



Collective Bargaining in focus: The voice of the teaching profession

Collective Bargaining –

- *Is a mutual exchange of positions followed by agreement – enables a group of employees with a “community of interest” to negotiate a binding written contract with an employer.*
- *Gives workers a voice in their workplace and has become a respected approach, valued by employees and employers in the private sector and throughout various levels of government.*
- *Is a process through which employee union and employer representatives exchange positions, mutually solve problems, and reach a written agreement.*

Collective Bargaining is good public policy

Effective bargaining is based on ideals that resonate with both workers and employers, such as working together to solve problems and treating each other with respect. Parties can exchange the frank views of their constituents as they explore and resolve the issues being bargained. When labor and management can come to agreement on salary and benefits while also improving teaching and learning conditions, everyone benefits.

Important points to consider

A negotiated union contract is not a set of permanent work rules carved in stone. Any section can, by mutual agreement, be discarded or revised during the talks over a successor contract. And in the healthiest education environments, good union-management relations is a continuous process—often carried out monthly through a joint labor-management committee.

Public education bargaining is constituent driven. On the labor side, union members and their elected leaders steer union decision making. Members determine union bargaining proposals and participate in a democratic, contract ratification vote. On the employer side, negotiators speak to the needs of site-level administrators, school superintendents or university chancellors, K-12 school boards or university trustee boards, and elected officials.

Collective bargaining is an exercise in freedom. Martin Luther King Jr. credited the labor movement with creating a better society. “The labor movement,” said King, “was the principal force that transformed misery and despair into hope and progress. Out of its bold struggles, economic and social reform gave birth to unemployment insurance, old age pensions, government relief for the destitute, and above all new wage levels that meant not mere survival, but a tolerable life. The captains of industry did not lead this transformation; they resisted it until they were overcome. When in the thirties the wave of union organization crested over our nation, it carried to secure shores not only itself but the whole society.”

In a non-bargaining environment, workers can only preserve agreements on wages, hours, and working conditions through relationships with managers, legislative lobbying, or employer-written policies and handbooks. Through collective bargaining, however, such arrangements are written into a binding contract, outlasting union and management turnover.

KNEA and Interest Based Bargaining

Interest-based bargaining (IBB) does not start with written proposals. Instead, both sides identify issues that are important to them and discuss why. The “why” is considered an “interest.” Both parties explore options to resolve their issues and accommodate each other’s interests. The parties agree on standards and procedures to evaluate all options. Both sides discuss the options until there is mutual agreement on a solution. Once the agreement is reached, a subgroup drafts the actual contract language.

KNEA, in concert with the Kansas Association of School Administrators (now the Kansas School Superintendents Association), formed the Partnership In Collaboration Kansas (PICK) to promote and facilitate interest-based bargaining. PICK seeks to move collective bargaining in school districts away from adversarial positioning and into a process that respects the shared fundamental values of the employer and the employee.