

Teachers Unions In Five States Spent More Than \$100 Per Teacher On Political Campaigns

New Education Next analysis finds two national teachers unions spent \$71.7 million on political campaigns in 2007-08 and millions more on policy research to support their agendas

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Cambridge, MA — A first-ever national analysis of state spending per teacher on political advocacy by the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) released today found that the national teachers unions and their state affiliates spent more than \$100 per teacher in five states, with Oregon at the top of the list at \$360 per teacher during the 2007-08 election cycle. The report, authored by Mike Antonucci, director of the Education Intelligence Agency, and available on the web at www.educationnext.org, also found that political spending from teachers union dues topped \$1 million during the 2007-08 period in 14 states, with California on top at \$12.6 million.

In “[The Long Reach of Teachers Unions: Using money to win friends and influence policy](#),” featured in the Fall 2010 edition of the *Education Next* journal, Antonucci also reveals that teachers unions have become a force in matters beyond education policy, including weighing in on domestic policy issues such as taxation, healthcare, gay marriage and redistricting.

“The unions’ influence over education policy is well known, but their influence over government is not. Teachers unions are by far the largest political contributors,” said Antonucci. “For the first time, we have put dollar figures on what has always been known anecdotally: The unions exert a great deal of influence on domestic policy, due to the sheer amount of money they spend on political advocacy, and at times pushing political agendas that are at odds with those of their members.”

Antonucci reports that with a 2010 budget of \$355.8 million for the NEA and \$165 million for the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the unions have become political kingmakers, applying their influence directly through lobbying and election campaigns, but also indirectly through a network of “front groups”—friendly organizations to which they give substantial contributions. The NEA in particular is a driving force supporting attempts to raise state taxes or defeating tax cut or limitation measures.

Although the NEA has a politically diverse membership, it spends its money almost exclusively in support of liberal causes. According to an NEA survey, 36 percent of respondents were “not at all” involved with the union at any level.

Antonucci's analysis is based on a national database of officially reported campaign spending created jointly by the Center for Responsive Politics and the National Institute on Money in State Politics. The database reveals that the NEA, which represents about 2.3 million K-12 public school teachers and about one million education support workers, spent \$56.3 million during the 2007-08 election cycle, making it the largest campaign spender in the nation. The American Federation of Teachers ranked 25th in campaign spending with almost \$12 million.

The five states in which the two unions spent more than \$100 per teacher were Oregon, Colorado (\$173.98), Montana (\$141.74), Utah (\$140.60) and South Dakota (\$132.15)—states in which there were hotly-contested political campaigns during the 2007-08 election cycle. Massachusetts came in sixth with \$81.24 per teacher, followed by North Dakota (\$68.17), California (\$41.21), Washington (\$40.75) and Minnesota (\$40.04). The [full chart available here](#) shows the total expenditures by the NEA and AFT in each state as well as what those expenditures translate into per teacher. The analysis uses the 2009 U.S. Digest of Education Statistics for the total number of K-12 teachers in each state, though the NEA and AFT represent non-teacher members as well.

Antonucci follows the money and the impact it has on policy. For example, in South Dakota, the money committed by the NEA to defeat an initiative went a long way in such a small media market. When a 2008 initiative, Measure 10, which would have banned the use of tax money for campaigns or lobbying and restricted political contributions by government contractors was defeated, its committee chair Jim Anderson noted, "We'll be able to prepare accordingly next time, knowing that the real opposition to ethics reform in South Dakota is NEA union officials back east."

About Education Next

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