

ALASKA

OVERALL RANK: 15TH¹
TIER 2 (STRONG)

STRONGER WEAKER

OVERALL		15			
1. RESOURCES AND MEMBERSHIP		13			
2. INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS				36	
3. SCOPE OF BARGAINING	4				
4. STATE POLICIES			21		
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AREA 1: RESOURCES AND MEMBERSHIP (TIED FOR 13TH)

Alaska’s two state teacher unions enjoy high membership and revenue totals. With 89.3 percent of the state’s teachers belonging to unions, the unionization rate in the Last Frontier is 17th-highest of 51 jurisdictions. More impressive, the NEA and AFT state-level affiliates bring in a whopping \$1,371 per teacher annually—the most of any state. External funding for K-12 education is more complicated. While Alaska spends \$16,174 per pupil annually (3rd), only 49.8 percent of these expenditures go toward teacher salaries and benefits (50th of 51).

AREA 2: INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS² TIED FOR 36TH

Despite high revenue, teacher unions contribute proportionally less to Alaska state politics than they do in most other states. Between 2003 and 2010, donations from unions accounted for just 0.45 percent of the money received by candidates for state office (31st). Alaska is also the only state in which the unions gave no money to state political parties. And only 12.9 percent of Alaskan delegates to the Democratic and Republican national conventions were teacher union members (27th).³

*AREA 3: SCOPE OF BARGAINING
TIED FOR 4TH*

Alaska has very permissive bargaining laws. Not only is collective bargaining mandatory in public education, but the state also lets its unions automatically collect agency fees from non-member teachers and allows its school teachers to strike. Alaska education leaders value bottom-up decision making (see sidebar); rather than mandating statewide terms of teacher employment, Alaska's bargaining laws require that eight of the twenty-one items examined in this metric be bargained between districts and their teachers: wages, hours, terms and conditions of employment, grievance procedures, transfers, insurance benefits, fringe benefits, and extra-curricular duties. Ten provisions are not addressed by law, which implicitly includes them in the scope of bargaining as well. Only three items are explicitly excluded from bargaining: class load, class size, and length of the school year.

*AREA 4: STATE POLICIES
TIED FOR 21ST*

Many of Alaska's education policies, particularly those relating to teacher employment, align with traditional union interests. The state does not require that student achievement data factor into teacher evaluations or tenure decisions, and it does not require its districts to consider teacher performance in layoff decisions. Other policies, however, do not reflect union priorities. Teachers are eligible for dismissal after multiple unsatisfactory evaluations and are dismissed due to poor performance at a higher rate than in all but one other state (South Dakota). Unions also typically favor limiting charter school expansion; and while Alaska does not place a cap on the number of charters allowed

in the state, it does limit potential school operators to a single authorizing option. Alaska also holds charters to all state and district laws, including those related to teacher certification, and requires that they participate in existing collective bargaining agreements (though schools may apply for exemptions).

*AREA 5: PERCEIVED INFLUENCE
36TH*

Stakeholder rankings place the strength of Alaska teacher unions toward the bottom of the national list. They rate the unions' influence on education policy below that of the state school board, state association of school administrators, and education advocacy organizations. Further, they note that state education leaders only sometimes align with teacher union positions. Like unions in many other states, Alaska teacher unions often turn to compromise to see some of their preferred policies enacted. Survey respondents report that policies proposed and enacted in the latest legislative session were only *somewhat* in line with teacher union priorities.⁴

*OVERALL
15TH*

Alaska's teacher unions enjoy a wide scope of bargaining and significant internal resources. They maintain a low profile in state elections and are not viewed as the loudest voice in education policy; still, many policies at the state level align with their interests.

Two of the biggest battles between legislators and unions in the Lower 48—education reform and money—simply aren't being waged to the same degree in Alaska. Traditionally a Republican state, the Alaskan State Department of Education decided to opt out of the Race to the Top competition in 2010. Education Commissioner Larry LeDoux explained, "Alaska has the right to be suspicious of an initiative where we hand over authority."⁵ Alaska is also one of just five states that did not adopt the Common Core State Standards, preferring to let districts decide their own academic standards.⁶ And in 2012, Alaska received a waiver from No Child Left Behind, which for one year will freeze the increasing proficiency levels required by federal law. Education leaders argued that the law is too rigid; applying its urban-centric philosophies to Alaska is "just illogical" said Les Morse, the Deputy Education Commissioner.⁷ State leaders will use the breathing room to further exercise their autonomy: "At the same time we're doing this freeze, we're also putting together an application for a comprehensive waiver in which the state would implement its own accountability system," said Eric Fry, spokesperson for the Alaska Department of Education, "so it wouldn't make sense to run the schools and districts through another year of the old NCLB when we're going to be changing things pretty soon."⁸

With state leaders not pushing very hard for controversial reforms, the teacher unions have little to argue about. And with an abundance of natural resources, Alaska has witnessed fewer of the recession-tinged budgetary issues plaguing most of the country.⁹ (Still, NEA-Alaska president Barb Angaiak noted, "The slight increase of just over 1 percent [in education funding for the 2012 fiscal year] is not acceptable in light of increased operational costs.")¹⁰ The state has witnessed significant conflict over just one issue: pensions. The mandatory shift in 2005 away from a defined-benefit to a defined-contribution pension plan for all state workers (including teachers) provoked six years of union efforts to reverse the law.¹¹ In April 2012, the union's push to let teachers choose between the two options was nearly successful, as SB 121 passed in the Senate before dying in the House.¹² NEA-Alaska may get another chance: a new appointee to the Alaska Retirement Management board announced in July 2012 that he supports a return to the defined-benefit system.¹³ With little else to fight about, however, for now it's pretty quiet on the Last Frontier.

ALASKA RANKINGS BY AREA AND INDICATOR

OVERALL RANK: 15TH

Area and Rank ^a	General Indicator	Sub-Indicator	Sub-Indicator Rank/Status ^b
AREA 1: RESOURCES & MEMBERSHIP 13*	Membership	By rank, what percentage of public-school teachers in the state are union members?	17th
	Revenue	By rank, what is the total yearly revenue (per teacher in the state) of the state-level NEA and/or AFT affiliate(s)?	1st
	Spending on education	By rank, what percentage of state expenditures (of state general funds, state restricted funds, state bonds, and federal "pass-through" funds) is directed to K-12 education?	49th
		By rank, what is the total annual per-pupil expenditure (of funds from federal, state, and local sources) in the state?	3rd
		By rank, what percentage of total annual per-pupil expenditures is directed to teacher salaries and benefits?	50th
AREA 2: INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS 36*	Contributions to candidates and political parties	By rank, what percentage of the total contributions to state candidates was donated by teacher unions?	31st
		By rank, what percentage of the total contributions to state-level political parties was donated by teacher unions?	50th
	Industry influence	By rank, what percent of the contributions to state candidates from the ten highest-giving sectors was donated by teacher unions?	33rd
	Status of delegates	By rank, what percentage of the state's delegates to the Democratic and Republican conventions were members of teacher unions?	27th
AREA 3: SCOPE OF BARGAINING 4*	Legal scope of bargaining	What is the legal status of collective bargaining?	Mandatory
		By rank, how broad is the scope of collective bargaining?	10th*
	Automatic revenue streams	What is the unions' legal right to automatically collect agency fees from non-members and/or collect member dues via automatic payroll deductions?	Permitted
	Right to strike	What is the legal status of teacher strikes?	Permitted
AREA 4: STATE POLICIES 21*	Performance pay	Does the state support performance pay for teachers?	State does not support
	Retirement	By rank, what is the employer- versus employee-contribution rate to the teacher pension system?	17th
	Evaluations	What is the maximum potential consequence for veteran teachers who receive unsatisfactory evaluation(s)?	Eligible for dismissal
		Is classroom effectiveness included in teacher evaluations? If so, how is it weighted?	Not required
	Terms of employment	How long before a teacher earns tenure?	Three years
		Is student/teacher performance considered in tenure decisions? If so, how is it weighted?	Not included
		Is seniority considered in teacher layoff decisions? If so, how is it weighted?	Required; Considered among other factors
		Is teacher performance included in teacher layoff decisions? If so, how is it weighted?	Not required
		By rank, what percentage of the teaching workforce was dismissed due to poor performance?	50th
Class size	Is class size restricted for grades 1-3? If so, is the restriction higher or lower than the national average (20)?	No restriction	

Area and Rank	General Indicator	Sub-Indicator	Sub-Indicator Rank/Status
AREA 4: STATE POLICIES 21* (cont.)	Charter school structural limitations	Is there a cap (limit) placed on the number of charter schools that can operate in the state (or other jurisdiction) and/or on the number of students who can attend charter schools?	No state cap
		Does the state allow a variety of charter schools: start-ups, conversions, and virtual schools?	Yes
		How many charter authorizing options exist? How active are those authorizers?	Single option, Some activity
	Charter school exemptions	Are all charter schools automatically exempt from state laws and state/district regulations (except those that safeguard students and fiscal accountability)? If not, are they eligible for exemptions?	Yes
		Are all charter schools automatically exempt from state teacher-certification requirements? If not, are they eligible for exemptions?	No; Schools cannot apply for exemption
		Are all charter schools automatically exempt from collective bargaining agreements (CBAs)? If not, are they eligible for exemptions?	No; Schools can apply for exemptions

AREA 5: PERCEIVED INFLUENCE^c 36	Relative influence of teacher unions	How do you rank the influence of teacher unions on education policy compared with other influential entities?	Fourth-most influential
	Influence over campaigns	On a scale from always to never, how often do Democratic candidates need teacher-union support to get elected?	Sometimes/Often
		On a scale from always to never, how often do Republican candidates need teacher-union support to get elected?	Sometimes
	Influence over spending	To what extent, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, do you agree that even in times of cutbacks, teacher unions are effective in protecting dollars for education?	Neutral
		Given recent budgetary constraints, would you say that teacher unions generally make concessions to prevent reductions in pay and benefits or fight hard to prevent those reductions?	Fight
	Influence over policy	To what extent, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, do you agree that teacher unions ward off proposals in your state with which they disagree?	Neutral
		On a scale from always to never, how often do existing state education policies reflect teacher-union priorities?	Sometimes/Often
		To what extent, from totally in line to not at all in line, were state education policies proposed by the governor during your state's latest legislative session in line with teacher-union priorities?	Mostly not in line/Somewhat in line
		To what extent, from totally in line to not at all in line, were legislative outcomes of your state's latest legislative session in line with teacher-union priorities?	Somewhat/Mostly in line
	Influence over key stakeholders	On a scale from always to never, how often have the priorities of state education leaders aligned with teacher-union positions in the past three years?	Sometimes/Often
Would you say that teacher unions typically compromise with policymakers to ensure that their preferred policies are enacted, or typically need not make concessions?		Compromise	

* Tied with another state

^a Area ranks are calculated using a weighted average of sub-indicators. For a more detailed description, see Appendix A.

^b Where possible, we report a state's rank as compared to other states on a given metric. For example, out of 51 states, Alaska has the 17th-highest percentage of teachers who are union members. Otherwise, we report a status: Alaska has mandatory collective bargaining, and union agency fees are permitted. For a more detailed description of our metrics and methodology, see Appendix A. To request the raw data for your state, send an email to uniondata@edexcellence.net.

^c For all survey questions, stakeholders were asked specifically about teacher unions, candidates, policies, and leaders in their state. In addition, we asked about unions and policies in the "current legislative session," but because legislative calendars vary from state to state, responses refer to policies proposed and enacted within the 2010-11 window.

ENDNOTES

¹ A state's overall rank is calculated as follows: First, we score it on multiple sub-indicators (sub-indicator data and scores for Alaska are shown in the table, *Alaska Rankings by Area and Indicator*). Second, we take a weighted average of the sub-indicators in each of five areas. In each area, we use that average to place the states in rank order: For example, in Area 1: Resources and Membership, Alaska is ranked 13th of 51 based on the weighted average of its sub-indicators. To generate the state's overall rank, we average the five area ranks together, then re-order the states. For a more detailed description of data sources and methodology, see Appendix A.

² Readers should note that these figures include direct donations only, not union and union-connected PAC spending on electioneering/advertising, mobilizing the union's own membership, lobbying, or advocacy. A recent *Wall Street Journal* report found that donations and lobbying activities account for a small share of union political spending compared with their expenditures on member mobilization and advocacy. Even the AFT agreed, making the argument that since its mission is organizing and activism, it will naturally spend significant amounts on these activities. Thus, the percentages we report here are extremely conservative representations of what unions actually spend on politics. For more information, see Appendix A, Area 2; Tom McGinty and Brody Mullins, "Political Spending by Unions Far Exceeds Direct Donations," *Wall Street Journal*, July 10, 2012; and Jeff Hauser, "Wall Street Journal Compares Union Political Spending to Corporate Donations," AFL-CIO, July 10, 2012.

³ At the time of publication, the 2000 conventions were the most recent for which such detailed data were available in forms that met rigorous standards. However, 2008 data provided by the Democratic National Convention were highly correlated with the reliable figures from 2000.

⁴ We asked stakeholders about unions and policies in the "current legislative session," but because legislative calendars vary from state to state, responses refer to policies proposed and enacted within the 2010-11 window.

⁵ Jeremy Hsieh, "Alaska Opts Out Of Race To The Top School Grants," *Daily News Miner* (Fairbanks, AK), May 4, 2010, http://www.newsminer.com/view/full_story/7295348/article-Alaska-opts-out-of-Race-to-the-Top-school-grants.

⁶ Lisa Demer, "Comeau Presses For Adoption Of National School Standards," *Anchorage Daily News*, March 14, 2012, <http://www.adn.com/2012/03/13/2369208/comeau-presses-for-new-school.html>.

⁷ Rosemary Shinohara, "Feds Grant Waiver To Alaska On No Child Left Behind," *Anchorage Daily News*, July 12, 2012, <http://www.adn.com/2012/07/11/v-printer/2539128/feds-give-alaska-waiver-on-no.html>.

⁸ Dave Donaldson, "State Gets First Federal Waiver For No Child Left Behind," *Alaska Public Radio Network*, July 6, 2012, <http://www.alaskapublic.org/2012/07/06/state-gets-first-federal-waiver-for-no-child-left-behind/>.

⁹ Phil Oliff and Michael Leachman, "New School Year Brings Steep Cuts In State Funding For Schools," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, October 7, 2011, <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/?fa=view&id=3569>.

¹⁰ Barb Angaiak, "Statement On Governor Parnell's FY2012 Budget And State Of The State Speech," NEA-Alaska, January 20, 2011, <http://www.neaalaska.org/nea/node/392>.

¹¹ "Priority Legislation," NEA-Alaska, accessed September 10, 2012, <http://www.neaalaska.org/nea/node/19>.

¹² Pat Forgey, "Senate OK's Traditional Retirement Plan For Public Employees," *Juneau Empire*, April 15, 2012, <http://juneauempire.com/state/2012-04-15/senate-oks-traditional-retirement-plan-public-employees#.T-nV2hdDzld>.

¹³ Pat Forgey, "Retirement Board Gets New Appointments," *Juneau Empire*, July 17, 2012, 2012, <http://juneauempire.com/local/2012-07-17/retirement-board-gets-appointments>.