

BILL FARMER

Candidate for NEA Executive Committee
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Dear NCHE Member:

Growing up, my family instilled in me the value of a higher education. It has the immense power to change the trajectory of a person's life. As a high school science educator, I have spent my 22-year career helping students to realize their academic potential beyond high school. I want to be a champion for your issues as a member of the NEA Executive Committee. To that end, these are some of my commitments to you:

VISIBILITY AND INCLUSION - If we are going to realize the full potential of the NEA, we have to make sure that the voice of our higher education members is present in EVERY space where decisions or recommendations are made. During my time on the NEA Board, there were several instances where our higher education members felt overlooked or excluded. There is a tendency to primarily consider things with a PreK-12 lens and we have to push ourselves to do better. NEA should be advocating for ALL of our students from their cradles through to their careers. Higher education plays a vital role in guiding students to step boldly into their brilliance. As a member of the NEA Executive Committee I will be an advocate to assure representation and help the organization grow to be more inclusive. When I was appointed as chair of the NEA SOGI Committee, I noticed gaps in representation, including the absence of higher education members. I immediately reached out to President Pringle to make adjustments to create a more representative team.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND FUNDING - It is no secret that there has been a chronic and growing underinvestment in higher education at both the state and federal levels for decades. Shrinking funds have contributed to budget cuts, hiring freezes, and reduced resources. Interestingly, many of my higher education colleagues report a growth in administrative staffing alongside simultaneous shifts away from tenured-track positions towards more adjunct or contingent faculty who work with lower pay, often no benefits, and little job security. These issues are being compounded by the Trump administration as it levies attacks on academic freedom and research. Many research institutions are grappling with this new financial uncertainty. I have several former students with hopes of pursuing a PhD in science who have had offers withdrawn or put on hold. This is unacceptable and we need to be pushing back forcefully. Academic freedom is an essential pillar of higher education. NEA needs to work with our higher education leaders to develop a model blueprint for the long overdue reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, last updated in 2008, to restore, revitalize, and strengthen our higher education institutions to be able to provide the world-class, uncensored educations that our students deserve.

ORGANIZING FOR GROWTH AND POWER - There are untapped opportunities for NEA to recruit and retain higher education members. This requires an allocation of NEA funds for staff and resources dedicated towards the development of a strategic plan for membership organizing within our higher education institutions. As a member of the Budget Committee, I have been listening to our members through budget engagements and it is clear that we need to make more investments at the state and local level to support higher education organizing efforts. This includes removing the current red-tape to access NEA grants and providing our members with greater flexibility to do the work. We cannot allow past failures to deter us from capitalizing on the growing public support of unions. Let's empower our state and local leaders who need the support of NEA to expand upon their efforts back at home.

ACCESSIBILITY AND AFFORDABILITY FOR ALL - We must keep advocating for the elimination of obstacles that prevent students from pursuing two-year, four-year, and advanced degrees. As tuition costs rise, higher education is becoming out of reach to many students. I've spent a lot of time helping my high school seniors navigate a complex and outdated system that often ends up providing inadequate support, forcing them to take on student debt to be able to pursue their dreams. Although the College Affordability Act and other recent efforts to enhance PELL grants have stalled in Congress, we have to hold legislators accountable and continue to apply pressure. While we celebrate recent loan forgiveness wins, we must continue our efforts to reduce the accumulation of crippling student debt.

I want to be a partner with your leadership team to connect on a regular basis to process concerns and collaborate on solutions. You can count on me to be an accessible and responsive advocate for your members. Thank you for reviewing my information, and please contact me for any additional clarity. Enjoy your conference!

Let's grow stronger together,

Bill Farmer