Arkansas Education Association

WHERE DO YOUR UNION DUES GO?

A LOOK AT AEA SPENDING IN FISCAL YEAR 2025 (Sept 1, 2024 – Aug 31, 2025)

The Arkansas Education Association (AEA) is the largest teachers union in Arkansas and is affiliated with the National Education Association. The union says its mission is to "advocate for educational professionals" and "fulfill the promise of public education."[1] Yet its own IRS filings tell a different story about where members' dues actually go. The union closed FY 2025 sitting on $3,405,447 in net assets, more than double what it held eight years earlier, while steadily shrinking the very staff that serves its members.[23]

Of the $2,223,180 the AEA spent in FY 2025, nearly two-thirds — $1,421,124 — went to salaries, compensation, and employee benefits for its own staff and officers.[4] Of that total, $337,307 went to staff retirement and employee benefits. A further $279,653 went to travel and conferences.[5] Because the AEA does not complete the functional-expense columns on its Form 990 that would show how much it devotes to actual representation versus overhead, dues-paying members have no way, from the union's own filing, to see how much of their money reaches the bargaining table at all.

The union's balance sheet, meanwhile, kept growing. Net assets climbed from $1,570,471 in FY 2017 to $3,405,447 in FY 2025, a 117% increase.[6] In FY 2024 that growth was turbocharged by a one-time $1,014,750 gain on the sale of assets; in FY 2025, with no such windfall, the union still finished the year in the black and left its $3.4 million reserve essentially untouched.[7] Either way, the AEA is accumulating members' money faster than it is spending it on members.

And the story does not end at the union's own books. Because AEA membership is inseparable from the National Education Association, a share of every Arkansas member's dues flows to a national organization that runs one of the country's largest and most one-sidedly partisan political operations: NEA's federal super PAC steered 100% of its committee contributions to Democratic-aligned groups over recent election cycles, and its candidate PAC gave 96.7% to Democrats.[8] That same national union pushes an active LGBTQ+ and transgender agenda, from an official "Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth" program and classroom guidance on chosen names and pronouns to a partnership with GLSEN, whose model policy advises school staff not to disclose a student's gender identity to parents without the student's permission.[9] Through the unified structure, Arkansas educators help underwrite all of it, whether or not they share it.

The Arkansas Education Association's own financial records reveal an organization increasingly built around itself. A union exists to represent its members, in contract talks, in grievance proceedings, and before the school boards and legislature that shape their working lives. Instead, the AEA channels the majority of its spending into staff compensation and benefits, banks a growing reserve, and declines to disclose how much of the remainder actually funds representation.[10][11]

FINANCIAL POSITION

The AEA reported $3,746,102 in total assets at the close of FY 2025, against just $340,655 in total liabilities, leaving $3,405,447 in net assets.[12] The union carries almost no debt: its liabilities amount to less than 10% of its assets. This is not an organization in financial distress. It is an organization sitting on a substantial and growing cushion built from members' dues.

Net assets have more than doubled over eight years, rising from $1,570,471 at the end of FY 2017 to $3,405,447 at the end of FY 2025.[13][14] The single largest jump came in FY 2024, when the union booked a $1,014,750 gain on the sale of assets.[15] In FY 2025, with no asset sale and revenue of just $2,230,442 against $2,223,180 in expenses, the union still finished $7,262 ahead — its reserve fully funded and barely touched even in an ordinary year.

Item	Amount
Total Assets (EOY)	$3,746,102
Total Liabilities (EOY)	$340,655
Net Assets (EOY)	**$3,405,447**
Net Assets, FY 2017 (8 years earlier)	$1,570,471
FY 2025 operating surplus (no asset sale)	$7,262

SPENDING BREAKDOWN

The AEA disbursed $2,223,180 in FY 2025.[16] The largest single line was $851,198 in salaries and wages for staff (separate from officer pay), followed by $217,712 in pension contributions, $159,680 in compensation of officers and directors, and $146,343 for conferences and meetings.[17] Travel added another $133,310, and staff health and other benefits $119,595.

What the filing does not show is just as telling. The AEA leaves blank the Form 990 columns that would allocate each expense between program services (the union's representational mission) and management/overhead.[18] As a result, there is no disclosed figure for how much of the $2.2 million actually funded grievance handling, bargaining, or member advocacy — the activities that justify a union's existence — versus running the organization itself.

Category	Amount	% of Total
Salaries and wages (staff)	$851,198	38.3%

Pension plan contributions	$217,712	9.8%
Compensation of officers & directors	$159,680	7.2%
Conferences, conventions & meetings	$146,343	6.6%
Travel	$133,310	6.0%
Miscellaneous	$123,885	5.6%
Other employee benefits	$119,595	5.4%
Legal fees	$80,000	3.6%
Fees for services — other (unitemized)	$77,504	3.5%
Payroll taxes	$72,939	3.3%
Occupancy	$69,056	3.1%
Membership	$17,752	0.8%
All other (office, IT, insurance, depreciation, etc.)	$154,206	6.9%

What Do These Categories Mean?

Fees for services — other: Payments to outside contractors and consultants not broken out as legal, accounting, lobbying, or management. The AEA reports no detail on who received this $77,504.
Program services vs. management: Form 990 asks filers to split each expense between mission/program activities and general management. The AEA left these columns blank, so no representational-spending figure is disclosed.
Pension & employee benefits: Retirement contributions and health/other benefits for the union's own employees — distinct from any benefit to dues-paying members.
Salaries and wages (staff): Wages and salaries paid to the union's non-officer employees, the AEA's single largest expense line.
Compensation of officers & directors: Reportable compensation paid to the union's elected officers and directors, separate from regular staff salaries.
Conferences, conventions & meetings: The cost of hosting and attending conferences, conventions, and meetings.
Travel: Travel costs incurred by the union's staff and officers.
Miscellaneous: An “other expenses” catch-all the filing labels only “Miscellaneous,” with no further breakdown of what it covers.
Legal fees: Payments to outside attorneys for legal services.
Payroll taxes: The employer's share of Social Security, Medicare, and unemployment taxes on staff wages.
Occupancy: Rent, utilities, and other costs of the union's office space.
Membership: An “other expenses” line the filing reports only as “Membership,” with no further detail on what the payments fund.

All other (office, IT, insurance, depreciation, etc.): The remaining smaller expense lines combined, including office expenses, information technology, insurance, depreciation, and interest.

LOBBYIST CONNECTIONS

Beyond the money it spends, the Arkansas Education Association maintains an active lobbying presence before the Arkansas General Assembly — and among the people doing the lobbying are the union's own leadership. In its registrations with the Arkansas Secretary of State, the AEA lists its President, April Reisma, as a currently registered lobbyist, along with other individual registrants such as Summer Lollie; its Executive Director, Dr. Bradley Bartels, also held an AEA lobbyist registration, since terminated.[19] The union's president is personally registered to lobby members of the General Assembly and public servants of state government.

Each AEA-linked lobbyist's public registration reports $0.00 in itemized lobbying expenditures for the period, and the public records list who is registered to lobby without disclosing any compensation figure.[20]

Patterns and Themes

The AEA also registers individual lobbyists who separately represent a range of unrelated interests before the same legislature. Corey Johnson, registered for the AEA in 2026, was in that same year also registered to lobby for Teach Plus, Inc. — a national education-focused nonprofit — and for ALP Supply Co.[21] Melissa Moody, registered for the AEA in 2025, was that year also registered to lobby for Fresenius Medical Care, the dialysis-services company.[22] Timothy Tucker, whom the AEA registered as a lobbyist in 2025, separately registered in 2026 to lobby for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, the Arkansas Land Title Association, and the Arkansas Recyclers Association.[23]

The public record shows a union whose lobbying runs through its own elected leadership and through individual lobbyists it shares with corporate, industry, and advocacy clients — while Arkansas's disclosures reveal who is registered to lobby but not what any of it costs members.

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

The AEA spent $337,307 on retirement and employee benefits for its own staff in FY 2025 — $217,712 in pension plan contributions and $119,595 in other employee benefits — equal to 15.2% of the union's total disbursements.[24] That staff-benefit spending is larger than the union's entire outlay on travel, conferences, occupancy, legal fees, or any category of spending other than base salaries themselves.

For a 501(c)(6) organization that discloses no figure for representational spending, the priority embedded in the numbers is hard to miss: more than one dues dollar in seven goes toward the retirement and benefit packages of the union's own employees.

Benefit Type	Amount
Pension plan contributions	$217,712

Other employee benefits (health, etc.)	$119,595
TOTAL BENEFITS	**$337,307**

WHERE YOUR NEA DUES GO

AEA membership is not a standalone product. Under the union's unified-dues structure, no one can join the Arkansas Education Association without simultaneously joining the National Education Association, the AEA's national parent.[25]

The national union as an organization is deeply engaged in transgender and LGBTQ+ advocacy. National funds are allocated to line items that include “Advance Racial Justice and Social Justice” and “Promote Safe, Healthy, Inclusive, Collaborative, and Future-Focused Public Schools” — which the NEA describes as building schools “affirming to all students and employees.”[26] The NEA also runs an official “Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth” program, hosts a recognized LGBTQ+ member caucus, publishes classroom guidance on chosen names and pronouns, lobbies for the federal Equality Act, and partners with GLSEN, whose model school policy advises staff not to disclose a student's gender identity to parents without the student's permission.[27] Arkansas educators who pay AEA dues are, through that unified structure, helping to underwrite this national agenda, whether or not they share it.

PAC POLITICAL SPENDING

The clearest example of the national union’s political spending is the NEA Advocacy Fund, the union's federal super PAC (Federal Election Commission committee C00489815).

Across the five federal election cycles from 2017 through 2026, the Advocacy Fund spent $49.5 million, including $41.36 million in contributions to other political committees. On the contribution side the split is absolute: 100% of that $41.36 million went to Democratic-aligned committees, and across five full cycles not a single dollar went to a Republican-aligned committee. Its largest recipients were the institutional super-PAC infrastructure of the Democratic Party:[28]

Recipient	Amount	Party
Senate Majority PAC	$8,105,000	D
House Majority PAC	$5,100,000	D
For Our Future	$2,826,390	D
America Votes Action Fund	$2,012,000	D
America Votes	$2,000,000	D

The NEA also operates a federal candidate committee, the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education (FEC committee C00003251), financed by voluntary contributions solicited from members rather than from dues. Across the same five cycles it directed $11.74 million to federal candidates and party committees — 96.7% of it ($11.35 million) to Democrats and just 3.3%

($390,000) to Republicans. Its top recipients were not individual candidates but the central campaign arms of the Democratic Party:[29]

Recipient	Amount	Party
DNC Services Corp./Democratic National Committee	$845,000	D
Biden Victory Fund	$618,500	D
Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC)	$405,000	D
Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC)	$390,000	D
Democratic Grassroots Victory Fund	$225,000	D

The bottom line for an Arkansas educator is straightforward. Through the unified NEA structure, the dues collected by the AEA help sustain the national organization that runs one of the largest and most one-sidedly partisan political operations in the country, whether or not the individual member shares those politics.

YOUR RIGHT TO LEAVE

No educator can be compelled to join or pay the Arkansas Education Association as a condition of employment.[30] Educators who conclude that the AEA is spending their dues on executive salaries, staff benefits, and a growing reserve rather than on representing them have every right to keep that money.

Workers who want help understanding their rights, or who wish to resign from union membership, can find free resources and step-by-step guidance from the Americans for Fair Treatment at americansforfairtreatment.org or by calling (833) 969-FAIR.

Data sourced from the Arkansas Education Association's IRS Form 990 filings (EIN 71-0004515) for fiscal years 2017 through 2025 (fiscal years ending August 31), obtained from the IRS Tax-Exempt Organization Search (TEOS) e-file data and ProPublica Nonprofit Explorer; and from the Arkansas Secretary of State's Lobbyist Registration database (ethics-disclosures.sos.arkansas.gov), 2024–2026 lobbying years. Arkansas teacher salary comparison from the National Education Association, Rankings & Estimates 2024–25.

NUMBERS TO HIGHLIGHT

Key statistics from AEA's FY 2025 (Sept 1, 2024 – Aug 31, 2025) 990 filing

$3.4M	Net assets at end of FY 2025 — more than double FY 2017
+117%	Growth in net assets since FY 2017
-36%	Cut in staff (22 – 14 employees) since FY 2017
$337,307	Spent on staff retirement & benefits in FY 2025 (15.2% of spending)
$851,198	Staff salaries in FY 2025 — the union's single largest expense (38% of spending)
$7,262	FY 2025 surplus — the AEA banked its cushion rather than spending it on members
64%	Of FY 2025 spending that went to staff salaries, comp & benefits

[1] IRS Form 990 (EIN 71-0004515), FY 2025 (tax period ending Aug. 31, 2025), Part I and Part VII.
[2] IRS Form 990 (EIN 71-0004515), FY 2025 (tax period ending Aug. 31, 2025), Part I and Part VII.
[3] IRS Form 990 (EIN 71-0004515), FY 2025, Part X (Balance Sheet).
[4] IRS Form 990 (EIN 71-0004515), FY 2025 (tax period ending Aug. 31, 2025), Part I and Part VII.
[5] IRS Form 990 (EIN 71-0004515), FY 2025, Part IX (Statement of Functional Expenses).
[6] IRS Form 990 (EIN 71-0004515), FY 2025, Part X (Balance Sheet).
[7] IRS Form 990 (EIN 71-0004515), FY 2024, Part VIII (Statement of Revenue), line 7 (net gain from sale of assets).
[8] NEA Advocacy Fund (Federal Election Commission committee C00489815) and NEA Fund for Children and Public Education (committee C00003251), 2017–2026 federal election cycles; see “PAC Political Spending,” below.
[9] National Education Association program materials (nea.org) and GLSEN Model District Policy on Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students; see “Where Your NEA Dues Go,” below.
[10] IRS Form 990 (EIN 71-0004515), FY 2025 (tax period ending Aug. 31, 2025), Part I and Part VII.
[11] IRS Form 990 (EIN 71-0004515), FY 2025, Part IX (Statement of Functional Expenses).
[12] IRS Form 990 (EIN 71-0004515), FY 2025, Part X (Balance Sheet).
[13] IRS Form 990 (EIN 71-0004515), FY 2025, Part X (Balance Sheet).
[14] IRS Form 990 (EIN 71-0004515), FY 2018–FY 2025, Part I and Part IX; figures compared across filings.
[15] IRS Form 990 (EIN 71-0004515), FY 2024, Part VIII (Statement of Revenue), line 7 (net gain from sale of assets).

[16] IRS Form 990 (EIN 71-0004515), FY 2025 (tax period ending Aug. 31, 2025), Part I and Part VII.

[17] IRS Form 990 (EIN 71-0004515), FY 2025, Part IX (Statement of Functional Expenses).

[18] IRS Form 990 (EIN 71-0004515), FY 2025, Part IX (Statement of Functional Expenses).

[19] Arkansas Secretary of State, Lobbyist Registration database (ethics-disclosures.sos.arkansas.gov), Arkansas Education Association lobbyist registrations, 2024–2026 lobbying years.

[20] Arkansas Secretary of State, Lobbyist Registration database (ethics-disclosures.sos.arkansas.gov); each AEA-linked lobbyist's public registration record lists $0.00 in itemized lobbying expenditures and no compensation figure. Figures reflect the public records reviewed in the 2024–2026 lobbying years.

[21] Arkansas Secretary of State, Lobbyist Registration database (ethics-disclosures.sos.arkansas.gov), Corey R. Johnson client registrations, 2026 lobbying year.

[22] Arkansas Secretary of State, Lobbyist Registration database (ethics-disclosures.sos.arkansas.gov), Melissa Moody client registrations, 2025 lobbying year.

[23] Arkansas Secretary of State, Lobbyist Registration database (ethics-disclosures.sos.arkansas.gov), Timothy G. Tucker Jr. client registrations, 2025–2026 lobbying years.

[24] IRS Form 990 (EIN 71-0004515), FY 2025, Part IX, lines 8–9 (pension plan contributions and other employee benefits).

[25] Arkansas Education Association, “Join” (aeaonline.org/join); AEA membership is unified — members join the local association, the AEA, and the National Education Association (NEA) together and cannot join one without the others.

[26] National Education Association Member Benefits, “How Your 2024–25 Dues Dollars Are Allocated” (neamb.com). The chart's line items include “Advance Racial Justice and Social Justice” and “Promote Safe, Healthy, Inclusive, Collaborative, and Future-Focused Public Schools,” which the chart describes as “affirming to all students and employees.”

[27] National Education Association, “Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth” and NEA LGBTQ+ Resources (nea.org); NEA partnership with GLSEN; and the NEA Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer+ Caucus (nea-lgbtqc.org). GLSEN's Model District Policy on Transgender and Nonbinary Students advises that staff shall not disclose a student's gender identity to parents or guardians without the student's permission.

[28] NEA Advocacy Fund, Federal Election Commission filings (committee C00489815), 2017–2026 federal election cycles, including the FY 2025 transfer from the National Education Association reflected in the committee's receipts.

[29] NEA Fund for Children and Public Education, Federal Election Commission filings (committee C00003251), 2017–2026 federal election cycles.

[30] Arkansas is a right-to-work state (Ark. Const. amend. 34; Ark. Code Ann. § 11-3-303).