



NEA Intends to Nationalize Public Schools

As mentioned in last month's column, the former president of the National Education Association, Lily Eskleson Garcia, is being talked about as a possible contender for a nomination to serve as the Secretary of Education. The rumor continues to have life, to the point where some advocacy groups are beginning to [dig into her past](#). Even if the former union boss does not wind up in the seat now held by Betsy DeVos, under a Biden administration the NEA will have huge influence over US education policy. And if the US Senate switches to Democratic control over the next few weeks, the NEA may have huge influence over the direction of our nation.

If you are wondering what increased NEA influence might mean for public schools and our nation, the NEA has an answer to the question. In a 49-page document entitled [2020 NEA Policy Playbook for Congress and the Biden-Harris Administration](#) the NEA lays out an aggressive plan to change the public schools, and a lot of other things not directly tied to the schools. The document promotes over 140 policy prescriptions that would regulate the public schools, tie the hands of private and charter schools, and promote social and economic policies for the nation.

Every recommendation in the *Playbook* is prefaced with, "The National Education Association (NEA) calls on ***national leaders*** (emphasis added) to..." so each recommendation calls for federal action. If this expansion of the federal role in local education succeeds, there will be little education policy left for local and state elected officials to regulate. While the NEA was founded on a strong belief in state and local control of the schools, that emphasis is almost entirely gone. Clearly the NEA wants to turn our public schools into a system that is governed largely from within the Washington, DC beltway.

It is important for all involved in education to understand how leftist the NEA has become. For too long the NEA has been able to cloak themselves with the goodwill generated by the terrific work that school employees do in support of the nation's students. They have used this influence to press for many items that go well beyond support for public schools, and some would argue, do not benefit our schools or our nation.

Many CEAI members have made a choice to not support the NEA or other teacher unions. However, many strong Christians remain union members even though the Supreme Court has ruled that school employees cannot be forced to join or pay fees to unions. While there should not be one religious orthodoxy urging all Christians to support the same candidates and the same policy positions, you may want to let your friends know that if they are members of the NEA their dues do not just go toward supporting higher salaries and more funding for the public schools. NEA dues dollars also support a broad political and cultural ideology that may not be healthy for education or our nation.

You can best uncover and judge for yourself this political and cultural ideology of the NEA by reading the *Policy Playbook*. However, we have attempted to summarize it below to ten general policy directions. In an attempt to be fair, we have included items that many CEAI members do support, like increased funding for schools and reduced class sizes, but if you look over the entire package you will understand the larger point that there is also a worldview promoted by the NEA that may be problematic for many Christians.

Here are the ten major policy priorities that the NEA supports at the federal level:

- 1. Prescribe broad personnel policies that would reduce the ability of state and local governments to shape school staffing:** They would extend collective bargaining to all public employees and include the right for school employees to bargain industry-wide and bargain for class size and other staffing issues. Additionally, they would include teachers under the Fair Labor Standards Act which would give them the wage and hour protections of hourly workers. They would also increase salaries for school employees, higher education employees, and fund state retirement plans.
- 2. More than double federal funding of the public schools increasing education's share of the federal budget from 2 percent to 5 percent:** With this funding the NEA would reduce class sizes, require full day kindergarten for every five-year-old, and offer pre-kindergarten programs for every 3 and 4-year-old during the school day. They would also provide programs to feed children, fund school construction and promote community schools, magnet school programs, Head Start, and Early Head Start. It is certain that each federal program would have a variety of federal regulations tied to it, restricting the autonomy of local schools and districts.
- 3. Curb the public's growing preference for charter and private schools:** They would block the "use of federal tax dollars to subsidize PreK–12 private school education" and oppose "all charter school expansion that undermines traditional public schools" as well as block federal funding to charter schools that are not "authorized or operated by local school districts." They would require all charter schools, whether they are public or private, to "abide by the same laws and regulations applicable to traditional public schools." The NEA would also oppose programs that provide incentives for parents to save for private school tuition. Furthermore, they would discontinue the Scholarships for Opportunity and Results (SOAR) Act voucher program that currently provides "\$20 million annually to private schools in the District of Columbia."

- 4. Use identity group politics to define and control the daily interactions among students and school staff:** In some cases such efforts usurp parental authority to raise their children with the values they feel are most appropriate. Specifically, the NEA will support “developmentally appropriate gender identity and LGBTQ equity education programs.” They would “enforce and strengthen the protections granted under the Supreme Court ruling in the *Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia* case (2020), which announced that LGBTQ employees—including all LGBTQ educators—are protected under federal law from discrimination at work based on sexual orientation or gender identity.” They would use federal resources to provide training for educators in “restorative justice practices and trauma-informed practices,” and support a host of women’s rights programs including the Equal Rights Amendment, the Family Medical Leave Act, and “Title IX’s protections against gender discrimination in educational institutions.” Additionally, they would reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act, and as staff return from the COVID crises, the NEA would “prioritize racial, social, and economic justice in developing guidance and providing fiscal support for states, local public-school districts, and institutions of higher education (IHEs).”
- 5. Prescribe assessment systems to be used at the local level:** Such programs would promote the use of multiple assessments including project and performance assessments, reduce the use of standardized assessments, and oppose the use of any federal mandated standardized tests for the “determination of a student’s future or an educator’s evaluation or as an indicator of school success.”
- 6. Prescribe federal tax policy:** Given the power to do this the NEA will repeal the tax cuts instituted by the Trump administration “and replace them with a progressive tax system.” They would also repeal the “cap on state and local tax deductions” that were part of the Trump tax cuts, increase estate taxes, and work to close tax loopholes that benefit corporations and high-income individuals.
- 7. Water down the influence of the numerous conservative federal judges and Supreme Court justices that were appointed by President Trump:** To do this, the NEA would pack the Supreme Court “by adding associate justice seats and nominating individuals to those seats who reflect the diversity of the modern United States” and create more judgeships in federal district and circuit courts. They would also push for affirmative action programs on the courts, requiring nominations of “People of Color, women, LGBTQ people, those with disabilities, immigrants, and those from various religious backgrounds,” and “prioritize nominating lawyers for judgeships who have represented labor unions, workers, consumers, immigrants, or civil rights plaintiffs.”
- 8. Restrict the sale of firearms from the national level:** While they have not taken an overt stand against the second amendment, they will make it more difficult to purchase firearms. They would ask the Center for Disease Control “to research gun violence as a public health issue,” ban the sale or possession of high-capacity magazines, and prohibit “their future manufacture for civilian use.” They would also prohibit the sale of guns between individuals unless a gun dealer or other entity takes possession of the weapon first and conducts a background check.

9. Increase our nation's dependence on huge federal programs: The NEA would support free community college and eliminate costs for the first four years of college "at all public higher education institutions." They would also push for a national health care policy that "mandates universal coverage" and issue a declaration proclaiming "that affordable, comprehensive health care is a right." And they would increase access for children to childcare programs.

10. Support immigration reform: The NEA's vision for immigration reform would place all DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) recipients "on a path to citizenship." They would also provide a path to citizenship for current undocumented aliens who are productive and paying taxes and "affirm the right to every child, regardless of immigration status, to access a free public K-12 education."

It was a pleasant surprise that, at least in this set of recommendations, the NEA did not explicitly call for stronger support of abortion rights. Do not be fooled. As recently as the NEA's 2019 convention they took a clear stand against the right to life stating in New Business Item 56,

[T]he NEA will include an assertion of our defense of a person's right to control their own body, especially for women, youth, and sexually marginalized people. The NEA vigorously opposes all attacks on the right to choose and stands on the fundamental right to abortion under Roe v. Wade.

If you share concerns about NEA's policy worldview with friends who are still in the NEA, I encourage you to be prayerful and patient. I can tell you from my own experience that it can take many years for individuals to change their views on political matters and the appropriate role of unions. Sincere Christians are convinced, at times, of diametrically opposed positions on a host of social, economic, and political issues. Our responsibility is to share our convictions as clearly and lovingly as we can and listen respectfully to the thoughts of others. We must then allow the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of our friends and in our own hearts. Deferring to the Spirit will lead us to truth and unity among Christians.

Please share your thoughts on this column that you would like other readers to see by entering them in the form below. Personal comments can be sent to JMitchell@ceai.org. John Mitchell is on staff at CEAI and teaches part-time in the suburbs of Washington, DC.

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