

Charter School Unionization FAQ

What Does it Mean to Organize a Union of Charter School Educators?

Charter school educators unionize in order to make sure that educators have a strong voice in decisions that impact their students, schools and professions. By forming unions, charter educators have been able to negotiate union contracts that can improve pay and benefits, cut down on teacher turnover, address work/life balance, establish job security and ensure that teachers have a meaningful say in decisions that impact their classrooms.

Have Other Charter Educators Unionized?

Yes. There are over 250 union charter schools in California. Over 40 have unionized in the past 4 years, including Summit Public Schools and Education for Change just in the past year. Educators at Bay Area charter schools such as Envision Education, East Bay Innovation Academy, Foundation for Hispanic Education (Latino College Prep, Roberto Cruz, and Luis Valdez in San Jose), and Community Learning Center Schools have recently won strong union contracts that have addressed workload issues, improved pay and helped retain quality teachers.

What is the Process for Unionizing?

Charter school educators can unionize as long as a majority of their colleagues support unionization. The unionization process is overseen by the Public Employment Relations Board ([PERB](#)) which is a California state agency that oversees the Educational Employment Relations Act ([EERA](#)), the state law that governs labor relations for our state's public schools. To build a strong union it is important that educators first build an organizing committee comprised of educators from each school in the network. This committee will help guide the unionization process and educate their colleagues about how they can help, while also getting input from their colleagues about their priorities. Though the law requires only simple majority support for unionization, most charter schools seek to achieve supermajority support in order to maximize the strength of their union and minimize divisions amongst their co-workers.

The steps for successfully unionizing are:

1. Build a representative organizing or steering committee of educators
2. Build supermajority support for unionization by asking colleagues to sign a union support petition
3. Submit your union support petitions to the Public Employment Relations Board (PERB) and be officially recognized as a union. This is the point when educators also go public and let administration know of their decision to unionize.
4. Negotiate a union contract with administration that improves learning and teaching conditions at their school

How Do We Bargain a Union Contract?

Once you have built supermajority support, submitted your union support petitions to PERB and been recognized as a union, administration is legally obligated to negotiate with you in good faith. This means they can no longer make unilateral changes to working conditions without negotiating with you and your co-workers first. At this point in the process, charter educators will select a diverse group of representatives from different schools and subject areas of your membership to be your union bargaining team. They will get input from all of your colleagues through meetings and surveys. They will then use that information as they negotiate a union contract. Contract negotiations typically take place during the school day and union bargaining team members

will be provided with substitutes for their classes. Union charter educators will have close mentorship and support from experienced union organizers and negotiators during this process.

Does Administration Want Us to Unionize?

Most network administrators would prefer that educators not unionize. Without a union, administration can make all decisions unilaterally. When charter educators unionize, educators have to be part of that process. They have the power to improve conditions for their students and their colleagues. However, some school site administrators understand that when educators unionize, they can help bring more resources to the classroom—which is a good thing.

How will our union impact DCP's finances?

We will collect financial data from DCP that will allow us to come to the bargaining table with proposals that are fiscally responsible for our organization. One of the reasons we are unionizing is to ensure the stability and longevity of our schools; we will not make proposals that would put our futures in jeopardy.

Am I putting my job at risk by supporting the unionization process?

It is not legal to discriminate against educators who are participating in unionizing their school. Participating in organizing the union is a legally protected activity. Most administrators understand this, and know that administration would get in trouble if they violate the law. When we are unionizing, it is of course important that we don't interrupt our teaching responsibilities and are thoughtful about our strategies. This is something that the organizing committee will discuss in detail during the process.

What Will Be Our Relationship to the California Teachers Association (CTA) and the National Education Association (NEA)?

Most charter schools form their own local unions. That local union is comprised of educators from their school or network and is led by educators elected by their colleagues at their schools. These local unions are affiliated with CTA (the largest statewide education union in CA) and NEA (the largest national education union in the US). CTA and NEA provide support for local unions and also help support educators and students by fighting for school funding and supporting legislation that supports teachers and students. For instance, charter school educators at Green Dot Public Schools (a large charter school network in Los Angeles) are members of the Asociación De Maestros Unidos, or AMU. AMU is affiliated with both CTA and NEA. CTA and NEA are also very supportive of charter school educators having a strong voice in decisions that impact their schools.

Do We Pay Dues?

Yes. Education union members pay dues to support their local, statewide and national unions. In fact, dues from existing traditional district and charter school unions help support non-union charter educators when they decide to unionize. Union dues are typically between \$80 to \$90 a month. However, charter school educators who are unionizing do not have to start paying dues until they have voted to approve their first union contract. That way they are able to weigh the improvements they have made in their contract against the cost of the dues. Members are able to vote on the contract, run for union leadership, and receive certain benefits from CTA such as liability insurance. Non-members don't have these rights and benefits, but they are still covered by the contract we negotiate and are still represented by our union in grievances or if they are disciplined/dismissed.

How Can I Help?

The most important role that one can play during the union organizing process is to be part of the organizing committee and guide that unionization process. The Organizing committee educates their colleagues about our union and gets input about issues that are most important to address. By distributing the responsibility among

many educators from each school, charter educators can minimize the impact on their already busy schedules while building a strong and democratic union. Union supporters who are not members of the organizing committee can best help by signing the union support petition (once it is launched), giving input about desired improvements at their school, and supporting the bargaining team.