



SUNLIGHT
POLICY CENTER
— OF NEW JERSEY —

ISSUE UPDATE

**SCHOOL DISTRICT DATA SHOWS NJEA
MEMBERSHIP DECLINED -10% FROM 2018-
2023**

**THE SUPREME COURT'S *JANUS* DECISION GAVE TEACHERS A
CHOICE, AND MANY HAVE CHOSEN TO LEAVE THE NJEA**

April 4, 2024

SCHOOL DISTRICT DATA SHOWS NJEA MEMBERSHIP DOWN -10% SINCE THE *JANUS* DECISION

Introduction

"[The Wayne Education Association president] certifies that since the SPC¹ email campaign began in 2020 she has noticed far fewer members have chosen to enroll in the Association, and the net result has been a decline in membership."

-- Wayne Education Association [complaint](#) to the Public Employment Relations Commission

The data supports the Wayne Education Association (WEA) president's claim: from the Supreme Court's *Janus* decision in 2018 to the fall of 2023, the WEA has lost 102 members, or -7.9% of its membership. Similarly, by the fall of 2023, only 90.2% of the Wayne school district's 1,314-person bargaining unit were New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) members; that is, 129 district employees were not members. No wonder the WEA is trying to get the Public Employment Relations Commission (PERC) to block Sunlight Policy Center's campaign to inform teachers² of their 1st Amendment rights and how their highest-in-the-nation dues are spent on politics and excessive executive compensation.

Wayne is the home district of NJEA President Sean Spiller, so if the WEA is losing members, it would strongly suggest that other NJEA affiliates are losing them, too. Sunlight's analysis of 17 New Jersey school districts found that was indeed the case.

From 2018-23, NJEA Membership Decline Averaged -10.9%

Since the Supreme Court's 2018 *Janus* decision,³ which allowed teachers to choose whether to belong to a union, the NJEA has seen a substantial erosion in membership.

Using Open Public Records requests,⁴ we analyzed 17 New Jersey school districts of varying sizes and locations where the NJEA is the union representing teachers. As shown in Table 1, we found that they averaged a -10.9% decline in membership from 2018-23.

¹ SPC stands for Sunlight Policy Center.

² Sunlight uses the term "teachers" as proxy for all the various NJEA membership categories, including teachers, paraprofessionals, retired teachers and pre-service teachers.

³ Prior to the *Janus* decision, NJEA-friendly New Jersey laws allowed the NJEA to charge non-members "agency fees" of up to 85% of regular dues. The existence of agency fees effectively forced teachers to join the NJEA. In *Janus*, the Supreme Court ruled that agency fees were an unconstitutional infringement on teachers' 1st Amendment rights.

⁴ Open Public Records Act (OPRA) requests were made to these 17 districts in the spring/summer of 2018 and the fall of 2023.

Every one of the 17 districts lost members, but the decline in five school districts approached a quarter of their membership: East Orange -25.6%; Sparta -23%; Hamilton -22.6%; Hanover Township -19.5%; and Camden -19.2%.

Table 1. From 2018-23, NJEA Membership Drops -10.9%

School District	2018 members	2023 members	% Decline 2018-23
Jersey City	4,379	4,023	-8.1%
Paterson	3,341	3,115	-6.8%
Toms River	2,098	1,847	-12.0%
Woodbridge	1,790	1,914	6.9%
Hamilton	1,729	1,339	-22.6%
Trenton	1,505	1,314	-12.7%
East Orange	1,449	1,078	-25.6%
Wayne	1,287	1,185	-7.9%
Camden	1,271	1,027	-19.2%
Sparta	561	432	-23.0%
Wyckoff	268	249	-7.1%
Ramapo-Indian Hills	267	251	-6.0%
Kinnelon	284	257	-9.5%
Hanover Twp.	256	206	-19.5%
Franklin Lakes	250	241	-3.6%
Hopatcong	248	205	-17.3%
Oakland	198	182	-8.1%
17 NJEA Districts	21,181	18,865	-10.9%

The NJEA Has Far Fewer Members than the 200,000 It Claims

The NJEA clearly does not want teachers or the public to know its membership levels. It used to provide regularly updated numbers on its website but stopped around the time of *Janus*. In 2018, the NJEA claimed to have [203,520](#) members, so a -10.9% decline would imply a loss of 22,183 members and would place 2023 membership at 181,336. The current NJEA [website](#) falsely claims that the NJEA has 200,000 members despite the fact that NJEA President Sean Spiller has [publicly acknowledged](#) that membership is less than 200,000. The data in Table 1 implies that membership is far below 200,000.

In 2023, NJEA Members Averaged 88.9% of Bargaining Units

The absolute decline in membership shown in Table 1 is real and significant, but it does not take into account that the overall number of employees in a school district can fluctuate due to extraneous factors such as the number of students enrolled, school

budgets, out-sourcing, and other factors. To account for such factors, we looked at union membership levels as a percentage of collective bargaining units (CBU).⁵ Lower percentages reflect more teachers choosing to leave the NJEA.

Pre-*Janus*, when teachers were effectively forced to join the NJEA, 99% of teachers were NJEA members.⁶ As shown in Table 2, that percentage declined to 88.9% in 2023, a drop of -10%, which mirrors the -10.9% absolute decline in NJEA members.

Notably, NJEA members made up less than 80% of five of the CBUs: East Orange 74.1%; Sparta 75.4%, Hamilton 75.6%; Wyckoff 79%; and Hopatcong 79.2%. Once again, the number of teachers who have chosen not to belong to the NJEA in these districts approaches a quarter of the overall bargaining unit.

Table 2. 2023 NJEA Members as % of CBUs: 88.9%

School District	2023 CBU	2023 members	as % of CBU
Jersey City	4,200	4,023	95.8%
Paterson	3,126	3,115	99.6%
Toms River	2,121	1,847	87.1%
Woodbridge	1,998	1,914	95.8%
Hamilton	1,771	1,339	75.6%
Trenton	1,557	1,314	84.4%
East Orange	1,455	1,078	74.1%
Wayne	1,314	1,185	90.2%
Camden	1,232	1,027	83.4%
Sparta	573	432	75.4%
Wyckoff	315	249	79.0%
Ramapo-Indian Hills	302	251	83.1%
Kinnelon	292	257	88.0%
Hanover Twp.	244	206	84.4%
Franklin Lakes	264	241	91.3%
Hopatcong	259	205	79.2%
Oakland	199	182	91.5%
17 NJEA Districts	21,222	18,865	88.9%

⁵ A collective bargaining unit comprises all of the district employees represented by the NJEA in collective bargaining. Because the NJEA has secured laws that make it the exclusive representative of a school district's employees, it must represent both members and non-members.

⁶ According to the NJEA, in 2012, there were [2,041](#) agency fee payers among [197,542](#) teachers, or 1%.

Conclusion

The data is compelling and convincing. The sample size of 21,222 teachers from 17 school districts of varying sizes and locations around the state provides a sufficient basis to assert that NJEA membership declined by approximately -10% from 2018 to 2023. We looked at the data two different ways to account for possible fluctuations in school district payrolls, and both indicated a similar -10% decline.

Based on these analyses, we estimate that NJEA membership is currently around 181,000. This is substantially below the 200,000 advertised on the NJEA's website (which even NJEA President Spiller has acknowledged is an incorrect number). We are left to approximate the NJEA's membership levels because the NJEA used to provide updated membership levels but stopped around the time of the *Janus* decision. Now it looks like we know why.

From this, we conclude that once teachers learned that they had a choice, and then learned how NJEA leadership was spending their highest-in-the-nation dues on politics and excessive executive compensation, many teachers chose to stop paying dues and leave the NJEA.

We take that as a validation of our campaign, just as the WEA president certified to PERC. Our goal has always been to empower teachers with the facts so they can make the best decision for themselves. It looks like they are doing exactly that.