

FAQs



Know the Truth

What does it mean to be a right-to-work (for less) state?

“Right to work” is the idea that no one is required to join a union or pay fees to a union for negotiations, representation or other services. In Florida, the so-called right-to-work status has been in the Florida Constitution since the early 1970s. As part of this law, anyone who chooses not to be a member does not pay dues or fees and is not entitled to representation or support from the union. When billionaire-funded out-of-state groups say that unions must still represent those who are not members, they are misleading those who work in Florida’s public schools, colleges and universities.

Why should I belong to my local union?

Together, we have successfully raised wages, improved working conditions, supported student loan forgiveness and made sure the voices of educators are actually heard. When educators are heard, respected and given the resources we need, we can give our students the very best.

Can another organization, other than your union, provide legal support and negotiated contracts?

Only the union can negotiate and enforce the contract. Someone who is not a member of their union may hire a lawyer (average Florida rate is about \$250 per hour) to represent them if an accusation is made against them or if they feel their rights are being violated or denied. The union has the right to be present at any such meeting to protect the contract agreement.

Can I have a contract without a union?

No. The Florida Constitution gives us the right to have a contract through our union. Specifically, it says “the right of employees, by and through a labor organization, to bargain collectively shall not be denied or abridged.” Without a union (labor organization), there is no right to a contract.

Why are billionaires funding shadow organizations, telling us to leave our union and spreading misinformation?

They know we are stronger when we stand together. The fact is, the higher the union membership, the better the pay and working conditions. Our union is the only organized group that effectively stands up for public school students, staff, teachers and professors. These same billionaire-funded groups regularly lobby against better pay and job security, while lobbying for legislation that blames teachers and limits your professional rights.

Why don't we strike?

Florida's constitution prohibits us from striking. Florida law has a very steep penalty – the loss of our retirement. If any employee, or group of employees, participates in any work stoppage (strike, organized sick out, etc.), those employees will lose their retirement. If we as a union call for a strike, you will lose your retirement, job, certification and, if you get hired back, your contract. There are penalties against the union as well, but they pale in comparison to what happens to our members. However, we are not without power. If we build our unions, enforce our contract, speak out and VOTE, we can have significant influence over what happens to public education in Florida. If we allow the billionaire-funded shadow groups to divide us for each other and from parents, then we will not succeed.

If our union falls below 60%, do we lose our union?

Maybe! If a local does not have an arbitrary number of 60% of the bargaining unit as dues paying members, the union must divert resources to conduct an election to see if the employees still want a union and contract. We know, based on what the billionaire-funded shadow groups have already said, that they will spend millions of dollars trying to get us to vote away our constitutional right to have a union and a contract. This means these elections could cost local unions significant amounts of your dues money just to keep your rights intact. If the members of the Public Employees Relations Commission (PERC), all of whom have been appointed by the governor, decide a union is not cooperating or determine the information the union provided is inaccurate, they will move to decertify the union without a vote, taking away your right to a union and a contract. This is why we must get all our local unions over 60% membership. Of course, you may also wonder what happens if we do get to 60%? Will the state try to raise that number to 70%? We wonder, too.

Is it even worth the fight to keep our union?

You bet it is. We must continue to fight for our students, schools, colleges and universities. They are an essential part of our democracy. Our country has faced adversity many times in its history and has overcome it by brave Americans speaking up, standing up and taking action. With so many of our colleagues making the difficult decision to leave a profession they loved, those of us staying must stand united and strong on the key value we share – the right for every child, regardless of race, background or ZIP code, to get the education they deserve and need!