In the highlighted areas add your own experience to localize these messages so they work for you when talking with potential members or members who have expressed a desire to drop their membership.

**(POSITIVE)**

I love teaching. I love connecting with my students and look forward to coming to work each day. Sometimes, though, there are issues –as there are in any workplace – and initially it felt like they were out of my control. But being a member of my local NEA affiliate gives me a real voice in my school and showed me that’s not the case. For example, when the school rearranged our schedules, I no longer had time to set up my classroom before class. My principal said there was nothing he could do, and when I tried to go to the school board, it was just a bureaucratic runaround. But then I went to the union and joined with others who felt the same way. We all showed up at the next school board meeting together to talk about it. We had a productive discussion and got back our setup time and my first-period students got their full class time back. It felt like I didn’t have much of a voice as a second-year teacher, but as part of a group of 100 educators in my school, and thousands statewide, we did. And if more people join the union, we can make our voice even louder.

**(RESPECT)**

Educators are some of the most under-appreciated people I know. You can have a master’s degree or decades of experience, but parents will still blame you and the administration and school board will still treat you like a child. The people making all the decisions rarely ask people in the classrooms for their opinions or communicate big decisions. They just micromanage instead.   More members and active participation in the union is how we change things. As we grow (we’re now 300,000 in California and 3 million members nationwide and thousands in individual states and districts), school boards and administrators have to respect us. And that can mean any number of things: administrators not adding unnecessary duties outside of what you’re trained and hired for; less testing; higher, livable wages; not treating people who work in schools like we took a vow of poverty, etc.  States with higher union membership have already been able to start changing the culture, even if that’s in small ways. One of our older members recently told me they had seen a real change. They felt like they were finally being treated like the expert they are, which meant so much to me. With more members and stronger local unions across the county, educators everywhere can finally get the respect we need to improve our lives and help our students succeed.

**(INVESTMENT)**

I look at the union as an investment in making myself, my school, and my students strong. It costs $800 a year, and I know that’s not cheap, but when you look at the results, there’s no question to me that it’s worth it. When we join the union and pay dues, we’re not just getting things like liability insurance and professional development, we’re investing in a voice for our students, ourselves and our communities that will really improve our situation, now and down the road. The power of a union is that when we all come together and give a little time, and, yes, money, we have an incredibly strong collective impact. Those dues help us deliver smaller class sizes, funding for our schools to buy supplies, or planning time so we aren’t staying up late or working on the weekend. That’s worth a couple dollars a day in dues for me. Not to mention that it contributes to higher wages and retirement benefits which make such a difference.

**(SOCIAL JUSTICE)**

Being in the union lets me be part of something bigger than myself and make changes in and beyond my classroom.I became a teacher because I wanted to help make sure every student had access to an inclusive, high quality education. I’m here to help my students everyday, but education is about so much more than just the subjects we teach in the classroom. I was able to take a course from NEA on putting together an anti-racist curriculum for my students and we worked through the union to push our local school board to adopt an anti-discrimination policy that’s inclusive of LGBTQ+ students and staff. And last year, we worked to organize teachers to speak out on racial injustice and helped elect leaders like President Biden that actually support public education. On my own, I worry about the consequences of speaking my mind at work, and I’m just one person in the community. But with the union, I’m part of a bigger team, and that means we can accomplish more.

**(SOLIDARITY)**

To me, the union’s strength is really in the solidarity of our members. As educators, we all care about our students, but we can’t help our students if we’re exhausted and stretched thin by paperwork, testing, etc. It isn’t sustainable in the long run. If we’re going to give students our best, we need to make sure we’re supporting each other and standing together as educators, too. That way, we can actually have some control over our days and the issues that get in the way. For example, at my school, we were understaffed, so they had people teaching subjects they weren’t trained for and others using planning time to cover lunch duty. It was frustrating, and it meant we weren’t able to focus on our students. It felt like it was out of our hands. But when we stood in solidarity, united, we got people to pay attention, and they increased staffing. Now we have planning time back, meaning we are less stressed, and our students get our best.

**(BENEFITS)**

I always try to tell people I work with about all the benefits CTA and NEA provide because I think most people don’t even know they exist. When you sign up for your local CTA and NEA affiliate, you get liability insurance covering up to $1 million. Some people know that, but when I tell them about the discount programs it’s a shock for most people. I use it to save money on school supplies and car insurance. I even saved almost $1,000 on a vacation with my son last year. Probably the most important for me was that the union helped me pay off my student loans with their financial counseling program. I knew I wouldn’t get rich as a teacher, but I wasn’t expecting the kind of financial stress I was facing starting out. Having the union to help me manage the financial side of the job really made a difference for me. And you get access to NEA’s professional development courses and conferences with experts to stay up to date on innovative teaching methods that help you improve your work.

**(LIABILITY)**

I used to be uncomfortable with the union because I thought they were protecting bad teachers. If you don’t take this job seriously, you don’t deserve protection, and further, it felt like unions just antagonized administrators. But these days, any kid with a smart phone can get you on camera in a way that looks bad, and if you leave the room for a second, a child can get hurt. And you can’t trust the district to look out for you when that happens. I saw a colleague who was one of the best teachers in the school spend tens of thousands on lawyers defending himself against an allegation from a parent that was totally false. Now I know, you can’t afford not to join the union. The union works *with* administrators to make sure you’re treated fairly. And there’s still a process for people who don’t do their job – the administration can still ensure they improve. Ultimately, it’s better to have NEA’s liability coverage and not need it than to need it and not be covered. When you join, the union’s going to have your back.

**(CHANGE)**

I didn’t use to see much value in the union. I worked in an area with low union membership, and we rarely got raises, so teachers were always leaving. And when I saw problems and tried to raise them, it was like my opinion didn’t matter. I didn’t connect that to not having a strong union at first, I thought that was just how the system worked. I signed up for the liability coverage, and that was fine.   But then I moved to a state with high membership, and it’s a totally different experience. Educators were respected. We all showed up at the school board and got an increase in planning time. We had a march at the state capitol with thousands of teachers and secured a 10% raise. Even on the little things, like when the air conditioning went out in my school and no one was paying attention, the union brought it up, and the school repaired it the next week. There’s so much your local CTA and NEA affiliate can do, it’s really whatever you make of it. But it all stems from having a strong membership. That’s why it’s so important to join.