

# Teachers Unions

## To Join or Not to Join?

Just as with anything in life, teachers unions have their share of pros and cons.

New teachers are bombarded with a myriad of decisions during their first few years, and determining whether or not to join their teachers union is just one of them. In navigating the sometimes murky waters of union politics, it can be confusing as to what advantages and disadvantages union membership brings.

Membership in a teacher's union does carry benefits, primarily the legal protection that is afforded teachers if they are ever accused of wrongdoing while on the job. Members can request that meetings with administrators be held in the presence of their representative in cases where they might need help advocating for their teacher rights.

Besides the legal protections offered by union membership, there are a host of other benefits from discounted insurance to credit union options. Many teachers unions also offer free or cost reductions on professional development courses that can be used to further one's career. For example, teachers seeking National Board Certification can often find support through their local union chapter, offered either as classes or connections to potential mentors.

Becoming more involved in a union also offers teachers leadership opportunities. Whether it is at the



local, state, or national level, teachers can be involved in union governance and internal policymaking. Some unions offer fellowships that connect teachers to policymakers and allow teachers a greater voice in decisions that directly and indirectly impact their classrooms. According to "Rock the Union: An Action Plan to Engage Early Career Teachers & Elevate the Profession," a report produced by teachers through a collaborative effort with Teach Plus and the National Education Association (NEA), teachers want even more teacher engagement in modernizing the profession.

Top reasons that teachers cite for not joining a union include pricey membership dues and political differences. There are 22 states (plus

Washington D.C.) that require all teachers to pay agency fees, whether those teachers join their union or not. In those cases, teachers are paying the same amount, whether or not they claim membership in the union, so financial reasons do not influence those teachers' decisions.

Some local union chapters are very politically active and if teachers disagree with particular union platforms, it can dissuade from joining as well. For example, some local unions are very vocal in protecting teachers' rights based on traditional union matters (such as seniority) which can alienate new teachers who may choose not to support this agenda. (Interestingly, some local unions are beginning to take a more modern approach that acknowledges seniority as just one factor in determining qualifications in the teaching profession.)

Before making any final decisions, potential union members need to do their research. Is their state a right-to-work state where both membership and fees are entirely optional? Or will agency fees be collected no matter what? What benefits do their local, state, and national affiliates offer? And perhaps most critical, in the unlikely event a teacher needs legal representation, is that a union benefit a teacher would want to be without? [DRP](#)