

# The Detroit News

THE FINAL WORD

## OPINIONS + EDITORIAL

### August only month to leave the MEA

Even with right to work, teachers only have two more weeks if they wish to leave their union this year

#### OUR EDITORIAL

Here's something Michigan teachers won't see posted in their work lounges: It's already the middle of August, and members of the Michigan Education Association have just two more weeks to leave the union this year.

Teachers must give their union notice during the month of August, or they are out of luck—as quite a few teachers learned the hard way last year. Even though right to work has been law in Michigan for more than a year, the MEA maintains its rule that members only have one month to opt out.

The union has followed that rule very closely, targeting the credit of teachers who didn't pay their dues because they thought they were out of the union—and didn't know about the limited window to leave.

Last year, after right to work went into effect, an estimated 15,000 teachers were able to leave their union and 10 percent did. This year, about 60,000 teachers will have the option.

The MEA is Michigan's largest teachers union, with about 150,000 members.

Roughly 330 public school districts now have contracts subject to the right-to-work law, representing 60 percent of teachers. But it will take many more years before the full impact of right to work is known, as 145 districts passed extended contracts before the law took effect in March 2013.

One of the only groups that's trying to get the word out to teachers is the [Mackinac Center for Public Policy](#). The

center represented a handful of teachers last year who sued the union over the August opt-out period. This year, the [Mackinac Center](#) has put together a website called [AugustOptOut.org](#), which offers an opt-out form for teachers to fill out and answers questions about leaving the union.

Audrey Spalding, education policy director at the center, says the site has attracted thousands of visitors, with as many as 1,000 people using it per day. While that doesn't translate into the number of teachers that may leave the union, it does indicate strong interest in the process.

Plus, an estimated 8,000 MEA members stopped paying dues last year. Since many of them missed the August window last year, they don't want to make the same mistake this time.

Some teachers are concerned to leave because they're afraid of retribution from the union. And union officials are also trying to scare members who've expressed an interest in leaving by leading them to believe they have to sign and initial a form detailing all the rights and benefits they'll be giving up. This "Nonmember Informed Consent Form" is unnecessary to the process of opting out of the union.

And it doesn't tell teachers that while they may no longer have some benefits like employee liability insurance from the MEA, they can certainly seek out those perks from other professional organizations like the Association of American Educators.

The majority of teachers will likely stay with the MEA, but the union will have to work harder to convince members their \$1,000 in annual dues is a good investment. That's a useful exercise.