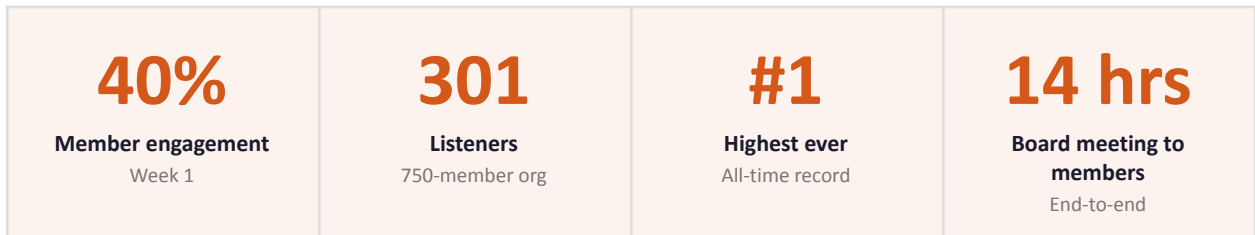


CASE STUDY

DEC Signal

How a 750-Member Local Union Achieved Its Highest-Ever Member Engagement Rate — in Week 1



Organization

District 65 Educators' Council (DEC)

Evanston/Skokie School District 65, Illinois

Product

Signal Network — Weekly AI-Produced Podcast

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BACKGROUND

The Organization

The District 65 Educators' Council (DEC) is the local union affiliate representing 750+ teachers and educators in Evanston/Skokie School District 65, Illinois. DEC operates under the Illinois Education Association (IEA) and the National Education Association (NEA).

DEC's communications profile is typical of most local union affiliates: no dedicated communications staff, no production budget, and a membership that receives information primarily through email blasts and occasional social posts. Board meetings happen. Important decisions get made. Members often find out days later, if at all.

ORGANIZATION SNAPSHOT

750+ educators · Evanston/Skokie, Illinois · IEA/NEA affiliate · No dedicated comms staff · No production budget

THE CHALLENGE

A Communications Gap Every Local Union Recognizes

District 65 was navigating an unusually active period: school closures, enrollment transitions affecting 800+ students, contract implementation, and active IEA legislative priorities in Springfield. Every Monday night, the board met and made decisions that directly affected DEC members' classrooms, assignments, and daily work.

The problem: those decisions were buried in multi-hour meeting recordings, dense board minutes, and official district communications designed for legal compliance rather than member clarity. By the time a DEC member got relevant information — if they got it at all — it was days later and filtered through rumor as often as fact.

DEC leadership identified the core need: a fast, credible weekly briefing that turned Monday's board meeting into something educators could absorb before Tuesday's school day. The challenge was producing it without adding workload to a leadership team already running on volunteer hours.

"Our members see the attacks before breakfast. They need to see our response before lunch."

— Composite — state association communications director, 18 months of field research

THE SOLUTION

Signal Network: Board Meeting to Member Ears in 14 Hours

The Signal Lab deployed Signal Network for DEC in February 2026. The workflow is straightforward by design:

- **Step 1:** DEC leadership emails topic priorities and editorial direction by 6:00 AM Tuesday

- **Step 2:** The Signal Lab scrapes the board meeting livestream transcript and cross-references district communications
- **Step 3:** A script is produced covering the 5 most important educator-relevant topics from the meeting — no public comment, no parliamentary procedure, no noise
- **Step 4:** AI voice host Carol Hennessy records the episode via HUME ACT voice synthesis (8–12 minutes)
- **Step 5:** DEC leadership reviews and approves the final episode
- **Step 6:** Episode is live on Transistor and distributed to all 750 members by noon Tuesday — 14 hours after the meeting ended

DEC leadership retains full editorial control. Strategy, priorities, and approval are human. Production — scripting, voice synthesis, formatting, distribution — is infrastructure. The total workflow adds less than 30 minutes of DEC staff time per week.

CAROL HENNESSY — AI VOICE HOST

Carol Hennessy is DEC Signal's AI-produced voice host, generated via HUME ACT emotional voice synthesis. She is disclosed as an AI voice in every episode. Members know she is AI-produced. They trust that DEC leadership approved every word she says.

RESULTS

Week 1 Performance

The first DEC Signal episode aired in February 2026. By Friday of the same week — without any paid promotion, without social media advertising, without outbound phone banking — 301 of DEC's 750 members had listened.

301 Total listeners Out of 750 members	40% Engagement rate Week 1, organic only
244 Listened Day 1 First 24 hours	10% Relisten rate Returned for second play

The 40% engagement rate is significant in isolation. In context, it is remarkable: it represents the highest member engagement DEC had ever recorded for any communication it had sent — across email, print, social media, or in-person event formats — in the organization's history.

“The IEA resubscription process was overloaded after one episode aired. Members who hadn't renewed used the new communication channel as the catalyst for re-engaging with their union.”

— Signal Lab field notes — DEC Signal deployment, February 2026

Full Results Summary

Metric	Result	Context
Week 1 listeners	301	Organic, zero-paid promotion
Member engagement rate	40%	750-member organization
Day 1 listeners	244	First 24 hours — no paid promotion
Episode re-listen rate	10%	Returned for a second full play
All-time engagement record	Yes	The highest DEC had ever recorded
IEA resubscription impact	Process overloaded	Members re-engaged after Ep. 1
Turnaround time	14 hours	Board ends 10 PM Mon → members noon Tue
Weekly production cost	Fixed monthly fee	No per-listener or per-episode variable cost
DEC staff time added per week	Under 30 min	Editorial review and approval only

ANALYSIS

What the DEC Signal Data Actually Demonstrates

Claim 1: Members engage with AI-produced content when it is relevant and timely

The 40% engagement rate is not a novelty effect. The relisten rate — 10% of listeners returned to play the episode a second time — indicates the content was valued as a reference, not just consumed as ambient media. Members were using it to stay informed, not just passively receiving it.

The content discipline was the differentiating factor. DEC Signal covers exactly what educators need: the 5 board decisions that affect their classrooms, their assignments, and their working conditions. It does not cover parliamentary procedure, public comment, or administrative announcements that belong in district communications. Members received a briefing engineered for them, not a recording of a meeting.

Claim 2: The cost economics are categorically different from traditional production

At 301 listeners, the cost per engaged member for Week 1 was under \$3. A traditionally produced equivalent — a scripted, professionally voiced podcast episode with comparable production value — would cost \$200–300 to produce. At that cost, producing weekly for a 750-member local is not viable. Signal Network makes it viable because the infrastructure cost is fixed, not per-production.

The math that changes the conversation:

Traditional production: \$200–300/episode · 24–48 hrs · not sustainable weekly

Signal Network: Fixed monthly fee · 14 hrs · same cost whether 100 or 1,000 listen

Claim 3: The workflow is sustainable without additional headcount

DEC has no communications staff. The Signal Lab's Signal Network workflow was designed explicitly for this constraint. The board meeting ends at 10 PM on Monday. DEC leadership provides editorial direction by 6:00 AM Tuesday. The Signal Lab produces the episode. DEC approves. The episode is live by noon Tuesday — 14 hours end-to-end.

The total added workload for DEC leadership: under 30 minutes per week. The total output: a weekly member communication that achieves engagement rates no prior communication had reached. The infrastructure absorbs the production burden. The organization retains the relationship with its members.

IMPLICATIONS

What This Means for State Associations and National Affiliates

DEC is a local union with no communications staff and no production budget. What it achieved in Week 1 is not a local-union result — it is a proof of infrastructure.

If a local union with zero production resources achieves 40% member engagement in Week 1, the question for state associations and national affiliates is not whether the model works. It is how quickly it scales.

THE 10-LOCAL EXPANSION MODEL

The IEA Foundation applies for and holds the NEA State Association Media Grant. The Signal Lab delivers Signal Network to 10 IEA local affiliates at zero cost to local budgets during the grant period. At the end of the grant period, locals with demonstrated engagement data convert to paid subscriptions. The grant creates the proof set; the proof set creates the pipeline.

For State Education Associations

- DEC's results replicate at scale: member engagement with relevant, timely local content is not unique to Evanston. It is a consistent response to content designed for educators rather than for the organization.
- The Signal Network workflow integrates directly with IEA's existing communications infrastructure — no new staff, no new distribution channels, no disruption to current operations.
- Grant funding via IEA Foundation means zero budget impact for local affiliates during the pilot period.

For NEA and National Affiliates

- DEC's 40% engagement rate exceeds typical industry benchmarks for member email (20–25%) and social media reach (<5%) by a factor of 2–8x.
- The NEA GPS Fund structure enables 10-local pilots across multiple states simultaneously — building a national engagement dataset without requiring individual state association budget commitments.
- The per-member cost at scale drops further as infrastructure amortizes across a larger subscriber base.

ABOUT

Signal Network

Signal Network is The Signal Lab's white-label weekly podcast infrastructure for membership organizations. It delivers a fully produced, AI-voiced weekly episode from source material — board meetings, legislative updates, contract news — to member distribution in under 14 hours.

Each deployment includes an AI voice host produced via HUME ACT or ElevenLabs voice synthesis, a script produced from source materials and organizational priorities, member distribution via Transistor to all major podcast platforms, and episode metadata optimized for member discovery.

Signal Network is disclosed as AI-produced in every episode. Member organizations retain full editorial control. AI disclosure is positioned as a feature — transparency about infrastructure, accountability for content.

\$2–3 Cost per piece vs. \$200–300 traditional	14 hrs Board to members End-to-end turnaround	70+ Languages Available via ElevenLabs	300+ AI personas Available in RAPID SIGNAL
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About The Signal Lab

The Signal Lab builds AI-powered rapid response communications infrastructure for civic membership organizations. Products include RAPID SIGNAL (300+ AI personas, 2–4 hour verified content), Signal Network (white-label weekly podcast infrastructure), and Signal Groups (AI-powered message testing). Chicago, Illinois.

thesignallab.ai · calendly.com/brian-rapidresponse/association-demo

AI disclosure: DEC Signal is produced using AI voice synthesis technology. All content is reviewed and approved by DEC leadership prior to distribution. This case study was developed with AI-assisted drafting; all data, analysis, and editorial decisions are The Signal Lab's.