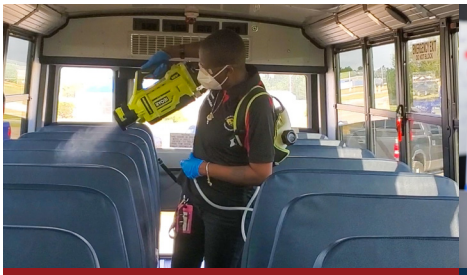
Tips & Tools for Cultivating Effective Worksite Reps/Stewards

A Guide for Organizing Members and Activists



RESPECT

EMPOWERMENT

INTEGRITY

ADVOCACY

The **150,000 members** of the Florida Education Association (FEA) believe in the bold promise of public education. **Together we will advocate to Fund Our Future** — to ensure student success, retention and recruitment of educators, and investment in our public school

FEA
Florida Education Association
affiliated with NEA, AFT, AFL-CIO

aft
A Union of Professionals

nea
NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

BTU
Engaging & Empowering Educators

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The right of employees, by and through a labor organization, to bargain collectively shall not be denied or abridged.

— Article I, Section 6 of the Florida Constitution

This guide was originally developed and has been revised by United Faculty of Florida, and now adapted for use by FEA K-12 membership. Special thanks to AFT, NEA, the AFL-CIO Organizing Institute, and Labor Notes for invaluable organizing resources and feedback.

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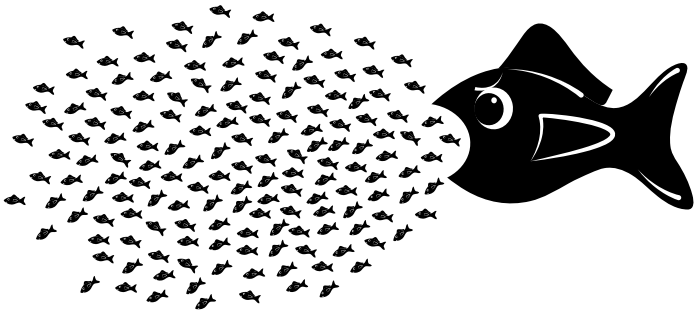
WHAT IS ORGANIZING?

Simply defined, organizing is . . .

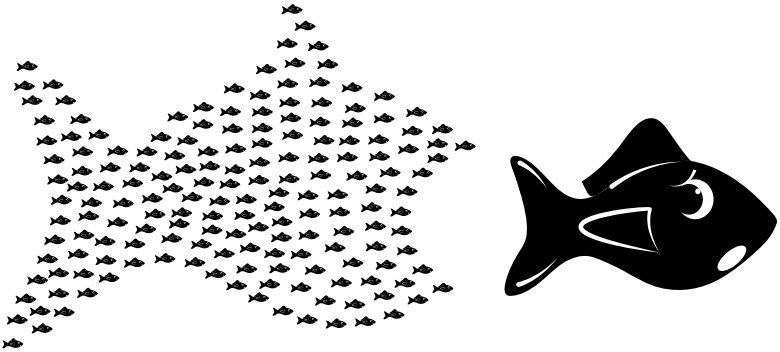
» **The process** of turning potential members into members, members into activists, activists into leaders.

» **It is most successful** when led primarily at the building level, member-to-member, colleague-to-colleague focused on issues and built on relationships and experiences.

» **Not a one time event.** An organizing-focused union puts members and people at the center of all union work, not just during a crisis or when people are needed to "turn out" for an event they did not shape.



ORGANIZE!



WHAT IS A BUILDING REPRESENTATIVE OR STEWARD?

Building representatives (also known as "Reps," "Stewards," "Worksite Leaders," "Organizers" or "Activists") are key to strengthening member rights and articulating employees' views. Reps provide the link between elected union leadership and members, bringing our union to the work site (or building, campus) level. Their job is to make our union's presence felt, field questions, build membership and involvement, and give voice to members' and potential members' concerns. Building a team of active building representatives is the best way to strengthen our collective voice and negotiating power, and it also spreads around the difficult labor of running an effective local union.

Some work sites only have a "Contact" or "Point Person." Figure out where to start and don't be afraid to be flexible and try new things as you identify the right leader for each site. It is better to just have a point person than to have the wrong Rep/Steward. The goal is to have a respected leader that represents the voice for members at each worksite, there is no "one size fits all."

As a steward, YOU are the key to overcoming:

- Isolation and indifference (not apathy)
- Fear and sense of futility about the future
- Lack of true understanding about our union and the power of getting together and taking collective action.

THE REP/STEWARD'S TASKS INCLUDE...

» Ongoing conversations with potential members about joining and taking a stand with their colleagues

» Coordinating the two-way communication, collection of information and surveys, as well as encouraging participation in collective bargaining negotiations or union events

» Welcoming new colleagues and encouraging them to join our union (early and often)

» Bringing concerns about contract violations or issues from colleagues to the local leadership

» Serving as a source of information about our union and about the contract for a group of members

» Attending Building Rep/Steward meetings and functions and encouraging colleagues to do so as well

WHY ARE FACE-TO-FACE VISITS BEST?

Research and our union's own experience has shown that mass emails and social media posts are minimally effective in building union membership and participation, but it remains the most utilized method of reaching out. We have to talk with colleagues in person. Why?

Because . . .

» It puts a face to your union. Our union and FEA are organizations of respected colleagues who want strong public schools for all students

» It serves to identify key issues, uncovering what motivates people to move towards taking action

» It builds personal relationships and establishes trust

» It serves to relate information and deal with questions and objections

Extensive research of public employee union campaigns has shown that a strong Building Representative/Steward structure or broad-based "Organizing Committee" that uses face-to-face organizing is the strongest indicator of success for building strength. See:

» "Union Tactics Matter: The Impact of Union Tactics on Certification Elections, First Contracts, and Membership Rates," Silver Spring, MD: Institute for the Study of Labor Organizations Working Paper, 1995

» Organizing for Social Change by the Midwest Academy Manual for Activists: Seven Locks Press, 2001

» Rebuilding Labor: Organizing and Organizers in the New Union Movement Edited by Ruth Milkman and Kim Voss: Cornell University Press, 2004

» "American Federation of Teachers Organizing Model," AFT/AFL-CIO, 2006

» Secrets of a Successful Organizer, Labor Notes, 2016. Available at: http://www.labornotes.org/secrets

TRANSFORMATIONAL VS. TRANSACTIONAL UNIONISM

We want to build a union that is:

√ visionary and inspiring
√ issues-driven
√ member- and worksite-centered
√ open and democratic
√ proactive
√ highly visible and engaging
√ prepared for mobilization
√ POWERFUL!

This demands that we approach organizing as an ongoing activity — as transformative — always evolving and growing, not something that is only done in crisis time. Our power is rooted in our members.

Here is a way to compare the "Transformational" (Organizing) Model vs. the "Transactional" (Service) Model:

TRANSFORMATIONAL	TRANSACTIONAL
Collective strength	A transaction
Personal	A rational calculation
About issues	About benefits, services
Active	Passive
About relationships	About marketing, sales
Listening, connecting	Pitching, selling
Ongoing activity	Occasional event
Union is power	Union is protection
Unionist	Customer
Members take a stand!	Members pay dues and sometimes vote

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Listen 80 percent of the time.

» Stay calm, open, and respectful, even if you hear negative or hostile comments.

» Listen for: What do people care about? What is their vision for change, for a better future?

» Ask: Why are things the way they are? How would we change things for the better? What would it be like around here if we had more say?

» Seek people out and take interest in them as colleagues, as people (as opposed to just wanting them to sign a form).

» Be aware of what makes you effective and use your strengths.

Make our union the First Friend, Best Friend to New Hires.

» The most important time you can spend is the time you spend reaching out to new hires, based on their needs.

» Sustained, personal contact over time is the key.

Our local union and FEA are vehicles for collective action, not an insurance company or charity.

» Language is important. Our union is "us" ("We the educators"or "We the teachers and education support professionals") — not an outside third party, staff or just the officers.

» Seek to involve all in our union's work, ask for input and participation early in the development of projects and planning, not after it has all been figured out by a small group.

» Celebrate success as a result of collective action rather than attributing success to individuals.

"Issues-Speak" is Your Best Language.

» Communicate with members on issues we care about, what we stand for, and what we are working to achieve together. Frame the issues around opportunity, quality, and student success and what our union can do when we work together.

» Member discounts and services do not motivate people to get involved or join, so talk about them in the context of the economic issues that educators face.

» Remember: Our union is about what we are doing together to build a better future vs. what any one of us "gets" in the here and now.

ORGANIZING BASICS AT WORKSITES

Building a powerful voice with your colleagues takes trust and commitment. Many eager new activists want to rush into membership drives through email blasts and/or passing out membership applications, but experience proves that there are no short cuts to building real power.

Our union has increased membership; we are growing faster than comparable unions around the country. We believe this is due to our colleague-to-colleague and positive approach. Our members care about public education and students. Organizing best practices include:

- **Building Worksite Leadership Team - you can't do it all alone!**
- **Know Your Data - members, potential members, activists!**
- **Organizing Around Issues – listening more than talking!**
- **Outreach to New Employees – be their first friend/best friend!**
- **Engaging the Community—Student success involves everyone!**

1. Keep Calm and Build a Worksite Leadership Team

Your worksite leadership team should reflect worksite and distinct diversity in terms of grade level, subject area, experience, age, gender, ethnicity and job family. Focus on face-to-face conversations to identify your team. Build from who you know and who the people you reach know. You want to identify respected leaders already on campus, find them by asking who people count on at work.

2. Know Your Data

Maintain an accurate database of your entire bargaining unit. Verify nonwork emails and cell phone numbers of all members (and potential members, if possible!) Collect data on degree of support for our union movement and priorities. Collect and add information specific to individual potential members.

Having data makes your job easier! Mapping your worksite is a great resource for your data. It allows you to identify your members and potentials, micro-target, and have quality conversations to engage your colleagues where they are and based on their interests.

3. Issue-based Organizing

The key here is listening. What do your co-workers care about? What changes would they like to see? Who are the respected leaders at each worksite? We suggest questions like "What do you love about working here?" as well as "What would make working here better?" and "Do you have a voice in how things are run around here? What might it be like if staff/teachers had a more powerful voice in how things are run?"

What are they willing to do about it? As people show their support, ask them to help build a powerful voice together by talking to 1-2 of their colleagues. Ask if they will join you at the next meeting or attend an event.

4. New Employee Outreach

Quality, personal introduction of new hires to our union as soon as possible is key. It allows us to define who we are and welcoming them will allow you to develop a relationship prior to the 'ask'.

Introduce and share that you are a building rep/steward for our union. Our professional association wants to help them succeed. We have resources available to support their success

"Our membership is made up of excellent teachers/education staff professionals, we invite you to be a part of this dynamic group."

Make sure you say the words, "Your success is a priority of our union, and your support is a commitment I make to you as a Steward/Building Rep."

New Employee Outreach – 'What to Expect'

- **School policies (unwritten & written)**
- **Parent – Teacher Conferencing**
- **Channels of communication**
- **Expected duties**
- **Materials/Supplies**
- **When a substitute is needed**
- **Faculty/staff meetings**
- **How/where copies are made**
- **Payroll & Benefits**
- **Contract highlights!**

5. Community & Student Engagement

Our public schools belong to all of us: the students who learn in them, the parents who support them, the educators and staff who work in them, and the communities that they anchor. Together, we will work to make our collective vision of public education a reality.

SAMPLE ONE-ON-ONE AGENDA

1. Introduce yourself and say why you're visiting.

If you know the person:

> *Hi _____, I wanted to talk with you about our union, and our contract and why we need to stand together now.*

Or if you don't know the person:

> *Hello _____. I'm _____, a member of _____, and I was hoping we could talk about your work here and how to build a stronger voice for teachers/education support professionals at _____.*

2. Get to the person's concerns. Listen 80% of the time. Ask probing questions.

» Start with asking what they do and how it is going (if you don't know).

» Ask what they like about their work.

» Ask what they'd like to change or improve about their work.

3. Explore the issue the person cares about. LISTEN! Tie their concerns to our union's priorities/contract or collective strength.

» Having identified the issue or issues the potential member cares about, ask more questions to get them to articulate what is unjust about the situation and what could be done about it.

» State why you joined; your own experience is compelling.

» Explain that our union only represents fellow dues-paying members in grievances and binding arbitration.

» Explain some of the things that have been won or are being worked on through your union or a current campaign (have talking points about our union).

4. Ask for a commitment. Unapologetically express that they should take a stand if they want a strong contract and serious voice for teachers/education support professionals.

> We invite you to take a stand and become part of our union – are you ready?

If "Yes":

> *Good, here is the membership application to fill out* (wait while they fill it out, don't just leave it).
>
> *To really have a voice and a vehicle to make the changes you want, we need more than your membership — we need you to get involved. Can you:*
>
> - *Wear your t-shirt (button) on Tuesday when we bargain?*
> - *Come to the meeting on _____?*
> - *Introduce me to two of your colleagues to talk about getting involved with our union?*
> - *Join a committee?*

If "No" or "Considering":

> *Thanks for talking with me. Do you have specific concerns or questions making you hesitate?*

Be sure to leave the door open for a friendly return visit in the future.

5. After the visit, reflect on how the conversation went and record your notes. Assess the person's support and decide what might be a good next step. Keep track of this somewhere (a central database, a union folder in your building, a running Google doc).

TALKING THROUGH RESISTANCE

The people we organize will often demonstrate initial reluctance to making a commitment to our local. How can an organizer effectively respond to resistance? Some do's and don'ts:

Do not trivialize or ignore someone's reasons for hesitating. The reason someone gives for not joining is often a clue to what motivates the decisions they make. They are being honest with you, and that is good!

A person's reasons for hesitating can sometimes tell you as much about what they care about — and what will ultimately secure commitment to our union — as anything else you learn in an organizing conversation.

Do not argue with the person whom you're organizing. You can't secure a commitment by scoring points in a contest of reason or rhetoric. Organizing isn't about rebuttals; it's about speaking to someone's convictions after carefully hearing them out. Try to not think over your response while they are speaking, actively listen.

Do not mistake someone's initial hesitation as an absolute and permanent refusal. It takes a lot of emotional and cognitive work to overcome inertia and make a commitment. Talk through someone's reasons for hesitating rather than writing off the prospect. Remember your own resistance to joining or getting involved. It's important to respect a colleague's position while at the same time working with him or her. This process will occur over the course of several conversations.

Do not hesitate to return to your colleagues to discuss the issues again. Sometimes experience or reflection will get the person to see the importance of your local and your collective bargaining agreement. **Keep trying!**

Do return the focus of the conversation to issues the person cares about. A strong commitment is always rooted in a desire to act to address issues. Bring the conversation back to these issues — pay, evaluation, testing, autonomy, healthcare, planning time, family leave, respect, inequality, etc. — keep the person thinking about what is important to him/her. Ask whether s/he imagines positive change occurring in the absence of a strong union.

Do use a person's resistance to help identify how s/he sees his/her own self-interest. Someone's perceived self-interest will drive most if not all decisions, and the reasons someone gives for not committing support often reveal what will motivate her/ him to commit support.

Recent research provides overwhelming evidence for our purposes:

» There is an urgent need to communicate about our union on the basis of issues. Too many have merely a functional (vs. substantive) view of their union. It is seen as irrelevant to their most deeply felt issues.

» We are responsible for this view often because we employ the transactional or service model of recruitment rather than the transformational or organizing model

» Dues are the number one objection to membership. (The good news is that it is to the exclusion of almost all others.) Dues objections are nearly always about value and relevance—not affordability.

» Our greatest enemies: lack of knowledge and lack of sustained personal contact with union colleagues.

» For too many, their union is distant and seen as something other than themselves.

» In the absence of union knowledge, job dissatisfaction does not translate into support.

» There simply needs to be more asking: The number one reason people have not joined, when polled, is because they were not personally asked to join. And members say our union does not do enough to get them involved.

TALKING THROUGH RESISTANCE (CONT.)

Objections can usually be classified into one of four broad categories:

» **Cost** – "I can't afford the dues."

» **Experience** – "I used to work at a place where our union was really ineffective."

» **Status** – "We're not assembly-line workers, and I don't think a union is appropriate for us."

» **Security** – "I'm not interested in making waves."

Having used someone's objections to identify self-interest, the organizer then connects that self-interest directly to having a strong union. What follows are some helpful responses. **Keep in mind that it's more important to listen and talk about building strength than to rebut.**

OBJECTION: Cost

"I can't afford to have dues deducted from my check."

» State your own reasons for joining and explain your own hesitations. Be honest that dues are a financial commitment, but explain how important it is to have a counterbalance to the administration and to have a voice in the state of Florida.

» "Membership strength translates into a greater say in our economic future and greater influence in the political arena. Your support will help make the changes you said were important to you."

» Don't be apologetic or soft-sell membership. Membership is not a favor to you. Respond with your own reasons for paying dues and why it's worth it to you.

» Quote dues in lowest terms: per day, per pay period, etc. "The deduction is $37 per pay period or $7.50 a week, $1 a day." Some Reps show their paystub.

» Share successes that you have had through member advocacy, lobbying and bargaining to show that dues are a good investment.

OBJECTION: Experience

"The Union just doesn't seem effective."

» "Our Union is not perfect, but it's democratic, and it is our voice. The more of our colleagues who get involved and help make it stronger, the more we can do. Would you rather the administration, the Superintendent or the School Board speak for employees and make all the decisions that affect us?"

» Our union believes that you — teaching, supporting, interacting daily with all our students, making this district work— should have a say in what your job should be, how problems surrounding it should be solved, and how much you should be paid for it.

» "How could it be done better?"

TALKING THROUGH RESISTANCE (CONT.)

OBJECTION: Status

"We're not assembly-line workers. I don't think a union is appropriate for us."

» "Teachers and education staff professionals do have a different culture from other workers, but we still need to be organized and speak up for education and our interests. The district has teams of employees working on all kinds of issues related to your working conditions. Who represents your interests? Together we do, through our union."

» "If you examine our track record, it has been our union who has stood for employees' working conditions, for increasing pay, for autonomy in the classroom, for fair and objective evaluations, for resources so that we can perform our jobs, for increasing our freedom from bureaucrats, etc. Our union — not the administrators, not the Superintendent, not the School Board — has held the district accountable for their action and works tirelessly to create the schools that every student deserves."

"I'm not planning on staying in this job" or
"I plan to retire soon so why should I bother?"

» "I know it's important to you to maintain the integrity of our profession. Supporting our union now will go a long way towards putting education before politics."

» "There are thousands of people in your position across the state, and your membership will help right now. We are all in this together, and we can't do it without you."

» "If you support the issues we're coming together for, joining makes our voice stronger. If you don't stay, at least you took a stand while you were here."

» "Your retirement's stability depends upon current and future employees, and the plan our union continues to defend. We need your support to continue providing a stable, healthy retirement for others and to protect your own pension plan."

» "Join now and stay involved through one of our retiree chapters. You'll not only remain a vital part of education in Florida, our union will continue to work to protect your investment and your future!"

OBJECTION: Security

"I'm not interested in making waves," or
"If I get active in our union, I will not get renewed," or
"I will not be evaluated fairly."

» "A union creates stability and provides procedures and standards that the employees and administration negotiate together. Showing your support by taking a stand with your colleagues doesn't mean you have to make waves as an individual; it means you stand with your colleagues in an organization that represents your interests."

» Reassure the prospective member by expressing your self-confidence and sharing your experience as a union member who has not seen retaliation.

» "One of the reasons we have a union contract is to prevent arbitrary treatment. Do you really believe you will be retaliated against for joining? If so, we need to fight that because your constitutional rights are being ignored."

» Name some colleagues who are members who s/he respects who have not been retaliated against or who serve in leadership roles.

» Many administrators are strong union supporters, or they at least understand the benefits of working collaboratively with our union. "Our Reps/Stewards are leaders in their worksites and many serve on school and district committees."

» It is against Florida Statutes to retaliate against you for union activity. The FL Constitution and Florida labor law protect your right to form, join, and participate in any employee organization of your own choosing. Exercise your rights.

ASSESSING OUR WORKSITE

Assessing Support: Ranking your worksite

After a conversation, assess where you think their support lies at this time with the scale below. Turn in your notes with an assessment to the Building Rep/Steward, local leadership, or Membership Chair. These notes and rankings are only used internally. Anything told in confidence should not be stored. Only assess potential members after conversations; be careful not to make assumptions prior to talking.

These assessments will change as we continue having conversations and move people from undecided to active.

Keep engaging colleagues; organizing is a process.

Follow up by answering a question someone you visited asked about or go back to hear their views on something our union is doing. Continue to ask targeted questions to figure out what is most important to your colleague. Don't always lead with your concerns at the expense of listening.

Union Support Scale	
0	**Not assessed**
1	**Member/Joined**
2	**Opted in to messaging system** (ie text messages from FEA or local messaging system or engagement)
3	**Gave/verified personal contact information** (personal email and cell phone number)
4	**Said NO to all three asks**

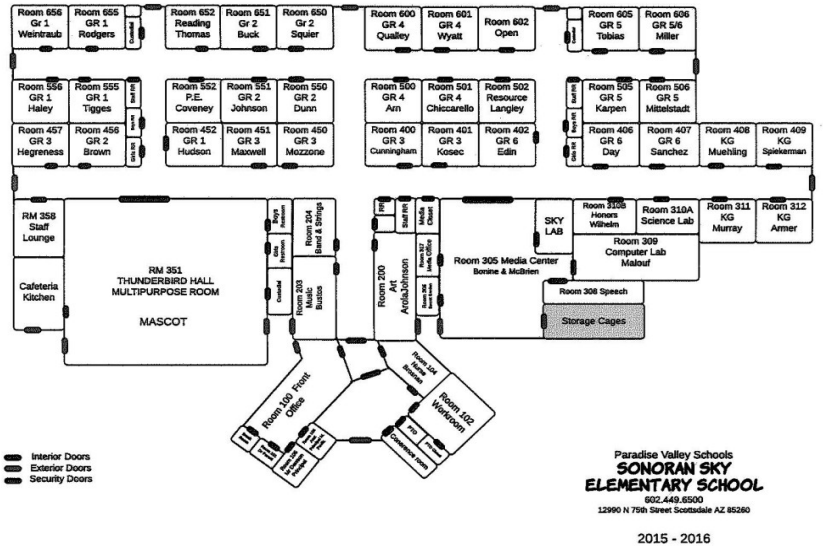
See if someone you have tried to recruit will go with you to a social or to observe bargaining. Keep in touch as the year goes on and keep asking questions and engaging the prospect. Sometimes an undecided colleague can become a serious leader because someone they trust kept reaching out and listening. Build trust and keep the door open and positive.

MAPPING & CHARTING

There are people who influence others, leading in both positive and negative ways. It's important when mapping to know who is influential and how they feel about our union.

Mapping is a worksite leadership team activity to create a physical depiction of a worksite that illustrates presence and physical proximity of educators and staff based on such factors as membership, job title, assessment status, etc.

Once created, a map gives us a look at selected data from a bird's eye view and provides a starting point for strategic discussion for organizing and engaging our members.



FROM POTENTIAL MEMBER TO LEADER

We have to move bargaining unit members towards involvement and engagement in our union if we are to see real change and thrive as a powerful union.

ENGAGEMENT

Person starts to see reasons to become interested in/pay attention to our union through conversations

ACTIVATION / RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

Person begins voluntary action in support of our union
Person joins and remains a member

INDUCTION

Person is oriented to your chapter/comes to know its history, structure, values, etc

CONTINUAL ACTIVATION

Person continues voluntary action

SECONDARY LEADERSHIP

Person assumes a formal leadership role
(Building Rep/Steward, leads website, committee, etc)

PRIMARY LEADERSHIP

Person advances to highest levels of elected leadership
(committee chair, chief negotiator, officer, etc)

If we are not engaging members on every level, our union will stagnate, and we will lose ground. If we don't ask members to help build their union, they will think they are not needed. We have to practice asking others for involvement if we want to build a powerful, grassroots union chapter.

IDENTIFYING LEADERS

Identifying new leaders is a process that takes time. We can only assess their potential leadership capacity through multiple interactions and opportunities to see them lead in small and gradually increasing ways. Good leaders empower others to become leaders. Review the list below and note when you see members and potential members show the capacity to become leaders. Remember that a leader doesn't always have to be an elected officer in the union. There are many roles members can play in the union that require being a leader.

Are they a leader? Do they...

- ☐ Listen and observe before talking?
- ☐ Understand and believe in the power of Unionism?
- ☐ Act enthusiastic and willing?
- ☐ Hold a place of trust and respect with their colleagues/peers?
- ☐ Respond positively when given opportunities to engage in additional union work (training, meetings, organizing)?

KEY TERMS & PHRASES

Bargaining Agent (Union):
A group, agency or organization (i.e., a labor union rather than an individual) authorized to bargain collectively on behalf of its members or bargaining unit. The Screen Actors Guild, for instance, is the bargaining agent for movie actors. Having a Bargaining Agent brings democracy to the workplace, allowing those who do the work to make decisions about their professional lives.

Bargaining Unit:
The group of workers that negotiates collectively with the employer through their elected bargaining agent. The boundaries of the bargaining unit can be a subject of dispute between union and employer, since these can determine which employees are entitled to representation.

Collective Bargaining:
Bargaining is a democratizing force in the workplace. In the language of labor law, it is: The negotiation of employment matters between administration and employees through the use of a bargaining agent that is designated by a majority of individuals within a bargaining unit. In short, it is when a group of people join together to enforce their collective voice in the hopes of securing higher salaries and better working conditions. When a majority of employees in a work place vote in favor of being represented by a bargaining agent, the administration is legally bound to bargain all employment conditions "in good faith" with the elected agent. It is illegal for employers to interfere with their employees' right to bargain collectively.

Collective Bargaining Agreement (a.k.a. CBA or the Contract):
A legally-binding agreement between an employer and a bargaining agent that represents its employees. A contract contains rules and regulations that set the terms and conditions of employment plus any additional benefits negotiated and is valid for a specified period of time. Breach of the contract by either side may be cause for a grievance, arbitration, or a charge of Unfair Labor Practice. For a contract to become effective, it must be approved by the bargaining unit by majority vote.

Grievance/Contract Violation:
A dispute or difference arising between the employer and one or more employees, claiming a violation of the Contract. A grievance is resolved through the grievance procedure, which is a systematic approach to handling workplace problems spelled out in the Con-

KEY TERMS & PHRASES (CONT.)

tract. Our union only represents dues-paying members in contract violations. Non-members may represent themselves or hire an attorney.

Issues:
These are the compelling reasons that the majority of employees want union representation and, as such, they are the issues of all membership recruitment efforts. A member recruitment plan focuses on these issues, organizing employees and union activities around them, and prioritizes them during contract negotiations.

PERC:
The Public Employees Relations Commission (PERC) is the agency that administers Florida's collective bargaining law (Florida Statutes, Chapter 447). It oversees public-employee union relations and disputes, or relations between a union and a public employer. To do this, it conducts hearings at which they determine bargaining units, verify authorization cards, conduct elections for collective bargaining, supervise the bargaining process, hear charges by either side on Unfair Labor Practices, mediate impasses, and adjudicate similar issues. The Governor appoints the members on the board.

"Right-to-Work" laws:
An anti-union term coined to describe state laws that make it illegal for a contract to contain clauses requiring union membership among all who receive the benefits. Majorities support the union but aren't legally compelled to pay for the work it does. Public employees in many southern states have no collective bargaining rights whatsoever. The landmark Janus v AFSCME case decided by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2018 eliminated the previously held right of public sector unions to collect "agency fees" from non-members for whom they still bargained a contract. This change essentially established "Right-to-Work" as the standard across the country, as it has been in Florida since collective bargaining rights were established for public employees.

Union Dues:
The payment that members make to their union. The amount is set by either the constitution or bylaws of each union and is approved by the membership. Dues pay for overhead (copies, office, technical equipment, etc.), as well as lobbying, legal representation, and staff at the local, state and national levels.

YOUR RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES

Most educators will go through their entire careers without facing disciplinary action. But it is still important to know and be familiar with your rights should you or your co-workers need to exercise them.

Be prepared: Know your rights

Being called into a meeting with your supervisor or an administrator can seem daunting. It's important to stay calm and remember your right to representation, also known as your "Weingarten Rights":

1. Remember: If a reasonable person would believe that discipline could result from the meeting, you have the right to representation.

2. Ask: "What is the purpose of the meeting?" Could discipline result from the meeting? If so…

3. State: "I want union representation." You can ask for representation at anytime during the meeting.

Do's and don'ts when facing possible disciplinary action

1. **DO remain calm**
2. **DO contact your local union or service unit office**
3. **DO keep notes**
4. **DON'T make statements**
5. **DON'T attend meetings without representation**
6. **DO get preliminary details**
7. **DON'T agree to a change in job status**
8. **DO retain letters, documents, notes, etc. on the matter**

DO NOT be insubordinate if denied representation.

- Attend the meeting.
- Keep asking for union representation.
- Take good notes.

DO NOT sign or agree to anything.

DO NOT make or write statements.

CALL your local union office or service unit immediately for assistance.

HOW TO AVOID TROUBLE

Although it is unfortunate, it is a fact that the very nature of your job leaves you open to serious allegations of misconduct, ranging from inappropriate discipline to excessive use of force to sexual misconduct to misappropriation of funds to falsifying records and everything else in between.

While it is impossible to stop allegations from being made against you, there are steps that you can take to protect yourself, your reputation and your career. It is important to note that teachers are not the only employees in a school district who are open to allegations of misconduct. Bus drivers, teacher assistants, food service workers, custodians, secretaries and other education staff professionals are just as likely to be charged as teachers.

By following these simple tips, you can help protect yourself from allegations being made against you.

- Never touch a child in anger. Avoid any contact that can be perceived as grabbing, pushing, shoving, pinching, twisting or hitting.
- Avoid being alone with a student, particularly one of the opposite sex. Try to have another student or adult present. If this is not possible, be sure to leave the door open and, if at all possible, move to an open location such as a media center.
- Do not give a student a ride in your personal vehicle.
- Do not give gifts to students.
- Do not engage in conversations with students about their dates, romantic problems or sex. If a student needs help, refer him or her to a guidance counselor.
- Avoid hugging students. If a student wants to hug you, try to do so standing side by side.
- Never drink alcohol in front of students or on a school-sponsored trip, even if students are not present.
- If you handle money, be sure to follow school and district policy regarding accounting, receipt and deposit procedures.
- Keep careful and accurate records. This includes student records, inventory records, financial records or any documentation for which you are responsible.
- Arrive at work on time or a few minutes early. Don't leave before the end of the workday without permission.

WHAT WE DO TOGETHER THROUGH OUR STATE & NATIONAL AFFILIATES

» We guarantee crucial rights and benefits in legally-binding collective bargaining agreements for over 140,000 education professionals in our state, and 4.2 million nationwide (these agreements cannot be altered by the unilateral action of politicians or administrators).

» We ensure that teachers and education support professionals have a significant role in determining the conditions under which we do our work, with the result being better opportunities and quality learning environments for students' success.

» We negotiate salary increases and working conditions.

» We enhance the scope of professional development and career building opportunities.

» We represent members in disciplinary meetings, grievances, and arbitration hearings.

» We defend collective bargaining rights before the legislature, labor board (PERC) or in court.

» We protect members from arbitrary and illegal terminations, lay-offs and non-renewals.

» We help ensure, through advocacy, bargaining, and community involvement that every student has a caring, qualified, and committed teacher or education support professional in their classrooms and schools.

» We speak out against and defeat encroachments upon academic freedom.

» We protect core academic principles and build a movement for quality public education.

» We lobby the state legislature, governor and the public on public education issues.

and much more…

MEMBER BENEFITS

People join because of issues they care about and because they want a voice and a vehicle through which they can make improvements. The benefits on this page are "icing on the cake." You can save many times your annual dues by taking advantage of our wide array of membership services. Our union has packets about these programs.

Have some with you at functions and send them to new members to help with retention. These services include:

1. $1,000,000 Professional Liability Policy: You are automatically covered for this amount should you be sued while acting in your professional capacity.
2. Attorney Referral Plan: You are entitled to two free half-hour consultations with our attorneys each year on personal legal matters, as well as discounts should you retain one of our referred attorneys.
3. Home ownership and automobile insurance.
4. Long Term Disability: The best available.
5. Mobile apps for discounts on the go, free subscriptions and magazine discounts, consumer guides, financial planning, AT&T phone 18% discount and more.
6. Free life and accidental death and dismemberment insurance: A $50,000 benefit for accidental death and dismemberment that occurs on the job or while serving as a union leader.
7. Free AA degree for members and their immediate family through Eastern Gateway Community College, a public, non-profit college in the university system of Ohio.

Shop these programs on the web for more information:

FEA: www.feaweb.org/member-benefits
NEA: www.neamb.com
AFT: www.aft.org/aftplus
ShareMyLesson: sharemylesson.com

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

The **Florida Education Association (FEA)** is proud to be your statewide union. We are committed to ensuring that school administrators, elected officials and the general public recognize your value. We invite you to join us and stand up for yourself, your co-workers and your profession. What's in it for you? Your membership works for you in hundreds of ways. Here are just a few:

1. Your union contract

From wages to working conditions, health insurance to promotions, nearly every part of our work lives is covered by the contract your union bargains with the school district. The bigger our union, the better the contract we can negotiate.

2. We've got your back

Your union is an important part of protecting Florida's middle class by fighting for fair pay and benefits and protecting workers from being abused and disrespected at their jobs. Your contractual and legal rights, working conditions and employment will be aggressively defended.

3. Community and networking

Your local union and FEA have the influence to represent you at the Legislature, your school district and everywhere decisions are made about your job. In the last few years your union has defended thousands of members against district harassment, unfair discipline, and changes to benefits; and fought for more money for public education and school employees.

4. Professional growth

Through FEA conferences, meetings, trainings and communications, you are connected to other education staff professionals, public employees and educators across the state who are dealing with the same issues as you.

5. Member benefits that save you money

Through the buying power of our two national affiliates you are eligible for big discounts on insurance, home financing and everyday purchases. Combine that with the FEA/Access member benefit program and it's possible to offset the cost of your membership with member benefit discounts alone.

6. You talk, we listen

This is your union. Your local union and FEA are grassroots organizations run by and for their members. Every member has a vote and unrestricted access to every level of union governance: local, state and national.

FEA
Florida Education Association
affiliated with NEA, AFT, AFL-CIO

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