

05-18-26

# Mission Aborted:

A Report on Institutional Governance,  
Financial Transparency, and Policy  
Influence in Major Teachers' Unions

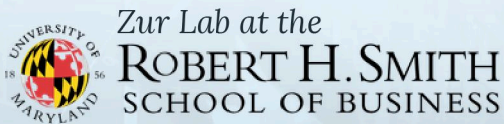


Image: Fight Back! News

## Executive Summary

The National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) together claim more than 4.7 million members, the great majority of them public school educators.<sup>1,2</sup> The NEA was the first and only labor union chartered by Congress in 1906 to “elevate the character of the teaching profession” and to “promote the cause of education in the United States.”<sup>3</sup> Today, the NEA states that its mission is “to advocate for education professionals and to unite our members and the nation to fulfill the promise of public education to prepare every student to succeed in a diverse and interdependent world.”<sup>4</sup> The AFT, founded in 1916 and affiliated with the AFL-CIO, has long presented itself as the institutional voice of the American teacher. The AFT describes itself as “a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities,” and states that it advances these principles through “community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.”<sup>5</sup> For more than a century, both the NEA and AFT have occupied a central role in American public education.

A comprehensive review of the financial disclosures, governance structures, and external relationships of the NEA and AFT finds that these organizations primarily operate as large-scale political and funding institutions with limited transparency and attenuated accountability to their members. The central concern is not merely that the NEA and AFT participate in politics, but that they route, classify, and report substantial portions of their spending in ways that conceal from members and the public the true scale of that activity, the self-dealing it enables, and the broader political apparatus to which their dues are ultimately directed. This report also examines how these financial and institutional dynamics increasingly intersect with educational policy and classroom practice, contributing to the growing politicization of school environments and raising concerns about the preservation of educational neutrality and academic freedom.

## Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF)

The NEA and AFT have abandoned the educators who fund them. What follows is not a political argument. It is a documented record drawn from the unions' own federal filings, their recipients' IRS returns, and traceable personnel overlaps in public records. Accordingly, this report assesses the following:

- **The NEA and AFT function as Democratic Party financing operations.** Combined NEA spending on political activities, lobbying, and contributions to outside organizations totals approximately \$175 million in FY2025, nearly four times the \$45 million spent on direct member representation. PAC records show more than 90 percent

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nea.org/about-nea>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.aft.org/join>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/4854/text>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nea.org/about-nea/mission-vision-values>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.aft.org/about/mission>

of NEA candidate-directed spending, and nearly all of the AFT's, has gone to Democrats consistently across decades.

- **Federal disclosures show systemic misclassification of political spending.** The NEA reported a \$500,000 payment to ballot initiative committee "No on 2109" as political activity on its DOL-filed LM-2 and as charitable "Financial Assistance" on its IRS-filed 990 – the same transaction with two contradictory federal classifications. In FY2024, NEA compensation classified as political work also fell 99 percent against the prior decade's \$7.9 million average with no corresponding drop in overall political spending, then rebounded the following year.
- **NEA and AFT leadership has been directing member dues to organizations they personally control.** NEA Executive Director Kim Anderson previously served as executive vice president of the Democracy Alliance; her predecessor John Stocks chaired the Democracy Alliance's board while still NEA Executive Director and directing NEA funds to it. Both now sit on the executive committee of the Democracy Alliance-affiliated Strategic Victory Fund, which received \$19.3 million from the NEA between FY2020 and FY2022 alone. This raises serious fiduciary concerns under the transparency and conflict-of-interest principles embedded in federal labor law.
- **These organizations have delivered limited measurable gains for the teachers they represent.** Adjusted for inflation, teacher wages have remained essentially flat for more than 50 years. The teacher pay penalty relative to comparably educated professionals reached a record 26.9 percent in 2024. Meanwhile, NEA membership has fallen by nearly 400,000 since 2009 while annual dues have risen every consecutive filing year.
- **Internal hypocrisy.** The NEA operates by labor rules it refuses to apply to itself. When NEA headquarters staff went on strike in summer 2024, the organization locked them out, revoked their hotel reservations and return flights, cut off their work email and phones, and threatened to terminate their health benefits, tactics it publicly condemns when used against teachers.
- **Union-funded curriculum has documented ties to foreign influence networks.** The Zinn Education Project, operated jointly by Rethinking Schools and Teaching for Change, produces K-12 materials characterizing America as fundamentally evil. NEA President Becky Pringle delivered opening remarks at its 2025 Teach Truth Day of Action event. The Project sits within a broader activist network that includes CODEPINK, whose financing has been linked in public reporting to Chinese Communist Party-aligned interests via businessman Neville Roy Singham, husband of CODEPINK co-founder Jodie Evans.
- **Student Impact.** The teachers unions' political advocacy increasingly extends into classroom policy and school operations. The NEA funds and partners with the Advancement Project, whose campaigns helped remove school resource officers and

redirect tens of millions of dollars away from school-security infrastructure in multiple districts. The teachers unions also support activist-oriented curriculum and advocacy organizations that shape how contentious political, social, and historical issues are presented in K-12 education.

This report finds that federal financial disclosures, IRS filings, and open-source organizational mapping provide a documented evidentiary record that warrants scrutiny across congressional, federal, state, and legal oversight channels.

## **Acknowledgments and Methodology**

In constructing this report, the Network Contagion Research Institute (NCRI) team compiled and analyzed a large and diverse body of financial, organizational, and open-source data related to the NEA, the AFT, and their affiliated networks. The core of the analysis is based on federally mandated financial disclosures, including Form LM-2 filings obtained through the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Labor-Management Standards (OLMS) database, as well as IRS Form 990 returns for both the unions and recipient organizations. These records were supplemented by structured keyword searches across financial filings using publicly available tools, including ProPublica's nonprofit database, to identify patterns in disbursements, classifications, and organizational relationships.

To support this financial analysis, the research team conducted extensive open-source review, including social media scraping and analysis, organizational mapping, and systematic review of publicly available reporting, institutional publications, and archival materials. These sources were used to contextualize financial flows and assess the activities and affiliations of organizations appearing in union disclosures.

A large portion of the underlying source material was drawn from a curated repository of materials compiled by the Gevura Fund, including social media content, external links, and other publicly available resources, which significantly expanded the scope and depth of the analysis. Additional research support was provided by the California-based Intelligent Advocacy Network (IAN), which contributed to data collection, validation, and synthesis. The integration of these sources enabled a multi-layered analytical approach, combining financial record examination with organizational and behavioral analysis, and forming the evidentiary basis for the findings presented in this report.

## **Institutional Landscape**

The analysis that follows centers on a select number of institutions whose scale and reach make them uniquely influential within American public education. Before turning to specific financial practices and governance patterns, it is necessary to establish a clear understanding of these organizations: how they are structured, how they operate, and the role they play within the broader education and political landscape.

The NEA and the AFT together represent millions of educators and function through extensive national, state, and local networks. These networks are not merely administrative; they form a coordinated system through which resources, personnel, and strategy are distributed across multiple levels of operation. Within that system, large local affiliates (most notably the United Federation of Teachers in New York City) play an outsized role in both internal governance and external political activity.

Over the past decade, these organizations have allocated substantial financial resources toward progressive-oriented political activity, lobbying, and external contributions.<sup>6</sup> While the precise composition of this spending varies by year and by union, a consistent pattern emerges across filings where political expenditures and contributions to outside organizations, many of which are ultimately political in nature, represent the majority of total disbursements, exceeding spending on core representational functions. This report examines not only the scale of that spending, but the mechanisms through which it is categorized, distributed, and ultimately deployed.

### ***National Education Association (NEA)***

The National Education Association is the largest labor union in the United States, representing approximately 2.85 million members across public education and related sectors.<sup>7</sup> With an annual budget around \$450 million, it operates as a national organization supported by a network of state affiliates and thousands of local associations.<sup>8,9</sup>

The NEA's structure allows it to function simultaneously as a professional organization, a labor representative, and a participant in the political process. Its national headquarters in Washington, D.C., establishes broad policy priorities and allocates funding, while state and local affiliates carry out both representational and political activities within their respective jurisdictions. This layered structure provides flexibility in how resources are deployed and enables coordination across multiple levels of government and electoral activity.

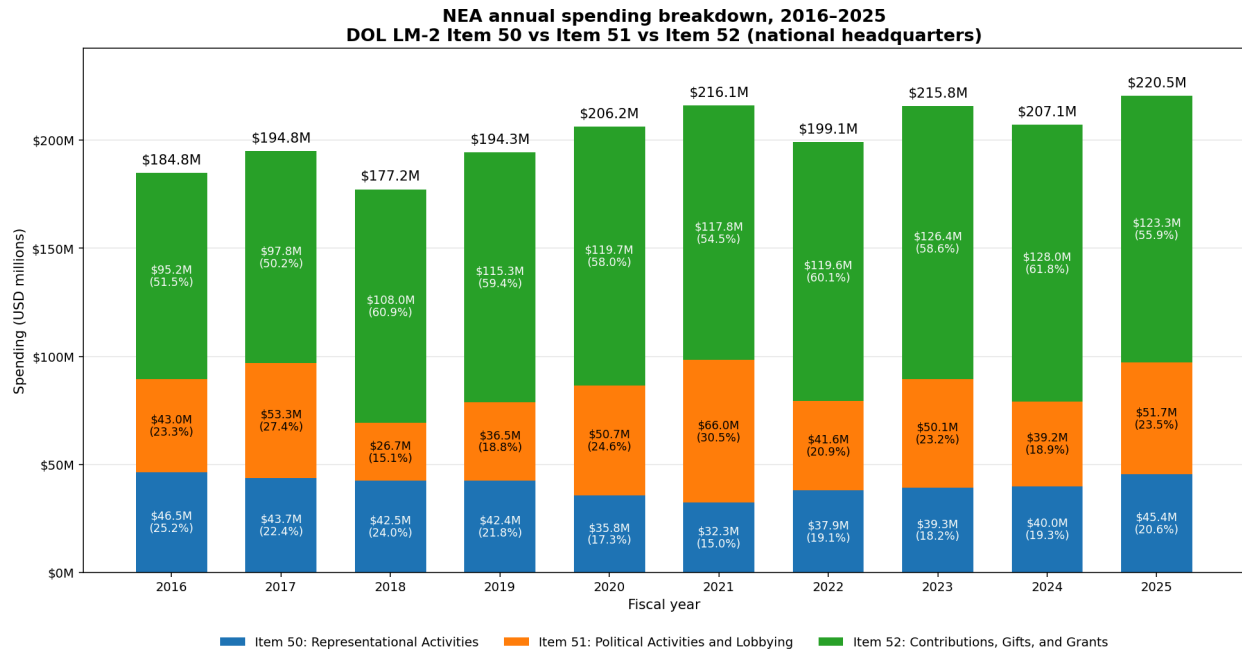
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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.opensecrets.org/industries/background?cycle=2024&ind=L1300>

<sup>7</sup> <https://olmsapps.dol.gov/query/orgReport.do?rptId=925350&rptForm=LM2Form>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nea.org/nea-affiliates>



Source: U.S. Department of Labor OLMS LM-2 filings for NEA national headquarters (file 000-342).  
 Item 50 = Representational Activities; Item 51 = Political Activities and Lobbying; Item 52 = Contributions, Gifts, and Grants.

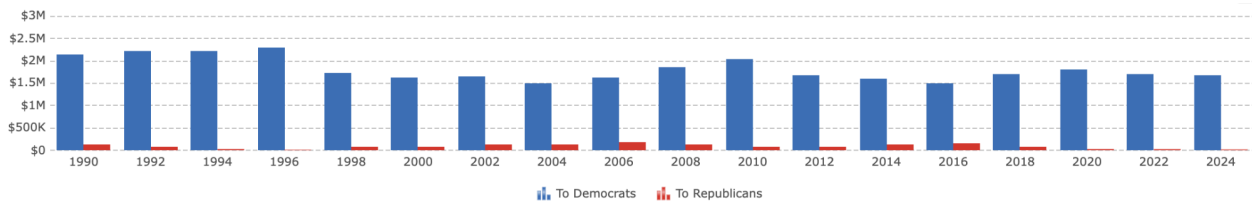
**Figure 1.** NEA annual spending breakdown according to LM-2 filings spanning FY2016 through FY2025. Combined, Item 51 (Political Activities and Lobbying) and Item 52 (Contributions, Gifts, and Grants) – which in many cases goes to political recipients – consistently exceed Item 50 (Representational Activities) disbursements.

Over the past decade, the NEA’s financial disclosures reflect a sustained commitment to political engagement, as shown in Figure 1. Annual expenditures on political activities and lobbying have remained consistently substantial, and when combined with contributions, gifts, and grants to external organizations, these allocations represent a significant portion of the union’s overall spending. These contributions frequently support organizations involved in partisan advocacy, electoral strategy, and policy development, extending the union’s influence well beyond its internal operations and raising questions about the extent to which these activities align with its education-centered mission.

The NEA also maintains formal political entities, including the NEA Advocacy Fund, a federally registered independent expenditure-only committee (super PAC), and the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education, a traditional political action committee funded through voluntary member contributions. The NEA Advocacy Fund engages in independent expenditures in federal elections, while the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education makes direct contributions to candidates and political committees within federal limits.

Public campaign finance data indicate that both entities have directed the overwhelming majority of their political spending toward Democratic candidates and aligned political organizations. According to filings, the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education has historically contributed more than 90 percent of its candidate-directed funds to Democrats,

while independent expenditures by the NEA Advocacy Fund have similarly supported Democratic candidates and causes.<sup>10,11</sup>



**Figure 2.** NEA PAC spending per election cycle based on party affiliation. Source: OpenSecrets.<sup>12</sup>

### **American Federation of Teachers (AFT)**

The American Federation of Teachers represents approximately 1.8 million members and operates with an annual budget exceeding \$275 million.<sup>13</sup> While somewhat historically distinct from the NEA in its organizational identity and approach, the AFT now occupies a similar position as a national union with a broad operational footprint.

The AFT’s structure parallels that of the NEA, with a national organization overseeing a network of state federations and local unions. This system allows the union to operate across multiple levels of governance, from local collective bargaining to national coordination. A defining feature of the AFT, however, is its formal affiliation with the AFL-CIO. Unlike the NEA, which operates independently, the AFT is embedded within a larger federation of unions that maintains its own governance structure, leadership bodies, and coordinated activities. Through this affiliation, AFT leadership participates in the AFL-CIO’s executive decision-making processes, and the union contributes to and draws from shared resources, including organizing infrastructure, strategic planning, and joint initiatives with other member unions.

This relationship has practical implications, such as linking the AFT to a broader set of institutional priorities that extend beyond education and situating it within a system where decisions about resource allocation and strategy are often made in coordination with actors representing industries ranging from transportation to healthcare. As a result, the AFT operates not only as a teachers’ union, but as part of a multi-sector labor federation with overlapping interests and integrated operations.

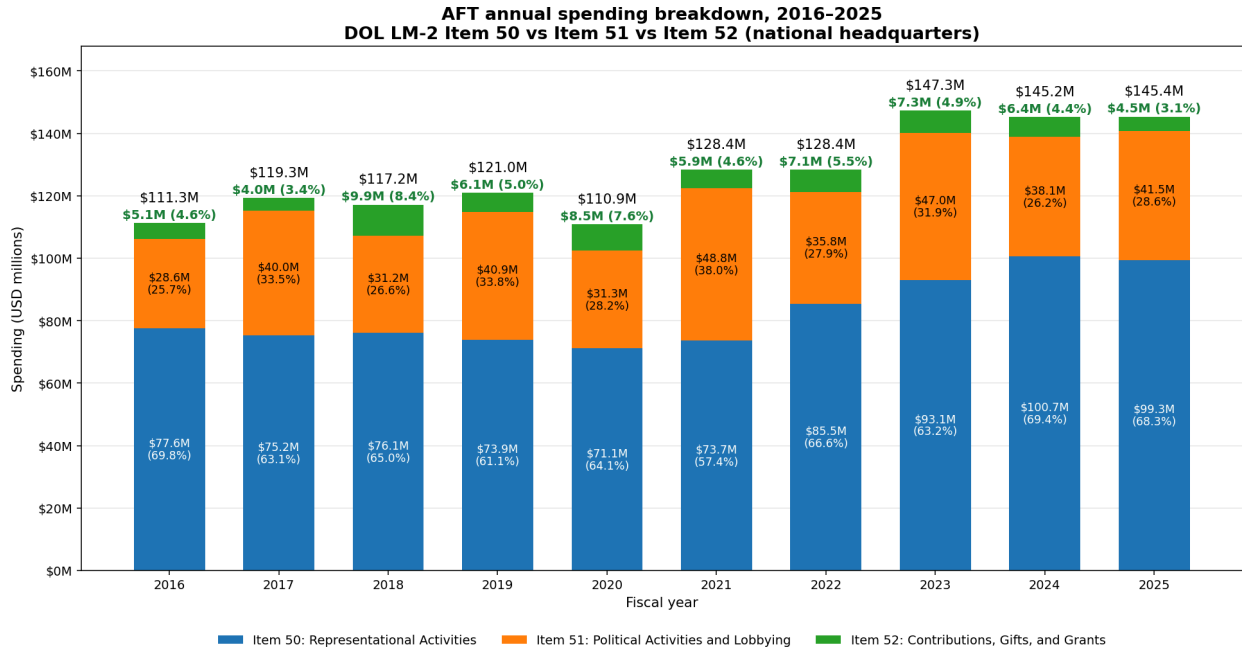
Financial disclosures over the past decade indicate that the AFT allocates a comparatively larger share of its resources to representational activities than the NEA. Nonetheless, the union continues to direct tens of millions of dollars annually toward political activities and lobbying, spending \$41.5 million in FY2025 alone within that category and reflecting a sustained commitment to political engagement alongside its core representational functions.

<sup>10</sup> [https://ballotpedia.org/NEA\\_Advocacy\\_Fund](https://ballotpedia.org/NEA_Advocacy_Fund)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.opensecrets.org/political-action-committees-pacs/national-education-assn/C00003251/summary/2024>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

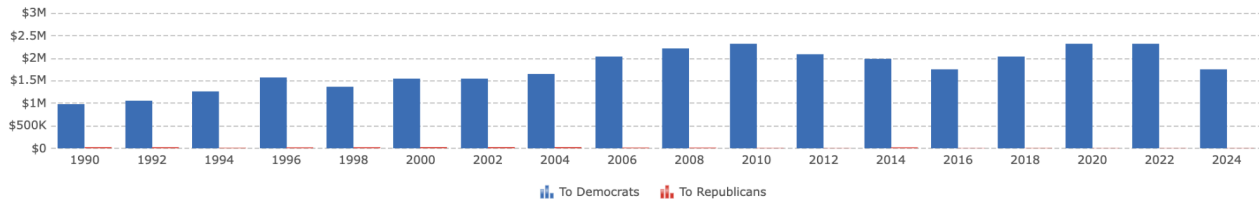
<sup>13</sup> <https://olmsapps.dol.gov/querv/orgReport.do?rptId=924116&rptForm=LM2Form>



Source: U.S. Department of Labor OLMS LM-2 filings for AFT national headquarters (file 000-012).  
Item 50 = Representational Activities; Item 51 = Political Activities and Lobbying; Item 52 = Contributions, Gifts, and Grants.

**Figure 3.** AFT annual spending breakdown according to LM-2 filings spanning FY2016 through FY2025. Unlike the NEA, Item 50 (Representational Activities) actually exceeds the combined Item 51 (Political Activity and Lobbying) and Item 52 (Contributions, Gifts, and Grants) disbursements, though both categories still comprise tens of millions of dollars in the AFT’s annual budget.

Like the NEA, the AFT routes additional political disbursements through its Schedule 17 contributions category, further suppressing its disclosed political spending ratio. The AFT’s support for Democrats, however, is even more pronounced than the NEA’s when examining its political action committee. As shown in Figure 4, the AFT’s PAC has directed nearly all of its candidate-related spending toward Democratic candidates across multiple election cycles. The significance of this pattern is not merely partisan preference, but the extent to which broader union financial activity supports the same political ecosystem through far less transparent mechanisms.



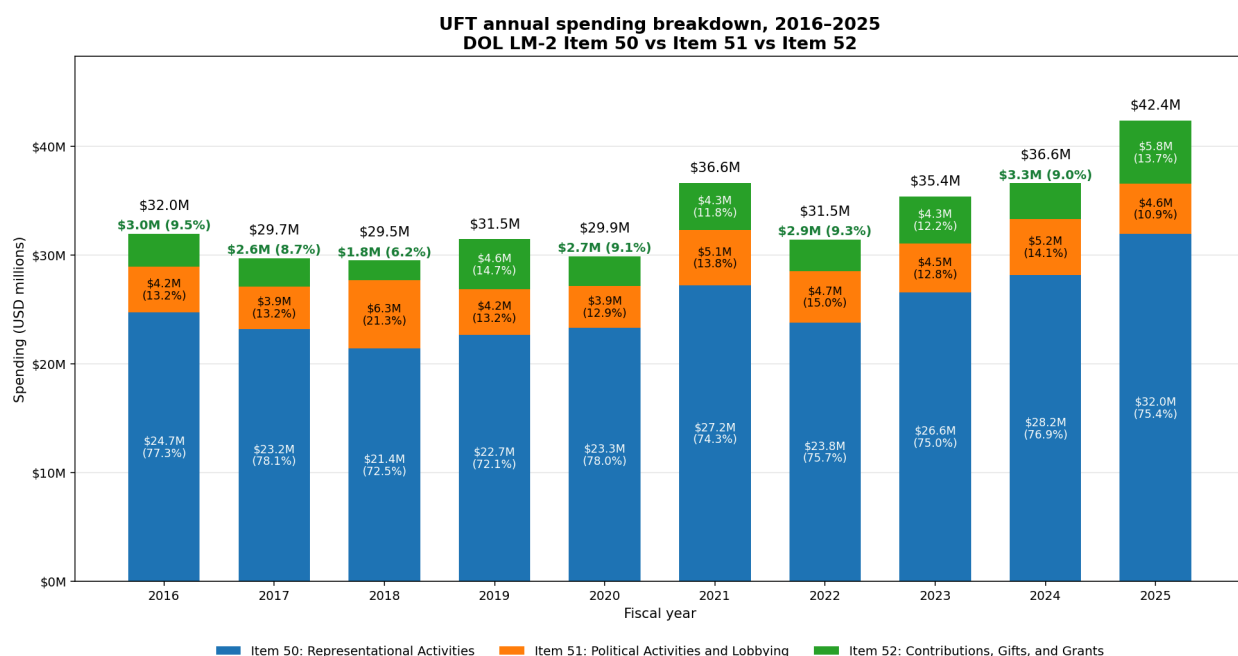
**Figure 4.** AFT PAC spending per election cycle based on party affiliation. Source: OpenSecrets.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.opensecrets.org/political-action-committees-pacs/american-federation-of-teachers/CO0028860/summary/2024>

## United Federation of Teachers (UFT)

AFT President Randi Weingarten assumed her current role after spending a decade leading its local affiliate, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT). Representing approximately 200,000 members in New York City, UFT is one of the largest local unions in the country and one of the most influential teachers' unions at the municipal level.<sup>15,16</sup> Originally founded as part of AFT, it is also a key component of New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), a statewide federation of local unions with approximately 700,000 members that is itself affiliated with both the AFT and the NEA.<sup>17</sup>

Operating within the New York City public school system, the UFT plays a central role in collective bargaining and workplace representation while also maintaining a significant presence in local and state politics. The UFT spends millions annually on political activities and lobbying, and its position within a major urban political environment amplifies the impact of those activities. As both a local affiliate and a major political actor, the UFT serves as a key example of how union resources and influence are exercised at the ground level, often in ways that mirror and reinforce national strategies.



Source: U.S. Department of Labor OLMS LM-2 filings for UFT (file 063-924).  
Item 50 = Representational Activities; Item 51 = Political Activities and Lobbying; Item 52 = Contributions, Gifts, and Grants.

**Figure 5.** UFT annual spending breakdown according to LM-2 filings spanning FY2016 through FY2025. Item 50 (Representational Activities) exceeds Item 51 (Political Activity and Lobbying) and Item 52 (Contributions, Gifts, and Grants) disbursements, though millions are spent annually across all three categories.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.uft.org/your-union/about-uft>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.influencewatch.org/labor-union/united-federation-of-teachers/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.nysut.org/about>

This influence has also been the subject of external scrutiny. In 2024, NCRI published an extensive investigative report examining the rise of antisemitic, anti-Israel, and anti-American bias in New York City public schools, with a particular focus on the role of the UFT.<sup>18</sup> Drawing on hundreds of documented incidents and internal materials, it identifies systemic failures in enforcing anti-discrimination policies, the widespread use of curricular content that presents one-sided or distorted geopolitical narratives, and the growing role of activist networks in shaping classroom instruction. It further documents more than 100 reported antisemitic incidents following October 7, 2023, alongside evidence that political advocacy and educator-led activism, including coordinated walkouts and the use of externally developed materials, have contributed to an increasingly hostile environment for Jewish students and staff.

This overview situates these unions not simply as representative bodies, but as complex institutional actors operating across multiple layers of governance and coordination. Their financial scale and organizational design determine how resources are directed and who ultimately exercises control over those decisions. At the same time, the distribution of political spending through their affiliates reveals a consistent partisan alignment that sits alongside a broad and varied membership base. This tension is central to understanding how these unions function in practice. The sections that follow examine how funds move through these systems, how relationships between organizations are structured, and how existing reporting frameworks reflect, or obscure, the full scope of these activities.

## **Circuits of Funding and Influence**

The preceding section establishes the scale and institutional structure of the nation's largest teachers' unions. What it does not yet explain is how those structures operate in practice – specifically, how financial resources move beyond the unions themselves and into a broader network of organizations that extend their influence. A central finding of this report is that union spending cannot be fully understood by examining the unions in isolation. A significant portion of their financial activity is directed outward, into a network of external entities that are not merely independent recipients of funding, but in many cases are institutionally and operationally connected to the unions themselves.

These connections take multiple forms. In some instances, recipient organizations share leadership histories with union officials. In others, they were established with the support or involvement of individuals who held senior positions within the unions. In still others, the relationship is less direct but nonetheless sustained through repeated financial transfers and coordinated activity. Collectively, these patterns describe a system in which money, personnel, and strategic direction circulate within a relatively closed network.

This section examines that system, beginning with one of the most consequential categories of union spending: contributions, gifts, and grants reported under Schedule 17 of Form LM-2.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://networkcontagion.us/wp-content/uploads/Entrivism-20241015-V1.pdf>

## Following the Money

Schedule 17 of the Form LM-2 – an annual disclosure that 501(c)(5) labor organizations are required to file with the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Labor-Management Standards (OLMS) – provides a detailed view of how unions distribute funds to outside organizations. In principle, this category captures charitable contributions and partnership grants. In practice, it often includes payments to entities engaged in advocacy, electoral strategy, and political organizing. An analysis of recent filings by both the NEA and AFT reveals tens of millions of dollars in such disbursements, many directed to organizations that are deeply embedded within opaque political funding networks.

The NEA’s most recent LM-2 report covering FY2025 shows that its largest contribution to an entity outside of its own state associations and super PAC was a \$4.9 million disbursement to the State Engagement Fund, a 501(c)(4) organization widely characterized as a “dark money” pass-through supporting left-wing causes.<sup>19,20</sup> The State Engagement Fund operates as part of a broader system of politically active nonprofits that pool and redistribute funds to support advocacy campaigns, ballot initiatives, and electoral efforts across multiple states. According to InfluenceWatch, there is “substantial evidence” that the organization is a subsidiary of the Democracy Alliance, which shares a physical address and has described its “State Engagement Initiative” as supporting strategic state-level efforts “to win elections, enact progressive policy, and build the power and leadership of the New American Majority.”<sup>21,22</sup>

Since 2018, the NEA has allocated over \$58 million to the State Engagement Fund and in turn received a one-time \$1 million vendor refund in 2018 for “research and communications.”<sup>23</sup> From FY2022 through FY2024, the AFT’s LM-2s reported sending them \$700,000.<sup>24</sup> As a 501(c)(4) “social welfare” organization, the fund is legally permitted to engage in substantial political activity while not being required to disclose its donors. Notably, these disbursements were generally reported under Schedule 17 as “contributions,” “grants,” or similar classifications rather than under Schedule 16, which is reserved for explicitly political activities and lobbying.

As such, classifying major payments to politically active intermediary organizations in this manner obscures the functional role those funds ultimately play, particularly when the recipient organization is engaged in coordinated electoral advocacy and partisan policy activity rather than traditional charitable or nonpartisan work. Closer scrutiny of this recipient points to a broader concern: the extent to which overlapping leadership and organizational relationships may create potential conflicts of interest, such as with the Democracy Alliance, which both receives union funding itself and shares personnel connections with the same individuals directing these funds.

The Democracy Alliance was founded in 2005 by political strategist Rob Stein as a donor coordination group aligned with progressive political objectives, with prominent backing by

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<sup>19</sup> <https://olmsapps.dol.gov/query/orgReport.do?rptId=925350&rptForm=LM2Form>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.influencewatch.org/non-profit/state-engagement-fund/>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> <https://democracyalliance.org/da-blog/das-2020-state-funds-april-updates/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://olmsapps.dol.gov/query/orgReport.do?rptId=685545&rptForm=LM2Form>

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Labor-Management Standards (OLMS) Payer/Payee database

billionaires like George Soros and Tom Steyer.<sup>25</sup> Upon Stein’s death in 2022, the group was credited with having contributed over \$2 billion already to a wide array of leftist causes.<sup>26</sup> The Democracy Alliance has collectively received over \$4.7 million from the NEA and AFT, not accounting for an additional disbursement of \$70,000 from the NEA earmarked for it through the Soros-funded Tides Foundation.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, another \$19.3 million was routed by the NEA to the Democracy Alliance’s associated Strategic Victory Fund over the course of just three years (FY2020 - FY2022), and a total of \$2.3 million was given by the NEA and AFT to its predecessor, the State Victory Fund.<sup>28,29,30</sup>

File #	Report	Name	Payer/Payee	Category	Type/Classification	Itemized	Non Itemized	Total	Union Name	Abbr	Designation Name
000-342	2021 (LM2)	DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE	PAYEE	CONTRIBUTIONS, GIFTS AND GRANTS	Social Welfare Organization	425000	0	425000	NATIONAL EDUCATION ASN IND	NEA	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-342	2016 (LM2)	DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE	PAYEE	CONTRIBUTIONS, GIFTS AND GRANTS	Social Welfare Organization	310000	2160	312160	NATIONAL EDUCATION ASN IND	NEA	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-342	2025 (LM2)	DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE	PAYEE	CONTRIBUTIONS, GIFTS AND GRANTS	Social Welfare Organization	310000	0	310000	NATIONAL EDUCATION ASN IND	NEA	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-342	2024 (LM2)	DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE	PAYEE	CONTRIBUTIONS, GIFTS AND GRANTS	Social Welfare Organization	310000	0	310000	NATIONAL EDUCATION ASN IND	NEA	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-342	2023 (LM2)	DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE	PAYEE	CONTRIBUTIONS, GIFTS AND GRANTS	Social Welfare Organization	310000	0	310000	NATIONAL EDUCATION ASN IND	NEA	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-342	2020 (LM2)	DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE	PAYEE	CONTRIBUTIONS, GIFTS AND GRANTS	Social Welfare Organization	280000	0	280000	NATIONAL EDUCATION ASN IND	NEA	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-342	2022 (LM2)	DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE	PAYEE	CONTRIBUTIONS, GIFTS AND GRANTS	Social Welfare Organization	270000	0	270000	NATIONAL EDUCATION ASN IND	NEA	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-342	2018 (LM2)	DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE	PAYEE	CONTRIBUTIONS, GIFTS AND GRANTS	Social Welfare Organization	220000	1102	221102	NATIONAL EDUCATION ASN IND	NEA	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-342	2019 (LM2)	DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE	PAYEE	CONTRIBUTIONS, GIFTS AND GRANTS	Social Welfare Organization	220000	0	220000	NATIONAL EDUCATION ASN IND	NEA	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-342	2017 (LM2)	DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE	PAYEE	CONTRIBUTIONS, GIFTS AND GRANTS	Social Welfare Organization	185000	772	185772	NATIONAL EDUCATION ASN IND	NEA	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-342	2015 (LM2)	DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE	PAYEE	POLITICAL ACTIVITIES	Social Welfare Organization	185000	0	185000	NATIONAL EDUCATION ASN IND	NEA	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-342	2014 (LM2)	DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE	PAYEE	CONTRIBUTIONS, GIFTS AND GRANTS	Issue Advocacy Group	160000	0	160000	NATIONAL EDUCATION ASN IND	NEA	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-342	2012 (LM2)	DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE	PAYEE	POLITICAL ACTIVITIES	Non-Profit	150000	0	150000	NATIONAL EDUCATION ASN IND	NEA	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-342	2008 (LM2)	DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE	PAYEE	CONTRIBUTIONS, GIFTS AND GRANTS	Non-Profit	110000	0	110000	NATIONAL EDUCATION ASN IND	NEA	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-342	2013 (LM2)	DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE	PAYEE	POLITICAL ACTIVITIES	Issue Advocacy Group	85000	0	85000	NATIONAL EDUCATION ASN IND	NEA	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-342	2012 (LM2)	DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE	PAYEE	UNION ADMINISTRATION	Non-Profit	85000	0	85000	NATIONAL EDUCATION ASN IND	NEA	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-342	2011 (LM2)	DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE	PAYEE	UNION ADMINISTRATION	Non-Profit	85000	0	85000	NATIONAL EDUCATION ASN IND	NEA	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-342	2010 (LM2)	DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE	PAYEE	UNION ADMINISTRATION	Non-Profit	85000	0	85000	NATIONAL EDUCATION ASN IND	NEA	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-342	2021 (LM2)	DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE	PAYEE	UNION ADMINISTRATION	Social Welfare Organization	70000	0	70000	NATIONAL EDUCATION ASN IND	NEA	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

File #	Report	Name	Payer/Payee	Category	Type/Classification	Itemized	Non Itemized	Total	Union Name	Abbr	Designation Name
000-012	2024 (LM2)	Democracy Alliance	PAYEE	POLITICAL ACTIVITIES	Charitable Organization	100000	3333	103333	TEACHERS AFL-CIO	AFT	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-012	2025 (LM2)	Democracy Alliance	PAYEE	POLITICAL ACTIVITIES	Charitable Organization	70000	0	70000	TEACHERS AFL-CIO	AFT	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-012	2023 (LM2)	Democracy Alliance	PAYEE	POLITICAL ACTIVITIES	Charitable Organization	70000	0	70000	TEACHERS AFL-CIO	AFT	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-012	2022 (LM2)	Democracy Alliance	PAYEE	POLITICAL ACTIVITIES	Charitable Organization	70000	0	70000	TEACHERS AFL-CIO	AFT	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-012	2021 (LM2)	Democracy Alliance	PAYEE	CONTRIBUTIONS, GIFTS AND GRANTS	Charitable Organization	70000	0	70000	TEACHERS AFL-CIO	AFT	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-012	2020 (LM2)	Democracy Alliance	PAYEE	UNION ADMINISTRATION	Advocacy	70000	0	70000	TEACHERS AFL-CIO	AFT	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-012	2019 (LM2)	DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE	PAYEE	UNION ADMINISTRATION	ADVOCACY	70000	0	70000	TEACHERS AFL-CIO	AFT	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-012	2018 (LM2)	DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE	PAYEE	POLITICAL ACTIVITIES	ADVOCACY	70000	0	70000	TEACHERS AFL-CIO	AFT	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-012	2017 (LM2)	Democracy Alliance	PAYEE	CONTRIBUTIONS, GIFTS AND GRANTS	Advocacy	60000	0	60000	TEACHERS AFL-CIO	AFT	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-012	2016 (LM2)	Democracy Alliance	PAYEE	GENERAL OVERHEAD	Membership Organization	60000	0	60000	TEACHERS AFL-CIO	AFT	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-012	2015 (LM2)	Democracy Alliance	PAYEE	GENERAL OVERHEAD	Advocacy Organization	60000	0	60000	TEACHERS AFL-CIO	AFT	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-012	2014 (LM2)	Democracy Alliance	PAYEE	GENERAL OVERHEAD	Advocacy Organization	60000	0	60000	TEACHERS AFL-CIO	AFT	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-012	2016 (LM2)	Democracy Alliance	PAYEE	POLITICAL ACTIVITIES	Membership Organization	25000	0	25000	TEACHERS AFL-CIO	AFT	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

File #	Report	Name	Payer/Payee	Category	Type/Classification	Itemized	Non Itemized	Total	Union Name	Abbr	Designation Name
000-342	2020 (LM2)	STRATEGIC VICTORY FUND	PAYEE	CONTRIBUTIONS, GIFTS AND GRANTS	Issue Advocacy Group	17000000	0	17000000	NATIONAL EDUCATION ASN IND	NEA	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-342	2021 (LM2)	STRATEGIC VICTORY FUND	PAYEE	CONTRIBUTIONS, GIFTS AND GRANTS	Issue Advocacy Group	18500000	0	18500000	NATIONAL EDUCATION ASN IND	NEA	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-342	2022 (LM2)	STRATEGIC VICTORY FUND	PAYEE	CONTRIBUTIONS, GIFTS AND GRANTS	Issue Advocacy Group	4500000	0	4500000	NATIONAL EDUCATION ASN IND	NEA	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

File #	Report	Name	Payer/Payee	Category	Type/Classification	Itemized	Non Itemized	Total	Union Name	Abbr	Designation Name
000-342	2018 (LM2)	STATE VICTORY FUND LLC	PAYEE	CONTRIBUTIONS, GIFTS AND GRANTS	Non-profit	2000000	0	2000000	NATIONAL EDUCATION ASN IND	NEA	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-342	2019 (LM2)	STATE VICTORY FUND LLC	PAYEE	CONTRIBUTIONS, GIFTS AND GRANTS	Non-profit	100000	0	100000	NATIONAL EDUCATION ASN IND	NEA	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

File #	Report	Name	Payer/Payee	Category	Type/Classification	Itemized	Non Itemized	Total	Union Name	Abbr	Designation Name
000-012	2018 (LM2)	STATE VICTORY FUND LLC	PAYEE	POLITICAL ACTIVITIES	ADVOCACY	200000	0	200000	TEACHERS AFL-CIO	AFT	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

**Figure 6.** Tens of millions in disbursements made by the NEA and AFT to the Democracy Alliance and its associated Strategic Victory Fund (formerly known as the State Victory Fund), as reported in annual LM-2 filings accessed from the Department of Labor’s OLMS “Payer/Payee” database.

The classification of repeated payments to the same recipient across multiple, materially different categories raises questions about the consistency of reporting practices and the extent

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/03/us/politics/rob-stein-dead.html>

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> <https://olmsapps.dol.gov/query/orgReport.do?rptId=537599&rptForm=LM2Form>

<sup>28</sup> <https://freebeacon.com/democrats/soros-donor-network-quietly-launched-new-big-money-entities/>

<sup>29</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Labor-Management Standards (OLMS) Payer/Payee database

<sup>30</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20190703200207/https://democracyalliance.org/organization/state-victory-fund/>

to which LM-2 disclosures accurately reflect the functional purpose of those expenditures. These recipients take on added significance in light of the fiduciary obligations imposed on union leadership, which require that member dues be managed in the best interests of those members and with appropriate safeguards against conflicts of interest, particularly when funds are directed to organizations with overlapping personnel or institutional ties. In the case of the Democracy Alliance, this financial relationship coincides with documented overlap between union leadership and the organization itself, blurring the distinction between independent recipients and organizations operating within the same circle of influence.

John Stocks, who served as executive director of the NEA from 2011 to 2019, provides a clear illustration of this dynamic. During his tenure, the union directed substantial financial resources to the Democracy Alliance and groups connected to it. In 2014, while still serving as executive director of the NEA, Stocks became Chairman of the Democracy Alliance's Board.<sup>31</sup> He was also credited with helping to build the Strategic Victory Fund, which, as noted, has received more than \$19 million from the NEA in recent years.<sup>32</sup> Even after stepping down from his leadership role at the NEA, Stocks remained a senior advisor to the union until at least July 2021, overlapping with his continued leadership position within the Democracy Alliance.<sup>33,34</sup>

Stocks' successor as NEA Executive Director, Kim Anderson, was recruited directly from the Democracy Alliance, where she had served as executive vice president, overseeing programs, staff, and budgetary operations.<sup>35</sup> Prior to that role, she had spent more than 15 years within the NEA itself, having first joined as a lobbyist in 2001.<sup>36</sup> In the Strategic Victory Fund's two most recent Form 990 filings, both Kim Anderson and John Stocks are listed as members of the organization's executive committee.<sup>37</sup> Stocks has been involved with the fund since its earliest available filings in FY2020, where he is listed as co-chair, before later being identified as chairman and a member of the executive committee beginning in 2023.<sup>38</sup>

Additional overlap includes the NEA's former director of organizing, Secky Fascione, who served as director of investment services for the Democracy Alliance from January 2020 through July 2025.<sup>39</sup> From the AFT, its president Randi Weingarten and her assistant Michelle Ringuette were selected to join as members of the invite-only Democracy Alliance in 2013.<sup>40</sup> The AFT's AFL-CIO partner, AFSCME, is also represented within the organization's leadership through its president, Lee Saunders, who serves on its board of directors.<sup>41</sup> These intertwined relationships, combined with the scale of the financial transfers and the inconsistent classification of their purpose over time, warrant closer scrutiny.

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.vox.com/2014/11/24/7274819/democracy-alliance>

<sup>32</sup> <https://democracvallyance.org/from-the-president/movingonafter7yearsattheda/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/in/john-stocks-479b587/details/experience/>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.influencewatch.org/person/john-stocks/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.nea.org/about-nea/leaders/executive-director>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/in/kim-anderson-456b416/>

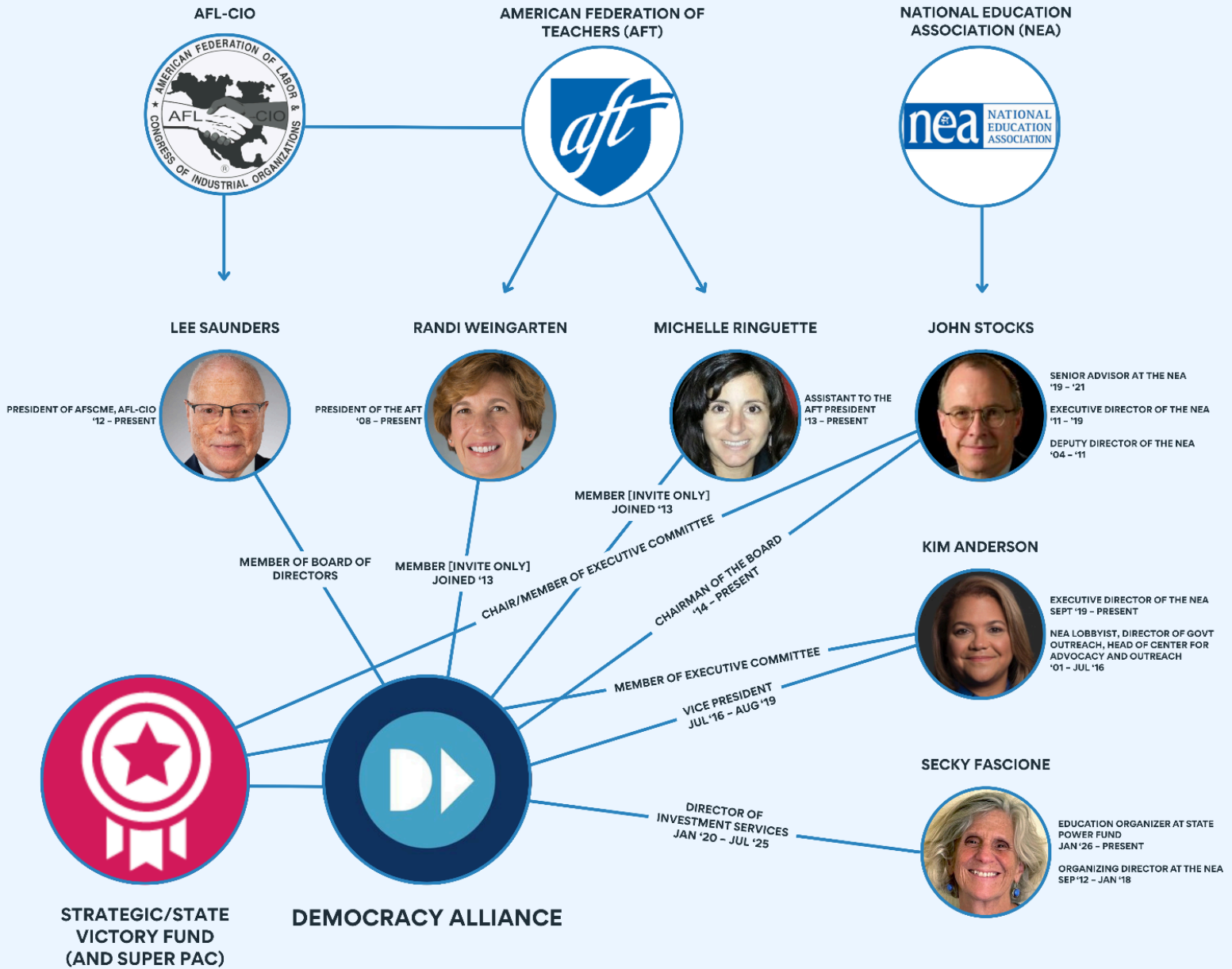
<sup>37</sup> <https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/organizations/842526354>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/in/secky-fascione-aa04035/details/experience/>

<sup>40</sup> [https://keywiki.org/Democracy\\_Alliance](https://keywiki.org/Democracy_Alliance)

<sup>41</sup> <https://afscmeatwork.org/union-hall/about-us/lee-saunders>



# BY THE NUMBERS:

Democracy Alliance Annual Dues

GOVERNING PARTNERS: \$35,000/YEAR  
INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERS: \$70,000/YEAR

Amount of money allocated to the Democracy Alliance from the NEA: [FY2008-FY2025 LM-2 Filings]

**\$3,859,034**

Amount of money allocated to the Strategic Victory Fund from the NEA: [FY2008-FY2025 LM-2 Filings]

**\$19,300,000**

Amount of money allocated to the State Victory Fund from the NEA: [FY2008-FY2025 LM-2 Filings]

**\$2,100,000**

Amount of money allocated to the Democracy Alliance from the AFT: [FY2014-FY2025 LM-2 Filings]

**\$858,333**

Amount of money allocated to the State Victory Fund from the AFT: [FY2020 LM-2 Filing]

**\$200,000**

A broader review of union disbursements reveals that a number of organizations receiving substantial and recurring funding occupy similar positions within this same set of relationships, connected through shared personnel, coordinated activity, or intermediary funding structures. In many instances, funds are directed through entities that redistribute resources across multiple initiatives, making it difficult to trace how union dues are ultimately deployed. This pattern, repeated across numerous recipients, suggests that the issues identified here extend beyond any single organization and instead reflect a wider system in which financial flows, organizational ties, and reporting practices operate in ways that limit transparency and complicate oversight.

The patterns identified in connection with the Democracy Alliance are reflected across a broader set of organizations that receive substantial and recurring union disbursements. Donor-advised funds like the Soros-backed Tides Foundation, for example, function as fiscal sponsors, allowing money to be directed to specific initiatives without those initiatives appearing as independent recipients in public filings. Similarly, coordination groups like the Funders' Committee for Civic Participation (FCCP) convene major institutional funders around shared priorities, shaping how resources are distributed without directly appearing as the endpoint of those expenditures. In both cases, the result is a separation between the origin of funds and their ultimate application.

The late Anne Bartley, a longtime philanthropist associated with the Rockefeller family, served as a central figure across several of these entities. She was a co-founder of the Democracy Alliance, a principal officer of the State Engagement Fund, and also tied to the FCCP, all of whom are listed recipients of NEA and AFT funds.<sup>42</sup> Scott Anderson, who joined the NEA as a political organizer in 2005 before leading its North Carolina state affiliate as executive director, left the union to become executive director of the Committee on States in 2013, which has received nearly \$3 million from the NEA over the years.<sup>43,44</sup> In 2019, Anderson assumed the role of executive director for the Democracy Alliance's Strategic Victory Fund and currently serves as its president.<sup>45</sup> He is also listed as the director of the State Engagement Fund on its 990 forms.<sup>46</sup>

Time and time again, member dues are directed into organizations that are not only engaged in political activity, but are connected through shared leadership with the institutions providing the funding. At the same time, those disbursements are frequently classified in ways that do not fully reflect their operational role, often appearing as general contributions in Schedule 17 rather than components of coordinated political efforts. While the use of intermediary and pass-through organizations makes it difficult to trace the ultimate destination of these funds, the entities themselves are openly engaged in progressive political advocacy and have been widely identified as key actors in funding and supporting political causes. As a result, members are not only limited in their ability to determine where their dues ultimately go, but are also funding organizations that operate within a highly partisan political framework, in some cases drawing criticism for their support of controversial or ideologically driven initiatives.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> <https://www.influencewatch.org/person/anne-bartley/>

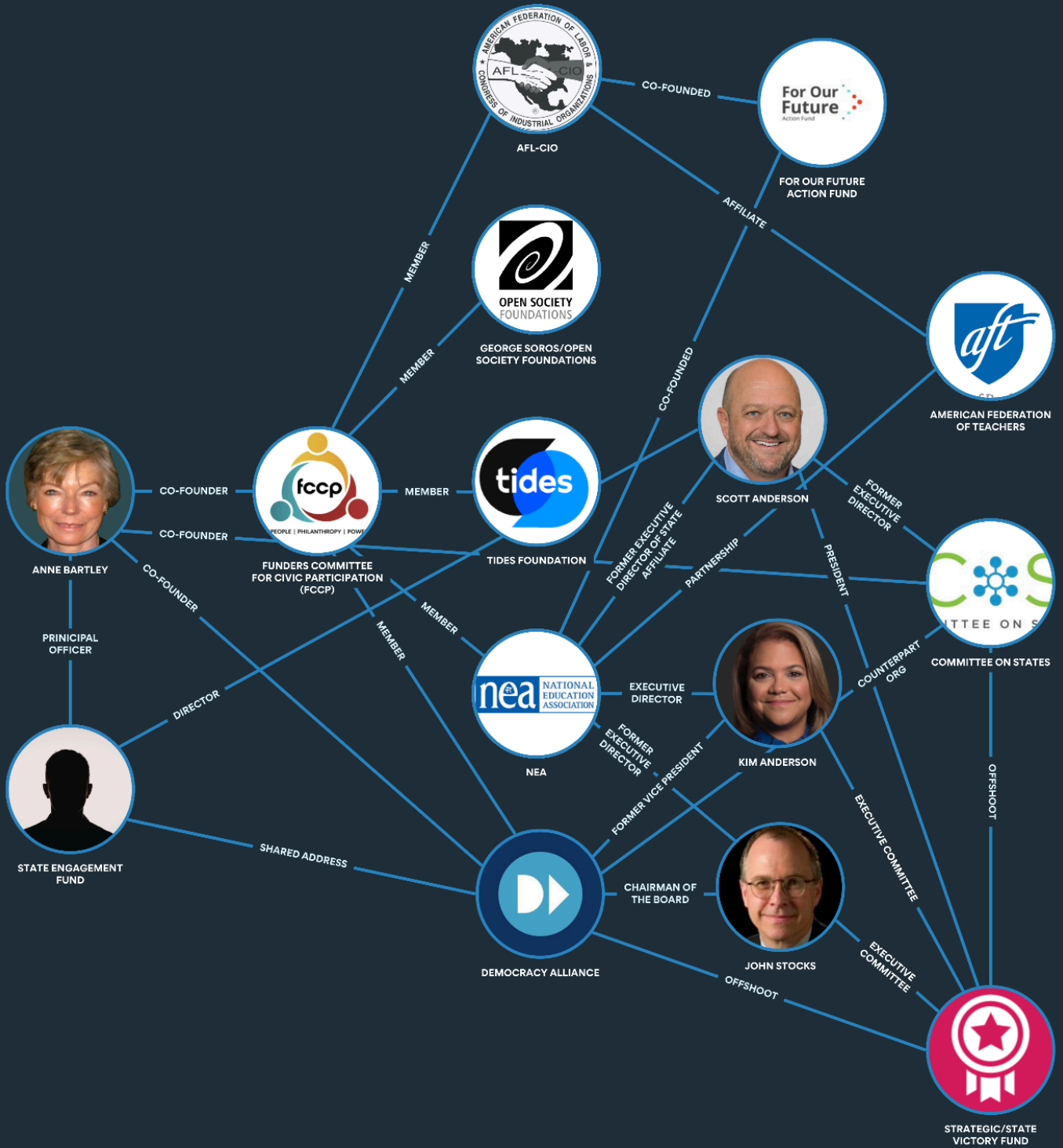
<sup>43</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/in/scott-anderson-707973191/>

<sup>44</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Labor-Management Standards (OLMS) Payer/Payee database

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/in/scott-anderson-707973191/>

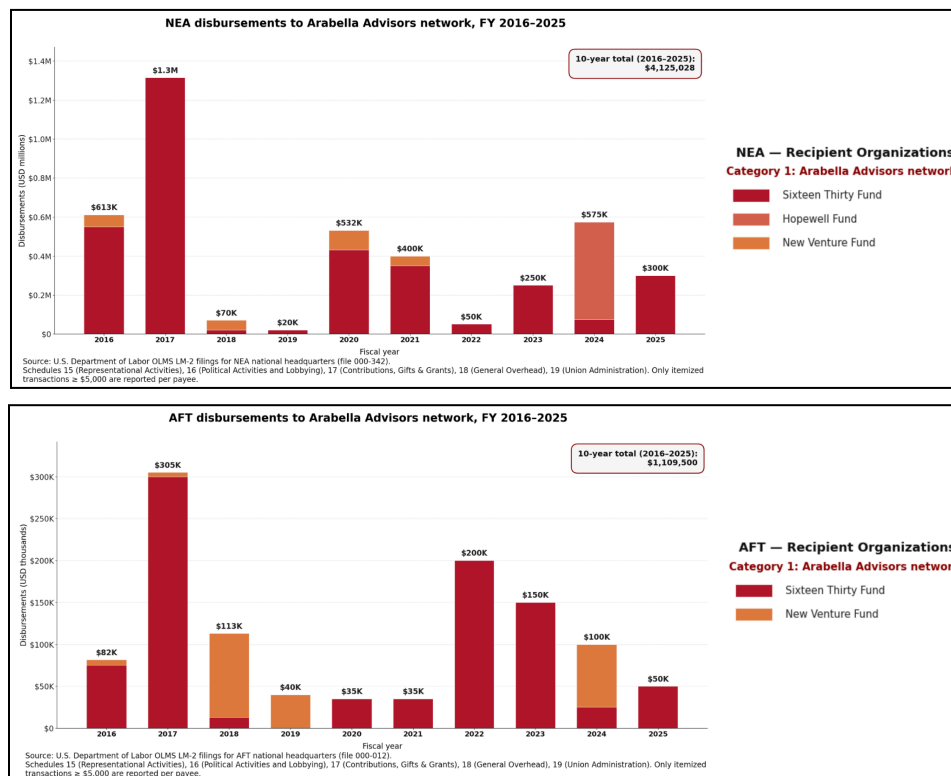
<sup>46</sup> <https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/organizations/810865943>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/2024/05/05/pro-palestinian-protests-columbia-university-funding-donors-00156135>



Another main feature of this system is Arabella Advisors, a Washington, D.C.-based for-profit consulting firm that constructed and managed one of the largest and most opaque funding networks in American political advocacy, before recently rebranding under the name Sunflower Services.<sup>48</sup> Although Arabella described itself as a philanthropic advisory firm, it has been characterized by multiple major publications as a central hub within a broader “dark money” infrastructure that facilitates large-scale political spending with limited donor transparency.<sup>49</sup> Arabella operates by maintaining operational control over a cluster of nominally independent nonprofit organizations. These include the Sixteen Thirty Fund, the New Venture Fund, the Hopewell Fund, the Windward Fund, and the North Fund, entities that function as fiscal sponsors for a wide array of leftist advocacy campaigns and policy initiatives.

Over the ten fiscal years examined in this report, the NEA directed approximately \$4.125 million to Arabella-managed entities, while the AFT contributed an additional \$1.1 million over the same period.<sup>50</sup> In almost every instance, these disbursements are recorded in LM-2 filings as contributions or partnership grants under Schedule 17 for an “issue advocacy group.” Across different filing years, however, those same recipients sometimes appear under other reporting categories, including political activities and lobbying, union administration, and general overhead. While these varied classifications may be formally permissible, they likely do not capture how funds function once they enter the Arabella system.



**Figure 7.** Millions in NEA and AFT funds allocated to the Arabella Advisors network, often described as a consortium of Democratic “dark money” pass-through organizations.

<sup>48</sup> [https://www.thecentersquare.com/national/article\\_796a41ef-6f24-4763-8cb2-fd33a05bdb3d.html](https://www.thecentersquare.com/national/article_796a41ef-6f24-4763-8cb2-fd33a05bdb3d.html)

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/29/us/politics/democrats-dark-money-donors.html>

<sup>50</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Labor-Management Standards (OLMS) Payer/Payee database

## Case Studies: [Mis]classification

A review of individual transactions further illustrates how union disclosures can obscure the functional purpose of political spending. In its FY2019 LM-2 filing, the NEA reported a \$1 million disbursement to the Greater Wisconsin Committee, classifying the payment as a “ballot [initiative] grant” under Schedule 17 and identifying the recipient as an “issue advocacy group.”<sup>51</sup> This classification suggests a non-electoral purpose, consistent with activity typically associated with ballot initiatives or general public policy advocacy.

Name and Address (A)	Purpose (C)	Date (D)	Amount (E)
GREATER WISCONSIN COMMITTEE			
PO BOX 861 MADISON WI 53701	Ballot init grant	10/16/2018	\$1,000,000
Type or Classification (B)	Total Itemized Transactions with this Payee/Payer		\$1,000,000
Issue Advocacy Group	Total Non-Itemized Transactions with this Payee/Payer		\$0
	<b>Total of All Transactions with this Payee/Payer for This Schedule</b>		<b>\$1,000,000</b>

**Figure 8.** NEA LM-2 filing for FY2019 with \$1 million disbursement to the Greater Wisconsin Committee under Schedule 17.

However, the recipient organization’s own Form 990 filings present a materially different picture. The Greater Wisconsin Committee reported no ballot initiative activity for the relevant period.<sup>52</sup> Instead, its primary expenditures were directed toward judicial elections, legislative lobbying, polling, and, most notably, significant payments to a Democratic-aligned media buying firm.<sup>53</sup> These funds were further transferred to affiliated political entities, including Greater Wisconsin Political Fund and Greater Wisconsin PAC, both of which engaged in express electoral activity.

The timing and structure of the disbursement further highlights its electoral function. The \$1 million payment from the NEA was made on October 16, 2018 – just 21 days before the Wisconsin gubernatorial election. During that election cycle, the affiliated entities supported Democratic candidate Tony Evers through coordinated advertising and campaign activity. Evers, who at the time was Wisconsin’s 26th Superintendent of Public Instruction and heavily backed by labor unions, ultimately ended up beating GOP incumbent Scott Walker by just 1.1 percent.<sup>54</sup>

Notably, one of the most prominent issues raised during the campaign involved Evers’ handling of a case in which a middle school teacher was found viewing pornography at school.<sup>55</sup> Although the teacher was initially dismissed, he was later reinstated after arguing that his conduct did not pose a direct risk to students. In his capacity as state superintendent, Evers declined to pursue

<sup>51</sup> <https://olmsapps.dol.gov/query/orgReport.do?rptId=712161&rptForm=LM2Form>

<sup>52</sup> [https://apps.irs.gov/pub/epostcard/cor/200938084\\_201812\\_990O\\_2020061917196226.pdf](https://apps.irs.gov/pub/epostcard/cor/200938084_201812_990O_2020061917196226.pdf)

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/11/07/scott-walker-vs-tony-evers-wisconsin-governor-race-results-2018-965594>

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2018/aug/29/greater-wisconsin-political-fund/hitting-back-group-defends-dem-governor-candidate/>

revocation of the teacher’s license on similar grounds.<sup>56</sup> Amid the controversy, the Greater Wisconsin Committee released advertisements defending Evers using the tagline “putting children’s safety first.”<sup>57</sup>

While the NEA’s LM-2 categorization presented the disbursement as a non-electoral grant, the downstream use of those funds indicates direct involvement in an active political campaign. As such, it appears that the NEA characterized a relatively large, time-sensitive disbursement to a politically active organization as a ballot initiative grant to an issue advocacy group. Yet the recipient’s own filings show no ballot initiative activity and instead document expenditures closely tied to electoral outcomes. The result is a reporting framework in which the formal description of a transaction diverges from its functional role, limiting the ability of observers (especially union members) to accurately assess how dues-funded resources are being deployed.

A second case illustrates the same pattern through a different mechanism: cross-agency contradiction. In its FY2024 LM-2, the NEA reported a \$500,000 payment to "No on 2109," a Washington State ballot initiative opposition committee, on Schedule 16 (Political Activities and Lobbying), with the type/classification field reading "Ballot initiative committee."<sup>58</sup> On its IRS-filed Form 990 Schedule I for the same fiscal year, the same \$500,000 payment to the same recipient was reported as "Financial Assistance," a charitable grant.<sup>59</sup>

NEA LM-2 (FY 2024) – SCHEDULE 16 (POLITICAL ACTIVITIES AND LOBBYING)				
Name and Address (A)	Purpose (C)	Date (D)	Amount (E)	
NO ON 2109 PO BOX 21961 SEATTLE WA 98111	Mishp communication strategy	05/22/2024		\$500,000
	Total Itemized Transactions with this Payee/Payer			\$500,000
	Total Non-Itemized Transactions with this Payee/Payer			\$0
	Total of All Transactions with this Payee/Payer for This Schedule			\$500,000
Ballot initiative committee (B)				

NEA 990 (FY 2024) – SCHEDULE I (GRANTS AND OTHER ASSISTANCE TO ORGANIZATIONS)					
(128) Name and Address	99-1350192	401(A) & 501(A)	500,000	0	FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE
(128) NO ON 2109 PO BOX 21961 SEATTLE, WA 98111					

**Figure 9.** NEA LM-2 and 990 filings for FY2024 showcasing a \$500,000 disbursement to a Washington-based ballot initiative committee called No on 2109.

The DOL classification reflects what the payment actually was. Initiative 2109 was a Washington State ballot measure that would have repealed the state's capital gains tax, the proceeds of which help fund public education and early learning programs.<sup>60</sup> The "No on 2109" committee was the organized opposition campaign that ran advertising, voter outreach, and get-out-the-vote operations against the repeal. The NEA's LM-2 designation as a "Ballot initiative committee" disbursement under Schedule 16 is consistent with the recipient's purpose and the payment's function.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.wispolitics.com/2018/greater-wisconsin-ad-says-walker-not-telling-the-truth-on-teacher-license-case/>

<sup>58</sup> <https://olmsapps.dol.gov/query/orgReport.do?rptId=900357&rptForm=LM2Form>

<sup>59</sup> <https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/organizations/530115260/202511959349301466/full>

<sup>60</sup> [https://ballotpedia.org/Washington\\_Initiative\\_2109,\\_Repeal\\_Capital\\_Gains\\_Tax\\_Initiative\\_\(2024\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Washington_Initiative_2109,_Repeal_Capital_Gains_Tax_Initiative_(2024))

The IRS classification, however, is structurally inconsistent with how ballot measure spending is treated under federal tax law. The IRS has historically classified ballot initiative spending as lobbying activity.<sup>61</sup> For 501(c)(5) labor organizations such as the NEA, lobbying expenditures and certain political activities are disclosed on Schedule C of the Form 990, specifically under Part III, which captures disclosures required of (c)(5) entities under section 6033(e). Schedule I, by contrast, is reserved for "Grants and Other Assistance to Organizations, Governments, and Individuals" – its instructions and intent are oriented toward grants for charitable, educational, or similar exempt purposes. A political contribution to a committee organized to defeat a state ballot measure does not appear to fit the Schedule I definition by any reasonable reading.

The structural significance of this placement is that ballot measure spending belongs on Schedule C of the Form 990 regardless of which interpretive framework the IRS applies. Whether the agency characterizes a particular ballot measure expenditure as lobbying (Part III) or as political campaign activity (Part I-C, for non-501(c)(3) organizations), both classifications route to Schedule C and trigger associated disclosure requirements. By reporting the disbursement on Schedule I instead, the NEA placed the transaction on a schedule that bypasses the disclosure requirements applicable to both lobbying and political campaign activity, regardless of which classification would otherwise apply.

In the case of the Greater Wisconsin Committee, the apparent misclassification occurred within a single filing: the NEA characterized a politically active disbursement as a "ballot initiative grant" to an "issue advocacy group," obscuring the recipient's electoral function within the LM-2 itself. The No on 2109 case operates differently, whereby the NEA's own LM-2 demonstrates that the union recognized the payment as political activity under DOL definitions. The same payment, in the same fiscal year, then appears under a non-political classification in the union's IRS filing. The contradiction is not a matter of interpretation then. It is documented by the filer itself across submissions to two federal agencies, placing the same \$500,000 disbursement into two categories that, by regulatory definition, cannot both accurately describe the same transaction.

## **Union Pockets Run Deep**

A recent letter from the House Committee on Education and Workforce to Randi Weingarten outlines an investigation into whether senior officials at the AFT improperly used union funds for personal benefit. The Committee cites specific figures from AFT's LM-2 filings, including Weingarten's \$457,769 salary and \$42,105 in additional disbursements in FY2024, alongside allegations that union funds may have been used for personal international travel and a private chauffeur service.<sup>62</sup> It also highlights over \$100,000 in annual payments to a limousine vendor and unusually large, consistent allowances paid to Secretary-Treasurer Fedrick Ingram, raising concerns about internal oversight and compliance with fiduciary duties under federal labor law.

In that context, recent LM-2 filings reveal a series of disbursements that further illustrate how union funds are directed to organizations connected to union leadership. In FY2024, at least

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<sup>61</sup> <https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/26/56.4911-2>

<sup>62</sup> [https://edworkforce.house.gov/uploadedfiles/08.07.25\\_aft\\_letter.pdf](https://edworkforce.house.gov/uploadedfiles/08.07.25_aft_letter.pdf)

four separate payments of \$10,000 each were made to Congregation Beit Simchat Torah (CBST), a New York-based synagogue led by Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum (now Rabbi Emerita), Randi Weingarten’s wife.<sup>63,64</sup> All four payments were made by national-level AFL-CIO affiliates, including the AFT, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), and the AFL-CIO itself. Although each payment was reported under “contributions, gifts, and grants,” they were classified differently across filings as a “synagogue,” “tax-exempt organization,” “advocacy group,” and “501(c)(3) organization” – despite referring to the same recipient.

File #	Report	Name	Payer/Payee	Category	Type/Classification	Itemized	Non Itemized	Total	Union Name	Abbr	Designation Name
000-012	2024 (LM2)	Congregation Beit Simchat Torah	PAYEE	CONTRIBUTIONS, GIFTS AND GRANTS	Synagogue	10000	0	10000	TEACHERS AFL-CIO	AFT	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-289	2024 (LM2)	Congregation Beit Simchat Torah	PAYEE	CONTRIBUTIONS, GIFTS AND GRANTS	Tax-Exempt Organization	10000	0	10000	STATE COUNTY AND MUNI EMPLS AFL-CIO	AFSCME	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-056	2024 (LM2)	CONGREGATION BEIT SIMCHAT	PAYEE	CONTRIBUTIONS, GIFTS AND GRANTS	ADVOCACY GROUP	10000	0	10000	FOOD AND COMMERCIAL WKRS	UFCW	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
000-106	2024 (LM2)	CONGREGATION BELT SIMCHAT TORAH	PAYEE	CONTRIBUTIONS, GIFTS AND GRANTS	501 (C)3 ORGANIZATION	10000	0	10000	AFL-CIO	AFLCIO	NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

**Figure 10.** Four payments amounting to \$40,000 disbursed by AFL-CIO and three of its affiliates, including AFT, to the synagogue led by the spouse of AFT President Randi Weingarten.

CBST has publicly established an endowment fund bearing both Kleinbaum’s and Weingarten’s names, described as supporting the organization’s work in Jewish and LGBTQ social justice initiatives.<sup>65</sup> Among the Kleinbaum-Weingarten fund’s public donor list, meanwhile, is the United Faculty of Miami Dade College (UFMDC), a local union affiliated through the Florida Education Association with both the AFT and the NEA. In its 2023 Form 990, UFMDC also reported a \$10,000 disbursement to Kleinbaum’s synagogue.<sup>66</sup>

Schedule I (Form 990)		Grants and Other Assistance to Organizations, Governments and Individuals in the United States						OMB No. 1545-0047	
Department of the Treasury Internal Revenue Service		Complete if the organization answered "Yes," on Form 990, Part IV, line 21 or 22. ▶ Attach to Form 990. ▶ Go to <a href="http://www.irs.gov/Form990">www.irs.gov/Form990</a> for the latest information.						<b>2023</b> Open to Public Inspection	
Name of the organization UNITED FACULTY OF MIAMI DADE COLLEGE							Employer identification number 59-3591895		
<b>Part I General Information on Grants and Assistance</b>									
1 Does the organization maintain records to substantiate the amount of the grants or assistance, the grantees' eligibility for the grants or assistance, and the selection criteria used to award the grants or assistance? <span style="float: right;"><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</span>									
2 Describe in Part IV the organization's procedures for monitoring the use of grant funds in the United States.									
<b>Part II Grants and Other Assistance to Domestic Organizations and Domestic Governments.</b> Complete if the organization answered "Yes" on Form 990, Part IV, line 21, for any recipient that received more than \$5,000. Part II can be duplicated if additional space is needed.									
(a) Name and address of organization or government	(b) EIN	(c) IRC section (if applicable)	(d) Amount of cash grant	(e) Amount of non-cash assistance	(f) Method of valuation (book, FMV, appraisal, other)	(g) Description of noncash assistance	(h) Purpose of grant or assistance		
(1) CONGREGATION BEIT CBST 130 WEST 30TH ST NEW YORK, NY 100010154	23-7406899	501C3	10,000				GENERAL SUPPORT		

**Figure 11.** UFMDC’s Form 990 showing a \$10,000 disbursement to the synagogue led by the spouse of AFT President Randi Weingarten.

In this context, payments by affiliated entities to organizations connected to union leadership take on added significance, reflecting the type of relationship that fiduciary standards are designed to guard against. Even absent direct involvement by national leadership, directing member-funded resources to organizations with personal or institutional ties introduces potential conflicts of interest, particularly if such relationships are not clearly disclosed or independently reviewed. When considered alongside broader concerns about financial oversight

<sup>63</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Labor-Management Standards (OLMS) Payer/Payee database  
<sup>64</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/07/13/nyregion/rabbi-sharon-kleinbaum-retirement.html>  
<sup>65</sup> <https://cbst.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/RSK-RW-Fund-for-Social-Justice-Letter-Feb-2024-v3-240220-1220.pdf>  
<sup>66</sup> <https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/organizations/593591895/202501129349300435/IRS990ScheduleI>

raised in the congressional inquiry, these types of transactions reinforce the need for transparency and consistent governance practices across both national unions and their affiliated entities.

## Foreign Influence?

In July 2025, Weingarten announced that the AFT would be launching a partnership with the World Economic Forum, an international business league based in Switzerland, to “create a curriculum that will lead to good jobs and solid careers in U.S. manufacturing.”<sup>67</sup> In response to AFT-NH President Deb Howes testifying on the matter, Florida Governor Ron Desantis tweeted: “The World Economic Forum should have zero involvement in education in the United States...”<sup>68</sup> Nonetheless, it is not the only case of potential foreign involvement in America’s K-12 schools.

Becky Pringle, president of the NEA, was elected to Education International (EI) as vice president in 2024.<sup>69</sup> EI, a global federation of education unions headquartered in Belgium, includes the NEA among its member organizations.<sup>70</sup> Its leadership further reflects cross-union overlap in board member Evelyn DeJesus, who also serves as executive vice president of the AFT.<sup>71,72</sup>

EI engages in broader political advocacy beyond education policy. The organization regularly issues public statements addressing international political disputes and human rights issues, including calls for ending the U.S. embargo on Cuba, characterizations of the Israel-Hamas war as a “genocide,” and criticism of U.S. actions involving Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.<sup>73,74,75</sup> NEA and AFT leadership involvement at the highest levels of EI thus places the unions squarely within ongoing geopolitical debates that extend well beyond traditional labor or education-focused advocacy.

## Looking Inward

While the preceding sections have focused on how union funds move externally – through affiliated organizations, intermediary entities, and coordinated political structures – it is equally important to examine how these activities are reflected within the unions themselves. LM-2 filings provide one of the few standardized windows into how unions allocate resources internally, particularly with respect to political activity. A closer review of these disclosures reveals a notable imbalance between externally directed spending and internally attributed political work.

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<sup>67</sup> <https://www.aft.org/press/speeches/moment-never>

<sup>68</sup> <https://x.com/RonDeSantis/status/2047301964417958383?s=20>

<sup>69</sup> <https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/28946:becky-pringle>

<sup>70</sup> <https://www.nea.org/nea-councils/education-international>

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/28966:evelyn-dejesus>

<sup>72</sup> <https://www.aft.org/about/leadership/evelyn-dejesus>

<sup>73</sup>

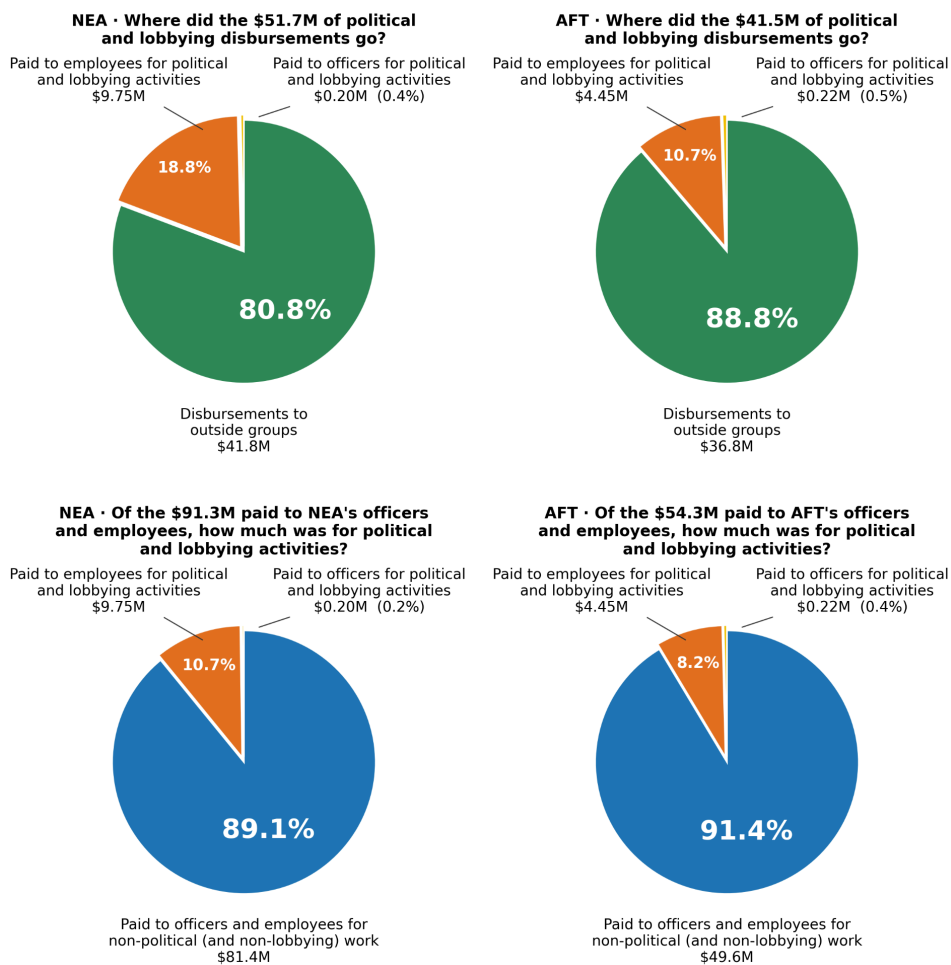
<https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/32397:cuba-education-international-calls-for-an-end-to-the-fuel-blockade-and-us-military-threats-against-the-island>

<sup>74</sup> <https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/32181:palestine-education-international-members-offer-a-lifeline-of-solidarity-to-gazas-educators>

<sup>75</sup> <https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/32181:palestine-education-international-members-offer-a-lifeline-of-solidarity-to-gazas-educators>

According to their most recent LM-2 filings, the NEA reported approximately \$51.7 million in total political disbursements, while the AFT reported roughly \$41.5 million.<sup>76,77</sup> In both cases, however, only a small fraction of those expenditures was attributed to the salaries of the unions' own employees and officers. At the NEA, employee salaries classified as political accounted for approximately 18.8 percent of total political disbursements, with officer salaries representing just 0.4 percent. The AFT's figures are similarly limited: employee political salaries accounted for 10.7 percent of political spending, while officer salaries represented 0.5 percent. The overwhelming majority, more than 80 percent at the NEA and nearly 90 percent at the AFT, was directed toward external expenditures, including contributions to outside organizations and other forms of indirect political activity.

**NEA & AFT (FY 2025) · Political Activities & Lobbying Breakdown**



**Figure 12.** (Top) Breakdown of NEA and AFT political spending based on officer and employee compensation designated for political work vs external political disbursements. (Bottom) Breakdown of union salary for officers and employees classified as political vs non-political.

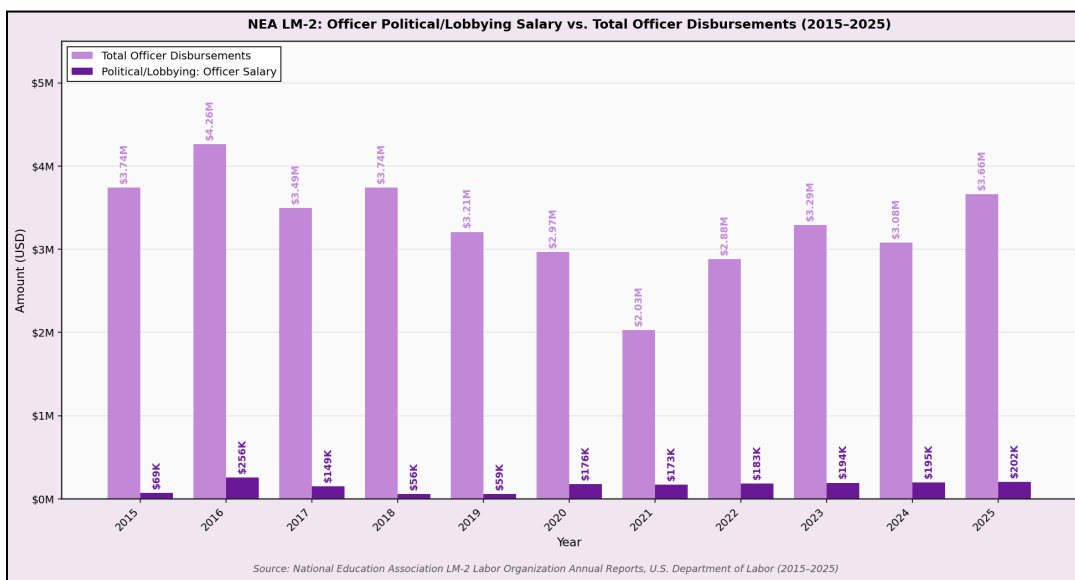
<sup>76</sup> <https://olmsapps.dol.gov/querq/orgReport.do?rptId=925350&rptForm=LM2Form>

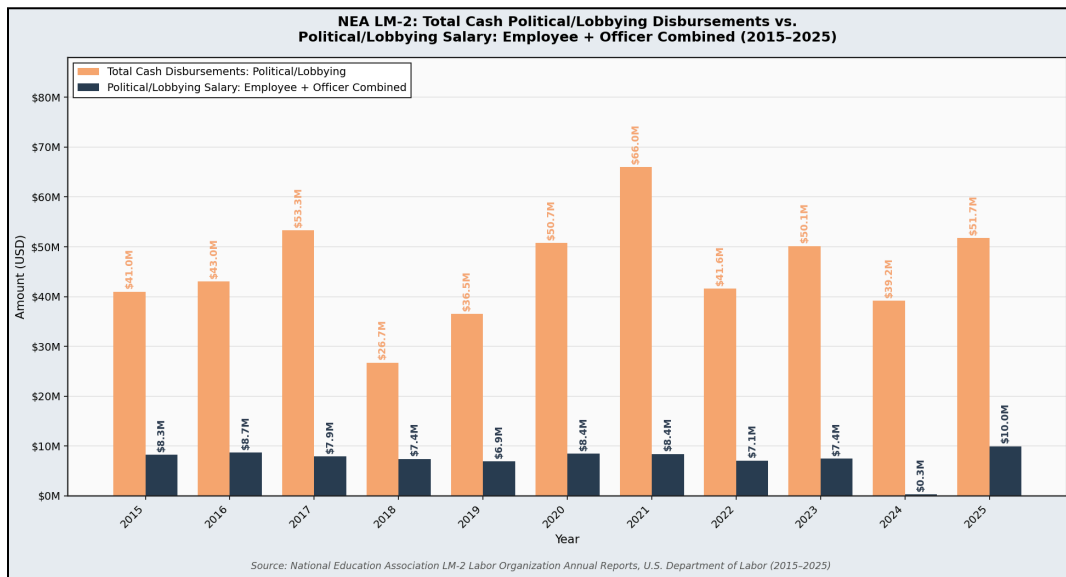
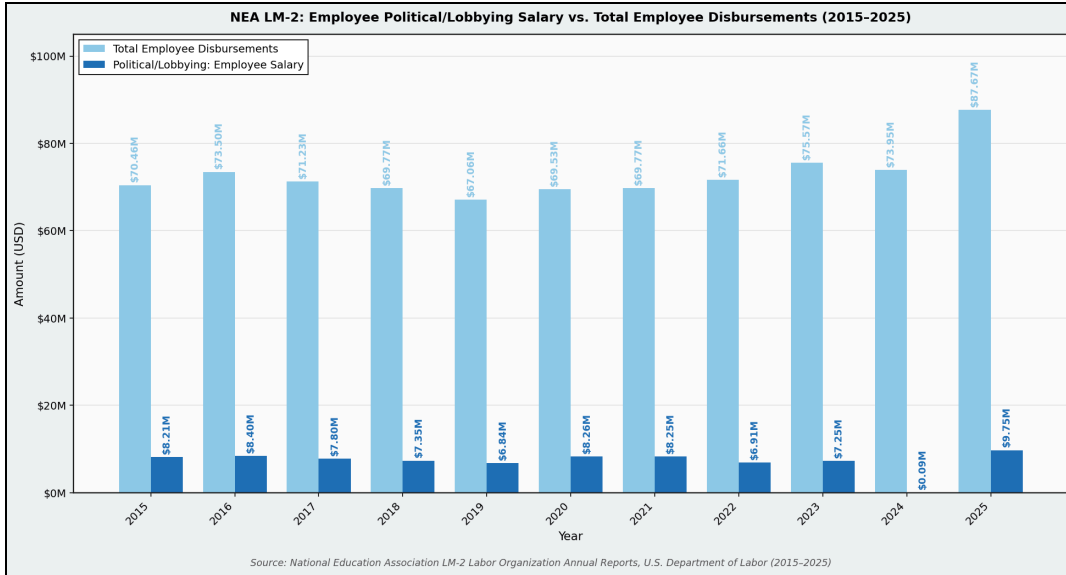
<sup>77</sup> <https://olmsapps.dol.gov/querq/orgReport.do?rptId=924116&rptForm=LM2Form>

When viewed relative to total compensation, the disparity becomes more pronounced. Only 10.7 percent of the NEA’s total salary-related disbursements and 8.2 percent of the AFT’s were classified as political, with compensation for political work by union officers falling to fractions of a percent in both cases. These figures suggest that the bulk of political activity attributed to the NEA and AFT occurs outside their formal organizational structure. So too, it raises questions about how political activity is defined and reported. Senior union leaders, including Becky Pringle and Randi Weingarten, play visible and well-documented roles in policy advocacy, legislative engagement, and electoral activity. The extent to which these activities are reflected in internal salary classifications appears limited, suggesting a potential disconnect between publicly observable conduct and reported allocations.

The reliability of these classifications is further complicated by apparent inconsistencies in reported data. In the NEA’s 2024 filing, employee compensation categorized as political declined to approximately \$86,678 – a reduction of nearly 99 percent from the prior ten-year average of \$7.9 million. This sharp deviation occurred without a corresponding reduction in overall political spending, raising questions about the consistency of classification methodology across reporting periods. The following year, however, reported political salary expenditures not only rebounded but exceeded prior levels, rising to approximately \$9.75 million. A review of individual employee salary allocations suggests that this fluctuation does not appear to be the result of a simple accounting error.

What this shows is that political activity is heavily externalized, with substantial resources routed through organizations outside the unions’ direct reporting structure, while internal allocations may understate the extent to which staff and leadership are engaged in political work. The result is a disclosure framework that captures certain forms of activity in detail while leaving others comparatively obscured. This imbalance limits the ability of members and observers to fully assess how political engagement is carried out and where responsibility for that activity ultimately resides.





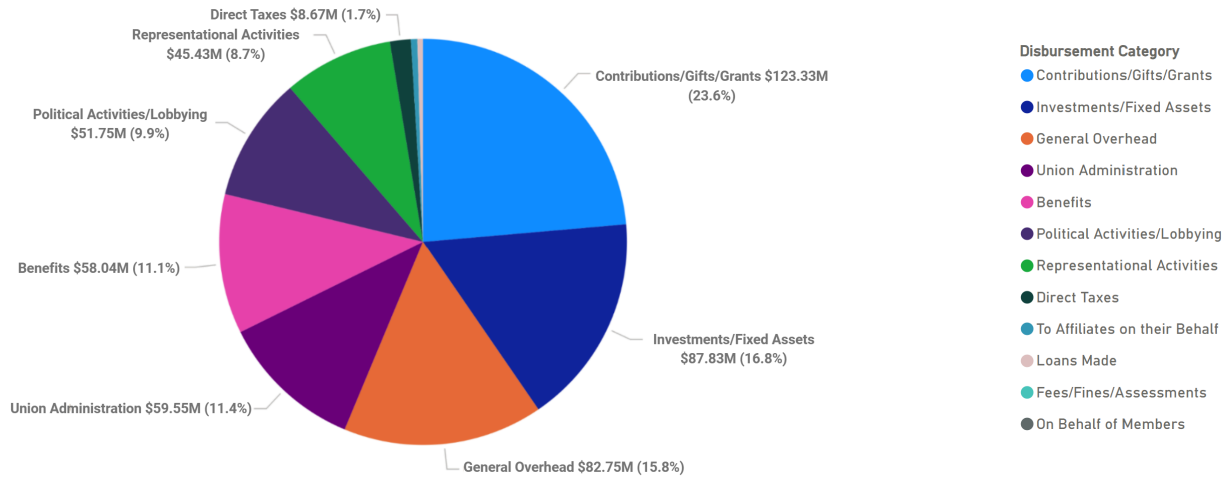
**Figure 13.** Overview of NEA political spending and union salaries from FY2015-FY2025. Note that virtually no employees reported political work in FY2024.

## Gauging Results: What Have Unions Delivered?

The financial patterns described in the preceding sections make it necessary to examine whether the nation’s largest teachers’ unions are effectively fulfilling the core function that justifies their existence – namely, improving the compensation, working conditions, and professional standing of the educators they represent. One way to assess this question is by examining how union resources are allocated relative to that mission.

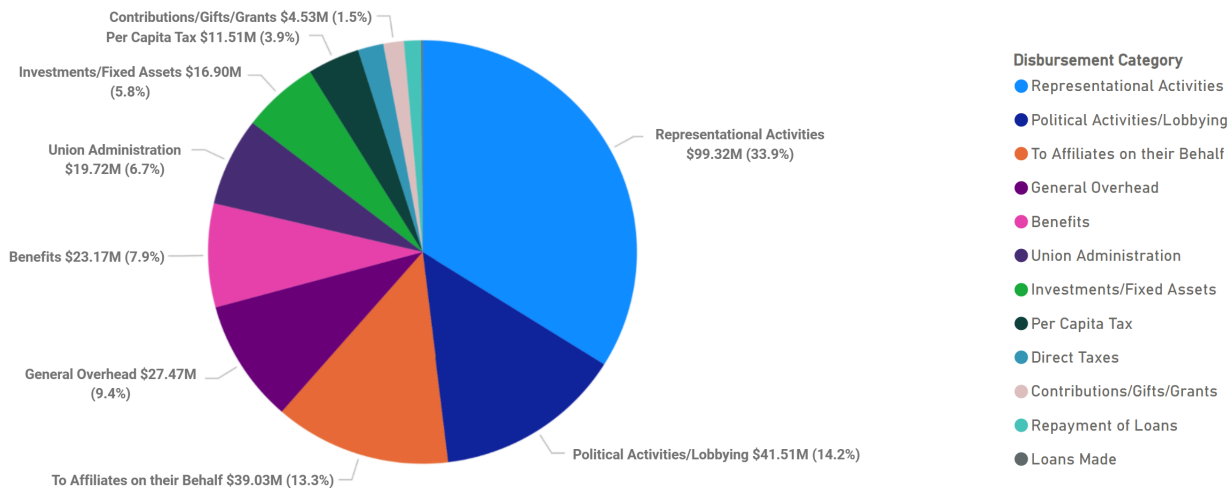
### Spending Priorities and Representational Activity

The most direct measure of a union’s core function is its spending on representational activities, the category in LM-2 filings that encompasses collective bargaining, contract negotiation, and grievance handling. In its most recent filing, the NEA reported total disbursements approaching \$450 million, of which less than \$46 million (approximately nine percent) was allocated to representational activities. By comparison, the union reported more than \$51.7 million in political activities and lobbying, along with an additional \$123.3 million in contributions, gifts, and grants, much of which ultimately goes to supporting political causes as well. Combined, these two categories are roughly four times the amount spent on direct member representation.



**Figure 14.** NEA disbursements breakdown from FY2025. Source: Department of Labor OLMS data visualization tool.

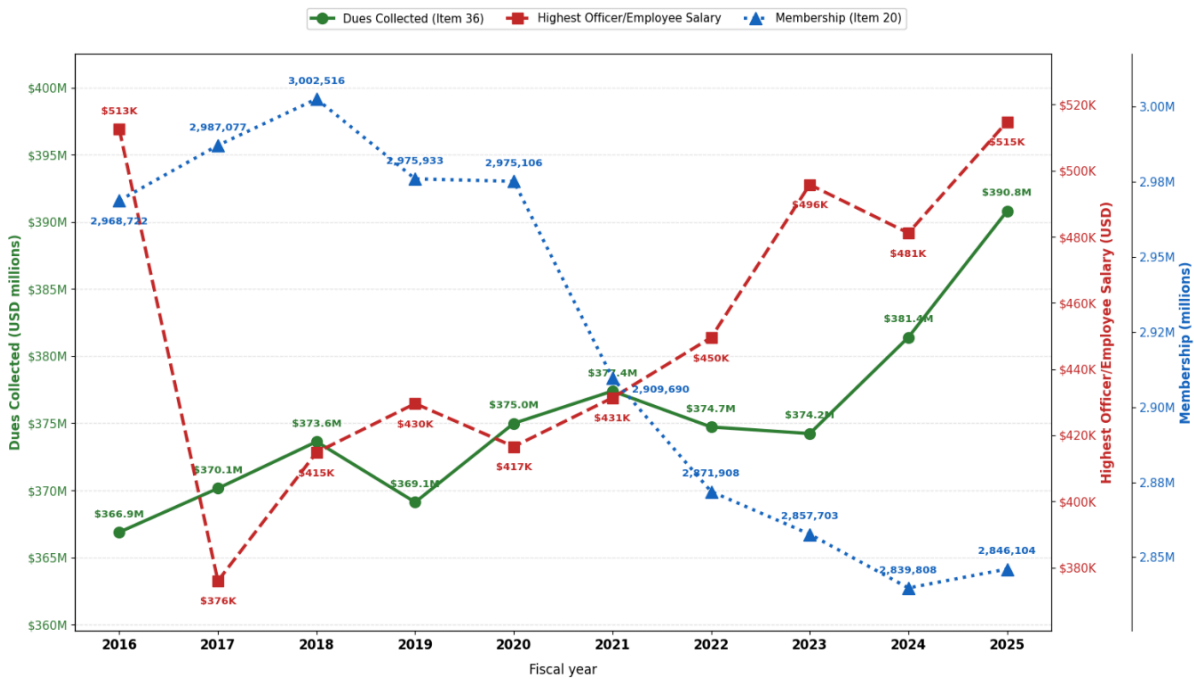
The AFT reflects a somewhat less pronounced pattern. Of its approximately \$278 million in total disbursements, roughly \$99 million was allocated to representational activities, while more than \$41.5 million was directed toward political activities and lobbying, in addition to external contributions (albeit a far smaller share). While a larger proportion of its spending remains tied to member-facing functions, the scale of its political expenditures still represents a substantial and sustained commitment alongside those core activities. These allocations illustrate a prioritization of resources that extends significantly beyond the unions’ stated core function.



**Figure 15.** AFT disbursements breakdown from FY2025. Source: Department of Labor OLMS data visualization tool.

The trajectory of union membership and dues rates over the past several years further highlights the degree to which these organizations have become detached from the educators they purport to serve. LM-2 filings also reveal that the NEA's membership declined steadily from 2,975,106 in 2020 to 2,839,808 in 2024 – a net loss of over 135,000 dues-paying members, before a marginal uptick to 2,846,104 in 2025, still well below pre-pandemic levels and part of a broader hemorrhage of nearly 400,000 members since the union's peak in 2009. Yet over this same period, the NEA raised its published annual dues rate in every consecutive filing year, from \$196 in 2020 to \$213 in 2025, effectively requiring a shrinking membership base to subsidize the same (or growing) expenditure priorities, chief among them the political spending documented above.

**NEA: dues collected, top officer salary, and membership, 2016-2025**

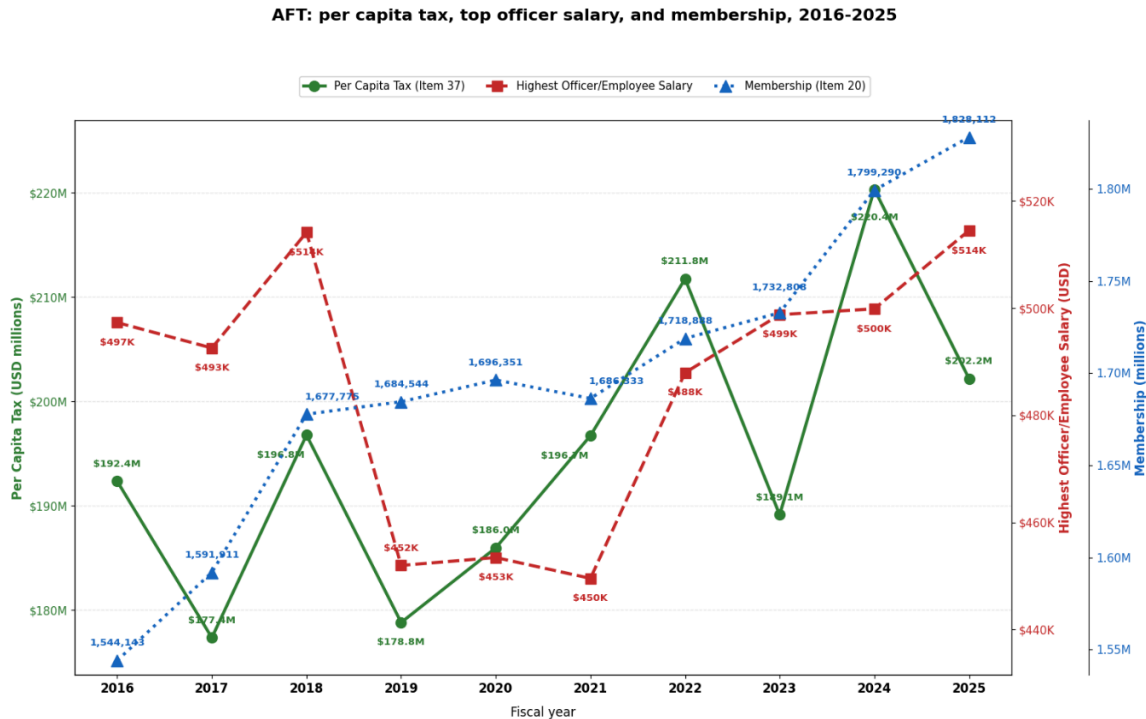


Source: U.S. Department of Labor OLMS LM-2 filings for NEA national headquarters (file 000-342), fiscal years 2016-2025. Dues Collected = LM-2 Item 36. Highest Officer/Employee Salary = maximum gross salary across all officers and employees. Membership = Item 20 (total members at end of reporting period).

**Figure 16.** Ten year overview of the NEA's dues collected, highest officer/employee salary, and union membership, showing increased revenue from dues during membership losses, while officer salary continued to climb.

The 2018 Supreme Court ruling in *Janus v. AFSCME*, which held that public employees cannot be compelled to pay union fees as a condition of employment, accelerated this attrition by removing the financial penalty for non-membership; in the years since, tens of thousands of educators have exercised their newly affirmed right to opt out, and the NEA's own internal

reports have acknowledged membership levels at historic lows in multiple state affiliates.<sup>78,79</sup> The AFT presents a superficially different picture, with its reported membership rising from 1,696,861 in 2020 to 1,828,112 in 2025, accompanied by modest monthly dues increases from \$19.58 to \$20.18 over the same period. However, this growth was driven not by a groundswell of classroom teachers rallying behind the union's mission but by aggressive recruitment in sectors far removed from K-12 education.



Source: U.S. Department of Labor OLMS LM-2 filings for AFT national headquarters (file 000-012), fiscal years 2016-2025. Per Capita Tax = LM-2 Item 37. AFT reports \$0 on Item 36 (Dues & Agency Fees). Item 37 is the national-level equivalent of dues. Highest Officer/Employee Salary = maximum gross salary across all officers and employees. Membership = Item 20 (total members at end of reporting period).

**Figure 17.** Ten year overview of the AFT's dues collected based on per capita tax, highest officer/employee salary, and union membership, showing mostly upwards trajectory across all three categories.

AFT President Randi Weingarten acknowledged as much at the union's 2024 convention, attributing the membership surge to newly organized airport ground crews, university staff, healthcare workers, bus drivers, librarians, charter school educators, and paraprofessionals, along with approximately 27,000 educators and school staff in Fairfax County, Virginia, who joined after a decades-long organizing campaign.<sup>80</sup> What this means is that a substantial and growing share of the dues revenue ostensibly collected on behalf of teachers is in fact drawn from workers who might not have a direct stake in K-12 salary negotiations, classroom conditions, or the pedagogical issues that define the union's stated *raison d'être*. The practical effect of both trends is the same: the NEA compensates for membership losses by extracting more from those who remain, while the AFT inflates its rolls with non-education workers to

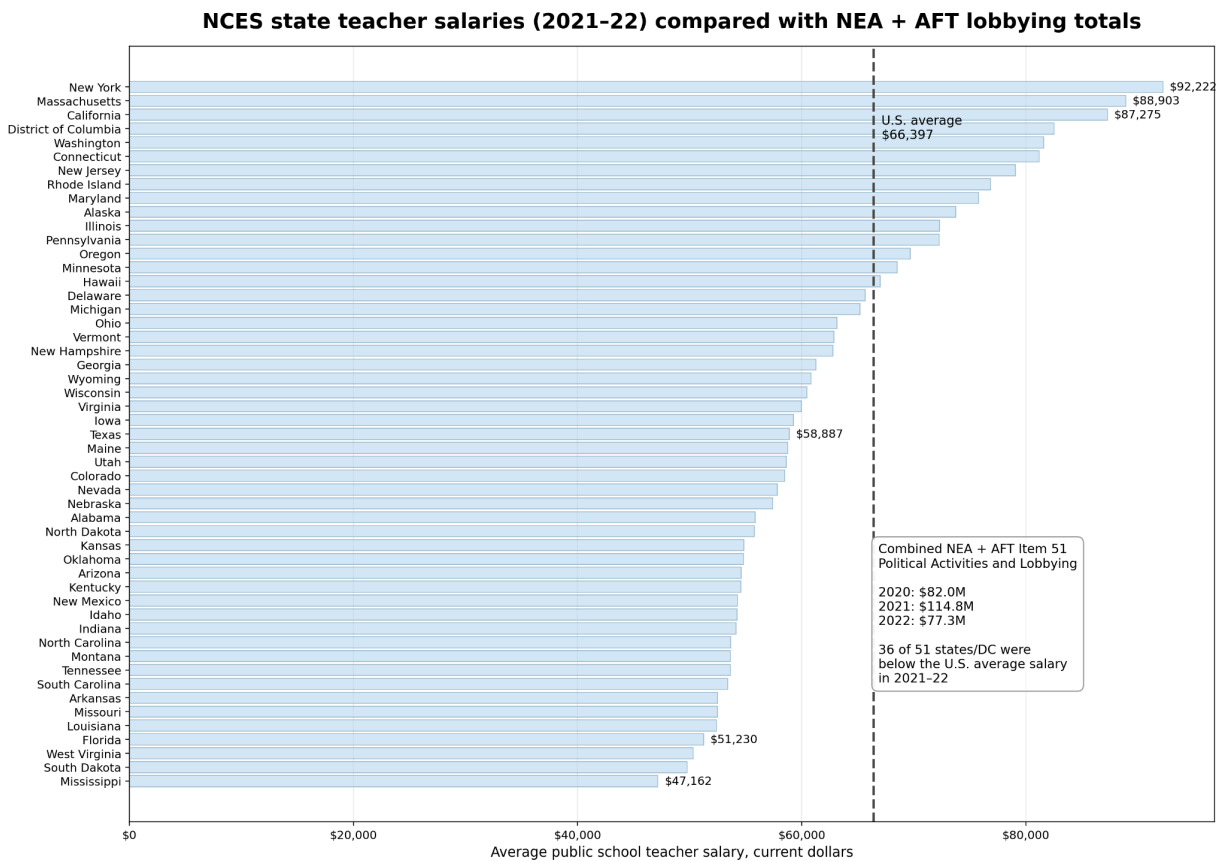
<sup>78</sup> <https://www.freedomfoundation.com/labor/aft-annual-report-discloses-post-janus-membership-decline/>

<sup>79</sup> <https://www.freedomfoundation.com/teachers-unions/nea-faces-sixth-consecutive-year-of-membership-loss/>

<sup>80</sup> <https://www.aft.org/press-release/address-union-afts-weingarten-champions-real-solutions-better-life-celebrates>

preserve the dues revenue stream that finances its political apparatus. Neither strategy reflects a renewed commitment to the working conditions, compensation, or professional standing of the teachers whose name both organizations continue to bear.

The question of whether teachers' unions have delivered meaningful salary gains for the educators they represent is perhaps most damning when examined across a multi-decade horizon. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the national average teacher salary stood at approximately \$66,397 as of the most 2021-2022, a figure that, adjusted for inflation, represents roughly 7.8 percent less in real purchasing power than teachers earned a decade prior and is scarcely distinguishable from the inflation-adjusted equivalent of \$64,401 that teachers earned in the 1969-70 school year.<sup>81</sup> In other words, over more than half a century during which the NEA and AFT have collectively spent billions of dollars, teachers' real wages have barely moved.



Salary source: NCES Digest Table 211.60 (state-by-state 2021-22 current-dollar salaries). Lobbying source: audited DOL OLMS LM-2 Item 51 totals for NEA and AFT national headquarters. This is a contrast visual, not a causal claim.

**Figure 18.** Teacher salary averages by state, shown alongside the amount of money spent by the largest teachers unions on political activities and lobbying in recent years. Note that 36 of 50 states (plus Washington, D.C.) fall below the national average.

Research conducted by the Reason Foundation corroborates this stagnation, finding that inflation-adjusted average teacher salaries fell in 40 of 50 states between 2002 and 2022,

<sup>81</sup> [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22\\_211.60.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_211.60.asp)

declining nationally by over six percent even as per-pupil education funding rose 25 percent over the same period.<sup>82</sup> The Economic Policy Institute has documented a parallel phenomenon: the teacher "pay penalty" relative to comparably educated professionals reached a record 26.9 percent in 2024, meaning teachers earned just 73.1 cents for every dollar their similarly credentialed peers took home in other fields.<sup>83</sup> The NEA has pointed to the disparity between states with the most and least expansive bargaining laws, claiming that teachers earn 24% more on average in states with collective bargaining.<sup>84</sup> However, this comparison obscures a critical confounding variable whereby the states with the strongest bargaining protections and highest nominal salaries (such as New York, California, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Jersey) are also home to the nation's most expensive metropolitan areas, where elevated salaries are substantially offset by higher costs of living.

The unions' counterproductiveness perhaps becomes most vivid when examined through specific episodes in which their actions directly harmed the educators and students they claim to serve. A recent emblematic illustration of this hypocrisy occurred in the summer of 2024, when the NEA's own internal staff union – the National Education Association Staff Organization (NEASO), representing approximately 350 headquarters employees – went on strike against the NEA itself.<sup>85</sup>

NEASO, which had been negotiating a successor to its three-year collective bargaining agreement since April 2024, authorized a strike after what members described as months of stalled negotiations and management's refusal to meaningfully address wages, health coverage, worker safety, and the outsourcing of an estimated \$50 million in staff work to outside contractors.<sup>86</sup> On June 20, NEASO members staged a 24-hour walkout at NEA headquarters in Washington, their first work stoppage in over fifty years. When the three-day unfair labor practice strike resumed on July 5, timed to coincide with the NEA's Representative Assembly in Philadelphia, NEA leadership responded not with the good-faith bargaining it counsels school districts to undertake, but with tactics it has publicly condemned when used by employers against its own members: it canceled the \$12 million convention, revoked striking staffers' hotel reservations and return flights, locked them out of work and pay indefinitely, cut off access to work email and phones, and on August 1 threatened to terminate their health benefits.<sup>87</sup>

After more than a monthlong lockout, seemingly timed to conclude before the Democratic National Convention so as not to interfere with the NEA's electioneering efforts for Kamala Harris, a tentative agreement was reached in mid-August, its terms kept confidential. The episode laid bare a fundamental contradiction. The organization that bills itself as the foremost defender of workers' collective bargaining rights deployed every coercive instrument in the anti-union playbook, spanning lockouts, benefit termination, and economic pressure, the moment its own employees exercised the very rights the NEA exists to protect.

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<sup>82</sup> <https://reason.org/commentary/why-teacher-salaries-are-stagnant/>

<sup>83</sup> <https://www.epi.org/publication/the-teacher-pay-penalty-reached-a-record-high-in-2024-three-decades-of-leaving-public-school-teachers-behind/>

<sup>84</sup> <https://www.nea.org/resource-library/educator-pay-and-student-spending-how-does-your-state-rank/teacher>

<sup>85</sup> <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/neas-staff-union-is-on-strike-halting-neas-biggest-annual-gathering/2024/07>

<sup>86</sup> <https://truthout.org/articles/why-did-the-national-education-association-just-lock-out-its-own-staffers/>

<sup>87</sup> <https://truthout.org/articles/i-work-for-the-uss-largest-union-why-would-it-hold-my-health-care-hostage/>

## The Impact on Students

The AFT's record under President Randi Weingarten offers an equally instructive case study in how union leadership can prioritize institutional power over member and student welfare. In July 2020, as the Trump administration urged schools to reopen for fall instruction, Weingarten characterized the plan as "reckless," "callous," and "cruel," declaring that if districts did not meet the AFT's demands for expanded safety protocols, including mask mandates, six-foot social distancing requirements that exceeded the CDC's own three-foot recommendation, and comprehensive ventilation upgrades, then "nothing is off the table," including "safety strikes."<sup>88,89</sup>

The union's posture hardened through the fall and winter of 2020, even as accumulating evidence from European nations including Sweden, Germany, and the Netherlands demonstrated that schools could reopen without becoming major vectors of transmission, and even as epidemiologists within the United States increasingly argued that the risks of prolonged closure (e.g., academic regression and social isolation) far outweighed the risks of reopening with reasonable precautions.

By early 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was preparing guidance to facilitate reopening. Internal emails later released by the House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic showed that the AFT had access to draft CDC guidance prior to its public release and proposed specific language, including provisions that could trigger renewed school closures.<sup>90</sup> Subsequent empirical research has reinforced the connection between union strength and reopening decisions, finding that districts with stronger teachers' unions were significantly less likely to resume in-person instruction, even after controlling for COVID rates and local conditions.<sup>91</sup>

The consequences were significant: the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) recorded the largest declines in math and reading scores in its history, with math scores falling by the largest margin ever and reading scores dropping to levels not seen since the early 1990s.<sup>92,93</sup> Weingarten later acknowledged before Congress that "there were things that we really didn't get right," including the impact of prolonged closures on students.<sup>94</sup> However, the AFT's earlier advocacy, including opposition to reopening timelines and involvement in shaping federal guidance, remains central to ongoing debates about the role of unions in education policy during the pandemic.

To further evaluate whether teachers' unions prioritize the interests of students, it is necessary to examine their institutional partnerships. A review of the NEA's national website reveals a

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<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jul/17/trump-teachers-reopening-schools-coronavirus-randi-weingarten#:~:text=E2%80%9CIt's%20as%20if%20Trump%20and,expected%20to%20fill%20to%20capacity>.

<sup>89</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/28/aft-strikes-school-reopening-384133>

<sup>90</sup>

<https://oversight.house.gov/release/american-federation-of-teachers-president-randi-weingarten-testifies-to-uncommon-influence-over-cdc-school-reopening-guidance/>

<sup>91</sup> <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED672114.pdf>

<sup>92</sup> <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/highlights/ltr/2023/>

<sup>93</sup> <https://abc7.com/post/national-center-for-education-statistics-2023-nation-report-card-math-reading/13413147/>

<sup>94</sup> <https://www.the74million.org/article/house-schools-hearing-pandemic-closures-randi-weingarten/>

partnerships page that outlines general criteria for selecting partner organizations, including alignment with the union’s resolutions, legislative program, and policy positions, but provides little detail about the full scope of those relationships.<sup>95</sup> While the page highlights select partners in areas such as immigration advocacy, LGBTQ education, and educator accreditation, it omits a comprehensive accounting of the many organizations that receive substantial union funding through LM-2 Schedule 17 disclosures. This selective transparency stands in tension with the stated purpose of a labor organization that collects dues from millions of public employees, who must navigate federal filings rather than their own union’s website to understand where their money goes.

Nonetheless, from the handful of partnerships the NEA does openly promote is one categorized under “partnerships to advance social justice” called the Advancement Project.<sup>96</sup> The Advancement Project, which describes itself as an organization dedicated to “supporting grassroots power” to “fulfill America’s promise of a caring, inclusive, and just democracy” identifies its core issue areas as policing and decriminalization, voting rights, and “education justice.”<sup>97,98</sup> The organization’s 2024 annual report highlights as a historic milestone its national Police Free Schools campaign, launched in 2018, through which it claims to have won the complete removal of police from schools in four districts and to have defunded school police budgets by nearly \$50 million in additional districts between 2020 and 2021.<sup>99</sup>

The Advancement Project’s operational ethos is further illuminated by its own hiring practices: a recent job posting for its next executive director describes the ideal candidate as someone who “shows a dedicated history in radical, leftist, and abolitionist movement spaces.”<sup>100</sup> The NEA is listed alongside the Southern Poverty Law Center as a sponsor of the Advancement Project’s 25th anniversary celebration, and the AFL-CIO is included as a supporter.<sup>101</sup> According to InfluenceWatch, the Advancement Project has received funding from the Soros-backed Open Society Foundation and is listed as one of the Democracy Alliance’s approved recipients for donations.<sup>102</sup>

The NEA has, at various points, issued public statements condemning school shootings, calling for stronger safety measures, and expressing concern for children’s physical welfare in schools. Yet the union simultaneously promotes and financially supports an organization whose stated mission is to eliminate the very security infrastructure – school resource officers, campus police, and law enforcement partnerships – that constitutes the primary armed response capability in the event of an active shooter or other violent emergency on school grounds. In essence, the NEA publicly mourns school violence while funding campaigns to ensure that no trained law enforcement personnel are present to prevent or respond to it.

The Advancement Project reflects a broader pattern in which unions do not simply fund or partner with external organizations, but also elevate and legitimize specific ideological

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<sup>95</sup> <https://www.nea.org/about-nea/partnerships>

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> <https://advancementproject.org/about-us/>

<sup>98</sup> <https://advancementproject.org/our-work/>

<sup>99</sup> <https://advancementproject.org/2024-annual-report/>

<sup>100</sup> <https://advancementproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Executive-Director-Announcement.pdf>

<sup>101</sup> <https://advancementproject.org/25th-anniversary/>

<sup>102</sup> <https://www.influencewatch.org/non-profit/advancement-project/>

frameworks within the education system itself. Through both formal partnerships and informal endorsements, unions help shape the materials, narratives, and priorities that enter the classroom.

This dynamic is particularly evident in the NEA and AFT's relationship with organizations that create and distribute curricular materials and teacher resources grounded in explicitly ideological interpretations of history, politics, and social issues. While these organizations may operate independently, their work is frequently promoted, amplified, or integrated into union-supported programming, professional development, and advocacy efforts. In FY2023, the NEA's LM-2 attributed over \$8,000 to Rethinking Schools for the purpose of "membership recruiting and organizing."<sup>103</sup> This dynamic allows the unions to not only engage directly in politics but also support the diffusion of specific ideological perspectives into K-12 instruction.

Two of the most prominent recipients in this category appear in the NEA's FY2025 LM-2 filing under Schedule 17, each receiving \$40,000 classified as a "non-profit" grant: Rethinking Schools, Ltd. and Teaching for Change.<sup>104</sup> These organizations are jointly responsible for the Zinn Education Project, a widely distributed curriculum development and training initiative named for historian Howard Zinn. By its own account, the project has provided materials to more than 176,000 educators and facilitated hundreds of thousands of lesson plan downloads for K-12 classrooms.<sup>105</sup>

The content these organizations produce for children is where the concern becomes acute. Rethinking Schools describes itself openly as an "advocacy organization" rather than an educational one, a distinction its own materials make explicit.<sup>106</sup> Its published curriculum includes lesson plans titled the likes of "What Is Terrorism? Who Are the Terrorists?" – a resource framing that invites K-12 students to question whether state actors, including the U.S. and Israel, should be characterized as terrorist organizations.<sup>107</sup> The framing is not an exercise in critical thinking, but an advocacy position dressed in classroom language and designed for distribution to children who lack the context to evaluate its premises.

The Zinn Education Project itself, through its collaboration with both Rethinking Schools and Teaching for Change, has produced and distributed materials on Palestine that the CAMERA Education Institute described as seeking to "indoctrinate students into believing that America is fundamentally evil" and depicting Israel as "an illegitimate and genocidal state."<sup>108</sup> In January 2025, the Zinn Education Project circulated a petition defending two activist teachers who had used a speaking opportunity at a national education conference to mischaracterize the roots of Zionism and characterize Israel's actions as genocide – remarks that major American Jewish organizations condemned and that the conference host subsequently rebuked as divisive and

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<sup>103</sup> <https://olmsapps.dol.gov/query/orgReport.do?rptId=875354&rptForm=LM2Form>

<sup>104</sup> <https://olmsapps.dol.gov/query/orgReport.do?rptId=925350&rptForm=LM2Form>

<sup>105</sup> <https://www.foxnews.com/us/public-school-districts-coast-coast-adopting-radical-curriculum-from-org-named-60s-radical>

<sup>106</sup> <https://rethinkingschools.org/about-rethinking-schools/>

<sup>107</sup> <https://rethinkingschools.org/special-collections/what-is-terrorism-who-are-the-terrorists/>

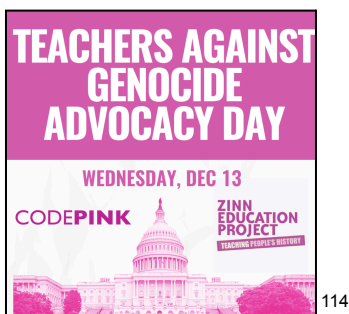
<sup>108</sup>

<https://www.camera-edu.org/article/zinn-education-project-rewriting-history-to-breed-resentment-of-america-and-hostility-toward-israel/#:~:text=Conclusion,that%20white%20people%20are%20oppressors.>

antisemitic.<sup>109</sup> The Zinn Education Project defended the teachers, insisting their framing not be characterized as antisemitic.<sup>110</sup>

The relationship between these organizations and the unions extends well beyond financial support. The NEA and the AFT have both served as named co-sponsors of the Zinn Education Project’s “Teach Truth Day of Action,” a coordinated national campaign involving educator training, public events, and classroom engagement.<sup>111</sup> NEA President Becky Pringle delivered opening remarks at a 2025 event hosted by the project, and the union has actively promoted participation among its members through official communications channels.<sup>112</sup>

Perhaps more concerning is the broader activist network in which the Zinn Education Project operates, including organizations connected through overlapping partnerships, campaigns, personnel, and funding relationships. Among the most prominent is CODEPINK, the activist organization co-founded by Jodie Evans, wife of businessman Neville Roy Singham. Singham, who has financially supported CODEPINK, reportedly has ties with the Chinese Communist Party that has sparked a federal investigation.<sup>113</sup>



**Figure 19.** An event titled “Teachers Against Genocide Advocacy Day” co-hosted by CODEPINK and the Zinn Education Project.

CODEPINK’s other co-founder, Medea Benjamin, a longtime activist who has participated in recent delegations to Cuba and previously traveled to Iran, has also publicly supported and promoted both the Zinn Education Project and Rethinking Schools. At one such event, she appeared alongside Mahmoud Khalil, a prominent figure in the 2024 pro-Palestinian encampment at Columbia University, holding a Rethinking Schools publication.

<sup>109</sup> <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/call-on-nais/#:~:text=January%2025%2C%202025,credibly%2Dcited%20critiques%20as%20antisemitic.>

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> <https://www.foxnews.com/us/public-school-districts-coast-coast-adopting-radical-curriculum-from-org-named-60s-radical>

<sup>112</sup> <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/teach-truth-day-of-action-2025-event-highlights/>

<sup>113</sup> <https://waysandmeans.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/9.4.25-The-Peoples-Forum-Letter.pdf>

<sup>114</sup> <https://www.codepink.org/teachersagainstgenocidedec13>



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**Figure 20.** CODEPINK co-founder Medea Benjamin and Columbia University pro-Palestinian activist Mahmoud Khalil promoting *Rethinking Schools*.

Union involvement has also extended into training activities. External documentation indicates that union representatives participated in webinars designed to prepare educators for the Day of Action, where participants discussed organizing strategies, messaging frameworks, and political objectives. AFT’s Share My Lesson site provides free-to-use Zinn Education Project materials.<sup>116</sup> These activities reflect a level of coordination that goes beyond a traditional grantor-grantee relationship, reinforcing concerns that the unions’ national reach, combined with their ties to explicitly ideological organizations, is helping to build a pipeline through which those viewpoints are introduced and normalized among students.



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**Figure 21.** Organizational overlap between Randi Weingarten, the AFT, and AFT’s local Chicago affiliate with radical groups including *Rethinking Schools*, *Party for Socialism and Liberation*, *ANSWER Coalition*, and *Students for Justice in Palestine*, among others.

## Conclusion

This report does not suggest that something may have gone wrong with America’s largest teachers’ organizations. It documents that it has.

<sup>115</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/p/DQM\\_HiGj-zE/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link&igsh=NTc4MTIwNjOzYO==](https://www.instagram.com/p/DQM_HiGj-zE/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=NTc4MTIwNjOzYO==)  
<sup>116</sup> <https://sharemylesson.com/partner/zinn-education-project#tabs-component>  
<sup>117</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/p/DATlrmcPud1/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFjZA==](https://www.instagram.com/p/DATlrmcPud1/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFjZA==)  
<sup>118</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/p/DVlhtKilG\\_9/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFjZA==](https://www.instagram.com/p/DVlhtKilG_9/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFjZA==)  
<sup>119</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/p/DTDzSeXDWvc/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFjZA==](https://www.instagram.com/p/DTDzSeXDWvc/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFjZA==)

The NEA and AFT have come to operate as institutions whose financial activity is increasingly difficult to reconcile with their stated representational purpose. They collect dues from millions of educators, route substantial portions of those dues through networks their own executives have led or continue to lead, misclassify expenditures across federal filings, and have produced little measurable improvement in the compensation, working conditions, or professional standing of the educators on whose behalf those dues are collected.

Financial conflicts documented throughout this report are not isolated technical discrepancies. This report assesses that union executives simultaneously directing and receiving member funds raises serious fiduciary concerns, while repeated classification inconsistencies across federal filings are consistent with intentional misreporting rather than routine accounting error. A 99 percent collapse in reported political compensation with no comparable reduction in overall political spending is difficult to reconcile as a normal reporting fluctuation. Collectively, these patterns, repeated across multiple years and organizations, suggest reporting structures that obscure the functional character of political expenditures rather than clearly disclose them.

Broader implications extend beyond financial reporting alone. The NEA remains the only labor union ever chartered by Congress, with a stated mandate to “elevate the character of the teaching profession” and “promote the cause of education in the United States.” Yet the patterns documented here suggest organizations increasingly oriented around political advocacy, institutional influence, and ideological activism rather than the material interests of educators or the educational outcomes of students. As political priorities consume greater shares of union resources and institutional attention, the effects increasingly extend beyond union governance and into the classroom environment itself. Ideological and advocacy infrastructure operating within parts of K-12 education is financed in significant part through dues paid by teachers who often have limited visibility into how those funds are ultimately used.

Ultimately, the central question raised by this report is not whether teachers unions participate in politics, but whether existing oversight and disclosure mechanisms provide sufficient accountability for organizations operating at this scale and level of institutional influence. The record presented here raises substantial questions about whether current reporting frameworks allow union members, regulators, and the public to meaningfully evaluate how educator dues are collected, classified, routed, and ultimately deployed.