

## The Real Facts About Waiting for Superman the Movie from NEA

### Super Myth #1: Teacher unions are “bad” but teachers are “good”

While acknowledging the many issues facing public education, in a sometimes animated and entertaining manner, “Waiting for Superman” concludes that teacher unions and teacher contracts are destroying the schools. Teacher unions are portrayed as “bad” and teachers as “good.” (Guggenheim **fails to understand that the teachers ARE the union, they are the members.** Teachers elect the union leaders. Teachers approve the negotiated contract.)

Although the movie tries to detach teachers from the teachers’ union, by portraying teacher unions as the root of all evil in public education, **Guggenheim is, in essence, placing the blame on teachers.** Those interviewed in the film are uniformly anti-union—mostly “reformers” who believe teachers unions are the main obstacle to great public schools. Guggenheim does not interview a single superintendent or politician who has a collaborative relationship with the union where real transformation has taken place (like in Chattanooga, Columbus OH, or Denver and other places.)

### Super Myth #2: Charter schools are a magic, silver bullet solution

NEA believes that charter schools and other nontraditional public school options have the potential to facilitate positive transformation and foster creative teaching methods that can be replicated in traditional public schools for the benefit of all students. By definition, charter schools are free from many of the restrictions placed on traditional public schools. **The innovative ideas that make some charter schools successful stem from the very issues NEA members have long identified as things they want to change about public education.**

Charter schools are only able to serve a small percentage of the student population, and only one in five charter schools outperform traditional public schools. In fact, research suggests that two in five charter schools perform worse than traditional public schools.

Recent films have suggested that charter schools are the only way we can improve public education, but even well-known proponents of charter schools are critical of these films:

“Movies that sell charter schools as a salvation are peddling a simple-minded remedy that takes us back to the worst charter puffery of a decade ago, is at odds with the evidence, and can blind viewers to what it takes to launch and grow truly great charters. These flicks accelerate the troubling trend of turning every good idea into a morale crusade, so that retooling K-12 becomes a question of moral rectitude in which we choose sides and “reformers” are supposed to smother questions about policy or practice. They also wildly romanticize charters, charter school teachers, and the kids and families, making it harder to speak honestly or bluntly.” (*Rick Hess, education commentator, American Enterprise Institute. His complete article can be found at: <http://blog.american.com/?author=25>*)

Charter schools are one solution, but schools across the country are benefitting from a range of exciting, new ideas that are the result of communities working together to improve their local schools. **NEA’s Priority Schools Campaign** supports schools that are thinking about education differently—from teacher-led schools in Denver, to service learning in Ohio, to teacher-mentoring in Michigan—school districts are working collaboratively with local unions to improve teaching and learning.

### Super Myth #3: Unions are unwilling to commit to “common sense”

#### solutions

America’s public education system has recently captured the attention and imagination of lawmakers, newscasters, commentators, filmmakers and the general public. **NEA welcomes others to join this large and very important national conversation.**

In many places, the situation is urgent, so for those new to the conversation, the impulse is to recommend simple, silver-bullet solutions. Of course, the challenges our public schools face are myriad and complex. NEA seeks solutions that are based on research, collaborative, and are well-planned and executed.

Smaller class-sizes; increased teacher autonomy and flexibility; higher status for the teaching profession; improved teacher quality and professional development programs; broader support and involvement by parents and the community; adequate tools and resources; modernized schools —these are things we know, from research and experience, will improve our nation's schools. **All schools should have the tools and resources necessary to help all students succeed – students shouldn't have to rely on chance or a lottery to get a quality education that prepares them to succeed in life.** NEA members are eager to receive the support that is needed to ensure all students, not just a few, have access to quality public schools.

Because NEA members are in schools and classrooms every day, we are also aware of the challenges our public schools face, and we are eager to have collaborative discussions to help determine ways that we can work with parents, community organizations, elected officials, and other concerned adults to benefit America's students. **Educating our children is a shared responsibility, and the debate over how best we do that should be cooperative, not divisive.**

## **Super Myth #4: Unions don't represent the opinions of their own members, and only exist to protect "bad" teachers**

The nation's teachers unions—NEA and AFT—comprise more than four million individual members: teachers and education support professionals, students preparing to be teachers, higher education personnel and retired educators. At NEA, policy is debated and agreed to among democratically elected members—our **members' opinions are diverse, and collectively they set the organization's agenda at the local, state, and national levels.**

NEA members' dues are spent on a range of priorities, which are democratically and collectively agreed upon each year during the organization's annual Representative Assembly, in which nearly 10,000 members participate. These priorities include developing effective teacher evaluation systems; providing funding and support for innovative projects through our Priority Schools Campaign; establishing guidelines for improving teacher quality; working to decrease school drop-out rates and lobbying for increased funding for school construction, special education, school nutrition and other important programs that help improve the quality public education in America.

**Nobody—especially NEA's members—want teachers in the classrooms who do not help students to learn and prepare for the future.** NEA's membership has been at the forefront of developing and implementing ways to improve teacher quality, including exciting evaluation methods, peer mentoring, and effective professional development. Union contracts are the result of meetings, negotiations, and agreements between the administration, school board, and the bargaining unit. Due to the current economic climate, school employees have agreed to pay freezes, furlough days, and a number of other concessions so that districts can continue to meet their ever-shrinking budgets, without unduly shortchanging students.