

NSO Contact

National Staff Organization

March 1, 2018

ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE READY?

#4: THE NEA UNISERV PROGRAM (STILL) MATTERS

NEA's UniServ Program, created in 1970, was designed to "help establish and maintain effective local affiliates by making professional staff available to provide direct support and assistance to local affiliates and the active members of such affiliates on an on-going basis." (-2008 *Guidelines for National Education Association UniServ Program*)

Recent NEA and state EA actions, in conjunction with the 2014 "Report of the NEA UniServ Core Competencies Task Force" and the patchwork introduction of NEA360, indicate a desire to dilute and/or undermine the effectiveness of the UniServ Program. Evidence for this includes:

- Fundamentally reorienting the work of UniServ staff from one of representative and legal advocate to one of organizer* (-*Task Force Preamble*)
- Replacing the annual UniServ Academy training with regional and/or virtual training modules and Webinars (-*Task Force Recommendations*)
- Hiring managers whose experience & background lie solely in the so-called "organizing model"*
- State EA management teams looking to require NEA360 data-entry and "chat room participation" quotas for staff

*Let's be VERY clear. NSO is **absolutely not** denying that organizing is a critically important element of our work. However, all too often, what NEA and state EA managements call organizing is actually simply membership sign-up. It isn't **building actual power** or even recruiting members **to** something **for** something. Their push, seemingly drawn from the failed SEIU model, also ignores the reality that maintaining the strength of the organization **also requires quality advocacy and service**. Without such quality advocacy and service, membership drops occur just as fast as you're signing up new members. NSO strongly advocates for a quality UniServ program focused on **both advocacy and real organizing** for power and capacity.



Why would NEA want to weaken or eliminate the UniServ Program?

A significant portion of NEA dues (\$51.07/teacher (\$30.84/ESP) or 27.91%) currently supports the UniServ Program. As NEA membership declines and continues to restructure, the result is a growing desire to divert UniServ dollars elsewhere in the budget. For those states receiving large chunks of their budget from NEA, any reduction in funding from NEA (due to *Janus* and other threats) is potentially disastrous. NSO contends that the solution *isn't* to dismantle the very program that has made us so successful. "Churn and burn" staffing based on

low-paid, expendable people is no way to maintain and grow our movement. A look at other unions who employ this model proves this to be true.

Why does the UniServ Program (still) matter?

- The UniServ Program preserves and promotes the core values of unions.
- The UniServ Program delivers NEA programs and implements common agendas for local and state affiliates.
- The UniServ Program builds relationships, creates loyalty, and retains members.
- The UniServ Program is responsive to local and state needs on a long-term basis, rather than being merely project-based.

As threats to the UniServ Program grow, whether from poorly-conceived NEA programs or from state EA executive management teams, we must advocate loudly and strongly in our state affiliates for a UniServ Program that provides a balanced service/real-organizing model that creates and strengthens loyalty to NEA and its state affiliates among EA members and locals. This includes challenging and fighting back against the misguided notion that the only real response to budgetary pressures is to cut staff in a vain attempt to “cut our way to prosperity.” As we said in the last issue, the only effective way to successfully combat these counterproductive ideas is to **organize ourselves!**

“The best way to make your job harder is to put off doing it.”—Anonymous

