

Voices: Stand up for teachers, not unions

Written by Ronda Reinhardt on Feb 7th, 2013. | Copyright © EdNewsColorado.org

Denver teacher Ronda Reinhardt urges legislators to approve a bill that would make it easier for teachers to cancel union memberships during the school year – or whenever they want. As a teacher in Missouri, like most of my colleagues, I was a member of a non-union teacher association. We were all quite satisfied with the affordable dues and the services provided, and the non-political nature of the organization. When I moved to Colorado, I was shocked to encounter a new reality in which teachers' unions are given preferential treatment and other teacher organizations are forced to take a back seat. When I moved to Denver I was surprised while attending my teacher orientation that the union was everywhere, and presented as the only available option for teachers to join. Due to the need for liability insurance I begrudgingly signed up. Little did I know that my decision that day would eventually lead to the union taking hundreds of hard-earned dollars from me against my will. After just a few months in the union, I learned that there is indeed a non-union, professional association available to teachers in Colorado. The Professional Association of Colorado Educators (PACE) is one-fourth the cost of the union and provides me with the benefits and services I need, without the politics that I don't want to fund. I was thrilled to find an option that met my needs, and especially my budget as an educator. What followed was shocking. I joined PACE immediately and sent a message of cancellation to the union, thinking that would be the end. I was appalled when the union informed me that they were refusing to cancel my dues payments. Apparently I was locked into paying monthly dues for at least the rest of year – and possibly the rest of my career. This was never explained to me verbally. Turns out if I want to make sure I'm not forced to pay union dues for an additional year, and every year I teach after that, I'm required to show up at the union office in person during the first two weeks of November to cancel. That was the only way. I was stunned. I further learned that these deceptive policies exist in 20 school districts in Colorado. I could hardly believe that an organization that claimed to serve teachers would turn around and lock me, a teacher, into such a shady contract. Teachers' unions should be accountable to members, and if they provide a service that we think is worth the cost of dues – great. However, it speaks volumes that the unions rely on these misleading, monopolistic agreements that lock teachers into unfavorable circumstances and crush our right to hold them accountable. I wanted to call the Better Business Bureau. I felt I had been scammed out of hundreds of dollars, which is a sad way to feel when talking about an organization that is supposed to be supporting teachers. Thankfully, brave legislators in Colorado have put forward a simple bill, Senate Bill 13-017 that would promote teacher freedom in our state. This law would grant teachers the ability to cancel their membership in any association, be it a union or some other teacher association, at any time during the year. This will put teachers back in charge of their money and make it so all teacher associations will need to demonstrate value to their members. The question before legislators is very simple. Are they more concerned about an individual teacher's ability to budget and decide how to spend their own money from month to month; or are they more interested in preserving the union's ability to lock teachers into unfavorable agreements? Teachers deserve the right to make their own decisions regarding their paychecks and should be protected from being deceived. Allowing the unions to continue misleading educators is unacceptable. It is time for legislators to stand up for teachers and not the union.