July 25th, 2024

Dear President Pringle, Executive Director Anderson and the NEA Leadership Team,

The NEA RA Delegation from the Portland Association of Teachers (PAT) in Oregon has observed your actions and emails in response to the NEASO strike and subsequent lockout.

We feel heartbroken, outraged, unsettled, and ashamed. Labor disputes should inspire us to convert conflict into passionate and transparent good faith dialogue. Labor disputes have an opportunity to unite us with a renewed sense of commitment to each other, our moral contracts, and the educators, students and families we serve. We, as a collective of educators, should model best practices in labor negotiations.

Rather than build solidarity with other unions and working class people under the care of the NEA, your decisions forced those who labor for us and with us to go on an Unfair Labor Practice strike to address their repeated concerns. At PAT, we know what it is like to have no other options. We were pained to read communications that do not address the conflict, degrading workers and lengthening the path to harmony when it was our own district. The pain has deepened knowing it is now our national union taking those same steps against our NEASO staff.

PAT Strike as Context
During the fall of 2023, PAT won one of the most important strikes in education in recent history, at great personal cost to our members. Despite cold, rainy days, our educators held the line for 15 days to make gains for our working conditions and student wellbeing. We lived in constant fear of retaliatory union busting tactics such as threats to our healthcare, many of which we blocked. We survived our fight only to later observe you using the same tactics against NEASO.

Without the support from NEASO staff members in the weeks leading up to and during our strike, we would not have been able to make the gains for public education that we did. It is worth repeating a third time: We are seeing our national union take the same actions we feared our district would take against us – misrepresenting our goals and actions, gaslighting workers, and cutting off healthcare and email without notice. These tactics that our school

board used in an attempt to force us off the picket line are the same union busting tactics that we see NEA management using against the NEASO staff that you locked out of work.

It is further disheartening to hear from NEASO staff members that the same institutional issues that we fought against during our strike, and continue to fight against, are mirrored in NEA management. We saw positions for student-facing staff members get cut while middle management expanded in budget and size year over year; We saw raises to administrators while we were told there was no budget for staff cost of living adjustments.

We see rank-and-file NEASO staff receiving no step increases or raises that keep up with the cost of living, while senior administrators received significant salary increases, some as high as 19.2%, in that time. During this time, NEA also increased the number of managers, where there is now 1 manager for every 4 NEASO staff, while NEASO staff have decreased (according to the LM2 tax data). This cost comes at the expense of people who do the work of the NEA on behalf of our members: The people who support educators on strike, the people who maintain the website, the people who provide educational credits that lead to wage increases, among many others. These people who do the work to support public educators are who our dues should support, not the management class.

There is a Different Way Forward
We know that there are difficult choices as managers when trying to manage our staff. For example, our Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) were drowning in caseloads that made it impossible to fulfill the mandates of students IEPs. We saw that the number of hours did not match the staff we had and understood the urgency to provide relief for workers and services for our students. In consultation with our members, we agreed to limited contracting of services to ensure some of our most vulnerable students received the services to which they are legally entitled. NEA should be working with NEASO to understand the workload and overtime necessary to do the work our members need, and collaboratively find creative solutions to support NEASO staff. This work MUST be sustainable while ensuring members receive the services THEY desperately need from our union. Collaboration is possible and necessary to build the world in which we hope to live.

Democratic processes and values do not exist in theoretical spaces: They exist when put into action. We cannot "win all the things" without solidarity and support for union members and working class people. Instead of attempting to drive a wedge between NEA and NEASO

members, our national union should lead the way with solidarity for its unionized employees. A win for one is a win for all, just as the harm being done to NEASO staff is harm being done to all of us who work in education.

We want to believe that NEA can learn and grow from this, and make different choices when confronted with more information. This isn't about bargaining a fair contract, this is about doing the right thing and stopping the retaliation for protected union activity. Stop using our member dues to pay for scabs. End the Lockout. Maintain NEASO health benefits. Focus on supporting our members over "winning" over our union siblings.

In Solidarity with the Working Class,

The NEA RA Representatives from Portland Association of Teachers, Local 410

- Angela Bonilla, State Delegate and President of the Portland Association of Teachers

- Sean Gunn, Delegate, Portland Association of Teachers

- Catherine Tucker, Delegate, Portland Association of Teachers

- Joe Rowe, Delegate, Portland Association of Teachers

- Tabitha Williams, Delegate, Portland Association of Teachers

- Zach Vestal, Delegate, Portland Association of Teachers

- Greg Burrill, State Delegate and member of the Portland Association of Teachers

- Jacob Jonas-Closs, Delegate, Portland Association of Teachers