

# DECLARING INDEPENDENCE

**AAE Affiliate Helps St. John Teachers Discard Washington Education Association and National Education Association for Local-Only Bargaining Option**

In an historic move, teachers of the St. John School District in Eastern Washington voted to disaffiliate their local teacher's association from the Washington Education Association (WEA) and the National Education Association (NEA). St. John teachers sought the assistance of Northwest Professional Educators (NWPE) to educate them about negotiation options, legal and liability insurance, benefits such as medical insurance, as well as other needs of teachers.

This is the second school district in Washington to have made such a move. The Sprague-Lamont School District teachers decertified their union in 2005 to establish a local-only teacher union. On a national scale, about a dozen school district staffs have been successful in booting out the state and national unions' control of their local association, the most recent being in Riley, Kansas.

Led by Missy Kjack and Marianne Gfeller, the disaffiliation means that teachers in this school district are no longer forced to financially support the WEA and NEA in order to have a voice in the bargaining process.

"It is liberating to declare our independence from the big teacher unions," said Ms. Gfeller, who teaches at St. John Elementary School. "Our politics just did not mesh with the politics of the WEA, and we couldn't see throwing any more money to their causes."

Teachers in St. John each paid a total of \$744 last year to the WEA and the NEA.

"We're proud St. John teachers didn't accept a status quo that violated their professional standards," stated Cindy Omlin, Executive Director of Northwest Professional Educators. "We're happy to pro-



Marianne Gfeller, president of St. John Education Association (left) with Missy Kjack, SJEA secretary

vide teachers with support services that empower them to establish local-only teacher unions that unite teachers on local issues and student needs instead of being divided along political lines."

"Having worked with NWPE, it was clear to us that we can provide for our

**As members of NWPE, St. John teachers will receive liability protection that is double the coverage offered by the WEA. NWPE annual dues are a fraction of union dues.**

local needs without the high cost of sending dues to WEA or NEA," Gfeller remarked. "It is great to have the support of a like-minded organization which believes that when teachers are free from union control, both teachers and students benefit, and the quality of education is improved."

As members of NWPE, St. John teachers will receive liability protection that is

double the coverage offered by the WEA. NWPE annual dues are a fraction of union dues.

"In this litigious society, it is absolutely necessary to have good liability insurance," added Gfeller. "We also appreciate the savings that comes with membership in NWPE."

Northwest Professional Educators is a nonunion professional educators' organization focused on advancing the professionalism of education. NWPE provides liability insurance, legal services, practical classroom resources, professional development, teacher scholarships and classroom minigrants, and a voice on education issues. ■

*NWPE is an affiliate of the Association of American Educators. For more information, visit [www.nwpe.org](http://www.nwpe.org).*