

Welcome to A New School Year

(Unlike Any Other)

Even under the best circumstances, navigating your role as an educator can present challenges, but at this moment when our state and our nation are working to develop a "new normal" for public education, it is more difficult than ever for educators to feel empowered in their profession. That's why we are dedicated to protecting our members – ensuring that administrators treat you fairly and fighting for safe and fair working conditions. At a time when the line between an educator's personal life and professional life is hazier than ever, it's never been more important for educators to have a powerful voice in the conversation about how our schools operate.



SPECIAL NOTE: NAVIGATING SCHOOL CLOSURES, RE- OPENING AND COVID-19



We understand the immense desire for life to return to the way it was before Coronavirus – for the ability to put the pandemic and all of the fear and frustration associated with it behind us. While all educators want to be with their students when school reopens in the fall, OEA believes it is imperative that school buildings remain closed until the virus is at least contained. Districts must center their day-to-day operations around protecting the health and wellness of students and educators, and that means enforcing public health mandates. And when school districts fail to do so, OEA will be ready to intervene on behalf of students and staff.

As the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Oregon and throughout the United States continues to climb, it remains clear that in our current public health climate, there is no way to reopen schools that will be 100 percent safe for students and educators. OEA is working directly with our local associations to develop a statewide set of minimum health standards that we believe schools must be able to meet before they should be allowed to reopen for in-person instruction.

As we begin this school year, we must also take time to unpack the trauma that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused for our students and their families. It is our duty to meet those social-emotional needs of our students, and we are here to support you in this work. Find the most up-to-date news around re-opening guidance and professional resources at: oregoned.org/covid19.

What Does Being a Union Member Mean?

Being united with 42,000 Oregon educators means you've got someone standing up for you, so you can focus on what you do best - educating and supporting students. **When we stand together as members of a strong union, we speak with one voice to fight for students, good working conditions, and the salaries and benefits educators deserve.**

As a union member, you should know your union is here for you. What does the Oregon Education Association do?

- OEA advocates with our strong collective voice on behalf of students and educators. We work to reduce class size, restore critical programs and positions, and increase support for managing classrooms and student behavior.
- OEA negotiates employment contracts for members. Together, we fight to improve your salary, working conditions, retirement, and healthcare benefits. We ensure contracts are upheld, offering representation if needed.
- OEA elevates your voice with the Department of Education to create safe and sound working conditions, particularly during the pandemic.
- OEA stands up for you by protecting your hard-earned benefits like healthcare and retirement.
- OEA defends against attempts to privatize public education, take funding away from schools, and increase red tape for educators.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

Your union membership empowers the union to effectively negotiate with your district to secure you a better salary, stronger benefits, and safer working conditions. When more members choose to be a part of the union, we achieve stronger contracts.

REACH OUT

When you need your union, call us at 503-684-3300, message us on Facebook, or email help@oregoned.org.



In states where more public employees are active members of the union, salaries are higher for all employees. When our union has an active membership, we have the power to negotiate from a position of strength.



Our union leads the fight to improve public schools in Oregon. Your union membership helps support strong advocacy to lower class sizes, increase school funding, and reduce standardized testing.

Know Your Rights



YOUR RIGHTS TO UNION REPRESENTATION

As a union member, you have certain rights in the workplace. If you are called into an investigatory or information-gathering meeting with a supervisor where you have reason to believe that discipline may result, make sure you follow these steps. And call your union!

- Request union representation clearly. Present this information to management or read the text to the right.
- Respectfully refuse to answer questions until your union representation arrives.
- The district does not have a legal right to continue questioning without a union representative present after this request is made.
- Remain in the meeting until it ends.

WHAT TO SAY:

"If this discussion could in any way lead to my being disciplined, terminated, or affect my personal working conditions, I respectfully request that my union representative, officer or building representative be present. Until my representative arrives, I choose not to participate in this interview."

OTHER RIGHTS IN THE WORKPLACE

.Your union representative and OEA can help you understand how to ensure your rights are respected and your workplace is in compliance with all laws and statutes.

Our union makes sure that you are treated as a professional. Together, we ensure that our rights as workers are upheld, the rules at our jobs are enforced, and that we are treated fairly.

EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS

If you are the victim of harassment, unfair treatment, or other discrimination at work, we can help you navigate this experience. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) protects all Oregon employees.

If you have a dispute regarding your contract or rights as a union member, we will work to enforce your contract and if necessary, provide representation at the Oregon Employment Relations Board (ERB).

The Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) enforces employer compliance with wage and hour laws, civil rights law, and terms and conditions of employment. If you are not receiving owed compensation, OEA will work with BOLI to ensure your contract is upheld. If you are facing an investigation by the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission (TSPC), OEA will provide an attorney to represent you.

If you are facing discipline or discharge from your position, your union will work to ensure that due process is followed and your rights are respected.

You are entitled to a 30 minute duty-free lunch break. If you don't receive this break, your union can help!

HEALTH AND SAFETY

If you are injured on the job, OEA can help you access the workers' compensation process.

You have the right to discuss safety or health problems with your co-workers, report job hazards to Oregon Occupational Safety and Health (OSHA), and participate in union activities about safety and health matters. It is your employer's responsibility to tell you the safety and health rules of your job and to train you on these rules.

OTHER QUESTIONS

If you lose your job, you may have access to certain benefits such as unemployment insurance and COBRA health insurance. Your union can help you secure these benefits.

As a new educator, you may have questions about the probationary period. OEA can help you navigate this time.

If you have questions about the professional evaluation process, OEA will help ensure that proper district and contractual processes are being followed.

Check your contract for district-specific information or visit the OEA website for more details and contact information: oregoned.org/contact.

Standing Up for You

EDUCATORS ARE STRONGER TOGETHER. When it comes to contract negotiations, salaries and benefits, workplace protections, and improving learning and working conditions, a stronger union means a stronger bargaining position.

As individuals, we have a limited impact on decisions that are made in our districts. Coming together as members of a strong union is the best way to have a seat at the table to fight for students and good working conditions. We join together to amplify our voices to advocate for our students and our professions.

This year, OEA's advocacy will be primarily focused on protecting educators during crisis:

- **FIGHTING FOR EDUCATOR JOBS:** In this time of uncertainty, our union is committed to fighting for additional investment in our neighborhood public schools and community colleges and fighting against any proposed staffing cuts that will only make it more difficult for our communities to recover from the COVID-19 crisis. We know that safely reopening our public schools will require more educators – not fewer – working in and with our schools, and we're ready to make that case in Oregon's school districts.
- **PROTECTING EDUCATORS DURING CRISIS:** During the COVID-19 crisis we've fought to protect the health and safety of educators and students throughout the state and ensured that nearly every educator continued to receive their regular pay and benefits during the school closure period. We've also worked tirelessly to ensure members have access to the most recent news and information about COVID-19 and its impact on Oregon schools. And we've helped to mitigate the financial stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic for members, students, and their families – providing emergency grants to help families through this difficult time.
- **HEALTHCARE FOR PART-TIME FACULTY:** It is wrong that part-time faculty teaching at community colleges across Oregon do not receive healthcare like their peers, and that's why expanding health care for our part-time faculty members is a top legislative priority for OEA. Many educators piece together full time work by working at multiple institutions yet they do not receive healthcare benefits. Educators working hard to ensure students receive a quality higher education must be respected as professionals.
- **RESTORING PROGRAMS & POSITIONS:** Our students need programs like art, music, and physical education to be engaged in school and have a well-rounded education – but much of this programming is being threatened by COVID-related budget cuts. We believe that state and federal leaders must provide our public schools with the resources required to restore critical positions that support our students, such as custodians, bus drivers, teachers, and educational assistants. OEA fights to improve public education for all students.



To learn more about our advocacy efforts and to get involved, visit oregoned.org/advocacy.

Coming together as members of a **STRONG UNION** is the best way to have a seat at the table to fight for students and good working conditions.





Our Commitment to Racial Justice

The social, organizational and individual culture in our state, our schools and our organization has long been centered and framed around practices and systems that reflect white dominant culture, failing to meet the needs of our diverse populations. This dominant culture institutionalizes disparities and will continue to perpetuate itself unless interrupted by transformative work around racial justice.

To that end, OEA is in the midst of an intentional journey to address equity and racial justice, with an eye toward reflection, systems change, culturally responsive growth and inclusion, authentic community partner coalition-building and social activism. OEA leaders have recommitted to applying an equity lens to every action we take as an organization.

Our equity efforts are not only comprehensive but scaffolded to include every aspect of our work and every level of our organization. We apply an equity filter in all of our decision-making, which operationalizes our commitment to equity and continually moves us forward, so that we are leading with a strong equity lens and social justice heartbeat.



As a predominantly white organization, it's critical that white educators lean into uncomfortable conversations and situations and truly challenge themselves to embody true and meaningful allyship. Moreover, we must seek to take direct action aimed at uplifting our students who belong to communities that have been marginalized and attacked for too

long. In the context of our public schools that work includes:

- Eliminating harmful policies like zero tolerance discipline plans and replacing them with well-resourced restorative practices initiatives
- Creating pathways for educators of color to enter and remain in the teaching profession so our schools better reflect the diversity of our communities
- Pushing our schools to meaningfully incorporate race and racial equity into curriculum.

OEA stands in solidarity with those fighting against our country's long history of racism and oppression, and we are committed to challenging the systemic problems that continue to allow violence and harm against people of color. We will constantly evaluate how we use our organizational power and our privilege to combat the systemic racism that has claimed black and brown lives, and we will continue to say: **Black Lives Matter**.

If you are interested in joining our racial equity efforts, opportunities await. Learn more about OEA's Human and Civil Rights Committee, and OEA's Committee on Racial Equity on the OEA Website. Educators of Color are also invited to attend an Equity Sparks retreat (upcoming dates can be found at oregoned.org/events).

Union Benefits You Can Use

GET HELP SUPPORTING STUDENTS FROM THE OEA FOUNDATION: Members can apply for grants of up to \$100 to help their students meet basic, urgent needs. Grants may be used for items like eyeglasses, winter coats, dental work, shoes, and many other basic supports for students. Apply for a grant or donate to the Foundation at oeafoundation.oregoned.org.



IMPROVE YOUR EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT: Your union negotiates your contract with your employer. Talk to a union representative at your worksite or call your local office to get more information about collective bargaining and to get involved. Visit oregoned.org/contact.

RECEIVE REPRESENTATION AND LEGAL ASSISTANCE FOR DIFFICULT MATTERS: You never know when you might need your union to represent you. If you have a question about your employment rights or benefits, OEA is here to support you. If you need legal assistance or representation in your workplace, as a union member you receive these benefits free of charge. Call 503-684-3300 or email help@oregoned.org to get in touch.

AMPLIFY YOUR VOICE ON POLICY AND PROFESSIONAL ISSUES: OEA advocates to the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission (TSPC), Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC), State Board of Education, and all of our elected officials on behalf of our students and our profession. Learn more at oregoned.org/advocacy.

ACCESS LIABILITY INSURANCE: Most educators don't think they will ever need to access this but like any insurance policy, our union is your backup to protect you as a professional. In certain employment-related situations, your union membership provides you with an attorney and \$1 million in liability insurance coverage for any judgment against you.

FIND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES: OEA provides and vets many professional development trainings throughout the year so members can better support students. Topics include licensure, distance learning, classroom management, career development, student loan forgiveness, and more. Visit grow.oregoned.org to find an opportunity that advances your practice.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM NEA MEMBER BENEFITS: Your OEA and NEA membership gains you access to many financial discounts through NEA Member Benefits, including special assistance to members in need who may have been affected by an involuntary layoff. Visit neamb.com for more.

Accessing Your Union

Your active membership allows the union to effectively negotiate with your district to secure your salary, benefits, and working conditions.

When more members choose to be a part of the union, we achieve stronger contracts. The Oregon Education Association is here for you! Please email us at help@oregoned.org or give us a call at 503-684-3300 to be directed to someone who can assist you!

Start by asking the union representative who works in your building or worksite. Not sure who that is? Give us a call or email using the information above and we'll get you connected. You'll find specific contact information for your local union representative and local association office in the welcome letter, included in this packet.

WE'RE HERE TO HELP IF:

- You need a copy of your contract.
- You're having an issue with your administrator or supervisor.
- You have questions or concerns about salary placement or contract compliance.
- You need information about retirement and healthcare benefits (OEA negotiates for these benefits on your behalf).
- You want to get involved in student-focused policy change.
- You're interested in professional development opportunities.
- You have any other questions about employment matters!

Going the Distance

As we embark on a year ahead of us that seems full of unknowns, you can be assured your union is here to support you, elevate your health and safety needs, and deliver tools to support your students and your career as an educator. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, your union knows educators are being tasked with the impossible. We have tips for navigating Distance Learning best practices and are sharing your successes - and challenges - on our professional learning blog at grow.oregoned.org.





Cover and people illustrations by Courtney Ahn Design



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