# Table of Contents

Introduction ......................................................... 2
Why do you need association membership? ......................... 3
MEA...at work for you! ............................................ 4
What do you get for your dues dollars? .............................. 5
When you need help .................................................. 6-8
General rules to survive as a public school employee ........... 9
Collective bargaining and you ........................................ 10
Get to know your contract ............................................ 11
Stress. How to manage it ............................................. 12
Important papers checklist ........................................... 13
Speaking the language ............................................... 14-15
MEA’s proud history ................................................ 16
Important MEA contacts ............................................. 17

## MEA’s Mission

The following mission statement, developed with input from members across the state, was officially adopted by the Representative Assembly on May 1, 1999:

*The mission of the MEA is to ensure that the education of our students and the working environments of our members are of the highest quality.*
Welcome to the MEA...
where membership makes a difference.

Welcome to the education profession and to our education team. Public education is a field that is exciting, challenging and demanding. There may be some difficult days and some disappointments, but there will be many rewarding exchanges and the pleasure of seeing our students grow and achieve.

We are a school family.

Everyone has an important role as part of our school family. Without you, students wouldn’t see their dreams come true; school doors wouldn’t open; the bell wouldn’t ring; the water wouldn’t flow; the heat wouldn’t work; students wouldn’t get the extra assistance they need; phones would go unanswered; records wouldn’t be kept; meals would get cold; the lights wouldn’t shine; and students wouldn’t be transported to school. Without our collective efforts, public education would come to a halt, so be proud of the job you do and the contribution you make to education.

We are here to help.

The MEA and your local association are here to help you. We hope this booklet will be useful as a new MEA member. It explains the many benefits and advantages of association membership. It is also filled with lots of helpful hints on how to have the best school year possible. We want you to call on us if there is anything we can do to assist you. No problem is too trivial or complicated for us to handle: interpreting school board policies, understanding your contract, explaining your employment rights. Anything at all!
Why Do You Need Association Membership?

You need your association to advocate for educational quality.
Obtaining quality professional development continues to be important for all school employees. MEA advocates for educator training and quality in many ways, including providing hundreds of hours of free, high quality, online professional development through the MEA Online Learning Portal.

You need your association to negotiate for you.
School employees cannot negotiate for themselves without extensive legal knowledge, time and money—and the collective strength of their fellow members. If you should run into some impasse at the bargaining table, the pressure you could exert as an individual would not be sufficient to get your contract settled.

You need your association if you become involved in litigation connected with your job.
You would no doubt find it difficult to afford the legal fees and/or wage losses. The automatic MEA/NEA member benefit of $1 million professional liability insurance coverage provides the necessary protection when you are involved in a criminal or civil suit as a result of a school-related incident.

You need the association to work for better educational legislation at all levels of government.
The association provides leadership in the determination of what is good legislation and lobbies on its behalf. The association works at both the state and national level to make sure your voice is heard on important educational issues.

You need the association to change public opinion about school employees and education.
The association provides the necessary resources, expertise and power to influence public opinion. A positive education image is achieved through the united efforts of your association.
MEA . . . At Work for You!

- **UniServ**
  UniServ directors negotiate and implement contracts, train local leaders and represent members in grievance processing, arbitrations, unemployment hearings, tenure cases and other advocacy hearings.

- **Legal Services**
  MEA spends over $2 million each year to protect MEA member employment rights and privileges, which may arise from your collective bargaining agreement, state or federal constitutions or statutes, or judicial administrative decisions.

- **Lobbying**
  Lobbyists meet with legislators daily to encourage support of educational employee issues. Our positions on issues are established by the MEA Representative Assembly, the MEA Board of Directors and the MEA Legislative Commission.

- **Research**
  Research staff provides financial analysis of local school district budgets, and up-to-date information on local, state and federal revenues and expenditures affecting education.

- **Professional Development**
  PD consultants coordinate professional development and training activities. They monitor education issues at the state level and provide training and advice to local associations to help improve student achievement.

- **Communications**
  Communications staff coordinate public relations for MEA, manage media relations, produce membership promotional materials, publish the *MEA Voice* magazine and member-only newsletters, and use social media to communicate with members and the public.

- **Organizing**
  Organizing consultants are constantly organizing new education employee groups and ensuring MEA members exercise their collective strength.

- **Political Action**
  This activity is sponsored by voluntary contributions of MEA members. PAC money is used to help influence legislation important to public education and to our members, and to assist in electing pro-education candidates at the local, state and federal levels.
What Do You Get for Your Dues Dollars?

Good question—and one you may have asked. Are you thinking that a great deal of your salary is going to pay your MEA dues, but you’re not seeing any returns on your investment?

Think again! Here are just a few things that your dues dollars buy you:

- Services from UniServ directors who have the training and expertise in bargaining, grievance processing, arbitrations, unemployment hearings and retirement.
- MEA’s magazine, the MEA Voice, which keeps you up-to-date on issues facing MEA members across the state.
- Legal assistance to protect your rights and privileges.
- Up to $1 million of work-related liability insurance if you are faced with a civil or criminal complaint in the course of your work.
- Lobbyists with the reputation as the leading advocates for the rights of Michigan’s public school employees who make sure your interests are represented in the Legislature.
- Professional development help and training on a multitude of topics, including certification.
- Training opportunities for education employees at one of MEA’s many conferences, on the local level, or online.
- Assistance in financial planning, choosing auto or homeowner’s insurance, or the stock market through MEA Financial Services (www.meafs.com).
- Medical advice and information on topics from the common cold to how to live a healthier lifestyle from MESSA.
- Members-only discounts of up to 50 percent with your MEA Member Benefit Card. Go to www.mea.org and log in to save on items like oil changes for your car, or on shopping at name-brand stores.
- National benefits through NEA Member Benefits (www.neamb.com) include complimentary life insurance, home and personal loan programs, auto purchase discounts, free online learning and more.
When You Need Help…

When you need assistance with job-related problems or other professional concerns, you can turn with confidence to the Michigan Education Association. Your association representative (AR), local association president or the MEA UniServ director can provide invaluable assistance. Here is a list of common concerns with suggestions for what you should do to protect your rights:

**Certification**

As a teacher, keeping your certificate current is the most important thing you can do and MEA can help! As an MEA member you have access to free online professional development, as well as, hundreds of hours of low cost, high quality, State Continuing Education Clock Hours (SCECHs) that can be completed online through the MEA Online Learning Portal. In addition, MEA members are invited to attend certification workshops that are held all over the state or speak directly with a certification specialist from MEA.

**Evaluation**

Before an evaluation by your supervisor, review the appropriate section in your bargained contract. Most contracts contain a specific evaluation process designed to assure a fair evaluation. If you receive a negative evaluation, discuss it with your AR as soon as possible.

**Child abuse**

By law, education professionals are required to report suspected cases of abuse or neglect of children under age 18 to the Department of Health & Human Services. Thanks to a new online program, those reports can now be completed online. To register for the Michigan Online Reporting System, go to [www.michigan.gov/mibridges](http://www.michigan.gov/mibridges) and click the Partnership link at the top of the page. For additional information about the Michigan Online Reporting System or reporting suspected child abuse and neglect in Michigan, mandated reporters can visit [www.michigan.gov/mandatedreporter](http://www.michigan.gov/mandatedreporter).

**Collective bargaining agreement**

The negotiated agreement is your legal contract defining wages, benefits, work hours and other terms and conditions of employment. Make certain you obtain a copy of the bargained contract. Read it carefully; gain an understanding of your rights and benefits. If you believe you are being denied benefits or are being treated unfairly, refer to the appropriate contract provision and talk to your AR.
Liability protection
As an MEA/NEA member, you are provided with a $1 million liability insurance policy for your protection in certain job-related matters. Contact your UniServ director immediately in the following circumstances: a) if you are being investigated by the police or other agency regarding a criminal matter; b) if criminal charges have been filed against you; or c) if you have been, or might be, sued by a parent or student. These circumstances may be covered by your MEA/NEA liability insurance and a claim form should be filed as soon as possible.

Student discipline
Review your collective bargaining agreement and any relevant employer policies regarding corporal punishment. If there is no written employer policy or contract language, ask your AR if there is an informal policy or other written information.

Student records
By law, student records may be shared and discussed with a student’s parents, legal guardian and other school district employees who have a need to know. Remember, student records are confidential and should not be made available to anyone except those mentioned above.

Personnel file
You have a legal right to review the contents of your personnel file, and it is recommended that you do so at least once a year. You also have a right to attach a written rebuttal to any derogatory statement contained in your personnel file.

Assaults
If you are involved in a job-related assault, report the incident promptly to your immediate supervisor. Write a summary of the incident as soon as possible, listing all particulars of the situation, including names, witnesses, date, time, location and general conditions, and notify your AR.

Discrimination
In accordance with state and federal law, employment practices may not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, national origin, religion or color. Suspected violations should be reported to your AR.
Employee reprimands and suspensions

If you are disciplined (through a verbal or written warning), reprimanded, suspended or dismissed, contact your AR or grievance chairperson immediately, even if you believe the discipline is warranted or is of a sensitive or confidential matter. In most cases, only a short time is provided to challenge disciplinary actions filed against you by the employer. Do not delay!

Seniority

Most collective bargaining agreements provide for a seniority list which determines the order of layoffs, recalls, transfers, promotions, etc. Make certain your placement on the seniority list is correct and report any inaccuracies to your AR.

Unemployment compensation

If you are laid off, you are generally entitled to unemployment compensation. However, to be eligible, you must apply for benefits immediately following your last day of employment. If you have questions, contact your UniServ director.

Worker’s compensation

Report any job-related injury immediately to your supervisor. Although you probably will be required to complete a form, you should also make and keep a written summary of the incident.
General Rules to Survive as a Public School Employee

1. Become familiar with your contract, and the general rules and regulations for your school. Unless there are conflicts in laws, in the contract, or there is some other important reason, you have an obligation to follow those rules and regulations, student handbook and board policies. Ignorance is no excuse.

2. Read your contract. Many parts of your job rights and responsibilities are spelled out there.

3. Keep all records. Maintain a personal file of notes from the principal or supervisor, other administrators and parents. Keep your evaluations, contracts, pay stubs and other official communications. They can be very important and helpful later.

4. Act now. Don’t delay! Many members wait to bring a problem to the association until much later due to indecision or embarrassment. Since strict timelines are established in the contract, it may be too late to help. If you are wondering, find out now.

5. Follow directives. From time to time you may receive an administrative directive or order that you don’t like or don’t believe is proper. Nevertheless, you have an obligation to follow that order (unless it is dangerous) and grieve later.

6. Filing a grievance concerning an administrative failure to follow the contract is not immoral, illegal, unethical, unprofessional or even personal. It is your right. If the situation calls for it, contact an association representative.
Collective Bargaining and You

Your contract
For more than 40 years, Michigan public school employees have enjoyed the right to bargain collectively. This means that rather than accepting whatever the employer is willing to offer you as an individual, the terms and conditions of your employment are controlled by a contract negotiated between the employer and your union. The salary and benefits you receive when you become an employee are not gifts from your employer. They are the result of many years of hard work on the part of your association members, leaders and staff. Furthermore, as a union member, you have the right to offer input into what that agreement contains. And finally, the contract must be returned to you for your ratification vote before it becomes a binding agreement.

Be informed and speak up.
Collective bargaining works best when the members are informed, knowledgeable and involved. If you feel an area of your contract is deficient, or a new subject needs to be negotiated, you should advocate for those changes within your association. This means talking to your co-workers, completing surveys, attending membership meetings, and perhaps serving on your bargaining team.

Know your contract.
A collective bargaining agreement is not an abstract document. It is the basis for all of your rights as an employee. It is legally binding on you as an employee, on your association, and your employer. It is important that you understand it and think about how you would like to see it change in the future.

MEA Services
Since 1965, when the Public Employment Relations Act (PERA) was passed, the Michigan Education Association has assisted local associations in bargaining. The MEA provides a vast number of services to local associations and members to assist in collective bargaining. These include numerous training opportunities, information exchange and consultant services. Most important, the MEA offers direct, at-the-table bargaining assistance and consultation through your local UniServ director. UniServ directors are the local “front line” of the MEA. They are experienced, knowledgeable and well-trained labor relations professionals who can help you in your contract bargaining.
Get involved

A local contract is only as strong as the association it represents. You can make both your contract and your association stronger by becoming involved.

Get to Know Your Contract

Everyone should have received a master agreement or contract. Ask your building representative if you haven’t received one. Your contract spells out your rights and responsibilities in the school district. There are many people who can explain any items or passages that may be unclear to you.

Ask your:
- Association Representative
- Local President
- Chief Negotiator
- UniServ Director

Find the pages in your contract that apply to the following categories:
- Salary schedule . . . . . . . . . . . . . Page______
- Insurance protection . . . . . . . . . Page______
- Seniority . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Page______
- Grievance procedures . . . . . . . Page______
- Sick/Leave time . . . . . . . . . . . . . Page______
- Layoff and recall . . . . . . . . . . . Page______
- Filling vacancies . . . . . . . . . . . Page______
- Contract expiration date . . . . . . . Page______
- Work hours . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Page______
- Calendar . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Page______

Once you find these pages, keep this with your contract and refer to it as questions about the contract arise.

If you feel that you are being treated unfairly, or being denied a benefit or right under the contract, ask one of these people.
Stress. How to Manage It

The best way to reduce stress is to change your outlook, attitude and goals. Bettie Burres Youngs is a noted consultant on school-related stress. The following suggestions are reprinted from her article in the Iowa State Education Association’s Communique.

- Make a conscious effort to be your best. Keep alert to changing practices and philosophies; attend periodic workshops and conferences; actively listen to your co-workers; keep active in hobbies and pursue your interests; actively listen to students’ interests, needs and hobbies; read pleasure materials; make a point of being flexible.

- Revitalize your career periodically—determine how you can change those activities you dislike and improve those activities you enjoy; get away for weekends or summers; take a leave of absence to renew your objectives.

- Work to eliminate stress-causing factors in your home environment.

- Proper physical and mental conditioning will help increase your ability to handle stressful encounters. Here are some ways to help get yourself in top condition:

  - Exercise. Get adequate rest and nutrition; seek prompt medical care for illnesses; cut down on caffeine-containing beverages; and supplement vitamins when necessary.

  - Learn to relax. Everyone lives in a stressful environment and learning how to adapt is an important skill. Try yoga or methods of meditating.

  - Identify the events that are stressful to you.

  - Place stress in a positive context and try to make it work in your favor. Do something constructive rather than being immobilized—action is the best antidote.

  - Cultivate habits that reduce stress. Try to regularize your environment by arranging your schedule. Be in control. Set aside a period of “private” time for yourself.

  - If you can’t change a stressful situation, change how you react to it.

  - Watch for symptoms that indicate you’ve exceeded your stress threshold and know your limits.

  - If you decide that you need professional help, seek it. Many of today’s therapists provide counseling in short-term behavior therapy methods to combat chronic stress and anxiety.
Important Papers Checklist

School employees should have the following documents on hand at all times:

- Employee contracts, including supplemental contracts
- Employee licenses and/or certificates
- Record of technical training courses, vocational certificates or diplomas
- Transcripts of higher education credits and degrees
- Record of job-related seminars, workshops and conferences
- Letters of appointment and hire
- Record of accumulated sick leave and other leave days (personal, vacation)
- Copy of assignment schedule
- Log of tax-deductible job-related expenses
- Information from the retirement system affecting your benefits
- Yearly salary notice supplied by employer
- Documentation of commendations, awards and honors
- All evaluation records
- Letters to and from your association
- Letters to and from administration/supervisors and departmental communications
- Letters to and from parents and students
- Employer-adopted policies on student discipline, suspension, expulsion, corporal punishment and work procedures
- Record of disciplinary methods used in handling student problems, including date and witnesses involved
- Record of assaults, violence and workplace thefts
- First aid or CPR certificate
- Personal reconstruction of events surrounding student injuries
- School calendar
- Employee fringe benefit information: Maintain records on fringe benefits, such as health insurance booklets, claim filing procedures and telephone numbers
**Speaking the Language**

**AR** — The association representative is also known as the building rep, faculty rep or steward. The AR is your link to your local association. He/she is located in your building or worksite. Problems or individual concerns should be channeled through your AR.

**CBA**—Collective bargaining agreement; the negotiated contract that governs your wages, hours and working conditions.

**Due Process**—Meant to protect a person from a mistaken or unjustified deprivation of certain rights; based on the premise that an employer must comply with and honor basic standards of fairness when imposing a disciplinary action on an employee.

**EA**—Education association; the local association that represents teacher/faculty interests in a local school district or college/university.

**ESP**—Educational support professionals who are represented by the MEA; it includes paraprofessionals, assistants, aides, technicians, secretaries, food service personnel, bus drivers, custodians, maintenance personnel, etc.

**Insubordination**—Failure on the part of an employee to carry out an order or directive given by a supervisor. The best course of action when given a questionable directive (unless physical health or safety is an issue) is to follow it while at the same time pursuing available remedies such as a grievance.

**Just Cause**—a basic set of standards against which the appropriateness of management-imposed disciplinary actions are measured.

**MEA Financial Services**—is an MEA affiliate focusing on providing quality programs and serving as the resource for financial information members. Products and services include: mutual funds, individual retirement accounts, and tax-deferred annuity plans. Group rates are available for auto, home, life, and long-term care insurance and credit card programs.

**MERC**—Michigan Employment Relations Commission; a state agency designed to provide mediation services and deal with other bargaining problems arising under the Public Employment Relations Act (PERA).

**MESSA**—Michigan Education Special Services Association is a separate corporation from MEA that provides members with negotiated insurance benefits such as health, life, dental, vision and long-term disability (LTD).
NEA—National Education Association is our national organization. It represents over 2 million members and deals with employment and educational concerns on a national basis.

PAC—political action committee; the political arm of the association at the local, state and national levels; its purpose is to further the cause of public education and public school employees through the electoral process.

Past Practice—an accepted way of doing things; those practices that are not specifically identified or written into the contract but which, because of acceptance by both management and employees over a period of time, have established working conditions as binding as if they were written.

PERA—Public Employment Relations Act; a statute allowing public school employees the right to collectively bargain with their employers.

PN—professional negotiations; a process whereby employees and boards jointly decide working conditions and benefits by negotiating a collective bargaining agreement (contract).

TA—tentative agreement; a term used in the collective bargaining process. A TA may refer to a complete negotiated document subject to ratification by the parties, or it may refer to a specific piece upon which the parties have agreed.

UniServ director—the staff person assigned to your local to assist with contract negotiations, contract maintenance, retirement, unemployment, representational issues and a host of other member issues.

ULP—unfair labor practice; any of a wide variety of practices which have been described by PERA as illegal; most often the failure to bargain in good faith.
1852: The Michigan State Teachers Association (MSTA) was formed by 20 charter members in a meeting at the State Normal School (now Eastern Michigan University) in Ypsilanti.

1857: National Education Association was organized in Philadelphia.

1911: MSTA’s constitution was amended to make membership fee $1 for both men and women. MSTA membership—was 8,288, with 7,148 being women.

1926: MSTA changed its name to Michigan Education Association.

1960: MESSA, the Michigan Education Special Services Association, was chartered to provide affordable health insurance to school employees.

1964: MEA completed a petition campaign, gathering 325,000 signatures, to get a mandatory statewide tenure bill before the Legislature, which approved the measure.

1965: Passage of the Public Employment Relations Act (PERA) gave public education employees the right to organize into local bargaining units to negotiate salary, benefits and other working conditions.

1973: MEA established MEA Financial Services, a wholly-owned subsidiary offering an array of financial products and services for school employees.

1984: MEA and Michigan Educational Support Personnel merged, making MEA one of the first state associations to offer full membership rights to school support personnel.

1994: Anti-union forces in the state Legislature rewrote the Public Employment Relations Act of 1965 to restrict MEA members’ bargaining rights.

2000: MEA members led the fight to defeat the statewide voucher initiative.

2007: MEA membership exceeded 160,000.
**Important Contacts**

**MEA  800-292-1934  www.mea.org**

MEA services include:

- Bargaining
- Legal services
- Liability insurance
- Contract enforcement
- Membership services
- Leadership training
- Retirement
- Media and community relations
- Human and civil rights
- Professional development
- Research
- Member communications
- Political action and lobby power

**MESSA  800-292-4910  www.messa.org**

MESSA (Michigan Education Special Services Association) is a not-for-profit membership organization chartered by the MEA in 1960 to provide a source for quality health, vision and dental group insurance programs designed with the unique needs of education employees in mind. Today MESSA has more than 90,000 members, and covers more than 235,000 education employees and their dependents.

**MEA Financial Services  800-292-1950  www.meafs.com**

MEA has an entire corporation, MEA Financial Services, designed for the sole purpose of providing members with competitive financial programs and insurance. These include:

- Tax-deferred annuities
- Mutual funds
- Homeowners insurance
- Auto insurance
- Life and long-term care insurance

**UniServ director**

Name ___________________________________________________________

Phone Number __________________________________________________

**MEA Help Center**

To get the most of your membership, contact the MEA Help Center with any questions about your benefits or other assistance you may need. Just call 866-MEA-HELP (866-632-4357), email help@mea.org, or live chat with a Help Center specialist at www.mea.org.
MEC Help Center
866-MEA-HELP
866-632-4357
www.mea.org

On the phone or online, get answers to your MEA questions.

Michigan Education Association

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The mission of the MEA is to ensure that the education of our students and the working environments of our members are of the highest quality.