

# Why I Joined. Why I Stay.

*One educator's story of legacy, truth, and standing together*

**Lori Young**

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28 Years Science Teacher | 5 Years Union Leadership

## **A Legacy of Standing Together**

Growing up, I heard again about the importance of standing together.

My mother started her teaching career in 1968, and over the course of her 43-year career, she often shared how she and her colleagues fought for something many of us now take for granted: the right for women to continue working while pregnant.

I was born in 1971, and when my mother became pregnant with me, she was required to resign her teaching position once she began to show.

There were no protections. No flexibility. No voice.

***Because educators stood together, that changed.***

That history is why I joined, but it is not the only reason I stayed.

## **When My Career Was on the Line**

Early in my career, during my second year of teaching middle school science, I experienced firsthand why a local union matters.

A family accused me of causing their child's illness, claiming that my lack of experience and misuse of chemicals led to medical complications requiring hospitalization.

The parents did not contact me directly to investigate what was used in class. Instead, they went to the principal and the superintendent.

Had social media been what it is today, those accusations could have spread quickly and publicly, amplifying a claim that was not grounded in fact.

***The student was ultimately diagnosed with an autoimmune disease, unrelated to anything that occurred in my classroom.***

Very quickly, the situation shifted away from facts and toward a narrative about my inexperience as a young teacher.

## **The Moment the Union Stepped In**

At that point, my local union president stepped in.

A meeting was scheduled with the superintendent. Present were my union president, my principal, and me.

What happened next is something I have never forgotten.

My union president came prepared.

They presented a clear, factual overview of the lab activities I had conducted throughout the year and demonstrated that every material used was safe, appropriate, and commonly found in everyday households.

### **Partial List of Chemicals Used in Class**

- Dihydrogen monoxide (H<sub>2</sub>O) – water
- Acetic acid (5%) – household vinegar
- Sodium bicarbonate – baking soda
- Sodium chloride – table salt
- Sucrose – sugar
- Calcium carbonate – antacids (Tums)
- Hydrogen peroxide (3%) – antiseptic
- Cornstarch – common thickening agent

The materials I used were comparable to what you would find in a kitchen or first aid cabinet – nothing beyond that.

## **Facts Over Narrative**

With the facts clearly presented, the narrative shifted.

The focus moved from accusation to evidence.

Looking back, I am certain that without the support of my local union, my career could have been derailed.

Instead, I had an advocate – someone who ensured that decisions were grounded in facts, not pressure, and someone who made sure my voice was heard and that I was treated fairly.

## **What It Means to Be Union**

That experience shaped my understanding of what it truly means to be part of a union.

The issues educators face today may look different, but the purpose remains the same: protecting educators, strengthening our profession, and ensuring that our voices are heard.

***I joined because of my family's history.***

***I stay because of what the union continues to do for all of us today.***



Lori Young is a 33-year public school educator with 28 years in the science classroom and five years in union leadership. She is a proud member of the Evansville Teachers Association, ISTA, and NEA and remains committed to advocating for educators, students, and public education.