

Where Do Teacher Union Dues Go?

By Rebekah Paxton

On average, 84 percent of dues go to state and national union organizations – not to the local union

RECOMMENDATION:

All union organizations, including local and county affiliates, should make union dues information available to the public (members and non-members). The MTA and NEA currently list dues levels in their budgets.

When a new teacher comes to work in a school district, he or she has to decide if she wants to join the union. Doing so, teachers are told, will bring a wide variety of benefits, including legal advice and protection, counsel on workplace matters, inclusion in negotiations and collective bargaining, and professional skills training, among others.

However, when a teacher joins the union, he or she also signs on to larger state and national union organizations. Affiliation with these large, politically powerful bodies can be beneficial; especially if you agree with their political stances. State and national union organizations have massive resources to deploy on lobbying and advocacy both for issues directly related to union members and also for those that may fall outside the domain of the average union member's interest.

The benefits of union membership come at a cost. A survey of 19 local union affiliates of the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA) and the parent National Education Association (NEA) suggests that union members pay total dues of between \$741 and \$911 annually. (Whether you are a new teacher earning \$38,000 or a 20-year veteran earning \$100,000, you pay an equal amount in dues.)

Because of the multiple tiers of union organizations in the United States, members pay union dues to their local, state, and national affiliate organizations. For example, a member of the Somerset Education Association will also pay dues to the Massachusetts Teachers Association and the National Education Association. In some instances, regional education associations which encompass multiple local organizations may require additional dues, such as the Norfolk County Teachers Association, which requires an additional \$8 as part of total annual dues. For higher



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Year	Local Association	Local dues ¹	MTA dues	NEA dues	Total dues	% Local
2010–2011	Abington Educ. Assoc.	\$184	\$489*	\$185	\$858	21%
2013–2014	Arlington Educ. Assoc.	\$128	\$489	\$185	\$802	16%
2015–2016	Dracut Teachers Assoc.	\$154	\$489	\$185	\$828	19%
2016–2017	Framingham Teachers Assoc.	\$159	\$494	\$189†	\$812	19%
	Lee Educ. Assoc.	\$60	\$494	\$187	\$741	8%
	Marblehead Educ. Assoc.	\$100	\$494	\$187	\$781	13%
2017–2018	Springfield Educ. Assoc.	\$217	\$494	\$189	\$900	24%
	Clinton Teachers Assoc.	\$80	\$494	\$189	\$763	10%
	Grtr. Lowell Tech. H. S. Teachers Org.	\$102	\$494	\$189	\$785	13%
	Haverhill Educ. Assoc.	\$164	\$494	\$189	\$847	19%
	MA State College Assoc. (MSCA)	\$120	\$494	\$189	\$803	15%
	Methuen Educ. Assoc.	\$100	\$494	\$189	\$783	13%
	Westwood Teachers Assoc.	\$85	\$494	\$189	\$768	11%
2018–2019	Northampton Assoc. of School Emp.	\$135	\$494	\$192	\$821	16%
	Barnstable Teachers Assoc.	\$225	\$494	\$192	\$911	25%
	Hudson Educ. Assoc.	\$93	\$494	\$192	\$779	12%
	Nauset Educ. Assoc.	\$125	\$494	\$192	\$811	15%
	Somerset Teachers Assoc.	\$128	\$494	\$192	\$814	16%
	Wayland Teachers' Assoc.	\$133	\$494	\$192	\$819	16%

* MTA and NEA dues information not available for the years listed (2010–2011, 2013–2014, and 2015–2016), but is conjectured here for comparison purposes.

† Official NEA Strategic Plan and Budget for 2016–2018 denotes that dues amount for 2016–2017 was \$187, but Framingham Teachers Association documentation says \$189.

education institutions in Massachusetts, professors also contribute dues to a hierarchy of associations. For example, a full-time professor at Salem State University paid \$175 to the Massachusetts State College Association, \$86 to the Salem State chapter of MSCA, in addition to \$494 to the MTA and \$189 to the NEA for the 2017–2018 academic year.

When teachers pay dues, it is generally in the form of a single deduction from their paychecks that doesn't delineate the amount being paid to their local, state and national organizations. Most local union dues information is limited for non-members, but the table below shows a breakdown of union dues by local, state (Massachusetts Teachers Association), and national (National Education Association) affiliations. Out of more than 160 districts with MTA-affiliated local associations, the table represents the only available information on per capita dues amounts, consisting of 19 localities in Massachusetts. Dues are differentiated by funds directed to local associations, the Massachusetts Teachers Association, and the National Education Association.

The average portion of dues directed to local associations is 15.6 percent. That is, of the dues paid by members to their respective teacher unions, only 15.6 percent goes to their local association. The remaining 84.4 percent goes to the state (MTA) and national (NEA) associations. The amount of dues paid to local unions spans from \$60 per year for membership in the

Lee Education Association to \$225 per year for the Barnstable Teachers Association.

There is also great diversity in the percentage of dues that goes to an individual's local union. For members of the Lee Education Association, just 8 percent of their total annual membership dues is directed to their local organization. For those affiliated with the Clinton Teachers Association, approximately 10.5 percent of individual dues are allocated to the local union. The greatest local portion of teachers' dues in this sample go to the Barnstable Teachers Association, which collects 24.7 percent of dues deducted from teachers' paychecks.

The allocation of dues revenue is striking, given that most of the costs associated with the unions' primary function—collective bargaining—are incurred locally. Due to the hierarchical relationship between national unions, the MTA, and the NEA, most dues revenue goes to the state and national organizations, where it funds administrative and political action costs. In the 2018–2019 MTA Proposed Budget, membership dues are listed initially as \$474 per member per year. However, hidden deeper in the document, the MTA Board of Directors, Executive Committee and Advisory Budget Committee voted to adopt additional dues of \$20 to go specifically toward the proposed “Public Relations/Organizing Campaign” budget.² While other education workers covered by the MTA do not

pay dues as large as those for teachers, these employees still pay prorated additional dues toward the public relations and organizing campaign budget. An analysis of previous budgets shows these dues have not changed since at least 2016.³

MTA Dues 2016–2019			
	Teachers	Secretaries, clerks, custodians	Aides, food service personnel, other
Membership dues	\$474	\$285	\$143
PR/Campaign dues	\$20	\$12	\$6
Total dues	\$494	\$297	\$149

In its 2018–2020 Strategic Plan and Budget, the NEA outlines how member dues are allocated by purpose. For the current year, 32 percent of member dues was proposed to go toward “enhancing organizational capacity”, described by language that implies strengthening the impact of the national association and its ability to further the union’s mission, while 29 percent was to go toward “enterprise operations”. The third largest component, which comprises 12 percent of a member’s NEA dues, goes toward “securing the environment to advance the mission of the NEA and its affiliates”, which “use[s] all available means, including organizing, legal, legislative, electoral, and collective action...to protect the rights of students and educators”.⁴

One interesting piece to the union dues puzzle is that Massachusetts’ state law allows cities and towns to opt into measures which require employers to provide their employees with liability insurance. M.G.L. ch.258 §13 provides that “Any city or town which accepted section one hundred I of chapter forty-one on or before July twentieth, nineteen hundred and seventy-eight, and any other city which accepts this section according to its charter, and any town which accepts this section in the manner hereinafter provided in this section shall

indemnify and save harmless municipal officers, elected or appointed from personal financial loss and expense including reasonable legal fees and costs.” According to Pioneer records, most, if not all, of the localities featured in this analysis have adopted this practice. Thus, for the most part, teachers receive their liability protection from their school district, not the local, state, or national teacher’s union.⁵

While this survey includes a small fraction of unionized public school teachers in Massachusetts, the average percentage of dues forwarded to state and national affiliates sends a clear message: Most dues revenue funds state and national salaries, administrative costs, efforts to extend influence, and government relations. The range of local dues is significant, but also implies that many teachers in communities not listed here make large annual dues payments and do not necessarily see the returns on their investment.

The recent Supreme Court decision in *Janus vs. American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees* articulated that no union could force a public employee to pay agency fees who chooses not to join. The analysis here further cements the importance of this decision. Massachusetts teachers deciding whether to join their union deserve to know that less than 20 percent of their dues (or agency fees) go to the local associations that aid union members the most.

Most of the benefits of teachers’ union membership are generated at the local organization level. While political action campaigns and other large legal endeavors certainly require the strength of associations at the state and national level, the immediate and most prominent member benefits come from collective bargaining activities of the local teachers unions. Why, then, are the vast majority of annual dues going to larger organizations that do not reap tangible benefits to members? And why is non-members’ access to information on allocation of dues revenue so limited?

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Endnotes

- 1 Local Association dues compiled from:
 - Abington Education Association <http://abington.massteacher.org/files/By-Laws%20November%202010.doc>
 - Arlington Education Association <http://arlington.massteacher.org/documents/AgencyFeeOptionforRequiredAEAMembership2013-2014.pdf>
 - Dracut Teachers Association <https://dracut-teachers.org/frequently-asked-questions/>
 - Framingham Teachers Association <https://framingham.massteacher.org/contracts/member-dues/>
 - Lee Education Association <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1suHEXWlVt6qmowwLJzV5SwuMjBv-nCO64xt6LFXjrRI/edit>
 - Marblehead Education Association https://marbleheadea.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/mea_dues.pdf
 - Springfield Education Association https://www.seateachers.com/files/7915/1794/5373/The_Springfield_Teacher_-_February_2018.pdf
 - Clinton Teachers Association <https://prezi.com/tq24cyxuds/cta-back-to-school-2017-2018/>
 - Greater Lowell Technical High School Teachers Association <http://glt.o.massteacher.org/secretary/GLTO%20Annual%20Rates-17-18.pdf>
 - Haverhill Education Association <https://haverhill.massteacher.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/30/2015/01/201709SeptemberNewsletter.pdf>
 - Massachusetts State College Association <http://mscaunion.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/2017-2018-Dues-Rates-revised-August-30-2017.pdf>
 - Methuen Education Association <http://methuen.massteacher.org/files/MEA%20Handbook%202017-18.pdf>
 - Northampton Association of School Employees <http://www.nasemta.org/dues/>
 - Westwood Teachers Association <https://sites.google.com/site/wtama2012/home/dues>
 - Barnstable Teachers Association <http://barnstable.massteacher.org/files/FY%202018%20dues%20schedule.doc>
 - Hudson Education Association <http://hudson.massteacher.org/files/HEA%20dues%20deduction%20schedule%202018-19%20full%20time%20.pdf>
 - Nauset Education Association <http://nauset.massteacher.org/full%20membership%20dues.html>
 - Somerset Teachers Association <http://somesetteachers.weebly.com/membership-and-dues.html>
 - Wayland Teachers Association <https://sites.google.com/site/rideoutphysics/wta>
- 2 2018–2019 MTA Proposed Budget, p.17
- 3 MTA 2018–2019 Proposed Budget, p. 17 <http://mscaunion.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Proposed-MTA-2018-2019-Budget-2.pdf>
- 4 NEA Strategic Plan and Budget 2018-2020, Appendix D.
- 5 NEA “Educators Employment Liability Program” <http://www.nea.org/home/18811.htm>

