



**UTLA 2014-2020: Understanding How Teacher Unions and Educational Justice Coalitions
Can Play Roles in Addressing Educational Equity, Civil Rights, and Democracy**

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Executive Summary

1. In the years prior to 2014, UTLA had suffered from hard fights and losses that had demoralized educators, weakened the union, and led to alienation from Los Angeles' community organization groups
2. In 2014, out of decades of caucus and community work on the part of rank-and-file teacher leaders, progressives won leadership of UTLA on a platform that was built on leading with a clear and bold vision; methodically developing a new union culture centered on supermajority organizing and power-building through high-participation member structures; and ensuring the centrality of racial, social, gender, and economic justice
3. From 2014 to 2020, UTLA underwent significant changes, including forming a coalition with community organizations called Reclaim Our Schools LA; passing a membership-wide dues increase to increase the union's organizing and community relations capacity; challenging privatization within public schools more directly; initiating a bargaining for the common good approach; and more
4. In 2019, UTLA amassed enough strength to go on a strike that successfully won class size reductions, more librarians and counselors, protection of healthcare, green space, limits on indiscriminate searches of students, a salary increase, Community Schools, an immigrant defense fund, and more
5. Through interviews conducted for this project, teachers repeatedly emphasized the role of the community in making these wins possible and how the power of the strike resided in the fact that teachers were not just fighting for their wages but to make schools and communities better for their students and their families
6. Labor/community educational justice coalitions are critical for further pushing back against austerity measures and attacks against public education

Short Project Description

What happens in public education has a tremendous and unique influence on society, and school systems are some of the most important institutions for building the norms necessary for multi-racial democracy. Educators are strategically positioned to organize—with large unions, natural connections to the community, and jobs that require them to engage key issues in society.

To better understand how teacher unions can play a role in building power and fostering movements that address educational equity, civil rights, and the expansion of democracy in schools and surrounding communities, this report takes the work of United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) in the 2014-2020 period as a case study. In 2014, out of decades of caucus and community work on the part of rank-and-file teacher leaders, progressives won leadership of UTLA. In this 2014 to 2020 period, the union leadership and broader organization helped to form a coalition with community organizations called Reclaim Our Schools LA; led on passing a membership-wide dues increase to increase the union's organizing and community relations capacity; developed deep, democratic member structures; challenged privatization within public schools; won significant racial justice victories; helped build state-wide and national educational justice coalitions; and engaged a "Bargaining for the Common Good" approach that, through a strike in 2019, won class size reductions, more librarians and counselors, protection of healthcare, green space, limits on indiscriminate searches of students, a salary increase, Community Schools, an immigrant defense fund, and more.

This report explores, through over 100 interviews—with UTLA rank-and-file leaders, parents and youth key to building Reclaim Our Schools LA, UTLA elected leaders, long-time Community School and educational justice theoreticians and practitioners, elected teacher union leaders across the country, national community organizing luminaries, educational historians, and more—and archival research, how UTLA was able to move from a low-participation union that was alienated from the Los Angeles community to become a union that contributed to building a powerful community coalition and that was strong enough to lead the successful 2019 strike, and considers how this connection between teacher unions and social justice coalitions can work to shape educational policy.

Introduction

Today, United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) represents over 39,000 workers, including teachers, counselors, nurses, social workers, psychiatrists, psychologists, early educators, adult educators, substitute educators, and more. The employer, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), is the second largest school district in the United States. UTLA, as a merged local, is the largest National Education Association (NEA) local and the second largest American Federation of Teachers (AFT) local in the country. UTLA has 925 work sites, with a goal of an elected leader at each site (called a chapter chair), 7 elected full-time city-wide officers, an elected Board of Directors of 46 people, an elected House of Representatives of over 250 people, and 8 regionally defined areas.

Its size and structure have made UTLA (and LAUSD) a focal point with regards to public education, particularly after the highly publicized success of the 2019 strike that won unprecedented class size caps and reductions, more librarians and counselors, additional green space, more social and emotional support for students, limits on indiscriminate searches of students, investment in a new Community Schools model, an immigrant defense fund, LAUSD Board support for a state-wide revenue measure, LAUSD Board support for a moratorium on charter schools, and more. Long-time organizer and labor educator Jane McAlevey wrote on the 2019 strike: “It took the teachers in the country’s second-largest teachers’ union...in America’s second largest city, exactly four years of serious, determined hard work to win a great contract in a hard-as-hell fight. These teachers fought for nothing less than the life of public schooling in Los Angeles, and in the process, won big for themselves and for their communities. If you can succeed at uniting 34,000 people as diverse as the teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District, you can unite America.”¹

What happened in these years of work that helped build UTLA to be a union capable of this strike? What changes needed to happen internally within UTLA to build this capacity? How did UTLA’s messaging and direction evolve to empower membership to walk out on the job for non-wage related issues? What steps did UTLA have to take to have 50,000 parents, youth, and community join the 35,000 striking teachers, and lead a strike with broad public approval? How did UTLA, after years of alienation with the community, build meaningful ties with community coalitions? What kinds of conversations happened when collectively building out an educational justice coalition?

Historical Context of Teacher Unions and Educational Justice Coalitions

Before further delving into UTLA, it warrants consideration of the longer trajectory of teacher unionism in the United States, and particularly the more recent resurgence of labor efforts that have re-galvanized social justice and organizing unionism.

Modern teacher unions grew out of the labor movement of the 1930s, but were not legitimized until the 1960s, wherein they were modeled on the steel and auto workers’ unions that were validated in the 1930s with the passing of the Norris-LaGuardia Act of 1932 and the Wagner Act of 1935. The following decades saw the rapid growth and fortification of these unions, and a wave of teacher strikes helped to win public sector bargaining in many states; historian John F. Lyons estimates that during the 1960s and 1970s, the country saw “over 1,000

¹ Jane McAlevey. *A Collective Bargain: Unions, Organizing, and the Fight for Democracy*. New York, Harper Collins, 2020. 199.

teacher strikes involving more than 823,000 teachers.”² A *Time* magazine article from 1963 reports: “The U.S. teacher used to be afraid to smoke, chew, cuss, or ask for a raise. Now he denounces crowded classrooms, upbraids lawmakers, and goes on strike almost as readily as a dockworker. He even demands a say in things that school boards always considered their sole province. Teacher militancy is bursting out all over.”³ This militancy, notes Aaron Brenner, drew on the Civil Rights, Black Power, feminist, and antiwar movements of the period, and the labor movement’s own traditions of rank-and-file organization; accordingly, teacher unions were advocating for “a more aggressive, inclusive, democratic, and politicized union movement that they believed could win greater rights for workers both on and off the job.”⁴

However, the following decades saw neoliberal economic policies favor privatization, deregulation, and the decline of unions. The educator movement’s power waned as more and more unions oriented themselves towards a narrower, traditional business unionism that focused on defensively protecting teacher contracts from these threats. Nonetheless, some teacher union activists during this period worked to push for a union more oriented towards educational justice and community organizing—for example, in August 1994, a group of 29 teacher union activists from a variety of AFT and NEA locals held a three-day institute in Portland, Oregon, and from this institute issued a statement entitled “Social Justice Unionism: A Working Draft.” This statement read:

Without a broader conception of the interests of teachers and of teaching, our unions will find themselves on evermore shaky ground, defending fewer jobs and shrinking privileges against repeated attacks. Without a better partnership with the parents and communities that need public education most, we will find ourselves isolated from essential allies. Without a new vision of schooling that raises the expectations of our students and the standards of our own profession, we will continue to flounder. Without a new model of unionism that revives debate and democracy internally and projects an inspiring social vision and agenda externally, we will fall short of the challenges before us...Social justice unionism cannot be implemented in a top-down fashion. Nor can it be just words on paper. It will require both enlightened leadership and rank-and-file mobilization. It will mean learning to teach in new ways; restructuring local union activities in new ways; reaching out to different communities in new ways; and building alliances at both local and state levels. It will require the national unions, perhaps one merged teacher union, to provide leadership to build a national movement for social and economic justice.⁵

When these activists distributed thousands of flyers detailing social justice teacher unionism at subsequent NEA and AFT conventions where a merger of the two unions was debated, their call to build one merged teacher union organizing for social justice seemed to fall short, and a merger was ultimately rejected in 1998. Teacher unions’ waning power was only further compounded by

² John F. Lyons. “American Federation of Teachers.” *Encyclopedia of U.S. Labor and Working-Class History*, ed. Eric Arnesen. New York: Routledge, 2007. 89.

³ John F. Lyons. *Teachers and Reform: Chicago Public Education, 1929-1970*. Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2008. 133.

⁴ Aaron Brenner et al. *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from Below During the Long 1970s*. New York: Verso, 2010. xi.

⁵ Michael Charney et al. *Teacher Unions and Social Justice: Organizing for the Schools and Communities Our Students Deserve*. Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools, 2021. 107-108.

the recession in 2008 that saw mass lay-offs and a corporate education reform agenda aggressively pushed by billionaires, blaming teachers and teacher unions for the struggles and setbacks of the public education system.

During the recession, in 2012, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel and his appointed Board of Education—made up of billionaires like the heiress to the Hyatt Hotels—engaged contract negotiations with the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) with proposals that extended the school year without increasing pay for teachers, tolerated class sizes that could reach 55 students, and more. In response, with more than 90% of educators voting in favor during the strike vote, CTU began its first strike in a quarter of a century in September of that year. The strike was led by leaders in the Caucus of Rank and File Educators (CORE), who began organizing colleagues and communities to resist the closures of 16 schools and turned out hundreds of parents to picket the Chicago Board of Education meetings to testify in defense of their schools. CORE leaders were elected to leadership positions in CTU in the spring of 2010, with newly elected president Karen Lewis stating at the time:

Today marks the beginning of the end of scapegoating educators for all the social ills that our children, families, and schools struggle against every day. Today marks the beginning of a fight of true transparency in our educational policy—how to accurately measure learning and teaching, how to truly improve our schools, and how to evaluate the wisdom behind our spending priorities. This election shows the unity of 30,000 educators standing strong to put business in its place—out of our schools.⁶

With CORE at the helm, Chicago teachers were able to achieve a decisive victory, winning on a range of matters such as hiring more teachers in art, music, physical education, and other subjects; language that promoted racial diversity in hiring; a pool of funding for social workers, psychologists, special education teachers, classroom assistants, and counselors in schools with high caseloads; a 7% rise in pay over three years that took experience into account; and more. Jesse Hagopian, writing on the CTU strike, emphasized that the victory hinged on the fact that the strike “transcended a simple labor dispute and was transformed into a social movement, with the teachers fusing their struggle with that of the community they serve—organizing with parents for more than a year prior to the strike, making demands for increased resources for the students.”⁷ Because CTU went on strike not only for wages but with the aim of defending and enriching public education for students of color and low-income families, it garnered widespread support—66% among parents of public-school children, according to a poll of 1,344 voting Chicago households.⁸

A few years after CTU’s highly publicized victories, a wave of teacher walk-outs and strikes took place. In late February 2018, some 20,000 West Virginian classroom teachers and thousands of other employees shut down schools across all 55 counties. Teachers and school workers lined the streets with signs, demonstrated for higher pay and other gains, and even went

⁶ Jesse Hagopian. “A People’s History of the Chicago Teachers Union.” *Teacher Unions and Social Justice: Organizing for the Schools and Communities Our Students Deserve*, ed. Michael Charney et al. Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools, 2021. 92.

⁷ Ibid. 94.

⁸ Chicago Teachers Union. “As Chicago teachers strike enters fourth day, a new poll proves majority of parents and taxpayers approve of fair contract fight.” *Chicago Teachers Union Blog*, September 13, 2012. <https://www.ctulocal1.org/posts/as-chicago-teachers-strike-enters-fourth-day-a-new-poll-proves-majority-of-parents-and-taxpayers-approve-of-fair-contract-fight/>

to the Capitol building, ultimately winning 5% raises for all public employees. Shortly after, Oklahoma and Arizona went on a multiday work stoppage, and Kentucky, Colorado, and North Carolina held walkouts. Almost all of the places where statewide actions occurred were right-to-work states, where cuts in school funding were amongst the steepest. Because these actions were taking place in predominantly conservative states, this wave of strikes was known as “Red for Ed.”

Red for Ed was hugely impactful, with many teachers often outright breaking the law to fight for better working conditions for themselves and their students. Teachers showed even more bravery when, in West Virginia and Arizona, they turned down raises that included only teachers and excluded support staff and other public workers. Many teachers demanded increases in state spending beyond schools for public services that had been drained of resources for years. This emphasis on fighting for not just what happens within the classroom but outside of it, too, and of fights led largely by women that draw inspiration from movements like Black Lives Matter and Me Too, continue to offer teacher unions today a powerful lesson in mobilization and community outreach.

A Brief History of UTLA, 1970-2014

UTLA was formed in 1970 after two large teachers’ unions in Los Angeles merged, and this merger was followed shortly after by a massive strike. Public school teachers walked out for twenty-three school days and won their first union contract with substantial raises. However, after right-wing groups sued, the court ultimately overturned this contract on the grounds that teachers in California were not covered by a collective bargaining law. Unionized teachers fought and ultimately won a state law in 1975 that granted them collective bargaining rights.

Although significant gains were made during this watershed moment, it was followed in 1978 by the passing of one of the strictest anti-tax measures in the country: Proposition 13. This proposition proposed a permanent tax subsidy to both commercial and residential property owners by capping property tax rates and limiting the rate at which a property’s assessed value could increase. It also limited local communities’ ability to raise taxes to pay for education, meaning the financial burden for education shifted to the state from the local government. The state had already been playing a larger role in public education in California because of the three *Serrano v. Priest* decisions in 1971, 1976, and 1977, wherein the California Supreme Court required California to break the link between local property wealth disparities and school funding disparities.⁹ However, Proposition 13 constrained and complicated the options for how to bring this school-funding system into compliance.

UTLA was strong, but Proposition 13 began to drain the tax base of the state, and funds for public education decreased. The union went on strike again in 1989, this time for nine days, and won a three-year, 24% pay raise.¹⁰ However, only a few years later, these financial gains were substantially lost as teachers took significant pay cuts to close what LAUSD called a \$247-million budget gap.¹¹ As the next few decades went on, and as Proposition 13 continued to

⁹ Carrie Hahnel et al. “Unjust Legacy: How Proposition 13 Has Contributed to Intergenerational, Economic, and Racial Inequities in Schools and Communities.” *The Opportunity Institute*, 2022.

<https://theopportunityinstitute.org/s/OI-Report-Prop-13-Final.pdf>

¹⁰ Elaine Woo. “Success of Strike by L.A. Teachers Felt Across U.S.” *Los Angeles Times*, June 12, 1989.

<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1989-06-12-me-1477-story.html>

¹¹ Sandy Banks. “L.A. District to Propose 14% Pay Cut for Teachers.” *Los Angeles Times*, July 25, 1992.

<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-07-25-mn-3845-story.html>

starve state and local budgets, UTLA's power similarly waned. In our interviews, when asked to describe this period, teachers recalled feeling less and less faith in UTLA and disempowered by years of grudgingly accepting cuts rather than fighting for stronger contracts. "I was a chapter chair for a long time," said Marie Germaine, "and prior to 2014, we were not as aggressive and progressive with our contract demands. We would go years without a salary increase. We had taken some salary reductions and RIFs [Reduction in Force], and sites were not as organized." Another teacher, Rosa Jimenez, who began teaching in 2007, recalled that UTLA seemed more focused on "protecting what the members ha[d]," rather than fighting for more.

The Great Recession of 2008 only further deepened these difficulties. In the years leading up to the recession, UTLA was close to bankruptcy due to low dues rates. In 2008, an attempt to win a membership-wide vote to raise dues was organized quickly but failed to implement a supermajority organizing strategy, resulting in an overwhelming loss—66.6% no to 33.3% yes.¹² Soon after, with the economic crash, LAUSD issued thousands of layoff and RIF notices, which, combined with demographic changes and corporate charter incursions, decreased UTLA's membership from 46,000 members to 33,000.

With Los Angeles being the home of Eli Broad, one of the most influential corporate charter philanthropists, and of Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, the school privatization sector had long seen the city as a center for its influence. As school district budgets across the country were slashed, the public education privatization movement gained even more momentum. In 2009, the privatizer-dominated LAUSD School Board created a Public School Choice policy that allowed private charter companies and entities to run newly constructed LAUSD schools and some "low-performing" schools. While important fights took place at some schools—such as Hillcrest Elementary—to keep private entities out, UTLA was limited by its struggle to build genuine, transformative relationships with community, parents, and students. Amy Schur, a long-time organizer with Alliance of Californians for Community Action (ACCE), reflected on those years: "It was very hard for us to partner with UTLA. The union was doing its own thing, and might reach out when they needed parent involvement, but it didn't feel like we were mutually developing a plan." Los Angeles community and political organizer Anthony Thigpenn said that "it was—in terms of community and labor alliances working together—more episodic, and UTLA was not really as consistent or as focused on building strong community alliances and community partnerships."

At this time, UTLA lacked the systems, structures, and culture for supermajority organizing and was not able to build an effective response to budget cuts and privatization. There was no reliable database of members to track organizing, spending priorities were often unclear, turf for staff often made little sense, different areas often focused overwhelmingly on their own priorities and campaigns, and there was a lack of engagement with members, with no member structures in place that could democratically reach a supermajority. Nevertheless, leaders in a progressive rank-and-file caucus at the time, Progressive Educators for Action (PEAC), were able to work with others to learn during this period. They learned more about the nuances in coalition building and strategic planning. In 2010 and 2011, PEAC and other member leaders worked to bring UTLA into a broad coalition of 31 community-based organizations spearheaded by Thigpenn called the California Alliance (now California Calls) that was working to challenge Proposition 13's historic corporate commercial property tax loopholes. PEAC leaders also helped shape a UTLA Strategic Planning Committee, which began to bring planning concepts more consistently into the Board of Directors and to chapter leaders. The work of the Committee

¹² Ana Valencia. "UTLA members reject dues increase." *United Teacher*, July 18, 2008. 22.

resulted in McAlevee being brought as a featured keynote speaker at the 2011 UTLA Leadership Conference to discuss supermajority organizing methods.

As these steps were being taken, however, the LAUSD School Board continued to promote privatization, making Los Angeles the epicenter of the corporate charter movement. In 2013-2014, Los Angeles had the highest number of students enrolled in public charter schools—more than 139,000 students, representing about 22% of the district’s total number of students.¹³ While the privatization movement continued to grow, UTLA’s influence amongst teachers continued to wane; members recalled feeling less likely to turn to their union for help when facing problems at their school. “Many people turned to administration at their school site [when they had workplace issues] and never thought about asking for union support,” said Ebony Batiste, a chapter chair at the time, “it was only when the principal wasn’t friendly that people reached out, but they barely knew who to reach out to in the union.” Juan Ramirez, who was first elected as a city-wide officer for the 2011-2014 term, elaborated that from his perspective, “we had a lot of issues we couldn’t resolve. We felt like we were always putting out fires, and there was no plan on how to address the problems. There were good people in office who wanted to help, but when you don’t have a plan, you just deal with problems one at a time.”

A plan was needed to change the union. Towards the beginning of 2013, PEAC and other progressive allies put together an organizing plan based on learnings from McAlevee’s structure-based supermajority organizing, the racial justice work of community coalition groups, an analysis of the gaps in UTLA’s structure, and learnings from Chicago’s CORE caucus, whom PEAC members had invited to Los Angeles for a cross-caucus retreat in 2009, with the relationship deepening in subsequent years. A series of core goals were established: creating organizing structures at every worksite to build power; organizing with youth, parents, and community and basing demands within racial and social justice; creating the capacity for research and communications to fuel campaigns; and using supermajority and community organizing methods to shape the political and electoral terrain. Collectively, these strategies were tied together under an initiative entitled the Schools LA Students Deserve (SLASD). PEAC and allies brought SLASD to the UTLA membership, gathering signatures to trigger a vote that, in April 2013, generated 50% turnout across the union and won over 70% approval.

To implement this initiative, PEAC and their allies knew that they would need to win the leadership of UTLA in the 2014 leadership elections. Through a series of discussions, a new, broader caucus called Union Power, including PEAC, several other rank-and-file groups, and independent activists, was formed. Union Power fielded a team for all 7 citywide officer positions and ran candidates for a majority of the Board positions. Their program in the election focused on the goals outlined in SLASD, and the caucus ran its internal election campaign in the way they hoped to govern the union—through massive organizing and democratic engagement with members. The campaign emphasized making alliances wherever possible with others who wanted to build a more militant, powerful, collectively driven union focused on social and racial justice. Karla Griego, a special education teacher at the time who is now an elected LAUSD School Board Member, said of this campaign: “I got inspired by them. I wanted to be part of it, to help get them elected, so I organized in my area, handing out flyers, talking to people. I think a lot of people were inspired by the platform’s focus on more organizing, more member power, more actions.” At the beginning of 2014, Union Power won all 7 citywide positions—the first time in UTLA history a single slate accomplished this—and won most of the Board seats they

¹³ National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. “A Growing Movement: America’s Largest Charter School Communities.” *National Alliance for Public Charter Schools*, December 2014. 2.

ran for, constituting a majority. Caputo-Pearl became UTLA President, Cecily Myart-Cruz UTLA NEA Vice President, Betty Forrester UTLA AFT Vice President, Juan Ramirez UTLA Elementary Vice President, Colleen Schwab UTLA Secondary Vice President, Arlene Inouye UTLA Treasurer, and Daniel Barnhart UTLA Secretary.

UTLA 2014-2020: A Case Study

Starting Strong

When the new UTLA Officers and Board of Directors were elected in early 2014, there was an immediate sense of urgency to begin working. With SLASD as a guide, there were several strands of work set into motion right away in order to create the foundations for a stronger union capable of winning more.

One of these strands was preparing the elected Board of Directors to take on more of a strategic leadership role. For many years prior to 2014, there was not an effective practice of building consensus on the union's direction among the Officers and Board of Directors. The newly-elected group began meeting before being officially seated on July 1, 2014 in order to immediately begin the process of funneling towards a strategic plan. In July, after collectively hiring Jeff Good as Executive Director, the Board held a retreat to continue these discussions, and from these meetings, the Board developed and approved the job descriptions for an Organizing Director, a Research and Analytics Director, a management-level Political Director, and a Parent/Community Organizer, all of which were positions that had not existed before, or had not existed for years, at UTLA.

As its role expanded and deepened, the Board shaped plans for immediate campaigns. When the new leadership was seated, UTLA was in a weak position in negotiations, as the current round of contract bargaining had been occurring off and on for over 2 years. In order to start strengthening UTLA's position, the new leadership began a worksite visit blitz of a scale and level of systematization that had not been seen in UTLA for decades. From the first day of school in August and continuing for months, all Officers and staff visited schools daily, often more than one, and rank-and-file Board members were included whenever possible. Each person had clear turf, the visits were tracked, and feedback from each visit was systematically collected. Omar Moreno, then a chapter chair, said the visits made a "huge difference." "Before, people really had no idea who leadership was, or what their vision was," he said, "so knowing the vision for what we were doing, how each action had a purpose and small ones led to bigger ones, helped us to be less reactionary and think more about the victories we wanted." Coordinated with this blitz, the Board implemented a mass, chapter-based bargaining survey, in which chapter leaders would hold meetings in their buildings and develop collective responses with their co-workers to identify bargaining priorities. This drew on lessons from a similar effort in 2006 and thousands of members participated.

An important early step, too, was to make bargaining for the common good a priority. After years of being in a weak position, leadership needed to establish UTLA as an organized force that could win on the more traditional bargaining issues that a supermajority of members would care deeply about, such as pay, healthcare, and working conditions, and for members to have confidence in these fights. From that foundation, the leadership believed that bargaining could expand to include major common good and racial justice proposals. However, to win on common good, it was necessary to build even more power than it takes to win on more typical

contract demands because the district is under no legal obligation to negotiate on these areas. LAUSD would see it as counter to its management interests to negotiate a broader set of issues with the union and include more provisions in the union contract. The district would need to be forced to do so, which would require a supermajority of members committed to fighting for these common good proposals and potentially strike on them.

To begin the process of common good bargaining, and consistent with member feedback gained through the mass bargaining survey, the Board decided to inject proposals regarding restorative justice and ethnic studies into the 2014 bargaining cycle. In a negotiations process that had been persisting for years, these were existing LAUSD programs, insufficient as they were, upon which new, progressive proposals could be anchored. Other common good issues for which extensive research and more power would be required to win—such as Community Schools, climate justice, immigrant rights, housing, transportation, privatization, funding, and deeper incursions into the school-to-prison pipeline—were not put forward as proposals in 2014. Instead, foundations were laid through research, member education, and coalition-building to bring them forward in the 2017 bargaining cycle. The Union Power caucus—which, critically, continued to build after the 2014 internal UTLA election—was crucial to pushing the common good bargaining framework forward at the Board and rank-and-file levels.

Through discussions, the Board united around seeing escalating actions as critical to achieving the power needed to win more. The Officers, Board, and staff invested in new intensive trainings with rank-and-file area steering committees and elected chapter chairs in each building to develop and implement a plan of escalating actions that put more and more pressure on the district over time: “Big Red T-Shirt Tuesdays” starting in August and September (where teachers would wear their union shirts); leadership conference trainings for area steering committees and chapter chairs on the essential mechanics of organizing in September; district-wide parent leafleting in October, followed by school-site picketing; regional rallies in December; a declaration of impasse in February; a mass, city-wide rally later in February; faculty meeting boycotts in March and April; and ongoing collection of commitment cards which included the commitment to strike. Ramirez, the Elementary Vice President at the time, reflected on how the plan intentionally started simple but even these simple actions were a “helpful metric for membership engagement.” “All of this was a plan, and we kept track of everything,” he said, “all of the officers and staff were out there working.” The Union Power caucus was again critical at Board and rank-and-file levels in promoting this orientation towards democratic member structure-building and militant escalating actions.

The escalating actions of this first contract campaign left a deep impression on members. Linda Cardwell, elected vice chair at her school, recalled of the February city-wide rally that drew over 15,000 people, that everyone was “so excited [and] felt so confident.” “We knew that we had made a statement to the board and to the nation,” she said, “we were united...we were one in ideology, we were one in purpose, we were one in our intentions.” As a chapter chair, Germaine similarly said that “leading up to that rally, we had smaller actions, but now we had a very public audience and a chance to be viewed much more broadly. It opened up the eyes and ears of some members who were less engaged and started to share our message publicly.” Of the faculty meeting boycotts, UTLA member leader Ivannia Nolasco spoke of the importance of this in shaping her experience of the union: “it was one of the first real times we said no to the boss, and made clear that they couldn’t infringe upon our time. There was a real sense of power and camaraderie with our colleagues in doing this together.” These actions had an impact on the broader Los Angeles community, too, with Eunice Grigsby, who had been a parent leader at

Crenshaw High School and had continued community organizing work, saying that “you saw the fight, you saw the red shirts all over the city, and you saw the preparation. The community felt invited into the struggle, and we were fighting together for a space that our students could be in.”

This plan ultimately proved to be successful, with a breakthrough victory in April 2015 during mediation. The highlights were a 10% pay increase, one of the biggest in the State; lowered numbers on the class size chart and formal requirements the district had to follow when wanting to raise class size; additional hiring of Health and Human Services (HHS) personnel; legal guardrails on LAUSD’s teacher re-assignment, or “teacher jail,” system; an end to the current teacher evaluation system, into which privatizers were attempting to inject test scores and other market-based mechanisms; additional supports for ethnic studies and restorative justice; and more. Jeff Good, the UTLA Executive Director, emphasized the importance of this contract as a “building block for subsequent strategic campaigns” laying the groundwork for victories in the 2019 strike and subsequent bargaining cycles.

Across this work, too, the UTLA Board and member leaders built another important strand: to more prominently align UTLA’s vision with racial and social justice community organizations. With many of the newly elected Officers and Board of Director members coming out of racial justice and community organizing backgrounds, they, in many cases, followed the lead of the organizations with which they had experience. Following the murders of Eric Garner and Michael Brown in July and August 2014, UTLA mobilized actions and published media statements supporting the growing Black Lives Matter movement. In the latter part of 2014 and through 2015, UTLA followed the lead of a coalition led by the Labor/Community Strategy Center which was demanding that the LAUSD School Police return all weapons from the federal SB 1033 program. This program provided domestic police forces with military weapons from the US Department of Defense, and for the LAUSD School Police this consisted of a tank, armored trucks, assault rifles, and more. UTLA mobilized leaders, members, and staff to School Board rallies led by the coalition. In 2015, in consultation with the Strategy Center, UTLA held meetings with the unions representing the school police, pressing them to return the weapons. Acting early regarding these issues, and engaging members about their importance, was foundational to shaping the ongoing approach to challenging the criminalization of students of color and confronting the LAUSD School Police.

Also in 2014, a UTLA Racial Justice Task Force was formed. This Task Force, co-chaired by current UTLA President Cecily Myart-Cruz and current CTA Secretary-Treasurer Erika Jones, would play an important role over the subsequent years as a discussion space for building broader alliances around racial justice. It would include members of UTLA, Black Lives Matter LA, SEIU Local 99, UTLA staff, Students Not Suspects, and more. UTLA also became a more significant part of the immigrant rights movement, protesting Barack Obama’s immigration and deportation policies.

The union needed to build concrete, independent power behind racial, social, gender, and economic justice issues. Consequently, efforts were made to create a local/labor community coalition, made up of base-building groups, working tightly together in democratic structures to build educational justice campaigns that would expand the base beyond educators. Upon coming into office, elected leaders set up bilateral meetings between UTLA and different community organizations and labor unions. This eventually became a series of multilateral labor/community roundtable discussions.

Within labor, UTLA leadership prioritized SEIU Local 99, a union representing 30,000 critical education workers in LAUSD including custodians, bus drivers, teaching assistants,

special education assistants, building and grounds workers, campus aides, parent/community representatives, and many more. These workers were overwhelmingly people of color and majority women, with many being parents of LAUSD students. Previous UTLA leaderships had had difficult relationships with SEIU Local 99, with the two unions on opposite sides of several School Board races. In addition to using structures such as the UTLA Racial Justice Task Force and the growing system of UTLA chapter chairs to engage rank-and-file Local 99 members at worksites, UTLA and Local 99 leaders also jointly attended a 2014 meeting of the national Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools (AROS) coalition with the aim, in part, to build this relationship. Prioritized, too, were early meetings with other militant unions such as UNITE HERE Local 11 and United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 7000.

Immediate bilateral meetings with community organizations were also critical because of the alienation, and in some cases outright animus, between the leaderships of these organizations and UTLA's previous leaderships. Several prominent community organizations received grants from large foundations that supported corporate charters and school privatization, putting these organizations at odds with the union. At the same time, some of these organizations had real bases and were leading important work with regards to housing, environmental justice, state funding, and equitable spending. In the bilateral meetings, UTLA spent time listening to stories of communities feeling neglected by the union in the past. These meetings needed to navigate UTLA listening to these community groups, discussing issues that could potentially continue to be political differences, such as privatization, discussing other issues around which there might be shared commitment, and also getting to know one another better. ACCE leader Schur emphasized that balancing these different forms was essential: "the most common dynamic between labor unions and community is that labor unions ask for community solidarity, but rarely show up for community campaigns." According to Schur, it was critical to make clear that the focus in these spaces and conversations was on building "collaborative and transformative relationships."

After these initial conversations, UTLA engaged Dr. John Rogers of the UCLA Department of Education and the Institute of Democracy, Education, and Access (IDEA) to facilitate a series of collective roundtable discussions with several of these unions and community organizations, which were convened approximately monthly over about 6 months. Whereas a primary goal of the bilateral meetings was to listen deeply, hear each other, and get to know one another, the goal of this subsequent roundtable was to bring organizations together across the city to begin to think about whether there were issues around which a new coalition could be built. These roundtables included the Youth Justice Coalition, Labor/Community Strategy Center, SEIU Local 99, Inner City Struggle, Community Coalition, Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE), ACCE, Students Deserve, BLM-LA, Pacoima Neighborhood Council, and others. "We knew it was going to be challenging in the sense that we were charged with bringing together folks who had difficulty being in conversation with each other," said Dr. Rogers. "UTLA felt like they had been thrown under the bus by some of the groups criticizing teacher effectiveness, while others felt UTLA had undercut them." Patricia Castellanos, then at LAANE, noted how "parts of the educational justice system are often pitted against one another; any time teachers demand more, it's automatically framed as taking away from students." She said this deepens the need to bring different stakeholders to the table together and "shift the frame by developing a mutual understanding that what teachers want is to create a better environment and serve students, and that the demands teachers are making are beneficial to teachers, students, and parents."

While the roundtable over those months was not perfect or always easy, it was critical that it was done. Some labor/community relationships were deepened positively. Others did not advance as effectively, but in those cases, the roundtable was a first step in bringing organizations together for struggle and dialogue. A critical result of the roundtable was the formation of a new labor/community coalition, Reclaim Our Schools LA, in 2016. The anchor organizations of Reclaim were ACCE, LAANE, Students Deserve, and UTLA. The central points of unity were on fighting for more school funding and a new model of Los Angeles Community Schools, and fighting against the criminalization of youth, racial injustice, and privatization.

Building out relationships with other unions across the state and country, too, was crucial for setting the foundations for future work. In 2014, UTLA developed with the California Federation of Teachers (CFT), California Teachers Association (CTA), NEA, and AFT a Partnership Agreement. This agreement, to which CFT President Josh Pechthalt and then-CTA Board Member David Goldberg were critical, solidified a financial partnership between the unions that would temporarily fund UTLA's organizing and transformation efforts. UTLA built out relationships with other California teacher union locals to discuss the issues of corporate charter growth, charter co-location, school funding, and what a potential state-wide, cross-local collaboration could look like. This would set the groundwork for launching a statewide coalition called the California Alliance for Community Schools (CACS) in 2016.

Build the Future, Fund the Fight

Amidst these important initial steps, UTLA was simultaneously a union in dire financial straits. UTLA's monthly dues were among the lowest in California among education unions, and over the years this had led to less and less money available to organize. Moreover, most of the other local affiliates in the state enacted a policy by which, if state and national affiliates' dues increased, this cost would "pass through" to local members, but UTLA did not have such a policy; consequently, this accelerated the organization's loss of revenue as its existing funds had to pay for every state and national increase. Further complicating matters was that despite being a dual-affiliated AFT and NEA local since its inception in 1970, constitutional provisions prevented it from being truly merged; when an individual joined UTLA, they had the option of being an AFT member, an NEA member, or both (at twice the membership dues). This sowed an unnecessary lack of cohesion and even division within UTLA.

After the failed effort to increase dues in 2008, it became a central part of the Union Power campaign and, after 2014, the UTLA leadership program to address this matter, resulting in the launch of the "Build the Future, Fund the Fight" initiative, also called BFFF. This campaign built on the work of UTLA Treasurer Arlene Inouye and past UTLA President John Perez, and on the momentum of the contract win and the organizing done between July 2014 and July 2015. With BFFF, the UTLA leadership proposed a membership vote that would increase member dues by 30%, revise the constitution to allow "pass throughs," and ensure that all UTLA members would be members of both NEA and AFT.

BFFF was based on an aggressive vision of the union drawn from SLASD and deep member engagement in the Officers' first year in office. It was a vision in which members could see both their self-interest and the interests of students. "We connected the campaign to everything," said Inouye, "we asked: do you want a fighting union?" Brian McNamara, who was hired in 2014 as UTLA's Organizing Director, emphasized that "we had to connect our strategic

plan and the financial restructuring of the union together as one. People weren't just voting for a dues increase. They were voting for things that would make their lives better."

To do so, the campaign based organizing conversations on what members felt every day: school under-funding, new corporate charters opening up, charter co-locations, the real possibility the district would come after healthcare, and the visceral aspiration for lower class sizes and case loads. Every organizing conversation incorporated the proposal on how the additional BFFF revenue would be spent: investment in organizing and leadership development to build power at every worksite, including more rank-and-file member release time, training, and staff hiring; capacity for organizing with youth, parents, and community to build power behind social and racial justice demands; capacity to increase UTLA's influence within the state and national union affiliates, labor, and among elected officials; and more.

Everything, too, was based on a systematic, supermajority organizing plan, with public petitions showing commitments to vote "yes" being used, one-on-one assessments on levels of support among individual members, dedicated time to discuss the organizing numbers at monthly Area Steering Committee meetings with Officer, Board of Director, and Staff guidance and support, the use of a database to assess strong and weak spots within regions, and worksite visits in all areas of the district. BFFF, in both process and outcome, was essential in the deepening of the internal UTLA transformation.

In February 2016, in the final weeks of the BFFF campaign, UTLA played a key role in AROS' first collective national walk-ins in support of public schools and racial justice, and opposing privatization. AROS worked with Chicago, St. Paul, Boston, Los Angeles, and more to lead the February effort, and hundreds of cities across the country participated. In UTLA, this helped to develop a key communications practice; namely, clearly conveying the profound threats to public education blended with the message that an organizing agenda leads to hope. The AROS walk-ins, organized across hundreds of Los Angeles schools, provided a last essential backdrop for BFFF before the all-member vote, demonstrating that UTLA was playing a leadership role not only in Los Angeles but also in a hopeful trend in union and community work nationally.

By the time the final vote came in, 82% of UTLA members voted to raise the dues by 30%, revise the constitution, and complete the merger. It was a huge victory that created the financial capabilities required to build a stronger union.

Several debates did emerge, however, through the BFFF campaign and after. One such struggle emerged on how to use the additional revenue won from BFFF. Some UTLA Board members argued for the hiring of additional staff to perform service-oriented work, such as staff whose sole purpose was to provide information about healthcare and retirement. Union Power caucus members and others on the Board were able to win this struggle and invest in not only more organizing and strategic campaign staff, but also in massively expanding release time with rank-and-file member leaders for training, strategic work, and organizing.

There was an additional struggle on whether UTLA would begin to give substantial annual financial allocations to the anchor organizations of Reclaim Our Schools LA. In the past, UTLA had given small and sporadic amounts of money to community organizations, generally independent of joint work or projected specific outcomes. 2016 was the first time it was proposed that the union give a large amount of money (enough to hire full-time staff) over a sustained period of years to a group of organizations that were accountable to each other in the work of launching a coalition and building a base. Some UTLA Board members opposed to this argued that supporting community organizations was beyond UTLA's scope, that these

organizations were too controversial to fund (particularly those opposing the criminalization of youth of color, supporting BLM, and organizing with a pro-immigrant politics), and that these organizations should not be prioritized over other Los Angeles community organizations. Again, Union Power caucus members on the Board and others won this struggle and invested \$75,000 per organization per year in the three Reclaim anchor groups, giving financial means to deepen the work in labor and community organizing.

2019 Strike

The 2019 UTLA strike was a monumental event for the union, community allies, Los Angeles workers, California politics, and for the educator union movement nationally. “The strike changed Los Angeles,” said UTLA member leader Wendy Lozano, “people saw that teachers can and will shut Los Angeles down. Other community organizers and organizations saw that teachers could get things done, and through the strike, other organizing groups gained momentum to do more.” To build UTLA from a union that had not gone on strike for 30 years to one capable of organizing a massive strike was not a fast process. The strike represented “years of organizing in the making,” said Thigpenn, and was an effort that exemplified “a systematic, multi-year approach of building power” focused on “organizing actual power both within the union itself and in the community.”

One of the tasks at hand was demystifying striking. By the 2017-2019 period, Gloria Martinez and Alex Orozco had joined the officer team, and UTLA leadership initiated a vital new structure to help in this demystifying process—the Contract Action Teams (CATs), a group of rank-and-file leaders at each worksite who meet regularly and are each assigned up to 10 workers with whom to be in regular contact. This structure, to which the Union Power caucus was again crucial, profoundly deepened democracy and dialogue within the union. Changes were made, too, with communication and research strategies. Anna Bakalis, who worked as the UTLA Communications Director during this period, explained how prior to 2014, “communications was basically attached to the President’s office,” reflecting a top-down messaging strategy that was disconnected from what members were experiencing. Bakalis and the communications team worked to turn themselves “into a fighting communications team, bringing organizing and communications together.” Deep research on opponents and analytics on internal organizing, including a newly-built database, were also critical. These efforts were led by Research and Analytics Director Grace Regullano.

The UTLA staff as a whole played a critical role in developing UTLA into a strike-ready union, and important developments and changes took place among the staff members to transform them into an organizing force. Many long-time UTLA staff had chosen to leave in the first years under Union Power leadership, disagreeing with the direction of the union and what their jobs would look like in an organizing union. In addition to hiring Jeff Good as Executive Director and Brian McNamara as Organizing Director, new staff members with diverse organizing backgrounds were brought in—like Jollene Levid and Pablo Serrano, who had international experience in anti-imperialist liberation struggles from the Philippines and South America respectively—but also critically, several long-time UTLA staff made the decision to stay, like Cami George, Carl Joseph, Bruce Williams, Kim Turner, Carolina Barreiro, and others. It was important that other staff saw these veteran staff members accepting the organizing approach and also share what they knew with the new staff, which also included some hired from the rank-and-file. Williams and Joseph, for example, led weekly training sessions with the new

staff on the UTLA contract, district structure, and historic union-district practices. Having a mix of long-time UTLA staff members who embraced the organizing model and new members who brought in a wide-range of diverse organizing experiences created a deeply collaborative and powerful staff capable of playing a critical role in building a massive union like UTLA.

This integration of communications, research, analytics, and organizing reflected a broader practice that was crucial for running structure tests to determine strike readiness. Structure tests served multiple purposes: they put escalating pressure on LAUSD, gave chapter leaders ongoing training in using the essential mechanics of organizing with their co-workers, and gave rank-and-file area steering committees and cluster leaders training on tracking and supporting strong and weak spots in organizing across worksites. These tests also measured efficiency, database tracking, capacity for large-scale back-and-forth dialogue through every level, and built confidence across all members. One chapter chair noted how chairs at other schools became increasingly confident as they reported organizing numbers, and another staff member said that for him, seeing how close the numbers on final votes and rally turnouts were to the predictions made through supermajority organizing helped him see that the methodology really worked. UTLA Board member Jennifer Anderson said that prior to 2014, the purpose of structures such as area steering committees and clusters was not “clearly defined,” but that now she cannot imagine UTLA without them as fundamental organizing bodies. “They’re the spine of UTLA,” she said, “if those structures are strong, then the organization is strong.”

In August 2018, members voted on authorizing a strike—the result was 84% turnout and 98% “yes” votes. While the 98% “yes” vote was excellent, the 84% turnout exemplified something even more important—by reaching such a deep supermajority with one-on-one conversations, and having them take action in voting, it showed that UTLA’s structures were strong and that members were ready to pull off a supermajority strike.

One important reason members were so ready to strike was that they were supportive of the matters on which they would strike. These issues had been identified through hundreds of worksite visits, back-and-forth dialogue through rank-and-file structures, and bargaining surveys. By systematically exposing members to non-wage related issues, building trust between educators, parents, and youth, and gathering ideas for bargaining, representatives from 10 community organizations and SEIU Local 99 met with UTLA bargaining team members to draft final Common Good bargaining proposals. Some of the final Common Good proposals to LAUSD were:

1. Support 20 schools through a Community Schools transformation process, with \$10 million allocated to the effort, for each school to have a full-time Community Schools Coordinator that is a UTLA member, and for the elected Local School Leadership Council to lead the Community Schools process with expanded democratic powers
2. Adopt a set of Students Rights and Support proposals that would end the practice of racist “random” metal detector searches of students’ persons and lockers, increase non-police-related student safety practices and programs, and have LAUSD advocate for an end to the MTA’s racist and anti-Black stop and frisk policy and the initiation of an MTA program allowing students to ride for free
3. Adopt climate justice, environmental justice, and green space proposals that would remove all unused bungalows from campuses and create a plan to develop green spaces on school campuses in accordance with the acreage requirement set out in the Rodriguez consent decree and reflective of racial, social, and economic equity

4. Adopt a set of charter school accountability proposals that would require community impact and educational impact reports before the authorization of any new charter school or the renewal of an existing charter school, and expand the rights of host public schools when they are co-located by charters
5. Adopt a set of affordable housing and student homelessness proposals including school-based supports for homeless youth, LAUSD passing resolutions in support of specific tenant protection and preservation, and LAUSD working with LAUSD residential tenants who are facing eviction and seeking ways to keep them in their homes
6. Adopt a proposal worked on with SEIU Local 99 on strengthening a training fund for classified employees represented by Local 99 to become teachers, in which LAUSD, Local 99, and UTLA would work in collaboration
7. Adopt a support for immigrant families policy calling for LAUSD to train all employees on protocols for interaction with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement; create a \$1 million immigrant family legal defense fund to support families of LAUSD students who are fighting the deportation of a student or family member; and work with community organizations on a plan to locate immigrant support clinics at as many schools as possible
8. Create an early education expansion task force to work with community and labor on expanding early education seats
9. Pass an LAUSD School Board resolution in support of and taking action behind UTLA and Reclaim Our Schools LA's demand of \$20,000 per pupil by the year 2020, including working behind any state-wide propositions moving towards this goal

Extending the fight beyond the classroom galvanized many members and the community more broadly. Reclaim Our Schools LA parent leader, Alejandra Delgadillo, spoke on the importance of these proposals being developed collaboratively and her experience presenting at the bargaining table. "We parents did more than listen," she said, "we were advocating for more oversight on co-locations, demands for housing, more mental health resources, and we were part of the process. It was a feeling of solidarity, and it gave us confidence that we were the ones pushing it through with our own experiences."

Political education was embedded into the build-up to the strike to help members learn about the social issues behind the Common Good demands, parents learn more about the conditions inside the schools and school funding policies, and students learn about privatization. Reclaim Our Schools LA parent leader, Alicia Baltzar, recalled trainings in the lead-up to the strike: "We would go to the UTLA building every Saturday from 8am to sometimes 5pm, and they would really train us parents to understand all the policies, all the procedures, how laws are being made, how they change, and what the strike was for." As a result, Baltzar said she felt that she and other parents were able to "combat a lot of conversations that the media was spinning about 'greedy teachers.'" Citlally Chavez-Perez, a UTLA member who was motivated to become an elected chapter chair during the strike build-up, said of the political education program, "I don't think it was until we became more socially conscious as a union that we realized all of those other issues are connected to education. We connected the dots. We began to understand how money was going away from public education and how it impacts us."

When the strike did happen in early 2019, it happened as predicted. 99.9% of members walked out. The early morning picket lines were incredibly strong and chapter chairs executed

their plans to shut down schools with tactical precision. Members, parents, youth, and community learned with every move they made. Rank-and-file area steering committees and cluster leaders worked with staff to play their structured roles in making assessments of schools and filling gaps. Although LAUSD Superintendent Austin Beutner said that very few educators were on strike, helicopter shots showed a march of 35,000 educators and tens of thousands of parent, student, and community supporters in downtown Los Angeles.

While there is much that could be said about the strike, one highlight repeatedly cited was the actions of members, students, and parents. The grassroots energy and perspective shaped the city's sense of the strike; it was an energy that had been cultivated and nurtured over years through highlighting member actions in the union newspaper and on social media. Many parents, youth, and educators came together every day of the strike in what was called "La Escuelita" or "Freedom School." Discussions and trainings here centered on debriefing their experiences with the morning's picket lines, addressing one-on-one organizing skills that could help them reach more parents and students, political education on specific issues relating to the strike, and daily tactical planning for the actions that would happen each evening of the strike (including actions at the houses and workplaces of privatizers and LAUSD officials). Sandra Soto, who became a UTLA vice chair in the lead-up to the strike, spoke about the years prior to the strike, specifically of parent leafleting and small group parent meetings that helped to reach this point in the San Fernando Valley:

We talked to a lot of community leaders, put a lot of signs around the community, in local businesses. They supported us. One day, during the strike, my coworkers and I were marching down Ventura Boulevard. People were coming out of their businesses. There was a beauty salon and a clinic, and the workers were clapping for us. I felt so much love and support and that we were fighting for a righteous cause. Another day of the strike, we joined other schools and called it Hands Across Colfax. It was organized by parents and teachers at a different school and ended up creating a mile-long human chain. I heard a lot of stories like this where people were touched by our cause, thinking of creative things to do. Parents were joining us on the picket line instead of sending their students to school.

The impact of community organizing was clear and integral to pushing UTLA to a resounding victory.

There were many victories in the following months and years that were a result of the strike, but the immediate wins included a 6% across-the-board ongoing pay increase, one of the highest in the state at the time; the defeat of the district's attempt to tier healthcare; the elimination of a class size policy that had, for decades, allowed LAUSD to raise class sizes unilaterally; a reduction in class sizes cascading over years at all levels, with a particular focus on the highest-need schools; first-time ratios on HHS personnel and the hiring of additional HHS personnel; the first-time creation of a Special Education article in the contract outlining rights in special education; a first-time commitment for a full-time nurse in every school, and a teacher-librarian in every secondary school; an LAUSD school board motion calling on the state of California to enact a moratorium on charter schools, which was critical to the state (9 months later) passing the first charter school regulation in 25 years; a first-ever commitment to invest \$12 million in initiating an LAUSD Community Schools initiative, starting with 30 schools; a first-ever green space task force, including UTLA representatives, to develop a plan to increase

green space at schools, prioritizing those in the most economically-marginalized communities with the least green space; a first-ever immigrant student support agreement to designate LAUSD attorneys and staff to support LAUSD families confronting immigration and deportation issues and questions; commitments from elected leaders to support the state-wide Schools and Communities First revenue measure; the elimination of student searches at a first set of schools, explicitly combined with not increasing police presence, that would be critical to, 6 months later, youth leading the effort to entirely eliminate the search practice at all schools; first-time contractual rights for schools being co-located by charters; and a district commitment to provide additional resources, support, and curriculum in order to implement ethnic studies and culturally/linguistically responsive pedagogy.

Local and State Coalition Building

When Officers and Board members from the Union Power caucus came into office in 2014, UTLA was alienated from the community and in battles with significant parts of what was considered the progressive community organizing sector in Los Angeles, particularly those who had aligned themselves with the interests of privatization. Consequently, building a labor/community coalition was a top priority, as was moving the supermajority of UTLA members to a place where they saw their union and their contract as vehicles in broader racial, social, and gender justice fights. Given the function of race, class, and segregation within capitalism, UTLA members needed to be exposed deeply to issues such as the criminalization of youth, poverty, immigrant rights, and climate justice. Having community organizations' expertise, moral authority, and base of leaders who could speak to UTLA members about these issues was critical to reaching that supermajority.

In order to do so, plans were set in motion to build what would become Reclaim Our Schools LA, consisting of four anchor organizations: UTLA, ACCE, LAANE, and Students Deserve (formerly the Coalition for Educational Justice). Long-time Los Angeles organizer and AFT staff member Sharon Delugach became the first Reclaim coordinator. Through the previously mentioned roundtable discussions led by Dr. Rogers, four pillars for unity emerged: fighting for racial and social justice, with an emphasis on fighting against criminalization, fighting for more school funding, fighting to establish a district-wide Los Angeles Community Schools Initiative, and fighting against the privatization of public schools. "The pillars were rooted in our values," said Rudy Gonzalves, who was the campaign director for LAANE during this period, "and the racial justice component is an important part of the work because all of the anchor organizations felt that we are where we are because of a racial politics that has hamstrung and set back people of color for decades because of funding structures, in particular Proposition 13, which has severely underfunded schools for decades."

The pillar on privatization yielded the most debate, not within the core Reclaim groups but in the wider Los Angeles organizing community. Eric Zachary and Keron Blair from the national AROS structure came into Los Angeles to help work through these struggles with a large group of community organizations. A definition of privatization emerged, drawing from the experience of mass privatization in New Orleans and the fights led by CTU, the Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization, and others in Chicago, that helped clarify what was meant; namely, the promotion of unregulated charter school growth, the top-down reconstitution and closure of schools, market-based mechanisms that narrow curriculum and

attack workers, and the thinning of educator union contracts and attempts to undermine the power of educator unions.

Having established unity on the four pillars, ACCE, LAANE, Students Deserve, and UTLA began discussions on how to form the coalition operationally, with these four organizations as the anchors and others as a broader set of allies. ACCE and Students Deserve were base-building organizations, seeking to expand the number of people and leaders involved. UTLA was similar from a labor perspective, organizing its worksites for action using a supermajority model, while also expanding its base through increasing member density and organizing non-union charter schools. LAANE complemented the other groups, bringing organizers who could supplement base-building, experience in forming labor/community coalitions, and additional capacity in research, communications, and political action. Castellanos noted that each organization represented “not necessarily different interests but different approaches,” and that each of the organizations brought a constituency that was “important for educational justice and made sure that [Reclaim] was covering as many fronts as possible.”

As previously noted, UTLA’s dues increase also made it possible to give each of the other Reclaim organizations an annual investment of \$75,000, thereby providing some of the resources needed to fight in an arena where corporate interests dominated. This money was incredibly important—it helped, for example, to hire a full-time person at each organization who could dedicate their time and energy towards Reclaim. Gonzalves spoke on what this monetary allocation signified, too, for the labor movement: “to have labor unions not just focus on their membership but also see themselves as connected to the community helps build power for both; when labor unions fund out of their own pockets, it is a big sign of that commitment.” Some members, however, also noted that while UTLA’s financial commitment was significant, it ran the risk of UTLA becoming a dominating force in Reclaim, against whom other groups would not take a position. This potential for a power imbalance was pro-actively and sensitively addressed by creating equitable decision-making processes for the coalition and an accountable, deeply-involved steering committee. Castellanos stated that “UTLA was a very principled player and partner,” and the issue of power continued to be pro-actively discussed and addressed.

Over the years, Reclaim worked on various fronts, one of which was laying the groundwork for Community Schools. A few Community Schools existed in Los Angeles before 2014, but Reclaim’s intent was not to have Community Schools as islands of innovation or success, but rather as a structural vehicle that could be scaled to build social justice and democracy. Dr. Sylvia Rousseau, whose work on education reform and as a racial justice advocate and educator were key in shaping this work, spoke on the inroads she, Reclaim, and UTLA members were able to make in centering social justice and democracy. “The group met for about a year,” she said, “and what we kept holding ourselves to was that even the way we met and made decisions together had to reflect what we were asking schools to do. We had to have a framework of what educating students means, a theoretical and historical basis for who our students are and the kinds of education they deserve, and in what ways do community schools meet that criterion.” From UTLA’s side, Community Schools were highlighted in the UTLA bargaining survey process in early 2017, which deepened and broadened member education on the model. UTLA and Reclaim worked, too, with School Board member Steve Zimmer on a 2017 Community Schools resolution. Zimmer provided an excellent lead at the Board level, combined with Reclaim’s coalition organizing, and in June that year, the resolution passed unanimously. This set essential ground work for the strike win on Community Schools a year and a half later.

In the years before the strike, Reclaim was also central in furthering the work around bargaining for the common good. Throughout its first years, Reclaim regularly held larger coalition meetings, working to bring in organizations that had significant alignment with the four pillars of unity, such as Black Lives Matter LA, the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights in Los Angeles (CHIRLA), SEIU Local 99, Democratic Socialists of America, UNITE HERE Local 11, and more. These meetings were crucial in building a broad front of organizations moving towards the strike, but also in gaining insights on specific pieces of the work. For example, Black Lives Matter LA, CHIRLA, and UNITE HERE Local 11 gave insights on bargaining proposals and campaign tactics related to anti-criminalization, immigrant rights, and targeting hedge fund billionaires associated with both hotels and school privatization.

After the strike, Reclaim played a key role in implementing some of these common good victories. By March 2019, two months after the strike, Reclaim worked with UTLA officers to initiate a process to develop a Community Schools Steering Committee that included equal parent, youth, educator, and union voices. This steering committee became a model for unions and community organizations across the country that were involved in the fight for Community Schools. Reclaim immediately advocated for district infrastructure to be built for Community Schools and was key to the decisions the Community Schools Steering Committee made in choosing the first 17 schools to begin the Community School transformation process. Many of the initial 17 schools were recruited by Reclaim leaders who supported these schools through the rigorous, grassroots, democratic application process that had been developed by the Community Schools Steering Committee. This process required student and parent engagement, staff votes, and a collectively-written narrative describing the school's initial vision and goals relating to social justice, democracy, and educational improvement.

The relationships built through Reclaim were also crucial in Jackie Goldberg's campaign for LAUSD School Board in the four months following the strike. As a 501c3, Reclaim was not organizationally involved in Goldberg's campaign, and neither were several organizations who were either anchor organizations of or closely aligned with Reclaim. However, many individuals who were exposed to Goldberg's leadership during the strike and through Reclaim interactions got deeply involved in her campaign, which culminated in a decisive May 2019 victory and brought Reclaim members more concretely into the electoral campaign space.

Within Reclaim, the anchor organizations each used the strength of the coalition to implement and expand on strike victories. Students Deserve, long leading the fight on student searches, continued this fight after the strike, backed by UTLA and Reclaim. Students Deserve leader Sarah Djato called the strike a "breakthrough moment" in students being able to bring demands to the bargaining table through the union and ultimately win the elimination of student searches at 14 schools (with the possibility of expanding to 28 schools).¹⁴ It was a watershed moment for many reasons, one of which being that once LAUSD had acknowledged that the search policy was not necessary at these schools, and that increasing police was not necessary in the place of searches, it was difficult for the district to defend the search policy at all. By June of 2019, after a series of additional rallies led by Students Deserve, the School Board voted to eliminate the search policy across the entire district. Students Deserve leader Marshe Doss, a

¹⁴ "Education, Not School-to-Prison Pipeline." *Against the Current*, November-December 2020. <https://againstthecurrent.org/atc209/education-not-school-to-prison-pipeline/>

student at the time, said “it’s really amazing to see that all the outreach and late nights, early mornings have finally made a difference in hundreds of thousands of students’ lives.”¹⁵

LAANE stepped forward as the Reclaim anchor to lead the green schools work. After the strike victory on green schools, LAANE and UTLA began to make connections to the broader ecosystem of climate justice organizations and to begin brainstorming additional demands for the next contract cycle. Gonzalves said that the strike “created the opening for green space to become not just one policy change, but also an organizing space that connected all of our climate issues. LAANE made a conscious decision to look at greening space and climate resilience from an organizing stance. What UTLA had won in 2019 was used to help think about what could be built upon. It prompted conversations about bus electrification with union manufacturers, solar panels on District building rooftops, school site stormwater capture projects, electric vehicle charging stations, climate curriculum, and the mid-range and long-range work to make that happen.” As LAANE took more of a lead, Reclaim formed a Climate Justice Working Group with Communities for a Better Environment, Angelenos for Green Schools, Sunrise Movement, and more.

In addition to the important work being done in Los Angeles by Reclaim, UTLA and others worked to build a statewide coalition: CACS, or the California Alliance for Community Schools. This built on informal dialogues across locals that David Goldberg, then CTA Board Member and now CTA President, had been organizing for some time. In 2015, UTLA worked with San Diego and Oakland to initiate more formal discussions alongside other educator union leaders from San Francisco, Anaheim, Richmond, and others about what role such a group could play in potentially lining up contract expiration dates, shaping state policy, and pushing within the state unions, CTA, and CFT. CACS was formally launched in 2016.

CACS took crucial first steps on building key structures and practices and creating mutual accountability in the space. Kisha Borden, at the time Vice President in San Diego, described this: “We would meet in person four times a year and have report-outs sharing what we had done. After each meeting, we had our set of goals, and at the next meeting we would say whether we had done that.” Borden also spoke on the importance of CACS as a learning space for the locals, and the mutual commitment across locals to create a truly collaborative space where UTLA did not dominate the other locals because of its size: “We talked about what site organizing teams should look like, their function, how to introduce them to our members; then, we talked about what they should do and different ways of doing structure tests to make sure they were functioning the way we needed them to. We worked together so that it wasn’t just one local trying to figure it out on their own.” In this collaborative vein, CACS also promoted local unions forming genuine coalitions with their communities and provided a space to discuss best practices for this in depth. In 2017, for example, CACS sponsored a gathering in San Diego that included the locals’ community partners.

CACS also coordinated around the mobilization to win AB 1505 and AB 1507, the first significant regulations on charter schools in California in decades that came out of the Los Angeles and Oakland strikes of 2019. 1505 provides local authorizers—both school districts and county offices of education—the ability to more closely analyze what the impact of a charter school will be on a local community and tailor their decision-making processes regarding petitions and renewals accordingly, thereby allowing local governing boards to take into account

¹⁵ Casey Jayne. “LAUSD Will Stop ‘Random’ Metal Detector Searches.” *Knock LA*, July 31, 2019. <https://knock-la.com/lausd-will-stop-random-metal-detector-searches-meet-the-students-behind-the-decision-66f580ad2ce1/>

the interests of the entire community. 1507, a sidekick bill, disallows charter schools and their resource centers to locate outside the boundaries of the authorizing school district or county. Erika Jones, at the time UTLA Board member, CTA Board Member, and CACS member, was the CTA representative on the committee that shaped the bills. CACS locals mobilized to Sacramento on the day 1505 and 1507 were heard. On October 3, 2019, Governor Gavin Newsom signed them both into law. CACS and Reclaim both exemplify the power of community and labor organizing to strengthen public education.

Policy Analysis and Recommendation

The Effects of Proposition 13 on California's Public Education

The impact of Proposition 13 on Los Angeles was discussed earlier, but the negative effects of Proposition 13 have had a broader impact on California's public education system and the state. In 1978, when 65% of Californian voters approved Proposition 13, it set a maximum tax on property of 1% of fair market value, thereby reducing property taxes by 57%; it limited growth in assessment to no more than 2% per year; and it required a two-thirds vote of the state legislature to issue any new state tax to substitute for lost local revenues. It did not include any rebates for renters in a state where (at the time) 60% of the voters were not homeowners, or procedures for determining how the new reduced property tax receipts would be divided among competing local taxing districts like schools, cities, and counties.¹⁶

Ostensibly, Proposition 13 was in response to the increasing median value of homes in California, which rose by over 250% from 1970 to 1980.¹⁷ However, there were other factors playing a role in the passing of a bill that disproportionately benefited older, whiter, and wealthier Californians. California was, in the 1970s, experiencing a significant demographic shift, as the share of youths who were minorities rose from 30% in 1970 to 44% by 1980,¹⁸ and the foreign-born population increased from 8.8% in 1970 to 15.1% in 1980.¹⁹ Proposition 13 was not just an effort to protect homeowners, but also specifically white homeowners from what was perceived as an encroachment of people of color and immigrants into their communities; perhaps unsurprisingly, the forces behind Proposition 13 were the same ones who "picketed and marched against busing to desegregate schools" in the 1970s.²⁰ This connection between xenophobia and racism and Proposition 13 was amplified throughout the 1970s and the decades that followed as a series of state referendums passed that reversed school-desegregation mandates, promoted "English only policies," and attempted to render immigrants ineligible for public education and other government services.²¹

¹⁶ Joan C. Baratz and Jay H. Moskowitz. "Proposition 13: How and Why It Happened." *The Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (1978). 10. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20299196>

¹⁷ Manuel Pastor. *State of Resistance: What Californians Dizzying Descent and Remarkable Resurgence Mean for America's Future*. New York: The New Press: 2018. 47.

¹⁸ Manuel Pastor. "After tax cuts derailed the 'California dream,' is the state getting back on track?" *The Conversation*, November 1, 2017. <https://theconversation.com/after-tax-cuts-derailed-the-california-dream-is-the-state-getting-back-on-track-77919>

¹⁹ California Immigrant Data Portal. "Percent foreign born: California, 1860-2021." <https://immigrantdata.org/indicators/foreign-born>

²⁰ Joe Mathews and Mark Paul. *California Crackup: How Reform Broke the Golden State and How We Can Fix It*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010. 39.

²¹ Daniel Martinez HoSang. *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.

Proposition 13, too, had a significant impact on public education financially. A report by Jerry McCaffery and John H. Bowman published in the months after Proposition 13's adoption found that the "largest immediate service reduction occur[ed] in education." Immediately after the measure's passing, 70 southern California school districts were surveyed by the *Los Angeles Times*, and about two-thirds of these schools eliminated or sharply curtailed summer school programs. LAUSD not only eliminated summer school but also closed regional occupation training centers; cut summer recreation by about 60%; and laid off around 10,000 clerical employees for two months.²² Proposition 13 consequently led to what has been called a "leveling down" of school funding, decreasing average spending per pupil and increasing the pupil-teacher ratio relative to other states.²³ Proposition 98 passed in 1988 in an effort to safeguard a consistent share of state funding for schools by guaranteeing a minimum amount in each year's budget allocation to K-14 education, but it did not increase education funding.

The legacy of Proposition 13 is still felt today, as the bulk of K-12 funding in California still comes from General Fund dollars. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, California has reached the national average in raw per-pupil K-12 education spending but still lags far behind comparable states like New York and Massachusetts,²⁴ and when the cost of living is factored in, the state falls further behind in per-pupil spending. Districts with smaller property tax shares and less local property wealth depend more on state funding than districts that receive more of their county's property taxes or that have a substantial local property tax base. High property tax districts that receive less state funding are called "basic aid" districts—of California's approximately 1,000 school districts, only about 150 (representing about 320,000 students) are basic aid.²⁵

Efforts Against Proposition 13

In the years since Proposition 13's passing, there have been several efforts to challenge it. Immediately after its adoption, several cities, school districts, and counties filed challenges that questioned the constitutionality of Proposition 13, arguing that its changes to property taxation were significant enough to render it a revision of California's constitution rather than an amendment (which requires a different procedure for enactment). These cases, consolidated as *Amador Valley Joint Union High School District v. State Board of Equalization*, were all rejected by the Supreme Court of California in 1978.

About a decade later, another effort was made, this time from the department store company Macy's. Macy's argued that Proposition 13 gave an unfair advantage to long-time commercial property owners, but after facing public backlash from leading business organizations, the company abruptly dropped the challenge, citing concerns over the "effect on homeowners."²⁶ Shortly after, in 1992, *Nordlinger v. Hahn* challenged Proposition 13's constitutionality again, arguing that the measure treated longer-term owners differently than

²² Jerry McCaffery and John H. Bowman. "Participatory Democracy and Budgeting: The Effects of Proposition 13." *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 38, No. 6 (1978). 531. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/976034>

²³ Jon Sonstelie et al. "For Better or For Worse? School Finance Reform in California." Public Policy Institute of California, 2000. xi. https://www.ppic.org/wp-content/uploads/content/pubs/report/R_200JSR.pdf.

²⁴ United States Census Bureau. "2023 Public Elementary-Secondary Education Finance Data." <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2023/econ/school-finance/secondary-education-finance.html>

²⁵ Carrie Hahnel et al. *Unjust Legacy*. 14.

²⁶ Oswald Johnston and Kevin Roderick. "Macy's Abandons Plea to Overturn Prop. 13's Legality." *Los Angeles Times*, June 8, 1991. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1991-06-08-mn-36-story.html>

newer owners, with the latter paying higher taxes than the former. However, the Supreme Court continued to uphold the measure's constitutionality.

Other efforts to challenge Proposition 13 have been made across the years, but all have been unsuccessful. The most relevant to consider for the purposes of this report is one of the more recent efforts; namely, Proposition 15. This measure proposed a “split roll,” wherein the cap on assessed values for corporate properties would be removed and property taxes for commercial and industrial properties would increase by pegging assessments to market value. There was no proposed change for homeowners or smaller businesses. The campaign in support of Proposition 15 was called “Schools and Communities First”—or SCF—because the plan for the additional revenue generated by these taxes would have been redistributed by the state to fund schools and other community services.

SCF received broad endorsement and backing from many unions, but not without effort. CFT was a leading proponent of SCF from the inception. UTLA played an important role in CACS, which in turn was a leading force in organizing CTA's State Council's vote in support of SCF. CTA was initially reluctant to take on this campaign. David Goldberg, the current President of CTA, said that historically, this reluctance came from the notion that Proposition 13 was unbeatable, and that it was “unimaginable that you could win challenging this.” Goldberg and others helped to build a CTA internal committee on school funding that helped soften the ground for SCF while CACS locals built independent pressure. “It was a good inside-outside strategy,” said Goldberg, “the committee had voices that provided a broader way of looking at political power, and the big local push around it helped create momentum.” Borden—who now serves as a CTA director—noted how CTA leadership “saw the deep organizing work” that the largest locals in the state were doing and knew they had to get on board. Additionally, CACS worked with California Calls to build broad bottom-up local support for SCF. Thigpenn suggested that the endorsement from CTA would not have come without this work, spanning from 2018-2020.

SCF became Proposition 15, and in a campaign that was dominated by corporate spending and interrupted by a pandemic, it narrowly lost 48.2% to 51.8% in November 2020. Five years earlier, getting it on the ballot, having as robust a coalition behind it, and coming within a few point margin to winning would have been unimaginable. Los Angeles County, in particular, voted 53.5% to 46.5% in favor of Proposition 15.

Future Directions

Although Proposition 15 was defeated, it nonetheless demonstrated that 48% of California voters were ready to take on Proposition 13 and end tax breaks for corporate property owners, particularly if money was instead going towards education and community services. This resonates with existing research and scholarship that says voters are more willing to increase taxes if they know the dollars will be spent on services “that they feel will be of direct use to them.”²⁷ A study on Proposition 13 found that even in 2018, a majority of adults would vote yes on a potential ballot measure that would tax commercial properties according to their

²⁷ Kim S. Rueben and Pedro Cerdán. “Fiscal Effects of Voter Approval Requirements on Local Governments.” Public Policy Institute of California, 2003. xii.
https://www.ppic.org/wp-content/uploads/content/pubs/report/R_103KRR.pdf

current market value and direct some of the new tax revenue to state funding for K-12 public schools.²⁸

Accordingly, during the 2020 campaign of Proposition 13, opponents of the measure did not attack the bill for its efforts to improve public education, but instead garnered support by emphasizing the impact on business owners. For example, Rex Hime (President of the California Business Properties Association) claimed that California “already has the worst climate for business and job creation in the country,” and that a split roll property tax would “increase pressure on many businesses that are already finding it hard to make ends meet.”²⁹ Opponents also cited the strains of the pandemic on businesses and jobs, such as Rob Lapsley, President of the California Business Roundtable, who stated that this is “exactly the wrong time in our economy” for a tax increase,³⁰ and Ted Gaines, a member of the California State Board of Equalization, who said that the agriculture industry in California “is straining from the shocking and unforeseen effects of coronavirus” and could not withstand a “massive jolt in tax costs.”³¹

Although Proposition 13 would not have unduly impacted small business owners (wealthy owners of the most expensive 10% of business properties would account for 92% of revenues, with exemptions to small businesses owning \$3 million or less in business property), this was the argument most vocally made by opponents of the measure, particularly in light of the consequences many businesses were facing due to the pandemic. Alex Stark, the communications director for the SCF campaign, said that the opposition to the tax spread misinformation about it, leading many to believe that Proposition 13 would negatively impact homeowners and small business owners. According to Stark, “scaring voters about possible homeowner taxes and increased consumer costs” was an effective tactic “during a pandemic when people are suffering financially.”³²

Moreover, while the voices of business leaders are very important and influential, the threats to public education have become increasingly apparent in 2025. Education continues to be an area that acts as a common ground for voters across a variety of demographics, and this shared investment in K-12 public education is important to focus on, particularly as we see efforts to attack it. After President Donald Trump revealed plans to issue an executive order to abolish the U.S. Department of Education, polling suggests that the majority of voters across age, gender, race, and educational status are opposed.³³ Polling on teachers overwhelmingly shows that between 70 and 92% reject the Trump administration’s education agenda across the board.³⁴

²⁸ Mark Baldassare et al. “Proposition 13: 40 Years Later.” Public Policy Institute of California, 2018.

<https://www.ppic.org/wp-content/uploads/jtf-proposition-13-40-years-later-1.pdf>

²⁹ Patrick Gleason. “Decades-Old Laws Keeping Property Taxes In Check Are Under Attack.” *Forbes*, July 28, 2020.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/patrickgleason/2020/07/28/decades-old-laws-keeping-property-taxes-in-check-are-under-attack/>

³⁰ Matt Kristoffersen. “Voters could change California’s landmark property tax law after measure qualifies for ballot.” *The Sacramento Bee*, May 29, 2020.

<https://www.sacbee.com/news/politics-government/article243033991.html>

³¹ Evan Symon. “Gov. Newsom Backs Prop. 13 ‘Split Roll’ Property Tax Increase on Business.” *California Globe*, September 12, 2020.

<https://californiaglobe.com/fl/gov-newsom-backs-prop-13-split-roll-property-tax-increase-on-business/>

³² Benjamin Y. Fond and Rebecca Garelli. “Voters will opt to tax the rich—if they know how the money will be spent.” *Jacobin*, April 22, 2021. <https://jacobin.com/2021/04/proposition-13-208-california-arizona-taxes>

³³ Data for Progress “Polling on Eliminating the Department of Education.” February 5, 2025.

<https://www.dataforprogress.org/datasets/polling-on-eliminating-the-department-of-education>

³⁴ Educators for Excellence. “Voices from the Classroom: A Survey of America’s Educators.” 2025.

<https://e4e.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Voices-from-the-Classroom-2025-Report-Digital-FINAL.pdf>

It was estimated that Proposition 15 would bring in a revenue between \$6.5 and \$11.5 billion once fully implemented, with 60% going towards local government and 40% going towards K-12 and community college education, as per Proposition 98. Typically, K-12 schools receive about 89% of the Proposition 98 share while community colleges receive about 11%. This would mean between \$2.6 and \$4.6 billion going towards K-12 schools, or about \$448 to \$793 per student. For an average-sized elementary school of 500 students, this money could hire two to three additional staff, such as counselors, nurses, and librarians, or reduce class sizes by one, and could expand preschool and afterschool offerings, establish new Community Schools, deepen professional development for staff, and more.³⁵

A ballot measure with similar objectives to Proposition 15 should be reintroduced by lawmakers in order to address the threats facing public education more broadly and also to work to bring California school spending to, at, or above the national average on a cost-adjusted basis. Central to passing such a measure is combating the kind of misinformation that was spread during Proposition 15's 2020 campaign, and on the ground organizing is needed to do so (something that unfortunately was hindered during the onset of the pandemic). SCF collected 1.7 million signatures to get Proposition 15 on the ballot, and this was in part the work of coalition members like CFT, California Calls, ACCE, CTA locals, and many others doing in-person organizing. Stark echoed that this field operation could have helped lead to a victory were it not for the pandemic, which instead prompted the campaign to shift to phone banking and Zoom events.³⁶ Running a similar campaign in 2025 onwards would be able to return to in-person organizing to help push against misleading narratives.

Another recommendation might be to have strict accountability for the funds raised, akin to Arizona's Proposition 208, the "Invest in Education" income tax measure that ran—and won—around the same time as SCF. For the funds raised by Proposition 208, 50% would go to teachers, 25% to classroom support staff, 12% to career and technical education, 10% to mentoring and retention programs, and 2% to increase scholarships at the Arizona Teachers Academy. While SCF emphasized the beneficiaries of the money, having clear percentages about where this money will go and how schools and communities will benefit may be a way to give voters confidence about how this will benefit the institutions and people around them, and also help push back at attempts to suggest that this money will not benefit voters.

Conclusion

While this report has analyzed the particularities of UTLA, these experiences, accomplishments, struggles, and difficulties are not unique. Teacher unions across the country are grappling with the effects of cuts to public education, privatization and the corporate charter movement, and the current administration's efforts to dismantle key institutions. President Trump's recent executive order directing the Education Department Secretary Linda McMahon to begin dismantling the department represents a new threat of stripping students of vital resources and tearing down mandated functions that are important to addressing racial and economic inequality in education.

In light of these threats, it is important to analyze how teachers have been able to win transformative victories in the face of adversity. UTLA offers a case study, aspects of which can be applied across geographic and political contexts. The 2014-2020 period offers valuable insight

³⁵ Hahnel, 35.

³⁶ Fond and Garelli.

into the importance of supermajority organizing, building strong community coalitions, and expanding beyond the classroom in order to secure victories not just for teachers but for parents, youths, and the community at large.

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