

Teachers United
Membership Information Sheet No. 3
Frequently Expressed Concerns

1. *NEA/CTA and my local make contributions to political candidates with my dues money. This is not right and I object.*

There are very strict laws which prohibit political contributions being made with members dues. It is illegal to do what many of our critics accuse us of doing. NEA, CTA and your local comply entirely with these laws.

All political contributions made by members are made voluntarily through our political action committees (PAC's.) The funds collected are kept in a separate account and are reported to the required state and federal agencies. It is simply untrue to say, as many of our critics maintain, that your dues money is used for political campaigns without your permission.

2. *The NEA, CTA and my local Association only contribute PAC money to Democratic party candidates.*

Many studies and surveys have shown that our membership is bi-partisan. Many proud Republicans are public school teachers. The decision which candidates should receive financial support is made democratically by members. The decision on who receives our support is based on the position of candidates on issues of concern to our members. NEA and CTA are very democratic organizations, but that does not mean that only Democrats are supported. In fact, where a Republican elected official or candidate is strong on our issues, NEA and CTA has demonstrated that they are, in fact, eager to support Republicans.

3. *I support the efforts of my local to support me in bargaining and in disputes with my employer, but I do not agree with the positions taken by the NEA and CTA on a number of issues important to me.*

The positions taken by NEA and CTA on important political and educational issues are determined by elected representatives who are either members of CTA's State Council (which meets four times a year to determine policy) or members who attend NEA's annual Representative Assembly (RA) which determines our national policy. Over 10,000 delegates meet each year to debate and approve (or reject) proposals made by fellow members. In every case, members determine our policy. Because this is true, we can only encourage members who disagree with CTA or NEA policy to become actively involved and produce the change you desire.

4. *I think that NEA and CTA are too concerned about the narrow interests of teachers and not concerned at all about the welfare of students.*

It could be argued that our first priority is representing the interests of our members. Few could argue with the logic of that statement. But it would be inaccurate to suggest that NEA, CTA or your local Association are unconcerned with the welfare of students.

NEA and CTA spend a great deal of member's money lobbying in Washington and Sacramento to increase funding for public education. NEA and CTA are leading the effort to support so-called "low performing schools" to improve student achievement. NEA has invested a great deal of political capital to extend health care benefits to uninsured children. NEA and CTA continue to support efforts to make schools safe for children, to make sure children are provided the material they need to succeed in school and to

increase children's access to the social services necessary to overcome the challenges that children living in poverty face every day, in and out of school.

It is not an exaggeration to say that if NEA and CTA suddenly ended its focus on children and concentrated exclusively on the interests of members, children would lose one of their most effective advocates.

5. Of all the positions taken by CTA and NEA, the one I find most personally offensive is their position on abortion. I consider myself "pro-life" and that puts me at odds with my own union.

It is true that NEA and CTA's is an organization that is "pro-choice." That means exactly what it says. Females, not the government, should make the important choices that relate to pregnancy. It is unlikely that the position will change and, therefore, will likely remain an issue for some of our members.

The position is based on a practice in the past of requiring pregnant teachers to resign during their pregnancy. Some school districts used to fire unmarried teachers who became pregnant. Our position is that the marital status or the fact that a woman is expecting a child should not determine whether she keeps her job. That is why we are pro-choice. Whether a member agrees or disagrees with this position, the reason for the position needs to be clearly understood.

6. I don't understand why CTA and NEA take positions on issues that have nothing to do with education.

It is probably true that, over the years, NEA and CTA have taken unpopular positions on controversial issues. If you take a stand on enough issues, a person or group is bound to make a mistake from time to time. However, it is also true that there are very few issues that don't impact either teachers or their students. In addition to being members, we are parents, workers, community members and, in the broadest sense, human beings. Therefore, it is consistent with our role as community leaders to take positions on issues that could be considered outside the scope of teaching. But, as was said earlier, these positions are determined by members who vote either yes or no on these issues.

7. I object to the practice of defending bad teachers. We all know that there are some people who should never be allowed near children but the NEA and CTA defend and protect them anyway, just because they pay dues. That's wrong!

First, it should be said that CTA and NEA protect and defend all teachers, whether they are members or not. Due process rights are the right of every permanent teacher. The law requires that every teacher has the right of "fair representation." You don't buy that with your dues money. There are rules set down by the courts and by the Education Code that dictate "the rules of the game."

Much like lawyers, it is not our job to decide if a particular is right or wrong, or even if they are good or bad teachers. Evaluating performance is the job the school district that employs them. If there are teachers who "should not be near children," then it is the job of the school district to terminate their employment. It is the job of the union to make sure they follow the rules when they do it.

8. I don't get a say in how my dues money is spent. It's taken from me, but I can't control how it's used. That's not fair.

As is the case with every other aspect of the Association, members decide how the money is spent. Each year, NEA, CTA, Teachers United and your individual local create an annual budget. The budget is put together by elected leaders and it is approved by elected leaders. If there was in item in the budget that was unpopular or controversial, any member has a right to express their view and influence the votes of those who must approve the budget. It is simply inaccurate to say that members have no say in how their dues are spent.

9. I'm a good teacher and don't need the services provided by the Union. If I was in trouble, my principal would help me out or I can take care of myself.

Most CTA, NEA and local Association members are excellent teachers. But history has shown that excellent teachers often find themselves at odds with their employers. The law does not permit individual teachers from bargaining their own contracts. And there are often times in the careers of every teacher when they need the support and advice of a professional organization. It is not too much to say that a union is a little like an insurance policy-you may not need it until something bad happens. Like the police like to say, the union exists to "protect and serve" it's members. We would all like to think that we are strong enough to take on any challenge. But a union made up of members who support each other provides real strength to men and women who perform one of the most difficult and challenging jobs imaginable. There are very few people who could do the job you perform day after day and year after year. People who have a job as important as teaching deserve nothing less than the kind of protection offered by a strong union.