

TEACHER UNIONS AND EDUCATION REFORM

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Over the past three decades or so, criticism of American teacher unions has increased. Yet, in contrast to the portrayal of self-serving unions advocating for teacher benefits at the expense of student learning, a new research review presents an evolving portrait of unions as organizations committed to strengthening the teaching profession and improving the quality of education.

The National Education Association commissioned Nina Basia and Pamela Osmond to review the role of teacher unions in education reform. The authors identify some of the most common examples of teacher-union initiated reform, including—

- Providing professional learning opportunities for teachers;
- Implementing peer assistance and review (PAR) programs (including those that combine mentoring programs for novice teachers as well as intervention programs for experienced teachers);
- Providing technical support;
- Launching media campaigns in support of public education, which has become a common practice of teacher organizations; and
- Serving as test beds for initiatives developed by teachers.

Bascia and Ormond conclude that there is still much that can be done by unions tending to their own organizational priorities, priorities that arise out of member needs; by ensuring that they are flexible, can manage a comprehensive array of programs, and are internally coherent; and by finding ways to express a different, more productive message about teaching and schooling. The following recommendations are offered—

- Teacher unions must develop and consistently articulate a coherent message about how the education system (and its parts) should work as well as necessary supports for teaching and learning.
- Teacher unions must clearly understand the costs and benefits of reform partnerships over the short and the longer term. Teacher unions must pay close attention to their memberships with respect to the variety of needs, members' access to the organization, and communications strategies.
- Teacher unions must select and create reform initiatives that further their basic message regarding supports for the educational system.
- Because internal organizational fragmentation is a serious detriment to teacher union effectiveness, it is important to develop organizational strategies that strengthen communication, the appropriate distribution of resources and access to information, and to recognize the necessity of unions' multiple roles.

For a full text copy of the paper, please see [\(link TK\)](#).