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## Picket Lines and Ballot Boxes: New Study Examines Strength of Teacher Unions Nationwide

Washington, D.C.—Today the Thomas B. Fordham Institute and Education Reform Now released the most comprehensive analysis of American teacher unions' strength ever conducted. Published weeks after the contentious Chicago teachers' strike and days before a hotly contested election, this timely study, *How Strong Are U.S. Teacher Unions? A State-By-State Comparison*, ranks all fifty states and the District of Columbia according to the power and influence of their state-level unions.

Reform debates increasingly focus on the teacher unions' role in the changing landscape of American K–12 education. Critics accuse them of blocking needed changes, protecting inadequate instructors and overpowering the public interest at the ballot box. Supporters object, arguing that unions are critical to defending teachers' rights, ensuring teachers' professionalism, and safeguarding them from misguided reforms.

“For better or worse, teacher unions look out for teacher interests,” said Chester E. Finn, Jr., Fordham's president. “This study sheds light on how exactly they do this, by measuring their strength, state by state, more comprehensively than any other analysis to date. It illuminates their power to hinder—or promote—education reform, on whether what occurred in Chicago could happen anywhere in the United States, and the myriad ways they seek to influence election outcomes and policy decisions.”

To assess union strength, the Fordham-ERN study examined thirty-seven different variables across five realms: 1) Resources and Membership; 2) Involvement in Politics; 3) Scope of Bargaining; 4) State Policies; and 5) Perceived Influence. Using these data, analysts ranked the relative strength of state-level teacher unions in fifty-one jurisdictions (all states plus the District of Columbia), and ranked their strength and influence. The study analyzed factors ranging from union membership and revenue to state bargaining laws to campaign contributions, and included such measures such as the alignment between specific state policies and traditional union interests and a unique stakeholder survey.

The report sorts the fifty-one jurisdictions into five tiers, ranking their teacher unions from strongest to weakest. This review determined that Hawaii has the strongest teacher union in the U.S. while Arizona has the weakest. (COMPLETE STATE RANKINGS CAN BE VIEWED BELOW) The entire study can also be viewed at <http://www.edexcellence.net/publications/how-strong-are-us-teacher-unions.html>

Other findings include:

- Teacher strikes, such as the one recently concluded in Chicago, are legal in fourteen states and illegal in thirty-seven.
- In the 2010 state election cycle, teacher unions were one of the top-ten *overall* donors to candidates for governor and other executive positions, legislature, high court, and elected education positions in twenty-two of forty-eight states. In twenty one states, they were among the top five highest-giving *interest groups*.
- The percentage of a state's teachers who are union members varies a lot; in 2008, the nationwide average was 74 percent; in two states it was lower than 35 percent; in sixteen states, 90 percent or more of teachers are unionized.
- Thirty-two states *require* local school boards to bargain collectively with their teachers, fourteen states *permit* this, and five states *prohibit* collective bargaining.

- The unions’ influence may be waning at the state level, however. For the three years prior to the 2011 legislative session, education policies in most states reflected union priorities. In 2011, however, a growing number of legislatures were enacting policies that were *less* in line with union priorities. (And other sources indicate that many teacher unions are losing members and incurring budget deficits.)

**The report has four key takeaways:**

1. **Mandatory bargaining tilts the playing field in favor of stronger unions overall.** It not only increases union resources and status, but also ensures issues are “on the table” (and not under the direct authority of state and local leaders).
2. **The scope of bargaining matters a lot, too, as does the right (or not) to strike.** Local unions use collective bargaining and strikes to protect teacher interests—but only on issues allowed by state law. When a wide scope of bargaining combines with ill-defined, timid, or absent state policies, unions have better opportunity to negotiate contracts that serve their goals.
3. **Resources make a difference.** Dollars and members are both important—even (or especially) if unions have limited bargaining rights. With higher revenue, a state union can better finance its lobbying and advocacy efforts at the statehouse, shaping policies that protect its interests while undermining or blocking those that do not. Greater membership means more union representation at the ballot box, more communications with state leaders, and more boots on the ground during rallies and campaigns—and in turn, more revenue from member dues.
4. **The fact that a state has mandatory, permissive, or broad bargaining laws—or its unions enjoy abundant resources—does not mean that state policies are union-favorable and vice-versa.** Many unions that have mandatory bargaining over a wide range of issues and high membership and revenue still see state education policies that are *not* particularly favorable to unions. Conversely, some states without strong bargaining rights have union-friendly policies regardless. That’s because other factors matter, too: state leadership (both past and present), federal policy, the condition of the economy, the influence of other key stakeholders, and the state’s own macro-politics.

*The Thomas B. Fordham Institute is committed to the renewal and reform of primary and secondary education in the United States. Education Reform Now is a nonpartisan organization that envisions an America in which every child, regardless of class or race, has the social and economic opportunities afforded by an excellent public education. How Strong Are U.S. Teacher Unions? A State-By-State Comparison was authored by Amber M. Winkler, Janie Scull, and Dara Zeelandelaar, with a foreword by Chester E. Finn, Jr. and Michael J. Petrilli. Generous support for this report was provided by the Bodman Foundation, the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, and Education Reform Now, as well as by our sister organization, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. For further information about this study, and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, please visit us online at [www.edexcellence.net](http://www.edexcellence.net).*

**Teacher Union Strength by Rank and Tier**

| Tier 1<br>Strongest |              | Tier 2<br>Strong |              | Tier 3<br>Average |              | Tier 4<br>Weak       |              | Tier 5<br>Weakest |              |
|---------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|----------------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|
| State               | Overall Rank | State            | Overall Rank | State             | Overall Rank | State                | Overall Rank | State             | Overall Rank |
| Hawaii              | 1            | Vermont          | 11           | Massachusetts     | 21           | Kansas               | 32           | Louisiana         | 42           |
| Oregon              | 2            | Ohio             | 12           | Maine             | 22           | District of Columbia | 33           | Oklahoma          | 43           |
| Montana             | 3            | West Virginia    | 13           | Maryland          | 23           | South Dakota         | 34           | Texas             | 44           |
| Pennsylvania        | 4            | Minnesota        | 14           | North Dakota      | 24           | Colorado             | 35           | Georgia           | 45           |
| Rhode Island        | 5            | Alaska           | 15           | Nevada            | 25           | Idaho                | 36           | Mississippi       | 46           |
| California          | 6            | Michigan         | 16           | Nebraska          | 26           | New Mexico           | 37           | Virginia          | 47           |
| New Jersey          | 7            | Connecticut      | 17           | Iowa              | 27           | Missouri             | 38           | Arkansas          | 48           |
| Illinois            | 8            | Wisconsin        | 18           | Kentucky          | 28           | Utah                 | 39           | South Carolina    | 49           |
| New York            | 9            | Delaware         | 19           | Wyoming           | 29           | North Carolina       | 40           | Florida           | 50           |
| Washington          | 10           | Alabama          | 20           | New Hampshire     | 30           | Tennessee            | 41           | Arizona           | 51           |
|                     |              |                  |              | Indiana           | 31           |                      |              |                   |              |

Note: With fifty-one total jurisdictions, each tier comprises ten except Tier 3—the middle tier—which comprises eleven.

## Teacher Union Strength by State

| State                | Overall Rank | Area 1: Resources and Membership | Area 2: Involvement in Politics | Area 3: Scope of Bargaining | Area 4: State Policies | Area 5: Perceived Influence |
|----------------------|--------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Alabama              | 20           | 24*                              | 1*                              | 45*                         | 18*                    | 25                          |
| Alaska               | 15           | 13*                              | 36*                             | 4*                          | 21*                    | 36                          |
| Arizona              | 51           | 40*                              | 49                              | 45*                         | 49*                    | 48                          |
| Arkansas             | 48           | 50                               | 47*                             | 45*                         | 20                     | 37                          |
| California           | 6            | 20*                              | 18*                             | 1                           | 37                     | 1                           |
| Colorado             | 35           | 37*                              | 18*                             | 25                          | 48                     | 29                          |
| Connecticut          | 17           | 9*                               | 29*                             | 13                          | 13                     | 27                          |
| Delaware             | 19           | 9*                               | 29*                             | 15                          | 36                     | 18                          |
| District of Columbia | 33           | 17                               | N/A                             | 21                          | 49*                    | 41                          |
| Florida              | 50           | 47*                              | 36*                             | 35*                         | 46*                    | 50                          |
| Georgia              | 45           | 35*                              | 36*                             | 48*                         | 26                     | 45                          |
| Hawaii               | 1            | 3*                               | 1*                              | 9                           | 9                      | 23                          |
| Idaho                | 36           | 30                               | 4*                              | 42                          | 45                     | 42*                         |
| Illinois             | 8            | 18*                              | 12                              | 3                           | 39                     | 28                          |
| Indiana              | 31           | 9*                               | 13*                             | 39                          | 44                     | 32                          |
| Iowa                 | 27           | 27                               | 23*                             | 32                          | 11                     | 31                          |
| Kansas               | 32           | 33*                              | 18*                             | 31                          | 14                     | 30                          |
| Kentucky             | 28           | 35*                              | 26*                             | 26                          | 10                     | 11*                         |
| Louisiana            | 42           | 40*                              | 44*                             | 24                          | 33                     | 44                          |
| Maine                | 22           | 20*                              | 44*                             | 16                          | 7*                     | 11*                         |
| Maryland             | 23           | 26                               | 40*                             | 20                          | 16                     | 4                           |
| Massachusetts        | 21           | 13*                              | 40*                             | 12                          | 21*                    | 16                          |
| Michigan             | 16           | 6*                               | 4*                              | 22                          | 51                     | 20                          |
| Minnesota            | 14           | 3*                               | 32*                             | 2                           | 46*                    | 19                          |
| Mississippi          | 46           | 49                               | 40*                             | 43*                         | 7*                     | 51                          |
| Missouri             | 38           | 33*                              | 47*                             | 23                          | 40                     | 24                          |
| Montana              | 3            | 20*                              | 10*                             | 6                           | 6                      | 5                           |
| Nebraska             | 26           | 18*                              | 13*                             | 37                          | 27                     | 38                          |
| Nevada               | 25           | 28*                              | 18*                             | 27                          | 28                     | 10                          |
| New Hampshire        | 30           | 24*                              | 40*                             | 14                          | 17                     | 40                          |
| New Jersey           | 7            | 1*                               | 26*                             | 17*                         | 5                      | 2                           |
| New Mexico           | 37           | 46                               | 32*                             | 35*                         | 29                     | 8                           |
| New York             | 9            | 1*                               | 13*                             | 19                          | 24*                    | 21                          |
| North Carolina       | 40           | 47*                              | 29*                             | 48*                         | 12                     | 11*                         |
| North Dakota         | 24           | 28*                              | 23*                             | 33*                         | 2*                     | 14                          |
| Ohio                 | 12           | 20*                              | 17                              | 10                          | 23                     | 35                          |
| Oklahoma             | 43           | 44*                              | 26*                             | 40                          | 43                     | 46                          |
| Oregon               | 2            | 9*                               | 8*                              | 4*                          | 34*                    | 3                           |
| Pennsylvania         | 4            | 13*                              | 10*                             | 7                           | 41                     | 7                           |
| Rhode Island         | 5            | 6*                               | 4*                              | 17*                         | 15                     | 15                          |
| South Carolina       | 49           | 51                               | 35                              | 43*                         | 38                     | 47                          |

|                      |    |     |     |     |     |     |
|----------------------|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| <b>South Dakota</b>  | 34 | 40* | 1*  | 33* | 34* | 49  |
| <b>Tennessee</b>     | 41 | 37* | 18* | 38  | 42  | 42* |
| <b>Texas</b>         | 44 | 44* | 36* | 48* | 30* | 34  |
| <b>Utah</b>          | 39 | 37* | 25  | 28* | 30* | 39  |
| <b>Vermont</b>       | 11 | 6*  | 44* | 8   | 2*  | 22  |
| <b>Virginia</b>      | 47 | 40* | 50  | 48* | 4   | 33  |
| <b>Washington</b>    | 10 | 3*  | 32* | 11  | 18* | 9   |
| <b>West Virginia</b> | 13 | 31* | 4*  | 28* | 1   | 6   |
| <b>Wisconsin</b>     | 18 | 13* | 8*  | 41  | 24* | 17  |
| <b>Wyoming</b>       | 29 | 31* | 13* | 28* | 30* | 26  |

\* State is tied with one or more other states.