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**Melissa Tussing/MEDILL**

United We Learn members at a forum last month on a lawsuit against the state about education funding.

*From New Trier to Daniel Boone Elementary, Lucy Klocksins has taught the children of the North Shore and of CPS. Listen to her talk about the inequities she's seen and the importance of getting resources to the schools that need them.*

## **North Shore education advocacy group aims to educate its own**

by [Melissa Tussing](#)

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A North Shore education advocacy group concerned with under-funded schools may seem like a novelty, but United We Learn member Gail Schechter doesn't like to think so.

"I think most people on the North Shore, in fact, care [about all students getting a good education]," Schechter said.

Members include parents of New Trier High School students and retired New Trier teachers, faith leaders and a Chicago Public Schools teacher who lives in Wilmette.

United We Learn has no budget and no staff. Attendance at meetings ranges from just five on some dates to about 150 people at the group's forum in May. They haven't enacted bylaws or elected officers, in part to stay away from turning into a bureaucracy.

The group meets with experts in education funding to learn about the issues behind Illinois' education funding gap, in which some schools receive a lot more per student than others. Group members are encouraged to organize forums about their main tenet, that children throughout the state of Illinois should have access to a high-quality education.

It's a position UWL member Lucy Klocksin said isn't always supported in Chicago's wealthier suburbs. "So often on the North Shore I hear people say, 'Well, I don't see how throwing more money at failing schools is going to make any difference,'" said Klocksin, who teaches at Daniel Boone Elementary School in Chicago.

For UWL member Lali Watt, it just makes sense. "It's sad because as a society we are completely wasting some of our most precious resources," Watt said. "It's something where the right thing to do morally and emotionally and economically all completely align, and yet we're failing to do it."

The group was formed when Illinois Sen. James Meeks (D-Chicago) encouraged Chicago Public School students to boycott the Chicago school system last fall and enroll in New Trier High School, one of the state's best high schools. His action was aimed at protesting against inequities in the school funding system. The group came together as New Trier parents planned how to best welcome the students.

"It felt like a civil rights action from many, many years ago," Watt said. "It piqued my interest about education funding, which I didn't know much about before that."

United We Learn's next forum on Dec. 1 will focus on the dollars and cents of property taxes and how they relate to education funding. The group doesn't endorse a certain proposal to improve education funding, Watt said.

"The goal is simply to alert normal, average people who are not experts as to why they should care about this problem," said Lali Watt.

"We all have to work on this together," Watt said. "It impacts all of us."

That message travels all the way to Anthony Anderson in Belvidere, who travels 60 miles one-way to attend meetings. He said he's a part of United We Learn because the group actually addresses the issues of education funding.

"I want to get down to what's actually going on, and why this is a problem," Anderson said. "I'll be involved in United We Learn as long as funding is an issue for education."

What's next

Dollars and sense forum on Dec. 1

Featured speakers: the Rev. James Meeks, a state senator, and Ralph Martire, executive director of the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability