins, like changes to a classroom AC unit or safety improvements, to build credibility that we can deliver bigger wins.
- Use certified teachers as validators to emphasize shared interests, cross occupational divides, and make ESPs feel welcome as union members

POSITIONING AND MESSAGING RECOMMENDATIONS:

These recommendations are based on our full body of research, including the organizer IDIs, potential member focus groups, and the survey, as well as our previous teacher join research.

Start by educating ESPs about the fact that there is a union that they can join that advocates on their behalf. There are a good number of ready to join to collect simply by letting ESPs know that, yes, there is a union they can join that advocates on their behalf (and in non-CB states that, yes, unions are legal). This is particularly important in non-CB states, with younger ESPs, and with Paraeducators.

Be mindful of the negative associations that certain people may have of unions. While some have less than positive views of unions, there’s real excitement about having a union with legally protected rights. Instead of shying away from the label, proactively assuage their concerns:

- **Concern:** unions are too political. → **Solution:** default to a more amicable tone and let people know that the union meets with lawmakers from *both* parties
 - That being said, a more confrontational tone can be more effective with some individuals. Reading the room and adjusting will be important. But amicable should be the default.
- **Concern:** unions don’t look out for students. → **Solution:** remind them how when educators feel good and have the resources they need, they can give students their best
- **Concern:** there might be negative social consequences for joining → **Solution:** remind them they have a legally protected right to join without retaliation, that you work with administrators, and possibly lean into the community of other local members as validation.

Demonstrate that the union is a good investment by lifting up the value of membership rather than proactively focusing on the cost of dues... Even though ESPs generally assume that the cost of membership is higher than it actually is, proactively trying to correct their mistaken assumption reduces interest in joining because it puts the focus on cost: regressions show that the back and forth over dues increases the salience of perceptions that the union is too expensive dramatically.

It IS very important to demonstrate that the union is a good investment as this is a strong driver of interest in joining the union both at the beginning and the end of the survey. Thankfully, our messaging about the value of the union does increase the belief that this is true among our most important target groups.

Our overarching message for potential members should be transformational, focusing on affiliates' potential to give educators a stronger voice, boost wages, and improve educators' daily lives.

Numerous independent tests in our research all point to an overarching message that is more transformational than transactional in nature and does NOT place legal protection at its center. Instead, it should focus on the potential of NEA and its affiliates to achieve real change that includes both higher wages and “smaller” day-to-day items, led by more defined hours and planning time. Working in increased respect from administrators can only help, though is not as essential.

Maximizing this argument requires also demonstrating that NEA and its affiliates can actually get results. To build credibility, stress that the union in their state or area:

- Has a legally protected right to negotiate (or ‘regularly negotiates’) on their behalf
- Regularly meets with lawmakers *from both parties*, to increase support for public education.
- Already has real wins, especially, if possible, local wins on wages – even while qualifying that the increases so far are not enough. (More on this below)
- Has strong membership.
 - To be clear, size is not nearly as good at conveying strength, but it can help. More localized membership numbers are better (50% in district > than 50% in state > largest union nationwide), and higher shares convey more strength (70% in state > 50% in district).
 - Telling potential members they are part of “the largest employee organization and labor union in the country” can work well in areas with lower membership.
 - Further, using membership to establish a sense of positive social pressure is something many organizers emphasize, and it likely plays a role that isn’t directly captured in research.

Liability and protection remain an important value-add for potential members (especially older ones), but they should be secondary, not the centerpiece of our messaging. Protection and liability have resonance with potential members, especially older teachers who have seen unfair accusations, and should remain part of our pitch. However, our regression analyses show that believing NEA and its affiliates “protect educators like me” does NOT drive interest in joining, and protection arguments are not as sticky as ones around a stronger voice and wages. All of this echoes our findings from qualitative research, which showed that relying on a liability message leaves us vulnerable to losing members to non-union alternatives offering competing liability protection. So, we should continue to include liability and protection in our pitch, but as a secondary value-add, not as the centerpiece. As a general rule of thumb, we should:

- Emphasize protection and liability MORE with non-classroom (special area) teachers and teachers who have actually seen a teacher tied up in unjustified accusations.
- Emphasize protection and liability insurance LESS with newer educators, as well as any educators of any experience level who have not seen unfair accusations made against someone they work with or themselves.

Other discrete benefits (professional development, financial counseling, discounts, etc.) can play a role as an add-on to our core pitch if they seem to be relevant to a specific audience or in written materials where space allows. These programs hold appeal with some, and in qualitative helped build some teachers’ sense of the range of value provided. But for the most part, they don’t persuade educators on the fundamental value proposition of the affiliates that we know drive the decision to join. Including the range of benefits in leave-behind materials can be useful, and connecting to educators’ personal experiences may be helpful as well. For example if an educator is speaking to a relatively younger teacher or recent college graduate, bringing up student loan assistance as part of a broader point on boosting wages could make sense. Or, as an educator is discussing difficulty planning lessons, bringing up relevant professional development opportunities could be helpful alongside a broader discussion on securing dedicated planning time and protection from after-hour mandates.

...While being ready to react to concerns about costs by focusing on the \$21/month figure. While we generally do not want to proactively bring up the cost of dues, we know that organizers are going to be asked about dues by potential members. When that happens, we should focus on the \$21/month figure. While this figure is more than 73% of ESPs say they are willing to pay, a majority say that it is reasonable, and it is closer to what they are willing to pay than a \$250/year figure and lower than what most ESPs think dues must be.

We should avoid explicitly addressing freeloading and, instead, combat it implicitly using a collective power message. Freeloading is certainly a problem. A belief that the union “already advocates on my behalf, so it’s not worth it for me to pay to be a member” is a strongly correlated in a negative way with interest in joining the union in our regression analysis. However, not only did our “freeloader” message earn the weakest ratings of any message, but the split that saw message saw about half the increase in interest after our positive message battery than the split that did not.

But that doesn’t mean we should not address the issue. We should just do it implicitly with our collective power message. The belief that the union would be more powerful with more members and that it “gives workers like me a stronger voice” are both drivers of interest in joining and by large margins and we make good gains on both with persuasion targets (especially the latter). Moreover, when we force ESPs to choose, persuasion targets are inclined to agree that more members will make the union more powerful rather than that it doesn’t matter if they join. So, it’s not a surprise that our “collective power” messaging performs well with those targets.

Our most important messaging imperative is connecting that collective power to higher wages (and benefits). Our “wages” message was the top testing message both overall and with key target groups and, more important, dominated the post-messaging open end as the most convincing argument to join. Its strength was also reflected in the strong gains we make in perceptions that the state affiliate “could help me get better pay and benefits” AND the fact that the messaging significantly increases the salience of that metric. Meanwhile, while “winning higher salaries for workers like me” is easily the #1 priority for ESPs, “providing better benefits for workers like me, including retirement benefits and affordable healthcare” was a strong #2. Our larger “benefits” message did not perform terribly well outside of the ready to join, but we think it makes sense to simply incorporate these benefits into our core “wages” message.

Privatization is a solid secondary message with custodial, transportation, and food workers. Our “privatization” message joined our “wages” message as the top testing with persuasion targets, though it didn’t really pop in the post-messaging open-end. However, it was especially strong (relative to other messages) with custodial, transportation, and food workers where it was easily the strongest-testing message with this group of classifications – even higher than wages. This echoes what we saw in the groups where ESPs from these classifications showed strong concern about the prospect of privatization.

A message on the union helping ESPs deal with administrators to improve their daily lives could also be useful, but it is not the kind of imperative that it is for teachers. Our “daily lives” message performed only so-so and ESPs do not rate things like protecting workers from mandates for more duties or reducing micro-management as terribly high priorities. However, regressions show that “could improve my daily life” is one of the strongest drivers of interest in joining and we make some of the largest gains over the course of the survey with persuadable ESPs on this metric. We have recommended some updated language to use as a secondary message, though we do not consider this as important as any of the messaging discussed above.

We need to do more to demonstrate that the union is cares about ESPs as much as teachers – including using other ESPs with the same job as validators... As we’ve noted, the perception that the union cares more about teachers than ESPs is a real barrier to joining. The messaging that we’ve discussed above should help on the front, but we need to do more on a tactical level to change this perception as well – things like making sure the union has ESP-specific (and classification-specific) materials and forms. And, where we can, we should use other ESPs who have the same role as our targets as validators for the union as these are easily the most trusted of the potential validators we’ve tested.

Finally, we should also use teachers as a validator, at least when recruiting paraeducators. Teachers aren’t in the same league as a validator as “people who have the same jobs as me.” But, as we’ve noted, our targets view teachers favorably and do have a solid level of trust in what they would have to say about the union. This is especially true of paraeducators, though a bit less true of non-paraeducators.

TARGETING RECOMMENDATIONS:

Our targets who are disproportionately “ready to join” are Democrats and Independents, people of color (especially men), and ESPs under age 55.

Our persuasion targets are Democrats, ESPs under age 45, Black ESPs, paraeducators and food service workers, ESPs in non-collective bargaining states, those in the Midwest, and those who have not previously been members.



MESSAGING FRAMEWORK: ESP RECRUITMENT

TOGETHER. A STRONGER VOICE.
Together We're Stronger. Together We're Heard.



Thank you for the work you do each day to support students and grow our union. This document will help guide conversations as you recruit support staff. Support staff are valued members of our union and our school communities, and your work to recruit them is vital.

OUR PITCH TO JOIN THE UNION

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING STATES

Short Pitch

We are a union that **has a legally protected right to negotiate** on behalf of support staff like you, so we can all get higher wages, better benefits, and improvements to our daily lives. When more people join the union, administrators listen to us. Our union has already collectively secured wins, and it's only a start. With more members like you, we'll have an even stronger voice and be able to secure real pay increases, cost of living adjustments, and increases in retirement and health care benefits.

Longer Pitch

We are a union that **has a legally protected right to negotiate** on behalf of support staff including para-professionals, transportation workers, librarians, food service workers [BE SURE TO LIST THE JOB OF THE PERSON YOU ARE RECRUITING] and teachers, so we can get higher wages, better benefits, and improvements to our daily lives.

Without a union, support staff like us are underappreciated and often unheard. When more members join the union, administrators listen to us—giving us a stronger voice to negotiate.

We do this work because we want to help students. We're not expecting to get rich, but far too often our work is undervalued. Banding together is the best way to get paid what we deserve.

Our union has already collectively won increases in salaries and benefits, but it's only a start because support staff deserve so much more. With more members, we'll have an even stronger voice and be able to secure real pay increases, cost of living adjustments, and increases in retirement and health care benefits.

NON-COLLECTIVE BARGAINING STATES

Short Pitch

Did you know you could be part of the union and that unions are allowed in [STATE]? We are a union that **regularly advocates** on behalf of support staff like you, so we can all get higher wages, better benefits, and improvements to our daily lives. When more people join the union, administrators listen to us. Our union has already collectively secured wins, but it's only a start. With more members like you, we'll have an even stronger voice and collectively be able to secure real pay increases, cost of living adjustments, and increases in retirement and health care benefits.

Longer Pitch

You may have been told that unions aren't allowed in [STATE,] but that isn't true. We are a union that **regularly advocates** on behalf of support staff, including paraprofessionals, transportation workers, librarians, food service workers, [BE SURE TO LIST THE JOB OF THE PERSON YOU ARE RECRUITING] and teachers, so we all can get higher wages, better benefits, and improvements to our daily lives.

Without a union, support staff like us are underappreciated and often unheard. When members join the union and band together, administrators listen to us – giving us a stronger voice to advocate.

We do this work because we want to help kids. We're not expecting to get rich, but far too often our work is undervalued. Banding together is the best way to get paid what we deserve.

Our union has already collectively won increases in salaries and benefits, but it's only a start because support staff deserve so much more. With more members, we'll have an even stronger voice and be able to secure real pay increases, cost of living adjustments, and increases in retirement and health care benefits.

TALKING POINTS

These are the safest messages to use among any audience, regardless of the state's collective bargaining status or the ESP's job title.

- **We are a union** that regularly advocates on behalf of education support staff.
- We advocate for **higher wages, better benefits**, and improvements to our daily lives.
- Our **voice is stronger** and more effective when we band together.
- Our union has a **proven track record of success**, but we need more members to amplify our voice so we can win higher salaries for support staff like us.

TAILORED MESSAGING

[non-collective bargaining states/collective bargaining states]

PARAEDUCATORS

Elevator Pitch

We are a union that [regularly advocates/has a legally protected right to negotiate] on behalf of paraeducators, so we all can get higher wages, safety from physical abuse, and improvements to our daily lives.

When more people join the union, administrators listen to us. As paraeducators, we're always looking out for others, but at a time when schools are overwhelmed, who is looking out for us?

Our union has already collectively secured wins, but we need more members so we can amplify our voice and secure real pay increases, cost of living adjustments, and increases in retirement and health care benefits.

Messaging Guidance

- Focus even more heavily on wages relative to other messages.
- Safety from physical abuse and other forms of bodily harm is complementary message that resonates.
- Use teachers as a validator, along with other paraeducators.



CLERICAL, TECHNICAL, AND HEALTH SERVICES

Elevator Pitch

We are a union that [**regularly advocates**/has a legally protected right to negotiate] on behalf of support staff like you, so we all can get higher wages, better benefits, and professional development opportunities to support your career and improve your daily life.

Workers like us are rarely asked for our opinions or included when big decisions are made. But when more people join our union, administrators listen to us.

Our union has already collectively secured wins, but we need more members so we can amplify our voice and secure real pay increases, cost of living adjustments, and increases in retirement and health care benefits.

Messaging Guidance

- Place a large emphasis on how the union can convince administrators to listen to workers like them.
- Highlight the union's work to provide professional development opportunities as a complementary message.
- It is even more important than with other classifications, to refer to these groups as “support staff.” Do not use the term “ESP” when talking to potential members.



CUSTODIAL, TRANSPORTATION, SKILLED TRADES, SECURITY, AND FOOD SERVICE

Elevator Pitch

We are a union that [**regularly advocates/has a legally protected right to negotiate**] on behalf of support staff like you, so we all can get higher wages, better benefits, and improvements to our daily lives.

Our union has already collectively secured wins, but we need more members so we can amplify our voice and secure real pay increases, cost of living adjustments, and increases in retirement and health care benefits.

School boards across the country are trying to privatize our jobs, but when we have a strong union, we are able to get communities, parents, and teachers on our side to help save our jobs.

Messaging Guidance

- Emphasize your work as a union to stop privatization.
- Educate them on their right to join your union, because many support staff don't know they can join.
- Emphasize your local affiliate is a union, not an association.
- Do not use the term "ESP" and be intentional about using teachers as validators.



GUIDANCE ON CUSTOMIZATION

Do	Don't
Say "support staff" or the specific job title of the person you are recruiting	Don't Say "ESPs" or "educators"
Demonstrate that the union is a good investment by lifting up the value and benefits of membership	Don't proactively bring up the cost of dues
Respond to questions about dues by talking about the monthly cost	Don't respond to questions about dues by talking about the annual cost
Make the argument that the union will be more powerful and better able to win higher wages and benefits with more members	Don't accuse people of "freeloading" or proactively bring it up

CB vs. Non-CB States

In States with Collective Bargaining:

- Emphasize you have a legally protected right to negotiate on their behalf.

In States without Collective Bargaining:

- As needed, make it clear that, yes, unions are legal.
- Emphasize you regularly advocate on their behalf.

Localizing Your Message

- Learn the issues facing support staff in your district and be prepared to showcase how the union will help address those issues.
- Highlight the union's past wins in your district / state.
- Use people's specific roles / classifications when you talk to them.

Universal Messages

- Start by educating them about the fact there is a union they can join that will advocate on their behalf.
- Focus on your work as a union to collectively secure wage increases and better benefits through collective power.



ORGANIZING NOTES

ORGANIZING NOTES

The 3 million members of the National Education Association, our nation's largest professional organization, work at every level of education—from pre-school to university graduate programs. Our members also include retired educators, students preparing to become educators, and other public employees. NEA has affiliates in every state and more than 14,000 communities across the United States.

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National Education Association
1201 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
www.nea.org

What Is Classism

<https://classism.org/about-class/what-is-classism/>

“Classism is differential treatment based on social class or perceived social class. Classism is the systematic oppression of subordinated class groups to advantage and strengthen the dominant class groups. It’s the systematic assignment of characteristics of worth and ability based on social class.”

That includes:

- individual attitudes and behaviors;
- systems of policies and practices that are set up to benefit the upper classes at the expense of the lower classes, resulting in drastic income and wealth inequality;
- the rationale that supports these systems and this unequal valuing; and
- the culture that perpetuates them

Classism is held in place by a system of beliefs and cultural attitudes that ranks people according to economic status, family lineage, job status, level of education, and other divisions.

Middle-class and owning- or ruling-class people (dominant group members) are seen as smarter and more articulate than working-class and poor people (subordinated groups). In this way, dominant group members (middle-class and wealthy people) define for everyone else what is “normal” or “acceptable” in the class hierarchy.

People who are poor/working class sometimes internalize the dominant society’s beliefs and attitudes toward them, and play them out against themselves and others of their class. Internalized classism is the acceptance and justification of classism by working class and poor people. Examples include: feelings of inferiority to higher-class people; disdain or shame about traditional patterns of class in one’s family and a denial of heritage; feelings of superiority to people lower on the class spectrum than oneself; hostility and blame towards other working-class or poor people; and beliefs that classist institutions are fair.

People who are middle-class and wealthy sometimes internalize the dominant society’s beliefs and attitudes toward them, and play them out against others. Internalized superiority is the acceptance and justification of class privilege by middle-class and wealthy people. Class privilege include the many tangible or intangible unearned advantages of “higher” class status, such as personal contacts with employers, “legacy admissions” to higher education, inherited money, good childhood health care, quality education, speaking with the same dialect and accent as people with institutional power, and having knowledge of how the systems of power operate.

A person from the more privileged classes can be a class ally—a person whose attitudes and behaviors are anti-classist, who is committed to increasing his or her own understanding of the issues related to classism, and is actively working towards eliminating classism on many levels.

Class Definitions

Class – relative social rank in terms of income, wealth, education, status and/or power.

Classism – differential treatment based on social class or perceived social class. Classism is the systematic assignment of worth based on social class; policies and practices set up to benefit more class-privileged people at the expense of the less class-privileged people, resulting in drastic income and wealth inequality and causing basic human needs to go unmet; the rationale and the culture which perpetuates these systems and this unequal valuing.

Class Privilege – Tangible or intangible unearned advantages of higher-class status, such as personal contacts with employers, good childhood health care, inherited money, speaking with the same dialect/accents as people with institutional power.

Class Ally – A person from the more privileged classes whose attitudes and behaviors are anti-classist, who is committed to increasing his or her own understanding of this issue related to classism, and is actively working towards eliminating classism on many levels.

Individual Classism – This term refers to classism on a personal or individual level, either in behavior or attitudes, either conscious and intentional, or unconscious and unintentional.

Institutional Classism – This term refers to the ways in which intentional and unintentional classism is manifest in the various institutions of our society.

CROSS-CLASS CAPACITY TOOL

<https://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/cross-class-capacity-tool.html>

This living document was created by the SURJ (Stand Up for Racial Justice) poor and working-class group as an act of love and commitment to our common desire, across the class spectrum, to bring white folks into action, dismantle white supremacy and engage with the complex struggle and beauty of collective liberation.

Some framing: White people working together to dismantle racism is critical work. Attempting to do this work without acknowledgment and thoughtfulness to how class affects folks' experience of race limits a true understanding of what is racism and what is classism. Working to dismantle white supremacy and to end structural and interpersonal racism doesn't mean we can avoid talking about issues of class privilege. On the contrary, if we don't become bold about what cross-class solidarity work means as white folks yearning for racial justice, our work will be less effective and our wins short-lived.

With this in mind here are some examples of common sticky spots that class privileged whites come upon when working across class:

- **Conflating Race and Class.** Assuming that all white people have access to wealth erases white poor and working class people. Referring to communities of color with an assumption of poverty erases the Black middle class and other class privileged people of color. These two systems of oppression use similar tactics and have always been intimately linked, however they are not interchangeable.
- **Scapegoating.** Through subtle or direct means, operating with a bias that assumes working class whites are somehow more racist than white folks with money reinforces classism. This scapegoating takes responsibility away from middle and upper class families who have often accrued wealth through exploitation and takes emphasis away from the damaging policies and practices put in place by wealthy whites that structurally reinforce both racism and classism.
- **Discomfort around conflict.** Recognition of conflict and figuring out disagreement is very different across cultures and classes. White, class privileged cultures often carry a value that avoiding conflict or being 'nice' and 'polite' are the better/only ways to talk about difficult things. This value is not universal and can sometimes stifle needed dialogues.
- **Outcome over Process.** Sometimes the desire to create action can override the process of thoughtful and intentional planning. When intentionality breaks down, group norms will almost always default to those with the most privilege/power calling the shots.
- **One right (controlling) way.** As is true with whiteness in general, within class privileged circles there can be an attachment to things happening in a particular way. The sense of what is the right way is informed by folks' class background and status. Attempts to control or micromanage the details can push out poor and working class involvement/leadership.

- **Attempting to homogenize.** Just as whiteness can attempt to subsume everything into a false perception of sameness, class privileged cultures often do the same. Creating cultural norms around language, dress, actions etc that cater to middle and upper class comfort. Bringing working class folks to the table without changing the class culture of the table in question will often be short lived.
- **Palatability.** Choosing only working class folks who are college educated or otherwise assimilated into middle/upper class norms to be a spokesperson/reference point around class.
- **Convenience.** Recognizing class dynamics when it's convenient but treating it as off topic when brought up in a way that challenges power or requires long term investment in our lives and communities.
- **Masking/False Scarcity.** Presenting as though stressed about money from a false sense of scarcity, not a lived experience of not having access to enough. This can be done in an attempt to relate to working class people or to assuage guilt, confusion, a lack of exposure to cross class learning spaces, or a combination of them all.

Examples of things that can be alienating to welfare/working poor, low income and working class whites:

- Speaking for and about working poor, low income and working class whites without the necessary leadership or adequate representation from these communities.
- Introductions that pivot on education/employment status and lineage or political resume and credentials. This holds true within emails, on conference calls and in person.
- Giving advice or asking questions about people's struggle; our impairments/health, lack of money, employment or anything that might be intrusive, patronizing or blaming.
- Presuming shared experience about activities that are dependent on middle class lifestyle and values of some sort, examples: college, out of state / country travel for pleasure, rejuvenation or political actions
- Using acronyms without explanation
- Not using class identifiers (see below)
- Defensive reactions to questions and feedback about barriers and assumptions that hinder our involvement.
- Inaccessible language and jargon (academic and non-profit speak)
- Making fun of, dismissing, or shaming working, welfare class, and rural cultures and equating our communities with ignorance and bigotry.
- Cultures of perfection, 'professionalism', and respectability politics (meaning messaging, language, formatting, and campaign demands have to be always appear 'respectable' to middle and upper class people in order to be legitimate)
- Commodifying our lived experiences to add credibility without an implemented commitment to alter the material conditions of instability and poverty we often are living through within our practice of white anti-racism.

Examples of some things that create room to be, breathe, and engage as welfare, working-poor and working-class whites:

- Provide food and childcare at meeting spaces/events. Ensure that meeting spaces are child friendly and have reasonable start and finish times
- Use class identifiers – be transparent and honest about your class background when getting to know each other and when starting to work together. Often class is not mentioned, and therefore, class experiences and differences are erased, even though they strongly inform everything we do!
- Practice creative ways to redistribute wealth. Examples include: prioritizing (whenever possible) resourcing of poor, welfare and working class leaders, as well as local leaders in under-resourced areas, over well resourced, urban career consultants. Work on building a presence within our communities that provides support for ordinary needs. Resource and staff regular food banks, provide basic advocacy for folks navigating government benefits. Help with access to childcare, healthcare and housing. Commit to stay - reduce the impact economic fragility and exploitation has upon our vulnerability to the race bribe. Build up local leadership within these spaces.
- Move at an accessible pace! Keep in mind that poverty and instability can be debilitating and at times completely preoccupying. Modeling a schedule, leadership or decision making structure based on class privileged and able bodied capacity can be a deterrent to poor and working class involvement.
- Engage in campaigns that are relevant to welfare and working class whites, ideally that are developed by and for low-income white folks. Includes relevancy in approach, demands, and language.
- Reflect on what type of culture is being created and in what ways it's centered around middle/upper class norms and comfort. What would it look like to center it around working class participation instead? Practice moving back from the front of the room and decision-making positions - embrace the value of being middle class / upper working class supporters and allies of working poor and low income leadership and direction.
- Support meeting spaces (in person, phone, online, etc.) for welfare and working class whites to strategize, share and develop resources, develop peer mentorship relationships, and support each other!
- Prioritize resourcing of leadership development and training for poor, welfare, and working class organizers
- Provide fundraising support for poor and working-class led projects (fundraising training as well as sharing resources)
- Provide travel support – metro cards / rides . Know where the local food stamp / HUD/ social security/ food banks office and shelters are.
- Find other class privileged people to sort thru things with. Challenge one another to dive deeper with your understandings and self reflection. Understand that less privileged folks get to move away from situations, without explanation, that they simply don't

want to have to deal with... again. Remember it is not the responsibility of welfare and working class folks to be supportive of a middle/upper class learning moment when those with less power are being hurt, alienated, offended, oppressed, triggered, and insulted.

Shifts of Consciousness for the Anti-Classist Activist

By Paul C. Gorski
 (gorski@edchange.org)
<http://www.EdChange.org>

1. Charity is Not Activism

Charity, when not coupled with an insistence on and movement toward systemic change, only reaffirms the power hierarchy. It does not—*can not*—lead to real sociopolitical reform because it fails to challenge existing power structures. Moreover, a benchmark of authentic activism is personal vulnerability. Charity does not make me or my privilege vulnerable. In fact, it allows me to maintain a comfortable distance. Therefore, seeing charity as activism is a demonstration in privilege.

2. “Culture of Poverty” or “Culture of Classism”?

Dozens of studies conducted since the early 1970s refutes Oscar Lewis's (and more recently, Ruby Payne's) construction of a “culture of poverty.” The poor Somali immigrants arriving in Minnesota this year are *not* the same culturally as poor families who have lived for generations in Appalachian West Virginia, for instance. And again, focusing on the supposed cultures of oppressed people is an expression of privilege, as it diverts attention from the gross and systemic class inequities (such as inequitable access to high-quality schooling) that pervade the U.S. and the world. It is this culture—the culture of *classism*—that I, as an anti-classist activist, must work to eliminate.

3. Capitalism Is Not Democracy

The consciousness of the anti-classist activist refuses binaries and false correlations by challenging most vigorously those notions that are defended most vigorously by the power structure. Chief among these is the unquestioned rightness and fairness of capitalism. Despite the propaganda, there is nothing inherent about capitalism that aligns it with democracy or freedom or justice. But somebody benefits from the notion that these concepts are synonymous. Who might that be? Other notions, systems, and conditions for critical reconsideration: consumer culture, globalization, and corporate welfare.

4. The De-demonization of Socialism

It's odd, don't you think, that while everybody seems to agree that a public (meaning *socialist*) education system is an essential part of democracy, a public healthcare system is inherently evil. And again, who exactly benefits from this demonization?

5. With Whom Lies the Deficit?

Deficit theorists such as Ruby Payne essentially blame poor people for their poverty by pointing to supposed deficits in their characters, spiritualities, and world views. Deficit theory helps to justify what Herbert Gans calls “the war against the poor”: the process of linking nearly every social ill to people in poverty in order to justify the elimination of social programs and policies meant to help them. If we see the poor as “undeserving,” then we needn’t waste our energies questioning skyrocketing healthcare and housing costs, the dissolution of labor unions, the disproportionate amounts of water and air pollution in high-poverty neighborhoods, or the fact that tens of thousands of people die all over the world each day from preventable poverty-related illnesses. The *real* deficit is a moral one and it lies with people who perpetuate classism, not with those who bear the brunt of that classism.

6. The Un-Meritocratic Meritocracy

The ideal of meritocracy assumes a level of equity and social justice that simply doesn’t exist, either in the U.S. or most (if not all) other societies. The education system is a good example. Economically disadvantaged students are much more likely than their wealthier peers to be assigned to schools with an abundance of unlicensed and inexperienced teachers, dilapidated buildings, inadequate educational materials, lower-order thinking curricula, over-crowded classrooms, and high teacher turnover rates. These conditions are wholly unrelated to individual students’ intelligence, ability, motivation, or “merit.” But they have an enormous impact on the quality of education students receive and, as a result, on their future opportunities. We might say we have a *wealthocracy*, wherein access and opportunity are granted on the basis of one’s existing levels of access and opportunity. Where’s the “merit” in that?

7. Everything’s an Intersection

One cannot understand classism or poverty, whether locally, nationally, or globally, without understanding its intersectionality with a plethora of other oppressions. In the U.S., for instance, classism is inextricably linked to racism. Slavery, Jim Crow, housing discrimination, Manifest Destiny—these are examples of racism institutionalized for the purpose of economic exploitation. Only about 4% of Fortune 500 CEOs are women. People with disabilities are much more likely to live in poverty than people without disabilities. Much of the undocumented immigration that some people rail against today is at least in part the result of U.S. and European colonization, imperialism, and economic exploitation of Southeast Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa. So any attempt to study or act against poverty and classism without a deep understanding of these intersections cannot succeed. And I cannot be an authentic anti-classist activist without also being a committed anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-every-kind-of-oppression activist.

Financialization Created Chicago Public Schools' Fiscal Crisis

BY

STEPHANIE FARMER

Chicago Public Schools has constantly found itself in fiscal crises in recent years, crises that then justify brutal austerity. But those crises didn't come from nowhere: they were the logical outcome of turning to Wall Street for funding on credit instead of taxing the rich.

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is in a deep and enduring fiscal crisis. After decades of budget cuts, Chicago's public K–12 schools have been hollowed out, magnifying the hardships of stagnant wages, rising housing prices, and more faced by the city's working class. Pundits have predictably blamed CPS's fiscal crisis on either the greedy teachers' union (Republicans' and a few austerity-minded Democrats' scapegoat) or on conservative suburban and rural "downstate" politicians in Illinois hostile to urban children's plight (most Democrats' scapegoat).

But Chicago is a one-party city, controlled by the Democrats, in a solidly blue state, where Democrats usually control the state government. In reality, CPS's endless fiscal crises and austerity are consequences of a ruling-class project to chip away at Chicago public education. This has involved a two-pronged strategy of school-choice policies and education financialization carried out by successive Democratic mayors with the backing and active encouragement of key elements of Chicago capital. School-choice policies seek to remake public education in the image of a competitive market, where schools compete for education consumers (children and their parents). Education financialization expanded the role of financial instruments, actors, and markets in public education's operations.

Together, these policies have reconfigured Chicago Public Schools. The district's funding streams now function as a rent extraction machine, channeling revenue out of the CPS classrooms that serve black, brown, and immigrant working-class neighborhoods and into the pockets of Wall Street.

A Marketplace of Schools

Public K–12 education has many uses. It provides hard and soft skills in preparation for the labor force; socialization in civic, cultural, and political norms; and acts as de facto childcare centers for younger children, reducing the cost of living for parents. Radicals and reformers have demanded tuition-free public education since the late eighteenth century. Universally accessible, tuition-free, public, K–12 education contributes to the social wage, the mix of publicly provided goods and services that add to the normative standard of living. Universal access to tuition-free public K–12 education was rolled out alongside other New Deal reforms of the 1930s and '40s — taxing the rich, the expansion of unions, and regulation of finance and industry — associated with the Keynesian period in the development of US capitalism.

By the 1970s, the Keynesian phase of US capitalism was in crisis as competitor economies in Europe and the Pacific Rim rebuilt following World War II, and high wages and high fixed costs cut into the corporate profit rate. In the 1980s and 1990s, an ideologically committed and organized capitalist class rolled back Keynesian capitalism and rolled out a more cutthroat neoliberal capitalism.

By the 1990s, an anti-tax, anti-union, anti-regulation, and anti-public-sector ideological conventional wisdom had taken root among Republicans and Democrats alike. Taxation was characterized as rent-seeking by the “parasitic state” with its inherently “inefficient” public sector. In contrast, free enterprise capitalism with open markets and light regulation was held up as the ideal institutional arrangement for organizing the production and distribution of nearly all goods and services.

In this context, the meaning of public education shifted. Public education became less about cultural enrichment and civic engagement. Under neoliberalism, the emphasis in public education was placed, first and foremost, on providing individuals with the skills and habits appropriate for the marketplace. Anyone could overcome the hardship of their circumstances so long as they were willing to work hard, first in school and later in the labor force.

Public schools were expected to operate akin to businesses and adapt to the new era of iterative austerity, doing more with less. Public education was expected to reflect and advance the same norms and practices as the prevailing neoliberal capitalism it was embedded in.

In Chicago, Mayor Richard M. Daley and his business-elite organization backers (like the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club) were ahead of the national trend in implementing neoliberal reforms of the school system. In order to make schools function more like businesses, CPS adopted school-choice reform policies (like the 1996 Illinois Charter School Law and the Renaissance 2010 plan of 2004) that would create a simulated “marketplace” of schools. Parents were encouraged to approach education like consumers and choose the best school product for their children, comparing metrics of success like shopping for toothpaste in the grocery store.



Chicago mayor Richard M. Daley in May 2010 (Chris Eaves / Wikimedia Commons)

To create this school marketplace, CPS closed putatively low-performing public schools and rolled out a portfolio of high-performing public schools (like gifted elementary, magnet, and selective enrollment high schools) with competitive admission criteria, primarily in high-value real estate markets.

CPS also privatized the school system through charter schools, schools that are privately operated but still publicly funded. These less transparent, less democratically accountable, and initially nonunionized charter schools were overwhelmingly placed in black and Latino working-class communities.

According to the Chicago Public Schools Comprehensive Annual Financial Report from 1995 to 2018 (our data source throughout), between those years, CPS opened 230 new schools, while closing 123 schools, for a net gain of 107 schools. Over half of CPS's 230 new schools were charter schools. Charter school expansion privileged the interests of charter operators, seeking a foothold for their business enterprises in the city, over what was best for the public school system as

a whole. As the CPS system was growing dramatically with a wave of charter expansion, Chicago's population of school-aged children actually declined from over 435,000 students in 2005 to 371,000 students (64,000 fewer kids) in the CPS system in 2018.

Despite this pattern of population decline, nearly 85 percent of the new charter schools were opened after 2005. By 2018, charter school proliferation consumed 11 percent of CPS's budget, up from just 3 percent in 2006.

The Financialization of Chicago Public Schools

Due to the prevailing neoliberal anti-tax conventional wisdom, the state and city governments were unwilling to raise taxes to fund CPS. So, in order to carry out these school choice reforms, CPS turned to credit markets, paving the way for education financialization. Local education administrators, financiers, and politicians partnered up to devise frameworks and investment instruments that insinuated finance capital into the funding and operation of public education as the needs and well-being of children were monetized for rent-seeking investors.

Finance capital was attracted to public education because it provided new sites for capturing profits. By the 1990s, due to overaccumulation in other markets and government deregulation of finance, capital flooded into US finance and real estate markets. Moreover, dollar-denominated US municipal bonds were comparatively safer and provided steadier returns (albeit at a lower rate of return) than other, more traditional private-sector investment instruments.

With this new, expanded access to credit markets, CPS leveraged \$8.5 billion in debt to finance its oversupply of choice schools. By 2018, CPS was dedicating \$651 million of its budget (or 10 percent of its operations budget) to make payments on its debt, up from \$133 million, or 3.5 percent of its operations budget in 1998 (adjusted for 2018 inflation).

Predictably, charter schools carved out their own niche in the financialization game. Since their finances are considered proprietary, researchers could only find data for 27 percent of all CPS charter schools in 2015 through audits filed with the Illinois State Board of Education. The combined outstanding debt from bond issuances for these Chicago charter schools totaled \$225 million. Ultimately, charter school debt becomes taxpayer debt, since charter schools receive a per-pupil stipend from CPS to cover their facility and operations expenses.



The Chicago Public Schools logo. (WBEZ)

As the debt obligations of CPS grew, the district pursued financial fixes to address debt-driven budget shortfalls. CPS leadership contracted with banks to develop new, higher-risk speculative instruments around CPS debt, including variable rate bonds, auction rate bonds, credit swaps, and options. CPS officials were hoping to deliver a financial windfall for the public sector via these high-risk, high-reward instruments.

CPS made an unprecedented \$1.5 billion bet on bonds with high-risk floating interest rates. Traditional municipal bonds have a fixed interest rate for the term of the bond. In contrast, bonds with floating interest rates have rates of interest that rise or fall in relation to some agreed reference rate (frequently the LIBOR rate at which banks lend to one another). If interest rates fell below the traditional fixed interest rate bonds, CPS would capture significant savings. Yet if interest rates rose above that fixed interest rate, CPS would be obligated to pay more for their bonds than traditional bonds.

Then, in a gambit to protect CPS from the impact of interest rates falling, the district “hedged” their risk by buying \$1 billion worth of interest-rate swap derivatives from Bank of America, Goldman Sachs, Merrill Lynch, and Lehman Brothers.

When the 2007 financial crisis hit, the Federal Reserve reduced interest rates to 0.5 percent. CPS’s interest-rate swap agreements mandated the school district pay a higher fixed interest rate on their variable rate bonds to the investment banks holding the swaps, which only had to pay a little over 0.5 percent interest rate on the variable bond. The investment banks pocketed the difference between what CPS paid them and what they owed on the bond. The *Chicago Tribune* has shown that the variable rate bonds may have cost Chicago taxpayers \$100 million more than if the schools had borrowed the debt with more traditional fixed interest rate bonds.

Meanwhile, the same banks that were reaping windfall profits from CPS’s interest-rate swap disaster were also receiving federal bailout dollars. There was no bailout for CPS. The district had to pay a total of \$254 million in penalties to terminate all their associated swap contracts in order to refinance their underlying debt at the lower interest rates now

on offer. Since CPS revenues nose-dived during the crisis, they had to turn once again to the credit markets, to borrow money (at interest) from banks awash in government bailout dollars to pay those penalties.

CPS also sold option derivatives to the Royal Bank of Canada and Bank of America on its bonds, where the contract compelled CPS to issue debt if certain conditions occurred, like credit rating devaluations. In the wake of the financial crisis, CPS's bond rating fell below the rating needed to be in good standing for those options. In turn, the banks exercised their rights to make CPS issue another \$263 million in new debt in order to protect their investments.

Altogether, CPS's fling with exotic debt instruments cost the school system at least \$617 million. Since these payments were themselves largely debt financed, the people of Chicago, via the taxes paid to CPS, will end up paying Wall Street nearly \$1 billion on these losses.

Public Education Dispossession

Chicago Public Schools' school choice reform and financializing strategies have entrenched the public schools in a cycle of austerity. Tax cuts for the rich and retrenchment of federal and state government forced local governments into footing the bill for public goods and services under conditions of fiscal austerity. CPS overbuilt public schools through a high debt leverage funding strategy. This debt-driven oversupply of schools in an era of austerity pushed CPS to use risky financial instruments that then increased the debt burden of CPS.

The rising costs associated with building and operating redundant schools, growing debt service obligations, and the fling with high-risk exotic financial instruments produced recurrent fiscal crises. The response from the mayor and CPS leaders has been to embrace more austerity for the public schools, dispossessing Chicago residents of essential public education services.

“Chicago Public Schools’ school choice reform and financializing strategies have entrenched the public schools in a cycle of austerity.”

By the mid-2010s, the school system was anticipating annual half-billion-dollar deficits. With raising taxes off the table, CPS again cut its expenditures to close budget gaps. Since 10 percent of the district's general operations budget is locked into servicing debt, this portion of the budget is off-limits to cuts, requiring CPS to make even deeper cuts to the parts of the budget associated with frontline teaching and learning.

The district cut teaching and other student-facing education professional positions. Between 2010 and 2018, CPS reduced spending on teachers' salaries by \$421 million. In that same period, CPS's debt service payments increased by \$264 million, from \$387 million in 2010 to \$651 million in 2018. Ballooning debt service payments consumed the "savings" from downsizing the teaching labor force, effectively transferring revenue from Chicago's teachers to the investor class.

CPS starved school budgets, forcing individual schools to make repeated \$1 million cuts from their budgets. Things got so bad that schools held toilet paper drives to supply their schools. Other schools have packed forty kindergarteners into single classrooms and slashed arts, language, and other enriching but noncore curriculum. The most vulnerable students with learning disabilities were not spared, as \$40 million in supports was pulled out from under them.

Dispossession was largely racialized. In 2013, under the directive of Mayor Rahm Emanuel, CPS closed forty-nine schools with low enrollments, nearly 90 percent of which were in mostly black communities.



Protesters march in the Loop on March 27, 2013 during a rally to protest the proposed closing of 54 Chicago public schools. (WBEZ / Robin Amer via Flickr)

In contrast, the affluent (and mostly white) families who sent their kids to CPS were largely insulated from dispossession, thanks to activist parents' fundraising activities. According to CPS's Internal Accounts data, CPS schools raised a combined \$33 million from parent groups and "friends of" committees that hosted whimsical holiday craft markets, teacher bartender nights, and school spirit stores in 2018.

You can't blame wealthier parents for plugging the holes in their kids' budgets. But schools in poorer communities could not equally tap into parents' or charitable community members' pockets.

When cuts and closures proved insufficient to fill in the holes in the budget, CPS doubled down on its financialization strategy and issued another \$725 million bond to pay off one year's worth of debt service and short-term operation expenses in 2016. The district was forced to borrow at an onerous 8.5 percent interest rate, since its debt burden drove down its credit rating. The dependence on debt to pay for operating expenses sealed the conversion of CPS into a rent extraction machine for finance capital.

A New Era of Education Inequality

The two-prong strategy of market-based school choice reforms and education financialization pursued by CPS has created a new era of education inequality. Compelling public education to mimic a marketplace of competition has privileged the interests of elites and the affluent over and against the interests of the working-class majority, hollowing out mostly black and Latino communities' schools so that the district could roll out exclusive enrollment schools (disproportionately serving white professional-class families) and a wave of privately operated charter schools.

Education financialization is transforming the distributive role of public schools, from taxing the rich to fund public education, to borrowing money from the rich to pay for schools. CPS's strategy of education financialization turns schools into income streams for rent-seeking finance capital, which siphons public dollars out of classrooms and communities. Those dollars are then channeled into investors' portfolios. As the burden of debt grows, debt overhang is used by austerians as an alibi to further shrink the public sector by inflicting cuts on frontline teaching and learning.

Political leaders can continue to debt finance and grind public education into dust. Or they can change course and tax the rich to raise the revenue necessary to fund public K–12 education. Clearly, taxing the asset-owning rich is the better option than borrowing money from them (through the bond market) and paying them back with interest.

Taxing the rich to spend on universal, tuition-free, public K–12 education funds quality education for all children; reduces economic inequality, channeling revenue away from the rich and raising the social wage for the working class; and demonstrates the efficacy of providing goods and services via the more transparent, more accountable, and democratically planned public sector. If we don't tax the rich to pay for public goods and services, we'll be stuck in endless waves of austerity — and working-class students, parents, and educators will pay the price.

The author thanks Rachel Weber for her contributions to this piece.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

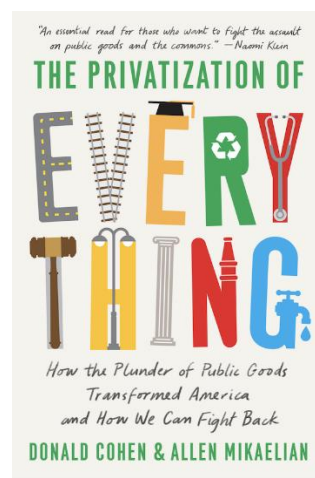
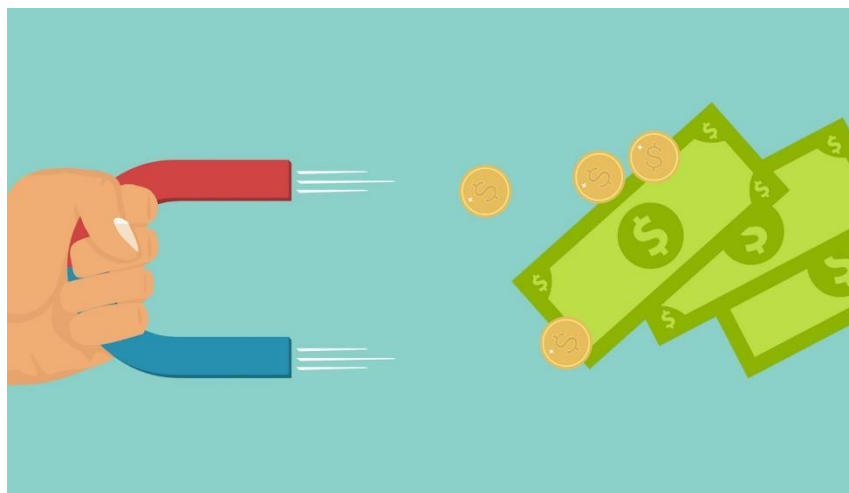
Stephanie Farmer is a professor of sociology at Roosevelt University.

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The Cost of Privatization in America

Public goods—like education and water—don't belong on the marketplace where they can be sold to the highest bidder and used to further inequality, says Donald Cohen, co-author of a new book on privatization.



What happens when everything—your water, your roads, your schools—are sold to the highest bidder? In his latest book, “The Privatization of Everything: How the Plunder of Public Goods Transformed America and How We Can Fight Back” (The New Press, 2021), authors Donald Cohen, the founder of [In the Public Interest](#), and Allen Mikaelian describe how privatization has led to segregated schools, politicized college curriculum, and the degradation of affordable health care, public transportation, potable water, and other public goods. Recently, Cohen talked with *NEA Today* about how NEA members and other citizens can turn the tide.

The book starts with a definition of public good that is broader than the definition privatizers prefer. In their opinion, almost nothing can't be bought and sold on the open market. How do you define a public good?



Donald Cohen: [Privatizers would say] that the market gets to decide what is a public good and what's not. By their definition, water is a private good. Health care is a private good. We disagree! By our definition, public goods are the things that everybody needs to survive, and, not only that, they're the things we need everybody to have. Public schools and universities are public goods. Things like transit—everybody needs to get around and we need everybody to be able to get around—these are all public goods by our definition. Broadband is another one. It's become clear now that everybody needs access to the Internet, and we need them to have access to the Internet.

You describe in the book how segregationists responded to the integration of schools in Virginia with the very first school vouchers. School privatization was—and still is—a means to school segregation. Is privatization basically a racist act?

DC: It's more than a racist act. But yes, there are racist implications in it. In public education, privatization was a racist segregationist response to *Brown v. Board of Education*. What state legislators did [in response to federal desegregation orders] was create school vouchers. They put schools in the marketplace, where people can shop for what they want and where sellers can exclude who they don't want. Take that idea forward a few decades and you see the growth of charter schools [[which are highly segregated by race](#)] and, of course, the growth of school vouchers.

You write about diversity as a public good, especially diversity in classrooms. Can you tell us more about that?

DC: In the end, democracy is based on trust. We need trust, not just in the institutions of government, but also in each other. You can't have trust in each other if you don't understand each other. It's very easy to "other" people. To the extent that we aren't integrating, that we aren't connecting or interacting with other people — people with other beliefs, other religions, other races — it hurts us all. It weakens democracy and when it weakens democracy, it weakens our ability to solve the problems that we share together, like climate change or health care.

Let's talk about higher ed. What's lost—for students and communities—when states withdraw financial support from public colleges and universities, and people like David Koch step in?

[Editor's note: For more on this, read our previous coverage of [Koch's efforts to influence faculty hiring and curriculum decisions through donations](#).]

DC: The first thing you lose is access to higher education. When you switch from tax funding to consumer funding, you get exclusion and that's what's happening today. Tuition is going up, but there are limits to [how much colleges can raise tuition.] So, colleges are out there dialing for dollars and when the dollars come in, they come in with strings—either formal, contractual strings, or implied strings. If you're familiar with the "UnKoch Your Campus" group, you'll know it's happening in a lot of places. [The donors] either go with straight-up demands: here's who you're hiring as your new faculty member and here's the curriculum they're teaching, or it's more subtle but still real influence.

So, the big question is: How do we turn the tide? How do we assert the public's role in public goods? In the book, you mention [how Massachusetts voters rejected efforts to privatize public schools in that state](#).

DC: First off, we have to realize that privatizers have played the long game and we need to play the long game, too. This is not about finding the right message or just doing the right campaign. Nothing happens without people, in motion, over time.

Donald Cohen, co-author of "The Privatization of Everything"

The second is the idea war. [Privatizers] have won a propaganda victory on ideas like 'business is more efficient.' We need to wade back into those battles. Efficiency is fine, but when you outsource jobs [such as school food service or custodial jobs] to private companies, the "efficiency" is just that you're just cutting wages and services. When they say they're "more efficient," ask them what they're going to spend less money on.

At the same time, we need to lift up the positive things that public agencies do, all around us. We don't do that enough. Everything from the cool things happening in public school classrooms to the

clean water coming out of your tap to the paint on your wall that no longer has lead in it—it's all because of government.

We also have to lift up the idea that there are things we can only accomplish if we do them together. And if our government institutions aren't doing a good enough job, then we need to work together to make them better and better.

What's the role of union members specifically?

DC: Frankly, NEA members—as well as school board members and state officials—need to ask the hard questions during the process of privatization. You need to ask: what's going to happen to wages and working conditions? My organization, In the Public Interest, has a specific resource on the “[10 Questions to Ask Before Any Privatization Deal](#)” that will be very helpful in these situations.

[\[Also check out NEA's model contract language to prevent privatization.\]](#)

All public-sector employees together, including teachers, add up to 20 million people. You need to be the advocates for the public good and the common good. You need to do a better job in talking about all the good things you do!

And finally, you all have to keep your ear to the ground, especially education support professionals (ESPs). Those members are going to hear first if [school board members] are thinking about privatizing, if somebody has been talking about it, or if there's a company rep walking around schools.

Here's what I always say: Start early, and you can win. Start late, and you do lose.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Thinking Bigger in Local Minimum Wage Campaigns: The Fight for \$15 in Seattle

JULY 15, 2014 • DAVID ROLF

Seattle recently passed the highest minimum wage in the country, \$15 an hour phased in over 3-7 years, with temporary credits for health care spending and tips. While Seattle's \$15 agreement is complex, the principles it reflects are straightforward: Workers get a substantial pay boost to \$15 an hour, smaller businesses get time to adapt, and our local economy sees a \$3 billion boost to the paychecks of 100,000 low-wage workers over the next decade.^[1]

This victory for low-income workers was the product of multiple intersecting forces including: The national economic and political climate; local political shifts; and smart, strategic organizing that seized this moment of opportunity.



Photo by Flickr user Pwnbot, used under Creative Commons [Sharealike](#) license.

Why raise the minimum wage?

At a moment when the labor movement is losing ground – including basic collective bargaining rights following recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions^[ii] – some workers and labor institutions have decided to take a new approach to building power and supporting struggling families. Raising the minimum wage is the most potent poverty reduction tool in our current economic and policy arsenal. Even for low-income Americans receiving public assistance, 70% of their income is tied to their wage and employment status^[iii].

Workers at the bottom of the income ladder have also been hit particularly hard by widening income inequality and increasing long-term unemployment in the recession and post-recession economy^[iv]. Wage income is more important than ever to raising the fortunes of low-income families^[v].

Yet rising inequality has broken the link between economic growth and broadly shared prosperity that characterized post-WWII American history^[vi]. Without strong pressure on companies to share the wealth with workers, gains have increasingly accrued to the top earners.

So how do we reverse wage stagnation?

Historically, major advances for workers have been won through politics at the federal level, or through campaigns to organize workers at major employers. But political gridlock means Congress an unlikely to yield any progress. And the current state of collective bargaining law presents few viable opportunities to take on corporate recalcitrance and bargain new worker victories on any significant scale.

This situation has left an opportunity at the local level to find real solutions to these challenges. And as public opinion consolidates — minimum wage increases tend to poll well — state and local minimum wage initiatives are sprouting up across the country^[vii].

Setting the stage for change: Shifts in the economic and political climate

The overall picture of the deterioration of our economy and increasing concentration of wealth is by now well-known:

- The gap between the top 1% and the rest of us has grown to crisis levels not seen since the Great Depression^[viii].
- Real hourly wages have been stagnant for several decades^[ix].
- Low-wage jobs are growing much faster the rest of the economy^[x].



- Labor unions represent an ever-decreasing share of workers[xi]. The share of income going to the top 10% has a consistent inverse relationship with union membership over the past 100 years[xii], and as membership has fallen, the top 10% have grown wealthier.

While income inequality, depressed wages, and declining unions represent long-term trends, the magnitude and permanence of the economic change we've undergone has only become widely recognized since the Great Recession, the bank bailouts, and their aftermath.

During the bleak times of recessionary free-fall in 2011, the Occupy movement emerged. In a moment when the people had little real economic power, activists created a new term – the 99% – that summarized many Americans' frustration and emphasized our shared economic pain not to mention our political divisions. Occupy focused public attention on the issue of income inequality and helped create a sense of moral and economic crisis about the gap between the top 1% and the 99%.

Since Occupy, worker unrest has continued to grow and amplify the public narrative about inequality. In late 2012, the Walmart Black Friday strikes and national fast food strikes set the stage for climate in which workers' demands for a better life could be taken seriously.[xiii] When fast food workers launched the first strike in their industry with a bold and even somewhat implausible-sounding demand for \$15 an hour, it sparked a level of attention surprisingly strong support. Suddenly — or rather, at last — we had a movement exciting enough and a demand transformative enough to measure up to the crisis at hand, launched by a radically disempowered and disrespected workforce in one of the least-paid and lowest-status occupations.

Many would have called organizing in the rapidly growing fast food industry impossible. It was common for critics to dismiss a much-stereotyped workforce of “teens and dropouts” paid minimum wage for serving customers of large profitable corporations, while trying to survive in some of the most expensive cities in the world. Against those odds, it was these workers, instead of the frustrated narrative of Occupy, who were fighting back to change the economy — and winning broad public support for their efforts.

Testing the waters: Airport workers win \$15 at the ballot box in SeaTac WA



In November 2013, the first \$15 minimum wage in the nation was passed in SeaTac, Washington (a suburb of Seattle). SeaTac Proposition 1 established an inflation-adjusted \$15 minimum wage for workers at large transportation and hospitality employers in and around Sea-Tac International Airport. The first time the \$15 minimum wage was tested at the ballot box, workers won, demonstrating that \$15 was not a dream or a negotiable demand, but the spark of a new movement for economic justice.

The \$15 minimum wage went to the ballot in SeaTac only after a long period of workplace-based mobilization by airport workers. Baggage handlers, cabin cleaners and other service workers had once been direct employees of airlines or the airport, but over the past decades their jobs have been contracted out and their wages eroded. As a result, a publicly owned airport was staffed by thousands of invisible poverty-wage workers, employed by an alphabet soup of little-known contractors to serve the customers of national-brand airlines.^[xiv] After a high-profile campaign failed to win concessions from the dominant local airline or the public agency that runs the airport, workers and community supporters were left with only one option: take it to voters with a local initiative. Though the victory in the November election was a narrow one, it remains a signal success for the \$15 movement, showing the scale of change that is possible in the current climate.

Although court challenges have meant that Proposition 1 remains unrealized for many workers, the political momentum for higher wages continues to build. Alaska Airlines — the dominant economic player at the airport and a key corporate target of the worker campaign — has recently paid for its subcontractors to raise wages to \$12/hour, and announced this move to the media.^[xv] And the governmental body that controls the airport, the Port of Seattle, is touting a process to establish new wage guidelines for airport workers.^[xvi] While neither of these moves is sufficient, they do reflect the intense level of public support for lifting up poverty-wage workers, and the ongoing political pressure to find a way forward.

Seizing the moment: Fighting for \$15 in Seattle

The national and regional stage was set for a big move in Seattle. Within just a few months of the first Seattle fast food strike in May 2013, both candidates in the race for Seattle mayor had publicly endorsed a \$15 minimum wage, and were even engaging in one-upmanship about who was a better champion of the issue.^[xvii]

At the same time, the only seriously contested race for City Council focused almost entirely on the \$15 minimum wage. Kshama Sawant — political outsider,

academic, and socialist — emerged as a towering political figure in the city after successfully challenging a long-term incumbent on a pro-worker, \$15 wage platform. Between the Mayoral and City Council races and the SeaTac ballot measure on the ballot, the political debate in Seattle was shifting with extraordinary speed.

The momentum continued after Election Day. Even before his swearing in, incoming Seattle Mayor Ed Murray announced plans to convene an Income Inequality Advisory Committee (IIAC) to quickly produce recommendations on how best to raise the minimum wage. Co-chaired by myself and local hotel investor Howard S. Wright III, the IIAC brought together representatives of workers, business, nonprofits, and community groups to hash out a plan to raise the minimum wage. Working under a deadline set in part by the mayor and in part by the looming possibility of ballot initiative, the IIAC was, after a few fits and starts, able to reach overwhelming agreement on a compromise plan the mayor forwarded to city council. (Only two members of the IIAC voted no — a business owner who demanded less, and Councilmember Sawant, who demanded more. The head of the local Chamber of Commerce abstained.^[xviii])

Though it does include some compromises, the IIAC agreement ratifies every key demand of the worker movement for \$15/hour. It ensures that:

- Every low-wage worker gets a significant raise every year on the way to \$15/hour and beyond.
- Every workers benefits from a robust system of community based enforcement of labor standards.
- After the phase-in period, everyone gets to a true \$15 minimum wage with no deductions for tips or benefits, adjusted annually for inflation.

Policy research helped to bring it home: Economic impacts of raising the wage

While worker voices changed what was possible, strategic data gathering and policy research helped win the debate on this new terrain. As part of its process, the city commissioned two reports that played a key role.

University of Washington researchers investigated which workers would be affected by a \$15 minimum wage, breaking down the numbers by industry as well as along demographic lines. This work established some powerful data points and lent them official bearing including, crucially, that there are approximately 100,000 workers paid less \$15 an hour in the City of Seattle (whose total population is

about 600,000); and that these workers overwhelmingly are employed in larger worksites, not smaller ones.^[xix]

University of California, Berkeley researchers took a close look at the economic impacts in other cities that had raised their minimum wages over the past decade. Their careful survey convincingly demonstrated to decision makers, journalists, and other influencers that higher wages do *not* result in job loss. Moving this key issue from a contentious question to a matter of settled fact has contributed greatly to the success of the campaign so far. Business claims about job losses have been greeted with an air of skepticism in many quarters quite unlike other recent debates on labor standards.^[xx]

Locally, the community empowerment organization Puget Sound Sage generated a series of reports that responded quickly to key questions around impacts on different groups such as tipped workers; women, immigrants, and people of color. They also reported on the overall economic impact of higher wages. Puget Sound Sage's local credibility and ability to produce convincing and strategic analysis of emerging questions was a critical part of the effort for \$15^[xxi]

A summary of the data collected by researchers:

- Decreasing poverty: If there were no changes in the labor market, an increase in the minimum wage to \$15 per hour would reduce the share of Seattle residents whose family income was below the poverty line from 13.6% to 9.4% (University of Washington)
- Dispelling the myth that this hasn't been done before: A raise in the minimum wage of \$9.32 to \$15 would be a 61% increase. In 2003-2004, Santa Fe raised its minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$8.50, a 65% increase with no net impact on employment or store closures—IIR Policy Brief, "*Do Businesses Flee Citywide Minimum Wage*," (Sept. 2006). When Washington State raised the minimum wage in 1989, the tip credit was also eliminated. The result was an 85% increase in the minimum wage for tipped workers over those two years. Restaurant employment continued to grow. (Source: *The Stranger*, 2/2/2014)
- Cost increases: a Political Economy Research Institute study (Sept. 2013) estimated that a minimum wage increase from \$7.25 to \$10.50 (45%) would increase fast food restaurants' cost of doing business by 2.7%^[xxii]. The *Seattle Times* recently estimated that raise in the minimum wage to \$15 would at most raise consumers' cost of dining out by 7% –*Seattle Times*, citing UC Berkeley research (March 12, 2014)
- On store closures and layoffs:
 - Other cities which have raised minimum wage showed no significant impact on employment or retail store closures. *Seattle Times* (relying on a UC Berkeley report studying San Francisco + 8 cities and 21 states with higher base pay than the federal minimum wage) showed almost no effect on employment

rates because of higher productivity, less turnover and modest increase in prices at the restaurants – *Seattle Times* (March 12, 2014)

- Studies of the Washington/Idaho border showed that rather than business flight to lower-wage Idaho, wages rose in Idaho to remain competitive with WA. And Big Macs cost the same. *Washington Post* (Jan. 8, 2014)

For the next wave: Lessons from the \$15 campaigns in SeaTac and Seattle

The public mood on the economy has shifted, offering us the possibility to seize new political opportunities to win gains for workers on a historic scale. In fact, the 100,000 Seattle workers whose wages would be substantially lifted by the mayor's \$15 minimum wage plan is greater than the number of workers organized in any single National Labor Relations Board election in U.S. history.^[xxiii]

Seattle has shown that public and political opinion can be moved dramatically in a very short time. It was less than a year from the first time fast food workers strike demanding \$15 an hour on May 30, 2013 to the mayor's announcement of a concrete plan to reach a \$15 wage on May 1, 2014. This extraordinary speed wasn't borne of a longstanding plan; it happened because advocates had the flexibility to seize the new political opportunities before us.

Public debate in Seattle has been transformed through the relentless appearance of workers articulating their aspirations, and solidified by the new data-driven consensus that higher wages lift the economy. Supporters of the \$15 minimum wage of all stripes have been extremely disciplined in reiterating the commonsense "middle out" argument about how economics works: more people with more money means more customers for more businesses.

Notably, working people have presented as people, not just workers. They're seen as our neighbors first, not activists. Instead of talking about their jobs, they've talked about their lives, their families, their struggles, and their aspirations. This is a rare workplace struggle where the debate has not focused on the workplace itself, but rather on our communities and our economic future. The result has been new perceptions of who low-wage workers are, what they deserve, and whether they matter.

And perhaps because Seattle's \$15 movement began in fast food — an industry not generally considered to have much intrinsic value — the focus has remained sharp on the universal human needs of working people rather than the "worth" of the particular type of labor they engage in. Universalizing this sense of who is

“deserving” has compounded the middle-out storyline, underlining the sense that higher wages are also a near universal economic benefit.

While polling has shown overwhelming support for the case workers have articulated, low-wage workers could not have won this struggle alone. It has been critical throughout the process to allow space for grassroots organizations and community business to come along. Their endorsements have been valuable ratifications of worker voices, helping move perceptions of worker demands from quixotic hopes to serious plans.

Another critical lesson is that high minimum wage numbers can rapidly become normalized. Initially, the demand for \$15 sounded quite high to many observers — including some staffers and even some low-wage workers — but with repetition and endorsement it became normalized.

Overall, the success of the \$15 effort in Seattle has demonstrated that worker voices can shape and move opinion about the economy — even more than business owners, elected officials, and journalists. In a recent poll, fast food workers registered as the group considered “most trusted” on the minimum wage. They came in significantly ahead of our new mayor, and far outpaced the Restaurant Association, the Chamber of Commerce, and the *Seattle Times*.^[xxiv]

The same poll also showed that public can be quite sophisticated and engaged in understanding these issues. An astonishing 74% of Seattle voters offered support for the idea of a \$15 minimum wage, up slightly from 68% earlier in the year. And the support appears to be firm: 87% of Seattle voters said they’re paying attention to the debate. Perhaps this close attention explains why many have been able to sympathize with some business concerns while maintaining a sharp commitment to the clear call offered by workers that bold action is necessary to take on the central moral and economic crisis of our era.

Most importantly, Seattle shows that by positioning the debate as a question of corporate profits or workers’ lives, ongoing mobilization by workers can keep the political debate focused on friendly terrain, offering new opportunities for bold policy moves that take on income inequality and lift up workers.



Known nationally as an innovative labor leader, David Rolf is the President of SEIU Healthcare 775NW based in Seattle, the fastest growing union in the Northwest representing 43,000 home care and nursing home workers in Washington state and Montana. He also serves as an International Vice President of the Service Employees International Union, the international

organization which represents more than 2.1 million workers in the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico.

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[ii] <http://www.epi.org/blog/courts-harris-quinn-decision-undermines/>

[iii] <http://talkpoverty.org/2014/06/18/gould/>

[iv] <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2013/09/charts-income-inequality-middle-class-census>; <http://www.epi.org/publication/raising-americas-pay/#figure-S>

[v] <http://www.epi.org/publication/raising-wages-key-improving-incomes-income/>

[vi] <http://www.nasdaq.com/article/productivity-gains-not-being-shared-with-the-workforce-cm345539>

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generation/. Real hourly wages of the median worker are up less than 4% since 1973, while productivity has risen 80%.

[x] Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Occupations with the most job growth,” 12/19/2013. Accessed at: http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_table_104.htm. A ninth occupation, “Secretaries and administrative assistants, except legal, medical, and executive,” has a median annual wage just above the full-time equivalent of \$15/hour.

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[xii] <http://www.epi.org/blog/union-decline-rising-inequality-charts/>

[xiii] <http://thinkprogress.org/economy/2013/11/29/3005101/walmart-workers-risking-arrest-strike/>

[xiv] For more background on the SeaTac Airport economy, see Medoza, David, et al. “First-class airport, Poverty-wage jobs,” Puget Sound Sage, May 2012. Accessed at <http://www.pugetsoundsage.org/downloads/First-class%20Airport,%20Poverty-class%20Jobs.pdf>

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[xix] “Local Minimum Wage Laws: Impacts on Workers, Families and Businesses,” the city-commissioned study by University of Washington

Evans School of Public Affairs researchers, is available at:

http://murray.seattle.gov/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Evans-report-3_21_14-+-appdx.pdf

[xx] “Who Would be Affected by an Increase in Seattle’s Minimum Wage?” the city-commissioned study by University of California, Berkeley researchers, is available at: <http://murray.seattle.gov/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/UC-Berkeley-IIAC-Report-3-20-2014.pdf>

[xxi] Numerous policy briefs and other research produced by Puget Sound Sage are available at their Sound Progress blog: <http://soundprogress.wordpress.com/>

[xxii] The Costs to Fast-Food Restaurants of a Minimum Wage Increase to \$10.50 per Hour. Jeannette Wicks-Lim and Robert Pollin, Political Economy Research Institute, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, September 2013

[xxiii] Harold Meyerson argues that the Seattle minimum wage proposal is akin to a form of collective bargaining in “Collective Bargaining Reborn?” The American Prospect, 5/27/2014. Available at: <http://prospect.org/article/seattles-15-minimum-wage-agreement-collective-bargaining-reborn>. The largest NLRB election, at the Ford River Rouge plant, covered about 85,000 workers in a single vote.

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