Organizational redesign

NEA Board proposes no more regional conferences

The NEA board recommended major structural changes to the budget during a very challenging May meeting.

Following the lead of executive director John Stocks, the NEA board proposed to reorganize the entire budget around two goals and six core functions. The board approved the goals and core functions at the September 2011 meeting. Regional conferences would not happen next school year, but winter meetings would return the following year in the form of an East and West summit.

Although the budget changes were necessitated because of projected membership losses of approximately 7 percent, the new plan does much more than make “across the board” reductions. Every NEA employee has been shifted to work within the two goals and six cores, and every NEA function now falls within these areas.

The two goals are “Strong Affiliates” and “Uniting the Nation for Great Public Schools.” The six cores are “Research, Policy and Practice,” “Organizing,” “Advocacy and Outreach,” “Communications,” “Business Operations”, and “Governance.”

Attacks on collective bargaining and public education have forced the change. “Our choice is pretty clear,” said Stocks. “Stay on the same path and defend ourselves to our death, or create a new path that leads to a stronger union, focused on our members and the students they serve.”

NEA Secretary-Treasurer Becky Pringle and the board’s budget committee made unprecedented recommendations to reshape NEA’s efforts. The new principles focus on growing membership through organizing and advancing the cause of public education by leading the profession.

“We’re going to focus this organization like we never have before on members, affiliates and students,” said NEA Secretary Treasure, Becky Pringle.

ESP survey gives picture of support professional

A representative survey of 1,638 Education Support Professionals nationwide in February found that members know what they want from their union: improved salaries and benefits, defense of their rights, and protection from being outsourced.

The findings were part of a very broad look at job satisfaction, perceptions, attitudes, and other workplace issues of both members and non-members from throughout dozens of school job categories.

ESPs, of course, fill such a broad spectrum of jobs that it’s sometimes hard to put them all together. But a picture did emerge from the survey. Some 88 percent of ESPs are age 40 or older and 81 percent have been in the profession six years or longer.

Even though 91 percent of the respondents worked full-time, many struggled to make a decent wage. Some 64 percent of salaries were under $30,000 per year and 52 percent were under $25,000. This puts nearly half very near the federal poverty level for a family of four, which is $23,050.
With mounting membership losses and growing attacks on public education, it may seem odd to remain hopeful. But despite the current state of affairs, NEA leaders and executive staff remain optimistic.

“Our world has changed and so have the lives of our members,” said Executive Director John Stocks. “It is up to us to choose a path for our association that makes us stronger and better prepared for the challenges we face today and the opportunities of tomorrow.”

NEA has reorganized around two basic ideas: “organizing” and “leading the profession.” Although members used to joke that NEA stood for the national “everything” association, the changes seem to be driving a renewed focus on survival.

NEA’s Barby Halstead-Worrell is heading the newly created Center for Organizing. Its charge is to create a culture of organizing that tests innovative strategies for membership recruitment then spreads them throughout the organization. Teams of “lead organizers” will target areas around the country that have the right conditions for growth, then work with local and state staff to create “living laboratories.”

Data will be an important part of what drives NEA’s new charges. A “values” survey has already been started using focus groups in targeted cities. A full survey of 2,500 members is planned. “What do we think, hope, and dream about,” asked NEA staff as they explained the survey to the board at the May meeting.

NEA vice president Lily Eskelsen explained that the path forward for the association has changed. “We will be stronger, leaner and more efficient so that we can get off defense and get on offense against our opponents,” she said. “We will fight to restore our members’ collective bargaining rights, and we will be successful.”

Part of that success must come in the form of “leading the profession.” Bill Raabe, director of NEA’s Center for Great Public Schools, said, “We have to lead in this, not just react.”

Raabe heads NEA’s efforts to improve teaching by orienting everything the association does around the needs of public school children. As state’s consider changing evaluation and assessments of teachers, Raabe wants NEA to lead the way and be recognized the place to go to get ideas that make schools great.

“How do we measure student success?” Raabe asked the board. “We must find a way to use assessments to inform teacher work.” He also went on to talk about the need to focus on improving the quality of teacher training programs throughout the country. “We can disarm our adversaries by leading the way in quality and equity,” he said.

The summits that are to replace regional conferences also have the opportunity to enhance what NEA does. The summits will mix together leaders and local level activists within the ideas of organizing and leading the profession. Although the summits are more than a year away, the concepts now being considered include: curriculum design and training ideas, collaborative and innovative teaching, online learning, community organizing and partnerships.

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- John Stocks, NEA Executive Director

ESP members want to be valued as part of education team continued from page 1

Even with the low wages, ESPs overwhelmingly said that their drive for working in education is make a positive impact on students. They also report that they have a very high sense of job satisfaction. Only 8 percent said they were dissatisfied with their current position.

However, state budget cuts have taken their toll in the last two years. Some 49 percent reported that they had experienced three or more hardships because of the economic downturn, including, in order of frequency: increased workload, layoffs, higher out of pocket expenses for benefits, wage freezes, reduced benefits, reduced hours and lower pay.

Nearly eight out of 10 ESPs said their job requires some sort of training, certificate, a college degree or passing a test. Most viewed the training as beneficial because it tended to protect against layoffs. Also, they said they would prefer if the training was offered at their school or work place, as opposed to a college, the union, a private company, or on the internet.

In general, members had a favorable view of their union, mostly because of the union’s attempt to increase wages while also helping fight for additional training and education. Those with positive views of their union also tended to be ones who heard from the union regularly. Those who had little contact with the union had a higher unfavorable rating.

The respondents were fairly evenly divided on whether they view their work as a “job” or a “career.” Some 47 percent said it was a career, while 37 percent said job and 14 percent said both.

Overall, a lack of respect and opportunity appear to underpin many of the responses. According to the survey, “ESP’s face significant unmet expectations in terms of opportunities for advancement, attention paid to addressing needs of ESP workers, being valued as part of the education team, and inclusion in decision-making.”
NEA’s challenges include a projected membership loss of 183,000 members and total budget modifications in 2010-2014 of over $65 million. This will necessitate an additional $38 million in staff and program cuts and 148,000 fewer staff hours available to complete program work in 2012-13.

The Board engaged in a great deal of discussion then debate in small groups regarding changes in the NEA budget that would reflect the reduction in revenue and yet preserve our capacity to implement our programs and services for members.

**Budget Committee Guiding Principles:**

1. How does this grow membership?
2. How does this ensure our financial health?
3. How does this maximize our outreach to our diverse members?
4. How does this advance our priorities of strong facilities, great public schools, professionalism and growth?
5. How does this advance the success of our students and the respect of our members?
6. How does this advance our commitment to social justice through education?

**Teacher and ESP of the Year announced**

Teacher of the Year Rebecca Mieliwocki of California and ESP of the Year Judy Near of Colorado will speak at the NEA Representative Assembly in July in Washington D.C. Mieliwocki, a 7th grade English teacher, and Near, a health technician and attendance clerk, were selected and honored this spring.

Mieliwocki was recognized at a ceremony at the White House on April 24. She teaches English at Luther Burbank Middle School, which houses 1,100 students in grades 6-8. She teaches 7th grade at the Burbank school.

“Students learn best when they have the most enthusiastic, engaged teachers possible,” said Mieliwocki. “I firmly believe that teachers must be held accountable for their students’ success, from helping them meet personal or schoolwide learning goals to achieving on district and state level assessments. Our students are our future, so we, their teachers, must do our best to inspire them and guide them to greatness.”

Near was recognized in March at the NEA ESP Conference in Memphis, Tennessee. She received $10,000 as part of the award. Near began her ESP career in 1985 as a substitute health technician. She is a member of the Canon City Education Support Personnel Association (CCCESPA).

At Skyline Elementary School, Near has worked fulltime since 1991 with the school nurse dispensing medications, providing first-aid, monitoring students with ongoing health concerns, and maintaining student health histories and attendance reports.

“I did not get here alone,” said Near. “There are so many people who should be standing up here with me.”

Colorado Education Association president

**BUDGET: NEA Board presents Representative Assembly with major changes**

The 2011-2012 budget was reduced by $17 million by the RA last summer. But with continued membership losses, more cuts are necessary. In total, from 2010 to 2014, the budget will have been reduced $65 million.

The NEA staff has already felt the pinch of the budget reductions. A voluntary exit program this winter ended in March with 56 employees choosing to depart. Although this avoided the need for a “reduction in force” at this time, it will result in an annual loss of 148,000 staff hours. In 2010, NEA had 540 employees, but that is down to 439. Executive support staff has been reduced 25 percent, and pay freezes for executives remain in place.

The proposed reorganization and budget shifts would result in a change in the traditional ratio of how NEA dues revenue is spent. Traditionally, the ratio has been roughly one-third spent on the categories of staff, state affiliates support, and programs and governance. The proposed changes would shift to approximately 31 percent on staff, 39 percent state and local support, and 30 percent on programs and governance.

The shift in the ratios is intentional. Given the attacks on state affiliates, the board chose to make this section of the budget a top priority. UniServ grants and other money to state affiliates received the highest priority in the budget. The board voted to set the UniServ rebate at $35,850, a $1,000 increase from what was announced in February. Unfortunately, the increase was due to UniServ job losses around the country.

“We can’t ignore our reality,” Stocks said. “If we do, we do it at our peril. And now to meet (members’) needs, so must we change.”

The board spent an entire day analyzing and discussing the detail of the budget and all the myriad changes. Relying heavily on the board budget committee recommendations, numerous proposals to restore areas target for cuts or reductions were defeated.

The board chose to eliminate one of its five yearly meetings at a savings of just under $500,000. Perhaps the most contentious area of reductions was the choice to have the NEA ethnic minority caucus chairs use virtual meetings instead of flying to Washington D.C. twice per year. A motion to restore that funding failed 91-71. Numerous other motions to restore programs also failed.

Beverly Ingle nominated Near because of her great leadership. In 2000, Near organized the ESP employees at Skyline. “I do not think of Judy as only an ESP leader,” Ingle said in her nomination essay. “I think of her as a selfless, respected, compassionate leader for us all. But I know that at Judy’s core, she holds tightly the interests of ESP members.”