

## NEA's GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE: A SHORT HISTORY

### OVERVIEW

- NEA's governance structure has been constantly evolving.
- NEA's governing bodies – and their processes and procedures – were established and then modified to reflect the realities of their times. We began as a relatively small organization – at least in relation to our current size. We didn't hit 10,000 members until we had been around for 60 years. Travel was burdensome and costly. The NEA predates the completion of the first transcontinental railroad by a decade and it would be another forty-five years before the very first commercial air flight was instituted. Communications were slow. Forget the idea that the Internet was yet to be “invented;” we had been around for 88 years before the ball-point pen was ever marketed. Our governance bodies, their size and scope, how they did their work, how often they met, how they communicated, were all reflective of the realities of their day.
- There is a tendency to think that our current NEA structure has always been with us. But that is far from the case. We are a very different organization than we were at our founding, than we were at our 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, as we became a labor union, or even than we were just a few short years ago.
- There was a time when any member who showed up at an NEA Annual Meeting could speak and vote; when the Board of Directors – made up almost exclusively of superintendents and college presidents -- was elected by the Representative Assembly, when we had a Board of Trustees that hired the Executive Director and controlled the permanent fund; when one of the most important committees of our annual meeting was the Committee on Necrology, when we had positions like that of “Junior Past President” or when there was a separate NEA Secretary and an NEA Treasurer and there were 12 NEA Vice Presidents.
- Obviously, much has changed. And that change has most often been deliberate. In fact, almost once a decade, NEA has taken a good look at itself to assess whether its structures and services are meeting the needs of the organization, its members, and the students they serve.
- Just look back over the past 40 years.
  - In 1971-72, NEA held a **Constitutional Convention** (“ConCon”) in Fort Collins, Colorado, to consider a major – in fact, a complete – restructuring of the NEA.
  - After the failure of ConCon to receive the requisite votes for ratification, a special **Committee of 12** was directed to relook at the fundamental issues addressed by ConCon. This Committee put together an amended plan which eventually became NEA's new Constitution in 1973 and serves as the basic framework for NEA's approach to membership, representation, governance, and affiliate relations.
  - In April of 1983, the NEA Board of Directors created a **Committee on Structure and Services Review**, chaired by NEA President Mary Futrell, to assess challenges facing the evolving NEA and recommend improvements in governance, programs, and priorities.
  - In December of 1989, the NEA Executive Committee established a **Special Committee on Organizational Streamlining** to again examine the structure and operations of NEA and, where appropriate, to make recommendations for change. Its 1991 report and subsequent action on its recommendations by the 1992 and 1993 Representative

Assemblies completely revamped a wide range of membership, governance, and servicing practices, including a total restructuring the NEA committee system and the addition of the concept of trusteeship to NEA's governing documents.

- The 2002 Representative Assembly established a **Special Committee on the Establishment of Policy** to clarify and codify the respective authority of and relationships among the various organizational bodies responsible for developing, adopting, monitoring and/or amending NEA policies.
  - Perhaps the best indication of how fluid NEA's governance structure has been lies in the actions of the Representative Assembly itself: **Since the ratification and implementation of the new NEA Constitution in 1973-74, the NEA Constitution and Bylaws have been amended 169 times.**
- No element in NEA's structure has gone unchanged. The following is to provide just a brief overview of some the fundamental changes that have affected the structure and operations of NEA governance, particularly as they relate to the NEA Representative Assembly, the NEA Board of Directors, the NEA Committee system, and the NEA Executive Committee.

#### **THE NEA REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY**

- From NEA's inception until 1921, the Association was officially governed by the members who showed up at the Annual Meeting. This town-meeting type of direct democracy had strong adherents, many of whom believed it was the purest form of democratic decision-making. Any member could come and have his or her voice heard.
- And many did. As the twentieth century unfolded, progressives seeking a voice for teachers in an Association that was then dominated by superintendents and state executive secretaries would organize local teachers to attend the convention in large numbers to push NEA to support improved pay and working conditions for classroom educators and to gain equal rights for women within the NEA. These efforts were gaining ground. In response, the NEA leadership scheduled its 1920 meeting in Salt Lake City – a location that would be difficult for teachers from the industrial heartland to reach. This meeting changed the rules for future annual conventions. And so the Representative Assembly was created, a body was to be made up of delegations from the state associations.
- Clearly, there were those who believed that the new structure would be more democratic, representative and efficient than the town-meeting approach. Others saw it differently: a strategy to limit the voice and influence of dissidents, women, and rank-and-file teachers and solidifying power in the hands of administrators who controlled their state delegations.
- We think of the RA as adding voices into decision-making, but at the beginning, the opposite was often true. One of the challenges of the town meeting approach was that the convention could be very large, often numbering thousands of individuals. As far back as 1884, the convention drew 5,000 members. The first RA had just 553 delegates.
- Each state association was entitled to elect one delegate and one alternate to the RA for each 100 of its active NEA members up to 500 hundred members and one delegate and one alternate for each 500 members after that. Local affiliates were entitled to elect one delegate and one alternate for each 100 of its active NEA members. Keep in mind that in 1920, NEA had a total membership of 52,850.

- That basic formula stayed in place until 1973.
- The new NEA Constitution allocated delegate credentials to state affiliates on the basis of 1 delegate for every 1,000 active members and allocated delegate credentials on the basis of 1 delegate for every 150 active Association members. It also changed the process for choosing these delegates from states and locals “selecting” them from among their membership to specific election process mandating one-person--one-vote.

Delegate Attendance:

<u>Year</u>	<u># of Delegates</u>
1921	553
1931	1,414
1941	1,561
1951	2,977
1961	6,671
1971	6,650
1981	7,165
1991	8,526
2001	9,061
2011	8,231

- It should be noted that there is a significant difference between the number of delegates allocated, the number actually elected and the number of delegates who do, in fact, attend the RA.
- While we pride ourselves on the size of the RA, actual attendance falls far short of the number allocated. For 2012, there were 17,275 delegate positions allotted, a total of 8,598 delegates elected, and 7,897 delegates who actually attended the RA. What this means is that less than 46% percent of the delegate slots were actually filled. Phrased differently, there were 8,677 delegate positions for which no one ran!

**THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

- In the early years of the Association, the NEA Board of Directors consisted of the officers of the Association and a representative from each of the state affiliates. As the union (that’s the United States...not NEA) grew and NEA’s organizational structure developed, so too did the Board of Directors.

- For example, in 1887, the Board was made up of the NEA President, 12 Vice Presidents, the NEA Secretary, the NEA Treasurer, one director from each state or territory, and each of the presiding officers of the NEA Departments. That totaled 51 Board members
- With the adoption of the Articles of Incorporation in 1907, the composition of the Board changed to the NEA President, the First Vice President, the Secretary, the Treasurer, the Chair of NEA Board of Trustees, one member from each state, and the US Commissioner of Education. All former NEA Presidents and all future NEA Presidents after terms expired were made Board members for life. In 1907 this amounted to a total of 85 people. With one year terms, the fastest growing segment of the Board was Past NEA Presidents!
- In 1920, with the creation of the NEA Representative Assembly, election of the Board moved from the states and territories to the RA itself. The RA elected all state directors, virtually all of whom were state superintendents of schools or commissioners of education, district superintendents, or college presidents.
- In 1940, a second director was added for any state with more than 20,000. Only one state qualified: California
- In 1953, a third director was added for any state with more than 40,000 members.
- In 1957, the Board allocation changed to one director for every 20,000 members.
- In 1958, election to the Board of Directors moved from being by the Representative Assembly to being held under the rules set by the RA.
- By 1971, the Board had grown to 98 members.
- By 1973 it was 101, thirty-five of whom were administrators.
- ConCon recommended a smaller board with non-voting status for each of the state presidents. However, the ConCon recommended constitution was never ratified. A year later, a new compromise Constitution was forged which – rather than shrinking the size of the Board – actually added proportional representation for ESPs, classroom teachers in higher education, administrators and ethnic minorities.
- In 1985, the Board augmented this by creating four non-voting ethnic minority positions
- By 1991 the size of the Board had reached 154 plus five honorary and nonvoting members. The NEA Committee on Streamlining found this size “troublesome from both an operational and financial point of view” and recommended a cap of 150 state directors. The NEA Constitution was amended putting such a cap in place and the NEA Board of Directors was given the responsibility of adopting rules to implement this limit. Those rules were adopted in 2010.
- Today there are 147 state directors, 13 at-large directors, three student directors, six directors representing retirees, the three NEA Executive Officers, the six other members of the NEA Executive Committee, plus the four non-voting ethnic minority representatives, and one honorary member (183 in total).

### **NEA COMMITTEES**

- In the early years of the Association, with a wide and dispersed membership, burdensome travel, limited means of communication, and few if any staff, committees were the principal means by which Association work was conducted.

- At the first meeting after the Association was founded, three committees were established.
- At later meetings committees were appointed to address virtually every fundamental education issue of the day: the development of a high school curriculum, the organization of school systems, teacher training and professional development, coordination of studies in primary and grammar schools, rural education, teacher salaries and benefits, tenure, pensions, library administration, college entrance requirements, the establishment of a national university, health problems in education, race relations.
- By the early 1920s, there were 25 ongoing committees -- including committees on Classroom Teachers' Problems, Behavior Problem Children, Child Labor, Co-Inclusive Membership, Community Relations, Educational Nomenclature, Ethics, International Relationships, Research, School Museums, Visual Education, even a Committee on Homes for Retired Teachers.
- Concern about the proliferation of these bodies led to another committee! A Committee on Committees was established in 1925. It recommended abolishing a dozen committees, restraint in establishing new ones, and time limits on those that were established. Yet by 1935, just 10 years after this report, the number of committees was greater than ever.
- Moreover, the scope of NEA's committees broadened as well. By the mid-1940s not only were there new Standing Committees on Academic Freedom, Citizenship, Credit Unions, and School Finance, NEA expanded their breadth to include joint committees with the American Legion, the American Library Association, the American Medical Association, the American Teachers Association, and the National PTA. Some committees like the convention committees on Credentials, Elections, and Resolutions continue to this day; others like the Committee on Necrology are no longer part of the NEA structure.
- By the 1960s, there were 76 separate units in the NEA: 33 Departments, 18 divisions, and 25 committees – most were relatively autonomous, making it difficult to harness these disparate sub-units to achieve any single purpose.
- In 1971, a Special Committee on Semiautonomous Bodies was formed in order to bring greater cohesion to the Committee process. Its 1972 report recommended the creation of three new committees (Teacher Rights, Legislation, Special Services), consolidation of some, and the elimination of others. Coupled with the impact of the new Constitution, the end result was a set of 13 NEA Committees – five of which were Standing Committees of the Representative Assembly and eight were Program-related Standing Committees.
- In 1974, a Special Committee on Minority Affairs was created for a two-year period. This was later extended and additional committees were added to the mix.
- At the time the NEA Special Committee on Streamlining issued its report in May 1992, there were 29 NEA Committees, the majority of which were Special or Program-Related Standing Committees. Concerned that these committees performed overlapping and/or unnecessary functions, did not adequately reflect the changing nature of NEA's constituency groups, and perhaps most importantly were not keyed to the NEA Mission Statement and Strategic Objectives, the Streamlining Committee recommended that they be replaced with five, 13-member Strategic Objective Standing Committees, reflecting NEA's strategic goals and objectives for the 1991-92 membership year. The idea at the time was that these committees would be regularly reviewed by governance and modified or eliminated as the Strategic Objectives changed.

- Today, these Strategic Priority Committees (Employee Advocacy, Human and Civil Rights, Legislation, Membership Services and Affiliate Relationships, Professional Standards and Practice) are virtually the same as they were in the aftermath of Streamlining, as are the Committees of the Representative Assembly (Constitution, Bylaws and Rules; Elections; Resolutions; Program and Budget; Credentials) and four of the five Advisory Committees (Women’s Issues, the Ethnic Minority Affairs, Membership, and Student Members -- the NEA-Retired Advisory Council is an elective, not an appointive, body). The Committee on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identification was established in 2003-04.

## **A QUICK COMMITTEE COMPARISON OVER THE PAST 40 YEARS**

### **COMMITTEES IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO CONCON (1972)**

#### Committees Established by the Representative Assembly

- Citizenship
- Educational Travel
- International Relations
- Professional Ethics
- Educational Finance

#### Committees Established by the Board of Directors

- DuShane Emergency Fund Advisory Committee
- Higher Education Coordinating Committee
- Planning and Organizational Development
- Special Services

#### Committees Established by the Bylaws

- Planning and Budget

#### Committees to conduct the work of the Annual Meeting

- Audit
- Bylaws and Rules
- Credentials
- Elections
- Resolutions

### **COMMITTEES SUBSEQUENT TO CONCON (1976)**

#### Standing Committees of the Representative Assembly

- Constitution, Bylaws and Rules
- Program and Budget
- Resolutions
- Credentials
- Elections

#### Program-Related Standing Committees

- Affiliate Relationships
- Educational Finance
- Human Relations
- Instruction and Professional Development

- International Relations
- Legislative Matters
- Teacher Benefits
- Teacher Rights

Special Committees

- Minority Affairs

**COMMITTEES IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO STREAMLINING (1991)**

Program Related Standing Committees

- Affiliate Relationships
- Benefits
- Civil Rights
- Educational Support Personnel
- Higher Education
- Human Relations
- Instruction and Professional Development
- Legislation
- National Public Relations
- Peace and International Relations
- Women's Concerns
- Advisory Committee of Student Members

Special Committees

- Minority Affairs
- Occupational Vocational Education
- Organizational Streamlining
- Telecommunications
- Urban Education
- Health Care

Internal Committees of the Board of Directors

- Executive Officers' Compensation Review Committee
- Friend of Education Award Screening Committee
- Internal Concerns Committee
- New Business Review Committee
- Steering Committee
- UniServ Advisory Committee

Standing Committees of the Representative Assembly

- Constitution, Bylaws and Rules
- Credentials
- Program and Budget
- Resolutions
- Elections

**COMMITTEES TODAY**

Strategic Objective Committees

- Employee Advocacy
- Human and Civil Rights
- Legislation
- Membership Services and Affiliate Relationships
- Professional Standards and Practice

#### Advisory Committees

- Ethnic Minority Affairs
- Women’s Issues
- Membership
- Student Members
- Sexual Orientation and Gender Identification

#### Internal Committees of the Board of Directors

- Executive Officers’ Compensation Review Committee
- Friend of Education Award Screening Committee
- Internal Concerns Committee
- New Business Review Committee
- Steering Committee
- UniServ Advisory Committee

#### Standing Committees of the Representative Assembly

- Constitution, Bylaws and Rules
- Credentials
- Program and Budget
- Resolutions
- Elections

### **THE NEA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

- The NEA Executive Committee was not an original part of the NEA governance structure. It was pre-dated by both the NEA Board and the NEA Board of Trustees, which was responsible for the financial oversight of the Association and – until 1969 – had the full responsibility for the hiring, oversight, and compensation of the NEA executive secretary as well as control over the NEA Permanent Fund.
- The Executive Committee was first established in 1895 and was made up the NEA President, First Vice President, Treasurer, the Chair of the Board of Trustees, and one member elected by the Board.
- In 1936, the Executive Committee was enlarged to nine members – The NEA President, the Junior Past President, First Vice President, the NEA Treasurer, the Chair of the Board of Trustees, two members elected by the Board and two members elected by the RA.
- In 1947, the membership of the Executive Committee was again enlarged, this time to 11 members: NEA President, Junior Past President, the First Vice President, the Treasurer, the Chair of the Board of Trustees, two members elected by the Board of Directors, and four members elected by the RA.



- The Board of Trustees was discontinued in 1969 and the Executive Committee assumed some of its functions.
- The 1973 Constitution reduced the size of the Executive Committee to back to nine – the three Executive Officers (President, Vice President, and Secretary-Treasurer -- all of whom were to be elected by the RA) and the election of 6 additional members also elected by the Representative Assembly.
- The 1991 Streamlining Committee took a hard look at representation on the Executive Committee. It gave consideration to the possibility of restructuring the Executive Committee on the basis of geographic regions. After lengthy debate, the Committee rejected this approach. It did, however, recommend adding an ESP or high education member should the Executive Committee members elected by the regular election process not include at least one of each of these. This recommendation was not adopted by the RA.

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