Where Do Teacher Union Dues Go: Public Higher Education in Massachusetts

By Rebekah Paxton

On average, only about 16 percent of annual union dues paid by members in 19 Massachusetts public school districts stayed with local union chapters. The remaining 84 percent of dues revenue went directly to the state (Massachusetts Teachers Association) and national (National Education Association) union affiliates, according to Pioneer Institute’s report, “Where Do Teacher Union Dues Go?”.

But what about public higher education in Massachusetts?

For unions representing faculty at the Commonwealth’s community colleges, state colleges and universities, and the University of Massachusetts system, the dues revenue structures are also hierarchical. Individual university unions remit a substantial portion of their dues revenue to state and national-level organizations, as shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Union name</th>
<th>State Affiliation</th>
<th>National Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UMass Amherst</td>
<td>Massachusetts Society of Professors</td>
<td>MTA</td>
<td>NEA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UMass Boston</td>
<td>Faculty Staff Union</td>
<td>MTA</td>
<td>NEA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UMass Dartmouth</td>
<td>Faculty Federation Organization</td>
<td>AFT</td>
<td>AFL-CIO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UMass Lowell</td>
<td>Massachusetts Society of Professors</td>
<td>MTA</td>
<td>NEA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Colleges</td>
<td>Massachusetts Community Colleges Council</td>
<td>MTA</td>
<td>NEA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Colleges</td>
<td>Massachusetts State College Association</td>
<td>MTA</td>
<td>NEA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Like K–12 teacher unions, the majority of annual membership dues does not stay with local affiliates to cover the costs of collective bargaining negotiations and grievance representation. For the Amherst and Boston UMass campuses, whose dues levels were made publicly available, less than 27 and 29 percent of total dues, respectively, remained at the local level. For the Massachusetts Community Colleges Council (MCCC), which represents all 15 community college campuses, 30 percent stayed local. The remaining 70 percent went to the Massachusetts Teachers Association and the National Education Association.

Rebekah Paxton is a Research Assistant at Pioneer Institute. She first joined Pioneer in 2017 as a Roger Perry intern, writing about various transparency issues within the Commonwealth, including fiscal policy and higher education. Since then, she has worked on various research projects under PioneerPublic and PioneerOpportunity, in areas of state finance, public policy, and labor relations. She recently earned an M.A. in Political Science and a B.A. in Political Science and Economics, from Boston University, where she graduated summa cum laude.
While these organizations exhibit a similar dues remittance structure to the K–12 unions previously examined, there is another tier to which dues paid by professors at the Commonwealth’s state colleges and universities are spread.

The Massachusetts State College Association (MSCA) represents faculty on nine campuses: Bridgewater State University, Fitchburg State University, Framingham State University, Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Massachusetts Maritime Academy, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, Salem State University, Westfield State University, and Worcester State University. While professors pay dues to the MSCA, it only retains 20 percent of annual dues revenue. Of $858 in total dues, $683 goes to the state and national teachers unions. Depending on the campus, professors represented by the MSCA, also pay $10 to $86 in “chapter” dues, which are added to the $858 already going to affiliated local (MSCA), state (MTA), and national organizations (NEA).

The nature of this structure means a very small percentage of dues go to the chapter closest to dues-paying professors. For example, 9 percent of what Salem State University professors pay in total dues goes toward the campus chapter of the Massachusetts State Colleges Association. On the other hand, only 1 percent of dues goes to the Framingham State chapter of the MSCA. Contract negotiations for professors are conducted by the MSCA at all nine state colleges and universities, yet members fund a total of four tiers of the union organization. According to the MSCA website, grievance representation is a chapter-level function, where members must utilize local MSCA “chapter grievance officer[s]” to protest potential violations of the contract. This allocation of resources raises questions about how individual chapters can afford to represent members with grievances. For these college professors, key services and benefits are dispersed among more levels of union hierarchy, while members are required to pay an additional organizations just to remain in the union.

In higher education, local unions tend to calculate dues by full-time or part-time status, or by credit hour. Thus, there is no real distinction between types of professor (i.e. tenured professor, assistant professor, lecturer, or adjunct faculty).

The U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in Janus v. AFSCME gives both union members and non-members the right to make wholly informed decisions about joining or remaining in the union. To assess the benefits union membership brings to individual professors, understanding the hierarchical nature of dues remittances and the value each level of union affiliates actually provides is important to making decisions about membership.
Endnotes


