

UNION FAQ

What Is an Educator's Union?

Our union is an organization made up of educators who come together to advocate for their rights, pay, benefits, and working conditions. As a union our main job is to represent you—both at the bargaining table and if something goes wrong at work.

By joining a union, you're part of a larger collective voice that fights for things like:

- Fair salaries and raises
- Manageable class sizes
- Safe and supportive working environments
- Professional development opportunities
- Protection against unfair treatment or termination

The National Education Association (NEA) is the largest labor union in the United States, representing nearly 3 million educators, including teachers, educational support professionals, support staff, and higher education faculty. By joining NEA-NM, you become part of an extremely powerful network of educators.

What Does Your Union Actually Do?

Your union negotiates your contract (often called a collective bargaining agreement, or CBA) with your school district. This contract covers:

- Pay scale and step increases
- Health insurance and other benefits
- Planning time and duty-free lunch
- Sick leave, personal days, and vacation
- Grievance procedures if your rights are violated
- Guarantees our voices are heard when district and state policies are drafted

Beyond contracts, the union organizes to provide legal support for members being disciplined or charged with work-related crimes, provides professional events and training, and lobbies to hold state politicians accountable for school funding and policy.

What is NEA-New Mexico?

NEA-New Mexico works to support all locals and harness our collective power in the state. We provide locals with staff support and legal help. We also provide teacher and union training and resource materials. Most importantly, we coordinate our lobbying and political action. **All school funding New Mexico is determined at the state legislature.** If organized educators do not stick together at the state capitol, our students will get left behind.

What Does Your Local Association Do?

This is the union closest to you—usually just your school district or group of schools. Your local association is made up of fellow educators, elected reps, and officers. They:

- Negotiate directly with your district
- Help you if you have a workplace issue
- Organize union meetings, votes, elections, and communications
- Elect members to represent you in discussions with administrators

Think of your local as your on-the-ground support team: they know your school, your challenges, and your contract inside and out. **For most grievances and questions, reach out to your Local Association Representative (AR) or Building Association Rep.**

What are my "Weingarten rights"?

Weingarten Rights refer to a U.S. employee's right to have a union representative present during an investigatory interview that the employee reasonably believes could lead to disciplinary action. These rights are derived from the 1975 U.S. Supreme Court decision *NLRB v. J. Weingarten, Inc.*

Currently, only employees represented by a union have Weingarten Rights. These rights apply during investigatory interviews by management, security, or HR that could result

in disciplinary action against the employee.

The employee must affirmatively request union representation. **The employer is not obligated to inform the employee of this right.**

Your union rep can help an employee understand questions, advise them on how to answer, and clarify confusing or misleading questions. They can speak during the interview but cannot interfere or refuse to let the employer question the employee.

Where Do My Dues Go?

Your dues go towards a combination of:

- Paying for experts, legal staff, and negotiators who help secure salaries, benefits, and working conditions.
- Covering legal support for educators facing disputes with employers, such as wrongful termination or workplace grievances.
- Supporting lobbying efforts at the local, state, and national levels to influence education policy, funding, and legislation.
- Funding workshops, training, and certification opportunities for educators to improve their skills and stay current.
- Increasing communications and outreach. The larger our union becomes, the more we can do.

Currently, NEA National gives back more money to New Mexican local members in the form of grants, support, and programming than it receives in dues. If you become a member, you get access to a host of member benefits that can add up to cover a significant portion of your dues, in the form of insurance and various discounts.

Am I Expected to Support Certain Politicians or Political Parties?

There are 3.6 million NEA members with 3.6 million different political opinions. But we all agree that our schools need more resources and our staff deserve dignity and respect. We believe in holding both parties accountable to fund and support schools.

Our union organizes and lobbies around

educators' issues and school funding. Union members share information and take action on local, state and federal laws that impact all of us and our students. Our union strives to inform members about elections, legislation and protests that apply to education policy, but whether and how you vote or participate is up to you.

The union's top priority is always organizing educators to build power in their workplace, community and the New Mexico legislature.

Will NEA National or NEA-NM Dictate What Our Local Priorities Are?

No. NEA National is a massive coalition of local education associations working together for mutual aid and strength at the national level. NEA policy is determined at an annual convention every July by rank and file educators. NEA-NM operates independently to determine New Mexico priorities through an annual delegate assembly of members from all the locals every October.

Locals operate independently with support and advice from NEA-New Mexico, because no one knows the needs of your district the way you and your fellow members do. NEA and NEA-NM exist to coordinate and offer support to locals, not dictate to them.

Why Should I Join?

Being part of the largest educator's union gives you a voice and a seat at the table when decisions are made. Whether it's better pay, fairer discipline policies, or safer classrooms, your union help make sure educators are heard and respected.

Even if things are going well right now, your union is your backup when they aren't. It allows you to share in the collective power of a team that believes that you deserve fairness, respect, and a dignified workplace.

