

ROCK THE UNION:

**An Action Plan to Engage
Early Career Teachers &
Elevate the Profession**



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE PROFESSION FELLOWSHIP

In 2013, the National Education Association (NEA) partnered with Teach Plus to launch The Future of the Profession Fellowship, a yearlong program aimed at equipping teachers with new knowledge about education policy and the role of unions. The goal of the Fellowship was for the 50 selected teachers to advise the NEA on ways to strengthen participation among incoming teachers and to amplify the voice of that group in the direction of the union.

The cohort of Fellows is a diverse group of teachers from around the nation. We come from 13 states (CA, CO, FL, HI, IL, IA, KY, LA, MD, MA, TN, VT, and WA) and represent elementary, middle, and high school levels. We teach a well-rounded range of subjects, including art, foreign language, language arts, math, music, science, social studies, and special education. While our years of experience range from two to 17, the majority of us are early career teachers (those who have been classroom teachers for 10 years or fewer). From the beginning, our cohort was committed to working with the union rather than apart from it, while also challenging it to evolve and grow.

Our cohort met monthly during virtual working sessions and came together in Washington, D.C. three times over the course of the year to meet with the NEA leadership and key national policymakers. The report that follows is the result of this work.

While the ideas and recommendations in the report are our own, we feel strongly that the experiences of the Fellows in our cohort match those of other early career teachers nationwide. We thus refer to early career teachers throughout this report.



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INTRODUCTION

The club we want to join

We want the NEA to become the club we want to join. We want our union leaders to speak to us on our terms, call on us to take roles in the union that improve student learning and teacher instruction, and invite us to share our innovative ideas to advance our schools and our union. We want to know that, when we feel more confident in our teaching and are ready to take on new challenges, our union will provide exciting new roles, train us properly, connect us to other teacher leaders to collaborate, and put us in positions to help improve classrooms beyond what we can do on our own. We want our union to be led by effective teachers who welcome divergent perspectives and critical thinking in their classrooms and in their union meetings. We want to know that our union puts students first, which is why we wanted to be teachers, but still works to create great working conditions, professional pay, and lead in elevating our profession. We want to know that our voice matters in our union. We want to be included.

The teaching profession is in the throes of an important generational transition that will have implications for how schools operate and serve children long into the future. Baby Boomers, who have filled the majority of American classrooms for the last forty years and built modern-day unions to strengthen their workplace, are retiring. Their successors are Millennials and career-changers looking to support students and advance changes aimed at modernizing the teaching career.

This once-in-a-lifetime workforce transformation represents a tremendous opportunity for improving how we as a nation help students and mobilize teachers as a force for change. As a result, the National Education Association (NEA) is tackling the challenge of engaging a new generation of teachers.

My concerns as an early career teacher are to improve my instructional practices, hone classroom management skills, network with other teachers, and navigate new evaluation systems.

-Michaela Kovacs



The report's title, *Rock the Union*, is an intentional play on the *Rock the Vote* campaign that launched over twenty years ago to encourage young adults to participate in our democracy, particularly the electoral process. Our message, like theirs, is to encourage participation by future leaders – newer teachers who are demographically least likely to be involved in unions – in a way that is culturally relevant and explicitly creates space for ideas that challenge the status quo.

The *Rock the Vote* campaign has endured for more than two decades as a mechanism to engage new voices in the electorate by evolving with the times. It is our hope that the *Rock the Union* movement that emerges from this starting point is equally enduring and compelling to new teachers entering the profession for years to come.

This paper is organized around a vision of what we believe early career teachers want their union to be. Early career teachers look to the union to become:

1. **The “Go-To” on High-Quality Instruction**
2. **The Leader in Developing Teacher Leaders**
3. **A Force that Engages all Teachers in Modernizing the Profession**

Each section and the recommendations contained therein help crystalize a change agenda for state and local affiliates of the NEA. We note improvements already underway at the NEA in pursuit of this vision. It is our hope that our recommendations, together with other NEA advancements nationally, will lead to a stronger teaching profession that better serves students.

Once I started working with the NEA directly, I realized that this is my union. In fact, I am now working with the NEA in their Great Public Schools Network [an online professional learning community], something I never would have imagined based on my local union experience.

-Emilie Hill



GO-TO ON INSTRUCTION

The “Go-To” on High-Quality Instruction

OUR VISION

We want our unions to focus on students and improving the profession

Most of us are focused on finding the answer to the question: “How do I become a better teacher and improve my students’ learning?” If we take a quick survey of all the things we associate with the union, how many of them will help us answer this question? All too often union meetings, contract policy, newsletters, trainings, and support offered, such as lawyers and grievance advice, do not help us answer this question. In fact, when many of us attend union meetings, we will not hear the word “student” uttered at all.

We want our unions to be proactive and collaborative

We want to work collaboratively with our peers, administration, parents, and external organizations offering support to students. We want our union leaders to model this collaborative culture. Teachers can disengage from the union when meetings turn into yelling matches where site reps speak disparagingly about administration in a way that contributes to an adversarial “us vs. them” culture. It is frustrating when union leaders appear to blanket all external support partners with suspicion and ill intent. We want a professional union that collaborates with all stakeholders and offers them a seat at the table when important decisions are made.

We want union leaders who are role models in effective teaching and advocating for their students

We want our union leaders, first and foremost, to be great teachers so that they enable a culture of professionalism and student-centered decision making to flourish. Generally speaking, most teachers’ interactions with union leaders begin and end with the building rep. In many cases, this person receives very little training and the position is fraught with conflict for which the rep is not explicitly trained. He or she usually ends up dealing with site grievances and enforcing the contract when it is being violated as opposed to providing instructional support. One constant for all building rep positions is that there is no way to ensure that they are effective teachers. Our interactions with this “face of the union” play a big part in helping us form opinions of union leaders and the union in general.

As an early career teacher, I want to be surrounded by the best instructors in the business. There is a clear distinction between those teacher leaders and our most active union members and building reps. This distinction certainly does not go unnoticed by early career teachers who are navigating the political waters.

-Michaela Kovacs



WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

With so many teachers entering the profession today and so many changes afoot (from evaluation reform to Common Core implementation and more), there is an unprecedented need for teachers to receive support on instructional improvement. We as developing teachers want access to expert practitioners who are still in the classroom. We want to be a part of a professional association in which those expert practitioners are the visible leaders. We know we speak for many when we say that we will find the time for meetings and activities that connect us to these expert teachers. We want the NEA to be this “go-to” connector. This is key to teachers owning our profession. All too often, non-teacher “experts” offer professional development that is low-quality and divorced from classroom realities. If we’re going to ignite a revolution that Rocks the Union with renewed and expanded participation, the goal of improving our work with students must be the starting point.

The NEA has already taken important steps in this direction. NEA President Dennis Van Roekel stated, “The NEA aims to ensure that every student has a qualified, caring, and effective teacher. We will support a stronger profession of teaching, and I will put the full weight of our national organization behind this effort.” Getting there will take more than the bully pulpit. It will take reallocation of resources and the efforts of local and state affiliates across the country to serve a different set of needs.

Early career teachers want a profession with clear, high standards for practitioners. In Teach Plus’ Great Expectations report: “62% of veteran teachers and 78% of teachers in the first 10 years of teaching thought that measures of effectiveness will help improve the profession” (Teoh & Coggins, 2012, p. 7). We entered teaching to change students’ lives. We want to know how we are doing on the path to that goal and want to grow in our careers as we become effective practitioners. For us, improving teaching

One obstacle to next-generation teacher engagement is the feeling among us that the union is only an advocacy group that focuses more on veteran teacher issues.

-John Prosser

and learning is at the center of a quality-driven profession. The component parts of a quality-driven profession are (see Figure 1):

- A fair, rigorous evaluation system with teachers leading the process;
- Differentiated compensation;
- Effective, collaborative, and teacher-led professional development;
- Rigorous, selective teacher preparation; and
- Career pathways that acknowledge, celebrate, and reward excellence.

Figure 1: Quality-driven profession



The NEA must develop a clear value proposition for new teachers, where the union is a key leader on instructional issues and engages educators around practice. This effort will have a profoundly important impact on the engagement of an entire new generation of teachers.

In Appendix A, we have profiled the Montgomery Education Association, whose work represents a promising example of how the union can be The “Go-To” on High-Quality Instruction.

CURRENT OBSTACLES

For early career teachers, some of the main obstacles to meaningful engagement with the NEA and its local and state affiliates revolve around the union’s limited focus on instructionally-related supports. Early career teachers generally do not see their association as a leading resource on these issues, though it is the predominant professional need they seek to fill.

The perception of early career teachers is that the NEA places far greater emphasis on “bread and butter” issues and broader political advocacy than instructional issues. The NEA budget reflects this gap in focus. There are two extensive categories in the NEA budget that quantify the scope of the challenge and help us to define a path forward. Within the budget, “Goal 1” refers to “defensive unionism,” funds used to fend off attacks on member rights and union strength. This item receives twice as much funding as “Goal 2,” which focuses on proactively shaping the future of education and equity, improving student learning, and advancing successful solutions that drive good policy (see “NEA Budget Goals 1&2” for more detail on Goals).

Early career teachers have limited time and energy to commit beyond the requirements and daily responsibilities of teaching, and therefore feel little connection to the union’s work if it does not directly support their work

NEA Budget Goals 1&2

Today spending on Goal 1, which is related to “defensive unionism,” exceeds funding for Goal 2, which is related to proactively shaping the future of education, by a proportion of 2 to 1. We would like to see funding levels for these goals become equal in the 2015-2016 budget district level policies (NEA, 2014b).

Goal 1: Building Affiliate Capacity for Great Public Schools

- Promote an organizing culture designed to build capacity to grow membership
- Increase member activism
- Improve fiscal health
- Enhance public education
- Assist affiliates in fending off attacks to member rights and union strength

Goal 2: Uniting the Nation for Great Public Schools

- Empower educators to collaborate with school and community stakeholders to co-create solutions designed to shape the future of education
- Improve student learning
- Achieve educational equity
- Enhance professional practice and the quality of professionals
- Advance successful solutions that drive national, state, and district level policies

I would be more engaged with my union if they had a professional focus on curriculum, instruction, assessment, students, and school culture, and focused less on “fighting the district.”

- Lisa Alva



in the classroom. For them, the union is often not associated with access to high-quality professional mentors or as a means for instructional or professional growth.

While early career teachers clearly recognize the importance of union involvement on issues related to compensation and working conditions, as well as continuing advocacy around public education, they care most deeply about developing their instructional practice in ways that directly relate to student learning and growth.

I have been to [union meetings] where the debate was vitriolic and angry, accusing everyone outside the room as a corporate reformer out to destroy education. This is not how we move conversation forward. New teachers didn't go into teaching to spew indignant words. I went into education to teach grace and compassion to students who desperately need it. Students aren't the only ones who need to model this. In order to be taken seriously, educators must come to the table with those same core values in mind.

-Evin Shinn

RECOMMENDATION 1

By the 2015-2016 NEA budget, expand the percent of the budget dedicated to proactively improving teaching and learning to equal that dedicated to defending the union against attacks.

We recommend that the NEA realign its spending priorities to place greater emphasis on engaging members around practice and assisting local and state affiliates in building capacity in this area. This will allow the NEA to better support high-quality instruction and increase NEA design/promotion of quality-based initiatives (see Figure 2 for funding allocation details).

WHAT IT WILL ACHIEVE

Greater financial commitment by the NEA to professional support would:

- *Position* NEA as the “go-to” leading professional organization developing and integrating research-based, cutting edge instructional practices.
- *Meet* early career teachers’ most immediate and important need of developing their instructional practice and addressing student needs.
- *Help* local and state affiliates integrate programs that contribute to a quality-driven profession.
- *Increase* the likelihood that early career teachers would become immediately involved in the union and subsequently broaden their involvement in advocacy issues and leadership positions.

Figure 2: Equalize the financial commitment



2014-2015 Budget

2015-2016 Proposed Fellows Budget

My local union does not currently have systems in place to run professional development or specifically support early career teachers. This means that local unions will need to reorganize resources and priorities around supporting early career teachers in a way that has not typically been a union role.

- Anna Bartolini



DEVELOPING LEADERS

The Leader in Developing Teacher Leaders

OUR VISION

We want clarity and transparency on how to impact change in our unions

The current union culture lacks transparency. It is difficult to navigate union structures to figure out where decisions are made or how to participate in areas that match our interests. It is equally difficult to find professional resources, trainings, and grants. It is not clear to a typical teacher what the qualifications, roles, and responsibilities of union leaders are at any level, including building rep, local executive board, state committee, and national staff. Most importantly, it is unclear how to advocate for change within the union or to use the union as an avenue to advocate for improved change at any level, be it school site, district, state, or national. It seems that most of this knowledge lies within the realm of those serving in positions of leadership and is selectively disseminated to those chosen to receive it. This does not create an atmosphere of openness or inclusivity where newcomers feel welcome and are given the information they need to succeed.

I would dedicate more time to union work if I received clear communication about how I can be engaged and then a good understanding of how those involvements affect teachers and students.

-Amy Bruns

We want the union to offer more leadership opportunities

For early career teachers, more immediate access to teacher leadership opportunities is critical. Early career teachers tend to view teaching as a profession that includes multiple leadership paths. They also tend to operate with shorter time horizons for career advancement and place greater value on skills/knowledge over years of experience. All of this provides a crucial opportunity for the union to play a central role in establishing itself as the "first stop" for teachers seeking teacher leadership opportunities and as an accessible gateway for career progression. By both establishing these opportunities and clearly communicating them out to early career teachers, the union would reposition itself as a champion of teacher leadership and dynamic career pathways.



WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

While there are existing practices and norms that often discourage early career teacher leadership in the NEA, there is today a unique opportunity to initiate important cultural shifts and actively promote leadership development for these teachers. The NEA can help prepare a new generation of union leaders poised to influence education policy and design instructional programs that allow teachers to take professional ownership of preparation, evaluation, professional development, and compensation and career pathways. In fact, 29 out of 50 current Future of the Profession Fellows have taken on new union leadership positions since joining the Fellowship (see Figure 3), including roles such as building representative, Negotiations Committee member, state and NEA Representative Assembly Delegate, and Great Public Schools (GPS) Network online facilitator. By connecting with other like-minded teachers, the Fellows were able to reimagine the role of their local and state unions, take action, and consequently begin to Rock the Unions to which they belong.

In Appendix B, we have profiled the Massachusetts Teachers Association, whose work represents a promising example of how the union can be The Leader in Developing Teacher Leaders.

I would become more involved with my union if there were more opportunities for involvement, individual voices were sought out, new members were invited to participate, and information was shared more effectively.

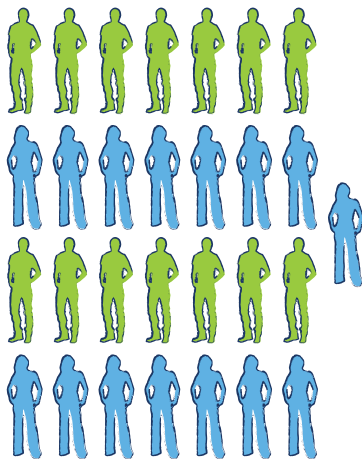
-Sarah Margeson

CURRENT OBSTACLES

The lack of clear leadership opportunities for early career teachers is closely tied to the deeply embedded values and norms often reinforced at various levels of the union. Specifically, early career teachers face what Susan Moore Johnson (Donaldson & Johnson, 2007) calls the “triple-threat” to teacher leadership barriers:

- **Autonomy:** The existing culture in many schools is for teachers to close their doors and practice in private with little feedback or interaction with others.
- **Egalitarianism:** The norm that discourages teachers from seeking any markers that identify them as “better than” their colleagues; and
- **Seniority:** Deference to experience at the exclusion of performance.

Figure 3: Teachers who took on new roles



29 out of 50

Fellows have taken on new leadership position(s), including roles such as Building Representative, Negotiations Committee Members, New Member Liaison EMAC Member, State and National RA Representative Assembly Delegates, GPS Network Online Facilitator

I became a Negotiations Member for my local during this fellowship because I was inspired by other fellows who believe that our union can be different.

-Ellyn Metcalf

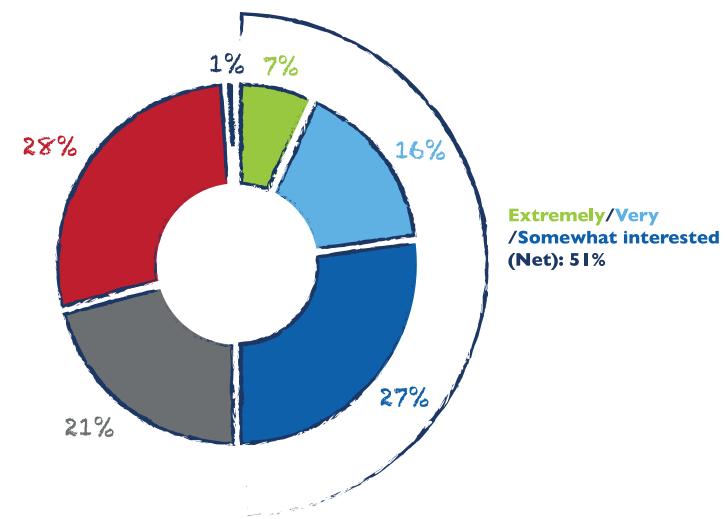


These barriers in schools and unions are powerful forces in discouraging teachers, and especially early career teachers, from seeking leadership positions. They also potentially conflict with early career teachers' rising interest in a career that includes a leadership path: the most recent MetLife survey of teachers (2013) suggests that half of all teachers (51 percent) are at least somewhat interested in a hybrid teaching role that would combine a classroom role with additional responsibilities in their school or district (see Figure 4).

If I had a clearer understanding of the actual improvements I could accomplish through my union, I'd be more likely to become involved. Although the union clearly effects positive change, it is sometimes difficult to see incrementally what the union does to make our lives better and improve student achievement, so I have taken leadership roles in other activities that produce more immediate results.

-Robert Marx

Figure 4: Teachers want leadership roles



Teaching in the classroom part-time combined with other roles or responsibilities in school or district

- Extremely interested
- Very Interested
- Somewhat interested
- Not very interested
- Not at all interested
- Don't Know

The interest in leadership is coupled with early career teachers' view that skills and knowledge, as opposed to years of experience, should be the main selection criteria for such roles. Faced with an antiquated system that values seniority, egalitarianism, and autonomy, early career teachers choose to disengage rather than to try and fight the uphill battle against the values largely embraced by current union structures and programs.

In order to appeal to and attract the best teacher leaders into their programs, the NEA will need to execute rigorous recruitment and selection processes to identify those most capable of leading, and encourage and support state and local affiliates to follow suit. Selecting leaders solely through criteria such as seniority or recommendations by current leaders will continue to draw from the same pool of candidates. Changing the process will ensure that other talented teachers can take advantage of leadership opportunities.

A great union leader should effectively communicate a vision, be open to new ideas or differing perspectives, have a passion for teaching and learning, and believe all students can learn.

-Bill Farmer



RECOMMENDATION 2

Design targeted programs to assist local and state affiliates in identifying and supporting high-potential union leaders to implement change around a quality-based profession.

We recommend that the NEA design programs to cultivate a pipeline of “high-potential” leaders at the local and state affiliate levels who are given the support to develop and implement key policies and instructional programs of particular interest to early career teachers. These policies and programs should align with focus on a quality-driven profession: career pathways, fair and teacher-led evaluation system, differentiated compensation, effective professional development, and rigorous teacher preparation. The NEA should support these initiatives through appropriate funding, partnerships with relevant organizations, and training of local and state affiliates.

I would like our union leaders to build a positive culture with a solutions-oriented approach that focuses on professional development, student achievement, and contract negotiations.

-Noreen Treadway

Furthermore, we recommend that the NEA establish a rigorous and transparent selection process and criteria for all its leadership initiatives. The NEA has already taken critical first steps to identify and cultivate the next generation of union leaders through programs like the East/West Summits, Teacher Leadership Initiatives, a partnership with BetterLesson,

and more. The impact of these initiatives could be strengthened through identification of our highest-potential leaders. This could be achieved potentially by using the established NEA Leadership Competencies (Leading Our Professions, Governance and Leadership, Communication, Advocacy, Organizing, Business)¹.

WHAT IT WILL ACHIEVE

Designing and executing high-potential union leadership programs would:

- **Attract** effective teachers, both those engaged with and not engaged with the union, to take leadership roles within the union.
- **Promote** greater diversity of union leaders as defined not only by gender/race/sexual orientation but by years of teaching experience.
- **Establish** clear leadership pathways for early career teachers to become more active members in key policy and instructional leadership positions.
- **Elevate** the teaching profession by putting teachers in positions to hold one another accountable for high-quality teaching.
- **Demonstrate** NEA’s commitment to continuously developing new innovative programs to implement the various components of a quality-driven profession led by teachers.

¹ NEA Leadership Competencies

·Leading Our Professions: advocate for quality in the teaching profession and promote the union’s role in advancing education transformation and student learning

·Governance and Leadership: establish the mission and strategies to empower, motivate, and foster an ongoing talent pipeline

·Communication: communicate via an integrated model that drives the goals of the profession

·Advocacy: advance public education through social justice and its benefits for students and union members

·Organizing: mobilize for impactful outcomes, strong internal and external relationships, and recruitment of new members and leaders into the association

·Business: accomplish the association’s goals through effective fiscal management



ENGAGE ALL TEACHERS

A Force that Engages All Teachers in Modernizing the Profession

OUR VISION

We want our union to want us

There is a “wait your turn” mentality that early career teachers often come up against so that we are made to feel that our voice does not matter. Most of us have experienced our divergent opinions dismissed as wrong and/or naive because we have fewer years in the classroom. We want to be proactive, but are unclear on the entry points to participation, the processes in place, and the language used in meetings. A small subset of us has been better welcomed by senior leaders and hope for this to become the rule rather than the exception.

We want the union to engage with us in a language we understand

In our fast-paced world, the union needs to find new ways to rise above the noise and connect with teachers in ways that are relevant. Using 21st century modes of communication such as social media and technology to modernize the union’s processes would make the union more accessible. The more options we have for participation, the more likely we are to engage.

When I ran for union president I advocated for my local union to adopt tools to engage newer members that included alternatives in voting formats, social media, and improved communication with their member base, but many were resistant to these changes. It seems there is a fear of changing the way things have always been done and it is preventing local unions from recruiting the next generation of teachers.

-Stephanie Molloy



WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Unions, while a key foundation of a strong middle class, are under attack in both the private and public sectors. An increasing number of states have placed limits on the role of unions, hurting membership and participation. The NEA and local and state affiliates have the opportunity to impact policy and implement instructional programs to modernize the teaching profession. It is important for the NEA to send a clear message to all members and affiliates that it has as a priority to fully engage all of its members by modernizing its processes, structures, and communication (see Appendix C for an example of a union modeling A Force that Engages all Teachers in Modernizing the Profession).

In Appendix C, we have profiled the Illinois Education Association, whose work represents a promising example of how the union can be a Force that Engages All Teachers in Modernizing the Profession.

CURRENT OBSTACLES

Engagement by early career teachers in the union and its governance is limited by:

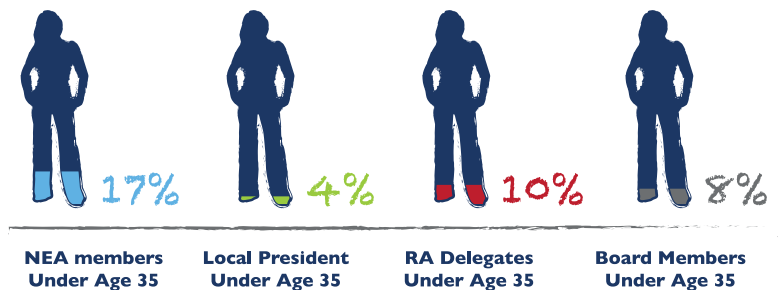
- An incomplete understanding of the union's structure and the opportunities for participation.
- A perception that NEA-related governance opportunities are "reserved" for veteran teachers.
- An antiquated communications system that does not leverage modern technology in ways that address the needs and practices of early career teachers.

Current processes fail to develop a clear initial understanding by early career teachers of the role and importance of the NEA and local and state affiliates. The building representative, who is the first union point of contact for new teachers, generally does not provide an orientation around the affiliates' structures. A golden opportunity is lost, since the focus of

subsequent communication with the building representative is generally on contractual or school-based conflicts. Scant attention is given to encouraging new teachers to engage with the union, either via governance or the professional development that is so important to early career teachers.

These issues are coupled with high barriers for attaining positions of influence. Attaining such positions within the NEA usually takes many years and is not explicitly connected to a member's effectiveness or potential. While it is true that the NEA governance is constitutionally democratic in its openness to all members (regardless of experience levels), the lack of awareness and the perception that members must "wait their turn" for governance opportunities are likely to discourage early career teachers. The composition of the NEA Representative Assembly (RA) exemplifies this (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: National Membership Under Age 35



While NEA members under 35 years comprise 17 percent of total membership, they make up only 10 percent of RA delegates. This pattern of underrepresentation of younger members extends to other positions of influence. For example, only four percent of local presidents are under 35 years old (NEA, 2014a).



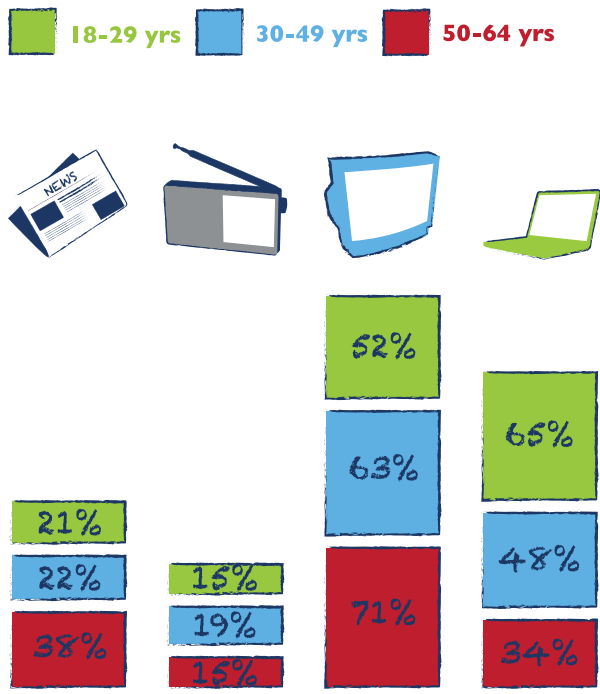
For early career teachers who value performance and operate with short lead times for making impact, the effect of a largely “experience-based” system when it comes to leadership selection is particularly negative. Instead of determining how to navigate this system or “waiting their turn,” early career teachers tend to completely disengage (or worse, not even join the union).

This situation is exacerbated by the fact that the NEA has not been able to adapt its communication practices to reach a generation of teachers who are used to receiving information in profoundly different ways from earlier generations. Early career teachers, either Millennials or second career teachers, expect technology to be seamlessly woven into their professional experience. A recent study by the Pew Research Center (2011) confirms key generational differences in how people get their news (see Figure 6).

I would like for local unions to provide more electronic means for members to view meeting minutes, engage in survey polls, and sign-up for upcoming opportunities to address policies and further action steps. Due to scheduling conflicts, on-the-job responsibilities, and involvement in other organizations, the union may have a meeting on a date I'm unable to attend. Therefore, an electronic avenue for increasing member participation would improve engagement.

-Tanika Johnson

Figure 6: How teachers get their news



PEW RESEARCH CENTER Dec 1-5, 2010.
 Figures add to more than 100% because respondents could volunteer up to two main sources.

People aged 29 and younger get most of their news via the internet, while those 50 to 64 years old are more likely to get their news and information via traditional media (TV, television, and radio). This shift strongly suggests that the NEA and its affiliates must embrace new technologies to effectively reach early career teachers.

Excessively “top-down” communication systems, which tend to be “one size fits all” and thus are not segmented by target audience, also hamper engagement. For early career teachers who expect individualized communication, anything short of customized, interactive means of communication is perceived as an obstacle.

The NEA and affiliates need to modernize their technology around key “touch points” that form an important basis for early career teachers’ view of the union. Voting systems are a good example of this, since many local and state affiliate elections are held by paper ballot without the option to participate electronically. Out of 37 different locals represented in our Fellowship, just 13 voted via electronic ballot during the last election while 27 voted via paper ballot (see Figure 7).



Figure 7: Paper vs. electronic ballots



**Out of 37 different locals,
13 vote via electronic ballot**

Modernizing NEA's delivery of information to match early career teachers' expectations can lead to more participation in the NEA, its work on the local and state level, and its governance processes.

I would be motivated to become more engaged if I felt invited to the discussion, or even tolerated, instead of feeling like I am fighting the long-established norm of seniority outranks all.

-Emilie Hill

RECOMMENDATION 3

Implement governance structures dedicated to early career teachers.

3a. Create a Standing Advisory Committee on Early Career Teachers.

We recommend that the NEA form a new NEA Standing Advisory Committee on Early Career Teachers with the purpose of increasing membership, engagement, and education of early career members at the local affiliate, state affiliate, and national levels. The committee would help with new teacher orientation to the union, develop curriculum relevant to new teachers for NEA conferences, improve communication to make it accessible and topically relevant, and engage early career teachers in governance. The NEA should dedicate a newly created position with a full-time staff person to support the committee's work (see "Early Career Teacher Committee").

WHAT IT WILL ACHIEVE

A formal structure that includes early career teachers would:

- *Help* early career teachers see themselves as better represented in the governance

structure and feel that their voices are being heard.

- *Ensure* that early career teacher participation and leadership is embedded into the NEA's structure.
- *Raise* the overall prominence of issues related to engagement and membership of early career teachers.
- *Develop* avenues for soliciting and acting on "bottom-up" feedback and ideas from early career teachers.

3b. Create an early career teacher observer seat on the NEA Executive Committee.

We recommend that the NEA amend the formal governance structure to include a place for early career teachers in the national leadership. This position could be a nationally elected seat on the Executive Committee or an ancillary, non-voting position similar to one held by the NEA Student Program President. The teacher in this position would be a member of the Standing Advisory Committee on Early Career Teachers.



WHAT IT WILL ACHIEVE

An early career teacher observer seat on the NEA Executive Committee would:

- *Expose* the NEA Executive Committee members to the aspirations and priorities of early career teachers.
- *Provide* highly visible leadership opportunities for early career teachers.

3c. Work actively to ensure the NEA Representative Assembly delegates represent the early career demographics.

We recommend that the NEA RA adopt a bylaw that encourages state affiliates to create a legally permissible plan to achieve a total state delegation that accurately reflects the membership body in terms of years of experience. This language should reflect existing Bylaw 3-1G which ensures a commitment to better representation of underrepresented groups.

WHAT IT WILL ACHIEVE

Ensuring early career teacher representation in the Representative Assembly would:

- *Send* a clear message to early career teachers that their voice is wanted at the table when the NEA creates policy.
- *Encourage* state affiliates to reflect on recruitment of early career teachers and potentially dedicate resources to the active recruitment of these teachers.

Early Career Teacher Committee

The committee should be made up of early career teachers and should be led by an early career teacher who reports to the NEA leadership. Members should be selected through a rigorous process that includes a strategic compilation of various skill sets.

The committee will be tasked with the following:

- *Advise* on the development of an online membership orientation to provide new members with relevant NEA information and resources.
- *Create* programs/trainings to identify and develop early career leaders.
- *Promote* existing and create new resources specifically geared toward supporting early career educators to help improve their classroom practice.
- *Develop* effective membership recruitment strategies targeted toward early career members.
- *Work* collaboratively with the Student Advisory Committee to develop structures that foster a smooth transition from student to active member.
- *Develop* and implement a program to promote early career teacher representation at the NEA representative assembly.
- *Develop* stories for media and/or create a blog that highlights the work of early career members.
- *Advise* on ways to enhance and expand upon existing communication methods (i.e. via website, smart phones, etc.)
- *Assist* with the development of relevant conference curriculum.
- *Connect* to relevant leadership and governance structures and other committees to provide feedback on work related to early career members.



RECOMMENDATION 4

Modernize existing processes through appropriate technology.

4a. Provide the opportunity for all local and state affiliates to adopt an online enrollment option for new members.

Many state affiliates still use triplicate (carbon copy) forms to enroll new members to join the union. The NEA should create a fully vetted and secure online enrollment option for state affiliates to adopt.

WHAT IT WILL ACHIEVE

Development of an online enrollment option would increase and accelerate the NEA and local union membership in the following ways:

- *Allow* for instantaneous processing of membership applications while minimizing the loss of paper enrollment forms and/or processing delays.
- *Streamline* and make seamless new member data collection at the local and state affiliate, and the national level.
- *Simplify* the process of joining the union for prospective members.
- *Increase* early career teachers' perception of the union as a modern organization that uses technology effectively and efficiently.

4b. Provide the opportunity for all local and state affiliates to adopt an online voting option for elections and contract ratifications.

Most local and state affiliates use paper ballots that must be distributed, collected, and manually counted. This often delays processes and disenfranchises voters based on various issues such as election timing and broken internal distribution and collection structures. The NEA should create a fully vetted and secure online voting platform that can be easily adopted by local and state affiliates.

WHAT IT WILL ACHIEVE

The ability of local and state affiliates to adopt an online voting platform fully vetted by the NEA would:

- *Increase* the often low participation rate in union elections by offering an alternative to the often cumbersome on-site or mail-in voting.
- *Raise* participation rates for early career teachers, who are more inclined to use online technology.
- *Democratize* the union and lead to greater voice/participation of early career teachers in both local and state affiliates and the NEA.

4c. Develop and use virtual orientations and new leader trainings.

We recommend that the NEA develop a Rock the Union-branded virtual orientation for new members with the intent that state and locals also adopt this unified branding. The orientation would include the following:

- An overview of the historically critical role of teacher unions and the NEA.
- NEA governance and support structures.
- Instructional resources.
- Member benefits.
- Parliamentary procedures.
- Opportunities for involvement and leadership.

Similarly, the NEA should develop a virtual orientation for new local affiliate leaders, particularly for those who are elected mid-year or miss formal training opportunities provided by the state affiliate. Ideally, these would be interactive sessions.



WHAT IT WILL ACHIEVE

Development and consistent use of virtual orientations and new leader trainings would:

- *Ensure* that all early career teachers have a uniform understanding of the NEA and its resources, opportunities, benefits, and processes.
- *Increase* early career teachers' enrollment and engagement in the local union and the NEA as a result of more immediate appreciation of the organization's relevance.
- *Increase* effectiveness of emerging leaders by ensuring that they have a more

immediate and consistent understanding of NEA's processes, opportunities, and resources.

- *Give* the NEA and local and state affiliates the flexibility to hold trainings across multiple scenarios such as teacher preparation programs, new member meetings, leadership conferences, etc.
- *Provide* a leadership opportunity for early career teachers to leverage their skillset in creating these virtual orientations and trainings (See Standing Advisory Committee on Early Career Teachers recommendation).

RECOMMENDATION 5

Design, develop, and execute an integrated Rock the Union communications initiative.

We recommend that the NEA develop a communications campaign under the Rock the Union umbrella. This would help ensure that the NEA's varied communication platforms reach a new generation of teachers and effectively translate the NEA initiatives for early career teachers. The Rock the Union communications campaign would:

- *Include* a new online publication and e-newsletter targeting early career teachers.
- *Highlight* the work of early career teachers in existing NEA publications like NEA Today.
- *Facilitate* targeted sharing of opportunities attractive to early career teachers (e.g., the Great Public Schools initiatives) via a Rock the Union website, social media, YouTube Videos, etc.

WHAT IT WILL ACHIEVE

A Rock the Union communications campaign would begin to alter the perception of the NEA among early career teachers in the following ways:

- *Align* with the varied means by which early career teachers access information.
- *Serve* as a focal point for more effective dissemination of information about recent innovative and important NEA initiatives.
- *Allow* early career teachers to engage more immediately in activities relevant to their practice.
- *Ensure* that more early career teachers feel comfortable running for elected offices as they see themselves reflected in union leaders.
- *Deliver* an important internal message on prioritizing professional issues and meeting the needs of early career teachers.
- *Serve* as a recruitment and engagement tool for local and state affiliates as they interact with early career teachers.



CONCLUSION

We are ready to Rock the Union! We are hopeful that the NEA and our local and state affiliates can adopt a change agenda so that all of our unions, with the NEA at the lead, become the “Go-To” on High-Quality Instruction, the Leader in Developing Teacher Leaders, and a Force that Engages all Teachers in Modernizing the Profession. The future of our profession has arrived and we are eager to help mold it through our unions.

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APPENDIX A

*Montgomery County Education Association (MCEA) –
The “Go-To” on Instruction*

*MCEA provides a model of the type of professional
capacity building that we want NEA to support.*

The MCEA, with Montgomery County Public Schools, has collaboratively negotiated and implemented progressive policies and programs that elevate the local union as a key leader on instructional issues. Their **Peer Assistance and Review (PAR)** program, **Career Lattice**, and **Center for Teacher Leadership, Inc.** engage educators around issues of practice and put teachers at the center of leading their profession.

PAR is a cornerstone of the evaluation process and represents a qualitative shift in how the school system supports and evaluates teachers (MCEA, 2014b).

- The assistance and performance review comes from a fellow teacher, rather than a “specialist” or an administrator. This peer educator, called a “Consulting Teacher,” is an outstanding teacher on leave from the classroom for three years.
- Consulting Teachers share responsibility for ensuring that all teachers meet the school system’s high performance standards through peer coaching, counseling, and collaborative learning.

- Teachers take collective ownership over teaching quality decisions, like continued employment, continued assistance, non-renewal, or dismissal.

The **Career Lattice** (career pathway) provides teachers with expanded opportunities to pursue school-based leadership opportunities and innovative instruction with attendant salary enhancements (MCEA, 2014a).

- Teachers must achieve “lead teacher” status in order to gain more leadership responsibilities and higher compensation.
- “Lead teacher” status is granted through effective classroom performance and leadership skills.

The Center for Teacher Leadership, Inc. is an independent non-profit organization that supports the professional development of its members (MCEA, 2014c).

- The Center engages public school teachers and teacher unions as full partners in school improvement and instructional leadership efforts.
- Major program areas include: support for National Board Certified (NBC) Teachers and NBC candidates; graduate programs in teacher leadership; and national programming to support teacher union leadership engaged in school improvement.

APPENDIX B

*The Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA) –
Developing Teacher Leaders*

*The MTA provides a model of a state affiliate
cultivating a pipeline of “high-potential” leaders
taking professional ownership over instructional
programs. We want the NEA to develop leadership
pipelines and support locals and state affiliates in
doing the same.*

The MTA Core Collaborative

The MTA partnered with Teach Plus in 2013-2014 to deliver a groundbreaking program for teacher leaders taking ownership over their professional development (PD) and growth. The MTA Core Collaborative (C2) is a teacher-led professional learning series through which teachers come together to collaboratively learn from one another and selected experts about the Common Core.

- C2 identifies and trains effective teachers to lead their peers in collaborative and applied hands-on-learning around Common Core strategies and practices to take back to the classroom.
- Teacher-created and teacher-facilitated Common Core PD that addresses real issues relevant to grade level and content area.
- No cost, high-quality professional development funded through the state union.
- Leadership opportunity for teachers with more pay while they remain in the classroom.
- C2 elevates excellent teachers as implementation leaders while maintaining a strong focus on student learning.



APPENDIX C

The Illinois Education Association (IEA) – Engages all Teachers in Modernizing the Profession

The IEA provides a model of a state affiliate sending a clear message to all members and local affiliates that it is a priority to fully engage all of its members by modernizing its processes, structures, and communication. We want the NEA and state and local affiliates to do the same.

The IEA flagged that early career teachers were underrepresented at IEA events and within IEA leadership structures, and subsequently launched an **Early Career Teacher Committee**. The Committee’s objective is to ensure that IEA represents and stays relevant to a growing population of early career teachers and provides these members with the support that they need for success. IEA also developed an aggressive **Student Program** and is utilizing technology to **modernize processes, structures, and communication**.

The **IEA Early Career Teacher Committee** was established in 2011 to engage, educate, and activate members in their first through tenth years of teaching (IEA Early Career Teachers Committee, 2014). Some outcomes have included:

- Professional partnerships with various organizations to promote a variety of PD opportunities for teachers.
- An inaugural state-wide weekend conference for early career teachers.
- Committee participation has led to members taking on additional union leadership responsibilities at the state, regional, and local levels.
- Other IEA committees actively seek input from the Early Career Teacher Committee.

IEA’s **Student Program** is pre-professional organization of undergraduate and graduate students preparing for careers in education. The program has a dedicated IEA staff person and resources. Some effective program components include:

- **Union Orientation** – Addresses teaching union history and importance. Teachers are invited to attend and present in union meeting in order to “learn the ropes” and feel empowered to become leaders once they enter the profession.
- **Mentoring Program** – Offers postsecondary students who enter the field of education the opportunity to work with a retired teacher in a mentee capacity.
- **Professional Online Publications** – Members receive access to a variety of publications providing targeted information for pre-professional teachers.
- **Online membership enrollment** – Electronic enrollment for student teachers (IEA, 2014a).

IEA developed a phone application, My IEA, that is free for members, well-advertised on the IEA website, and provides users access to the following (IEA, 2014c):

- A running education newsfeed
- Ability to update their membership profiles
- Professional development resources
- A union calendar that includes conferences and other relevant events
- Online registration for conferences
- Advocacy news and ways to get involved
- Member benefits
- Link to job postings
- Contact information for union leaders and offices

Website Development Support for Local Affiliates

- IEA offers a free platform and content support for local affiliates to have an online presence (IEA, 2014b).



RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

By the 2015-2016 NEA budget, expand the percent of the budget dedicated to proactively improving teaching and learning to equal that dedicated to defending the union against attacks.

Recommendation 2

Design targeted programs to assist local and state affiliates in identifying and supporting high-potential union leaders to implement change around a quality-based profession.

Recommendation 3

Implement governance structures dedicated to early career teachers.

- 3a.** *Create a Standing Advisory Committee on Early Career Teachers.*
- 3b.** *Create an early career teacher observer seat on the NEA Executive Committee.*
- 3c.** *Work actively to ensure the NEA Representative Assembly delegates represent the early career demographics.*

Recommendation 4

Modernize existing processes through appropriate technology.

- 4a.** *Provide the opportunity for all local and state affiliates to adopt an online enrollment option for new members.*
- 4b.** *Provide the opportunity for all local and state affiliates to adopt an online voting option for elections and contract ratifications.*
- 4c.** *Develop and use virtual orientations and new leader trainings.*

Recommendation 5

Design, develop, and execute an integrated Rock the Union communications initiative.