

NEW JERSEY EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

REVIEW

NOVEMBER 2024

njea.org



an education and advocacy resource



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Plainfield EA's groundbreaking contract



2025 Winter Leadership Conference

WORKSHOPS:

1. Presidents' Roundtable
2. AR: Key to a Strong Organization
3. Legal Issues Affecting School Employees
4. Grieve, Don't Gripe: Contract Enforcement
5. Preparing for Negotiations: Collective Bargaining
6. Salary Guides: What All Members Should Know
7. Next Level Leadership **NEW**
8. Leadership Development 101: A Beginner's Guide for Association Leaders
9. Membership Chair Training
10. Advanced Membership Chair Training **NEW**
11. Critical Conversations Around Power, People, and Politics **NEW**
12. Civil Rights and Racial Justice: History and Current Issues in Education
13. What Would You Do? Covering Hot Topics in Health and Safety **NEW**
14. Bridging the Member Involvement Gap

SOUTH

JAN. 31-FEB. 1, 2025
HARRAH'S - ATLANTIC CITY
REGISTRATION DEADLINE: DEC. 6

NORTH

FEB. 21-22, 2025
SHERATON - PARSIPPANY
REGISTRATION DEADLINE: JAN. 10

CENTRAL

MAR. 14-15, 2025
DOUBLETREE - SOMERSET
REGISTRATION DEADLINE: FEB. 7

 njea.org/WLC

For more information & registration materials,
see your local president or visit the website.





On Sept. 22, dozens of NJEA and NJREA members crossed the Delaware River to talk to voters in Pennsylvania about the importance of electing Kamala Harris and Tim Walz for president and vice president.



Theresa Maughan, the 2021-22 New Jersey Teacher of the Year, was delighted to see her NJEA Review cover story on display at Turtleback Zoo in West Orange. NJEA's Northeast Zone held a member event there on Sept. 14, where the NJEA Communications Division displayed a sampling of what it provides for members, including editions of the Review with Northeast Zone members on the cover.



NJREA members and leaders from Hudson County at the NJREA Fall Luncheon held on Sept. 26 at the Nottingham Ballroom in Hamilton. The luncheon prepares members for a year of advocacy. Seated from left: Joe Fleischner, Andrea Pastore and Karen Babinski. Standing from left: Grace Lepore, Donna Mirabelli, Anita Kober and Anna Picca.

FEATURES



22 | PLAINFIELD EA BRINGS HOME GROUNDBREAKING CONTRACT

Bargaining a new contract in 2023 and 2024 was personal for the Plainfield bargaining teams. The school community, which includes more than 14 buildings, 1,300 all-inclusive association members and nearly 10,000 students, had previously seen decades of acrimonious bargaining. But for the past five years, the association has been working hard to develop relationships and change the climate. The result? A landmark settlement.

BY KATHRYN COULIBALY



26 | HOLOCAUST EDUCATION TRIP CHALLENGES AND INSPIRES

Every year for the past 25 years, Maud Dahme boards a flight to Europe in July. Dahme, the current chair of New Jersey's Commission on Holocaust Education, has been painstakingly planning this trip for many months. She will be joined by 30 to 35 educators who will spend two weeks learning about the Holocaust and visiting sites in four different countries, all to bring what they learn back to their students and communities.

BY KATHRYN COULIBALY



30 | TURNING EMPATHY INTO SOCIAL ACTION WITH TEEEM

Founded by a former photojournalist and New Jersey native, Jarret Schecter, The Empathy Equality Entrepreneurship Mission (TEEEM) provides a host of innovative, dynamic learning experiences that teach students here in the U.S. how to develop empathy and understanding for people living in difficult situations while fostering their own social entrepreneurial and leadership skills.

BY THEODORE OPDERBECK



34 | THE YOUR STORY MATTERS MOVEMENT

The Your Story Matters movement at Jefferson Township Middle School has grown from a local initiative into a powerful statewide cause that aims to ensure every person's story is heard, valued and respected. This movement is about more than just storytelling—it's about community, inclusivity and creating a space where people feel seen and understood.

BY ALYSSA GUAGENTI AND PEGGY WIDGREN



36 | TURN YOUR CLASSROOM RIGHT SIDE UP

Today's news can be overwhelming. It can make anyone feel powerless, including us and our students. But we can use those feelings as an impetus to rethink basic assumptions on teaching. Doing so will help us become more engaged in safeguarding our sanity and upholding our profession.

BY DR. GLEN COLEMAN

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The number \$39.87 billion

The total contributions to the state's pension systems for the last seven years under Gov. Phil Murphy—keeping his promise to fully fund our pensions. By comparison, during his eight years in office, Gov. Chris Christie contributed only a fraction of that amount, or \$8.57 billion.

Source: NJEA Research and Economic Services Division



Top 12 reasons to join njea.

Reason #3: Student advocates

The number one reason educators cite for working in public education is that they care about students. As a member of NJEA and your local union, you have a voice advocating for the best interests of students because your voice is stronger when you stand with others who care.

Visit njea.org/top12 for more.



The negotiations team for the Plainfield Education Association, with support from NJEA staff, bargained a landmark contract setting the standard for salary, benefits and working conditions.

PHOTO BY
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REVIEW.

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Organizational Directory

NJEA headquarters, Trenton

To reach any of the offices at headquarters, call NJEA's main number, 609-599-4561.

Executive Office: includes NJEA's statewide officers and the offices of the Executive Director; Human Resources; Human and Civil Rights, Equity and Governance; Legal Services; Organizational Development; and the Labor Management Collaborative.

Business Division: includes the offices of Accounting and Finance; Information Systems, Facilities, Mailroom and Production; Membership; and Comptroller.

Communications Division: responsible for all aspects of the association's communications efforts, both internal and external. The division produces the *NJEA Review* and njea.org; manages the Hipp Foundation and assists local and county affiliates with internal and external communications.

Government Relations Division: includes the Office of Policy and Politics, which addresses legislation, administrative code, policy and advocacy at a statewide and federal level, and the Office of Member and Political Organizing, which works with members at the county and local level to organize around local, state, and federal issues that affect public education.

Professional Development and Instructional Issues: assists members and local and county affiliates with instructional issues and professional learning. The division also monitors state level and school level implementation of administrative code as promulgated by the New Jersey Department of Education.

Research and Economic Services: Provides information to support state and local association programs and activities, including collective bargaining and policy analysis. Offers guidance on retirement issues and administers NJEA Member Benefits.

UniServ regional offices

Provides extensive field services to members and local and county affiliates throughout the state, including negotiations assistance, contract administration and grievance adjudication, member organizing and local member consultation and representation. UniServ field representatives train local leaders and assist in the coordination of NJEA and NEA resources. UniServ regional offices are organized under four zones.

UniServ South

Reg. 1-3
Director's office
856-234-0522

Region 1 (Atlantic and
Cape May counties):
609-652-9200

Region 2 (Cumberland,
Gloucester and Salem
counties):
856-628-8650

Region 3 (Burlington and
Camden counties):
856-234-2485

UniServ Central

Reg. 7-9, 11, 13 and 29
Director's office
732-287-6899

Region 7 (Ocean County):
732-349-0280

Region 8 (Mercer County):
609-896-3422

Region 9 (Monmouth County):
732-403-8000

Region 11 (Middlesex County):
732-287-4700

Region 29 (Higher Education):
609-689-9580

UniServ Northeast

Reg. 15, 19-21, and 25
Director's office
973-321-3221

Region 15 (Union County):
908-709-9440

Region 19 (Hudson County-
North and Newark):
201-861-1266

Region 20 (Hudson
County-South):
201-653-6634

Region 21 (Essex County,
except Newark):
973-762-6866

Region 25 (Bergen County):
201-292-8093

UniServ Northwest

Reg. 13, 17, and 27
Director's office
973-347-0911

Region 13 (Hunterdon,
Somerset and Warren
counties):
908-782-2168

Region 17 (Morris and
Sussex counties):
973-515-0101

Region 27
(Passaic County):
973-694-0154

MEMBERSHIP

Active professional: \$1,082 (full time); \$216.40 (full time *low-earner); \$541 (part time); \$541 (on leave); \$216.40 (part time *low-earner). Active supportive: \$520 (full time); \$104 (full time *low-earner); \$260 (part time); \$104 (part time *low-earner); \$260 (on leave). Retired professional: \$95; \$1,800 (retired life). Retired ESP: \$49; \$880 (retired ESP life); Preservice \$32. General professional (outside N.J. public education employment): \$250. Subscribing \$250. Only those in education positions in N.J. public schools and colleges are eligible for active membership. Payment of annual dues entitles a member to receive the *Review* for one year, from January through December. Dues include \$5 for the NJEA *Review*. *Low-earner threshold 2024-25 is \$23,200.





PRESIDENT'S *Message*

Union work is about values

As members of NJEA, we know that there is power in uniting across diverse backgrounds and voices to act as one. Our unified strength empowers us to work together to put our values into action.

In this issue of the magazine, we cover several stories that reflect our values as a labor union, as educators and as human beings.

One of the fundamental principles of NJEA is our commitment to economic and social justice. This month's cover story on the Plainfield Education Association (PEA) reflects that commitment. The members of PEA, working closely with their NJEA field representative, were committed to changing their community's history of acrimonious bargaining. Over the course of many years—and well in advance of the next round of contract negotiations—the leadership of the association had worked closely with administrators and community leaders to create an educational environment that prioritized respect for staff and an excellent learning environment for Plainfield students.

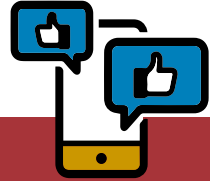
As a result, PEA has proudly ratified a landmark contract that puts the district in a position to attract and retain quality staff and provide an excellent education for students. The new contract, and the path to it, will benefit not only the members of the association, but every student and family in the district.

Another value NJEA members share is commitment to human rights. In this issue, you will read about the annual Holocaust education trip, coordinated by the New Jersey Department of Education with financial support from NJEA. More than 350 educators, including my wife Lauren and me, have made this journey over the past 20 years, bringing back to our schools and communities what we have seen, felt and learned.

Finally, our profile of an organization working to help educators connect their students with people around the world helps the students develop empathy and encourages them to take an entrepreneurial approach to economic justice and empowerment. It teaches our students—and it reminds us—that what happens to one of us ultimately affects each of us.

Thank you for everything that you do to make New Jersey's public schools the best in the nation. Our schools have a reputation for excellence, but perhaps our most important endeavor is working with parents and the community to help our students become the people they want to be so they can create the future we all want to see.

In unity,



SEAN M. SPILLER

Facebook

@SpillerforNJEA: Earlier this week, I spent time in D.C. for NEA's Super Week. Together, with hundreds of NEA Directors from around the nation, we are working to support candidates and policies that will benefit public schools. I was also humbled by the support for our campaign for Governor of New Jersey! It was an honor talking to hundreds of educators who support my campaign and who are going to help from afar to ensure an educator finally has a seat at the table in NJ. We're going to keep doing big things all year long.

On Oct. 3, NJEA President Sean M. Spiller shared several images of him with others in attendance at NEA's Super Week. During NEA Super Week state education association leaders and supporters from across the nation to lobby in Washington, D.C. for pro-public education policies.

STEVE BEATTY

Facebook

@SteveBeattyNJEA: Membership matters! ... A potent reminder today as I joined in the Brookdale Community College Professional Staff Association (PSA) membership blitz. Led by new local president, Rich D'Alco, and his team of Adam Winkler, Denise Vigil, Tamara Bado, and Jim Foley we set out to talk with dozens of potential members about the union and asked them to join ... So important to listen to our potential members, meet them where they are, and offer them welcome and space towards a more perfect union.

On Oct. 9, NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty shared photos from the potential membership blitz held at Brookdale Community College. Great conversations were led by the PSA and NJEA field reps, Maury Koffman, Marianne Rodriguez, and Chip Junker, GR staff Marybeth Beichert and Fran Pfeffer, NEA Fellow Tiffany Harris-Green and Monmouth County President Denise King.

PETAL ROBERTSON

Facebook

@PetalforNJEA: You can win 2 free nights in Atlantic City!

On Oct. 9, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson shared a video from the NJEA Convention Facebook page uplifting a contest for members to win two free hotel nights in Atlantic City to attend the NJEA Convention. The video, featuring Robertson, indicated what she loves about the NJEA Convention. She encouraged others to create and share a similar video. Winners were selected in the weeks leading up to the convention.

OFFICERS ONLINE

The ADVOCATE

RESOURCES FOR YOUR LOCAL ASSOCIATION

NJEA Consortium seeks design team ambassadors

Do you dream of classrooms where every student feels seen and celebrated? Imagine being part of a dynamic team working to enhance an intersectional and inclusive curriculum that reflects the beautiful diversity of New Jersey's public schools and communities.

Under the coordination of Dr. Kim Pinckney, the NJEA Consortium is looking for 30 passionate, experienced and skilled curriculum designers to join the NJEA Consortium's next cohort of design team ambassadors (DTAs). The NJEA Consortium is a project within the association's Professional Development and Instructional Issues Division (PDII). It is funded through a National Education Association Great Public Schools grant.

As a DTA, you will work collaboratively with the team to:

- Curate and design impactful and intersectional curricula: Develop high-quality instructional resources that represent all students.
- Champion equity and build connections: Lead exciting professional learning workshops and experiences with educators across the state.

What is a DTA?

A DTA is an active NJEA, NJREA or NJEA Preservice/NJ Aspiring Educators Association member with expertise in diverse content areas. They serve as designers and champions for inclusive intersectional curricula. A DTA term is for a minimum of one year with the option to extend through the end of this grant-funded program.

DTAs advocate for teaching truth, equity and justice, consequently inspiring related actions via professional learning, community engagement and the creation of representative curricular resources. They are action oriented, and comfortable with collaborative learning and design. DTAs are compensated up to \$3,000 a year in increments dispersed upon successful completion of Consortium-related responsibilities.

Who we are looking for:

- Passionate, active NJEA members.
- Experience using the Understanding by Design framework and Universal Design for Learning guidelines for curriculum development.
- Expertise in and across the N.J.S.A. mandates: Amistad, Holocaust, LGBTQIA+, Persons with Disabilities and Asian American/Pacific Islanders.

- Professional development facilitation skills.
- Collaborative, design-oriented individuals who are proficient with digital tools.

What you can expect:

- **Teamwork:** Collaborate with an intersectional group of dedicated educators and NJEA staff to establish curricular materials.
- **Leadership opportunities:** Become a recognized leader in curriculum design and equity through a combination of professional development and community engagement experiences you will have, inclusive curricular resources you will co-design, workshops you will facilitate and the model classroom status your learning environment may gain within your school district and beyond.
- **Immersive experiences:** Engage in exciting and thought-provoking field experiences, such as World Peace Game Facilitation Training (July 14-18, 2025), to deepen your understanding and provide inspiration for performance task design. (Includes some travel and overnight opportunities.)
- **Flexible schedule:** The experience is designed to include a flexible combination of in-person, synchronous and asynchronous activities. We anticipate your contributions over approximately 25 days per calendar year. We will make every effort to take your availability into consideration and be flexible in scheduling throughout the school year and summer.



Scan this QR code to complete the screening application by Nov. 22, 2024.

For more information, email Dr. Kim Pinckney, Consortium coordinator, at consortium@njea.org

Want to know more?

The Consortium

Visit learning.njea.org and select "NJEA Consortium."

State curriculum mandates

Visit learning.njea.org and select "NJEA Consortium."

Understanding by Design framework

bit.ly/ascd-ubd-framework

Universal Design for Learning guidelines

udlguidelines.cast.org

Open Enrollment begins for NJEA-endorsed insurance plans

NJEA members can take advantage of guaranteed acceptance and fast and easy enrollment in NJEA-endorsed Disability, Hospital Indemnity and Critical Illness Insurance Plans, issued by The Prudential Insurance Company of America during a statewide open enrollment period. The open enrollment will coincide with the NJEA Convention and start on Nov. 7 and continue through Jan. 10, 2025.

The NJEA-endorsed Income Protection Program includes three reliable ways you can help protect your financial future and get back on track if life throws a curveball your way. And during this special open enrollment you won't be asked any health questions when you apply.

Disability Insurance covers most injuries or illnesses that prevent or limit people from working, including accidents, illness, pregnancy, and mental and behavioral health.

The Hospital Indemnity Insurance Plan helps pay for expenses not covered by health insurance when you are admitted and/or confined to a hospital or ICU.

Critical Illness Insurance covers several conditions usually limited to acute illness, not chronic disease.

Each of these coverages can separately help with paying your bills and expenses, such as housing and childcare costs, when you are unable to work due to an accident, illness, pregnancy, hospitalization or covered critical illness.

NJEA recommends that all members consider this important insurance coverage, particularly in the event you use up all your sick time. Enrolling in these plans, together or separately, may help protect your paycheck and give your family peace of mind.

For more information or to enroll, visit enroll.njea.org.

Questions? Call an NJEA account executive at 800-727-3414 and choose Option 3.

Membership Chairs: Use the Potential Member Reporting Form

The Workplace Democracy Enhancement Act (WDEA) requires boards of education to send local associations information about their respective members and potential members.

The information should be supplied to the association for all negotiation unit members every 120 days. Preferably September, January and June. Once processed by the NJEA Membership Division, local presidents and membership chairs will be able to reconcile their list using the WDEA Recon Tool found in their Web Apps.

In between WDEA lists, NJEA requests that each month you have new employees, submit a Potential Member Reporting Form, with the appropriate information. This

form will be used to help keep your membership and potential membership records up to date. This form can be found on njea.org. On a laptop or desktop computer, hover over to your name in the upper-right-hand corner of the homepage. Click on "Documents," then "Forms," and look for "Potential Member Report."

Convention Program updates

Since the printing of the 2024 Convention Program, the following corrections and updates have been received.

Target audience corrected

The target audience for Creating and Maintaining a Productive CTE Advisory Board should be high school. The workshop is scheduled for Friday, Nov. 8 at 1 p.m. in Room 415.

Meeting description added

Curious about what will happen at the PERS and TPAF meeting at the NJEA Convention? Representatives from the New Jersey Division of Pensions and Benefits and the Division of Investment will present information about the Teacher's Pension and Annuity Fund (TPAF) and Public Employees' Retirement System (PERS) and answer your questions. The meeting is scheduled for Thursday, Nov. 7 at 11 a.m. in Room 301.

Presenter names corrected for virtual workshops

The presenter names for the following virtual workshops were incorrect in the printed Convention Program.

Building Multilingual Learners' Academic Literacy: High School to College

Presenters should be Megan K. Biondi and Lauren K. Lesce. The workshop is scheduled for Thursday, Nov. 7 at 11 a.m.

Anti-Bullying in Schools

Presenters should be Samuel Hart and Philip DeCara. The workshop is scheduled for Thursday, Nov. 7 at 1 p.m.

School Discipline Discrimination and the N.J. Law Against Discrimination

Presenters should be Patricia Perlmutter and Danielle Thorne. The workshop is scheduled for Friday, Nov. 8 at 11 a.m.

Session canceled

The workshop **Strategies for Teaching Culture** in the World Language Class has been canceled. It had been scheduled for Thursday, Nov. 7 at 11 a.m.

Presenters added

Two additional presenters have been added to a panel discussion titled **Rise of Peacemaking**. The full panel includes Jillian Luis, Louis Ntambirabigwi, Nmuta Jones, Peehi Waho, William Smallwood, Maud Dahme, Channy Laux, Thuraya Zeidan and Reda Taleb. The panel is scheduled for Thursday, Nov. 7 in Room 322.

COOL STUFF



NOMINATE A COACH FOR ALL SEASONS

For the fourth consecutive year, NJEA and the New Jersey Interscholastic Athletic Association (NJSIAA) have teamed up to recognize hard working athletic coaches. Each month throughout the year, they will feature a deserving coach that tirelessly gives their time throughout the school year, coaching multiple sports over multiple seasons. Please take a minute to consider anyone throughout your program that fits that description as well and link below so anyone can submit a nomination. Visit bit.ly/njsiaa-cfas to make your nominations.



WATCH THE NJHOF INDUCTION CEREMONY ON MY9NJ

On Nov. 16 and 17 from 6-8 p.m., the New Jersey Hall of Fame will honor the brightest stars and trailblazers who have made New Jersey proud. The event will be broadcast on WWOR My9NJ. From legendary athletes like Phil Simms to world-renowned entertainers like Meryl Streep and Paul Rudd, and from pioneers in business like Peter Cancro to public service icons like Geraldine Thompson, this event celebrates the incredible talent that calls the Garden State home. This annual celebration honors leaders across various fields, highlighting their contributions to society and their deep ties to New Jersey. If My9NJ is not accessible on your TV service, you can watch the station online at my9nj.com.



PLAN YOUR FIELD TRIP TO THE NEW JERSEY HALL OF FAME AT AMERICAN DREAM

Are you seeking a unique and inspiring field trip experience that aligns with your curriculum?

The New Jersey Hall of Fame at American Dream offers field trip opportunities for all grade levels. Its interactive Entertainment and Learning Center provides a fun and engaging experience through which the next generation can discover heroes who inspire them to overcome adversity on the path to greatness. Immersive exhibits include the Fly Me To The Moon flight simulator, a Late-Night Jersey TV Studio where students can interview inductees, an inspiring 15-minute film in The Jersey Pride Theater, and a holographic Karaoke Stage with performances by Gloria Gaynor, Frankie Valli and Wyclef Jean, among other notable New Jerseyans. Explore opportunities at NJHallofFame.org/Learn, or email Ali Genova, director of Educational Programming, at Alexandra@njhalloffame.org.



SPECIAL VOTING RIGHTS EDITION OF NJSBF'S RESPECT

The New Jersey State Bar Foundation's fall 2024 issue of *Respect* features articles on challenges to voting maps for the 2024 presidential election, as well as an article on lawsuits that fight restrictive voter laws. In addition, the issue contains an article on how states are passing Voting Rights Acts to fill the gap left by attacks on federal Voting Rights Act of 1965. A PDF of the issue can be downloaded, copies can be ordered for classroom use, and individual articles can be downloaded from the *Respect* Rundown. Educators can subscribe to receive future issues.

Visit publications.njsbf.org to find *Respect* and other NJSBF publications.



REQUEST A FREE SPEAKER FOR LAW RELATED TOPICS

The New Jersey State Bar Foundation's Speakers Bureau has volunteer attorney speakers who are available to address law-related topics for school assemblies, class discussions and on career days. There is no charge. Schedule using the online form. Visit speakers.njsbf.org to make your request.

CLASSROOM TIPS

Supporting students with ADHD

By Carolyn Leigh Kellerman

ADHD affects 3-5% of school-aged children, meaning at least one student in a class of 25-30 is likely to have ADHD. Symptoms include hyperactivity, impulsivity and sleep issues, which can lead to academic and social challenges as the child grows. It is a chronic condition, and while medication can help, it's not a complete solution. Teachers play a crucial role in managing behaviors and supporting the child's success.

Support strategies for individual students with ADHD

These strategies aim to create a supportive classroom environment that fosters success for students with ADHD.

- **Understanding the Child's Perspective:** Teachers should help students understand their ADHD and provide positive reinforcement through behavior logs.
- **Movement Breaks:** Incorporate regular movement breaks to help manage hyperactivity and inattention.
- **Organization:** Help students stay organized with visual schedules and clear expectations.
- **Social Interaction:** Increase the child's social circle through structured sharing times to help them feel included and engaged.

Support strategies that benefit the whole class

Here are some classroom activity ideas tailored to support students with ADHD while benefiting the entire class.

Brain break stations

- **Setup:** Create several "Brain Break Stations" around the classroom with different activities such as stretching, quick exercises, walks outside the classroom or sensory toys.
- **Implementation:** Allow students to visit a station for a 2-3-minute break when they need to release energy or refocus.

Interactive learning centers

- **Setup:** Organize several learning centers focusing on various subjects (math, reading, science) with hands-on activities (puzzles, math manipulatives, educational games).
- **Implementation:** Rotate students in small groups to keep them engaged and moving, helping those with ADHD maintain focus.

Movement-integrated lessons

- **Setup:** Incorporate movement into lessons. For example, when teaching math, students could hop to the correct answer written on the floor or use hand gestures to represent different concepts.
- **Implementation:** This active participation can help students with ADHD stay engaged and retain information better.

Fidget-friendly choices

- **Setup:** Provide "fidget tools" like stress balls, quiet spinners or textured materials at desks.
- **Implementation:** Teach students how to use these tools appropriately to help focus without disturbing others.

Collaborative group projects

- **Setup:** Design group projects where students work together to solve a problem, create a presentation or build something.
- **Implementation:** Assign roles that allow for movement and interaction, such as being the group leader who circulates around the room to gather materials.

Mindful meditation

- **Setup:** Introduce a daily "Mindful Meditation" where the class practices deep breathing, visualization, yoga or quiet reflection.
- **Implementation:** Use this time to help students calm their minds and bodies, making it easier for those with ADHD to transition between activities.

Interactive story time

- **Setup:** During reading sessions, use interactive storytelling techniques such as assigning characters to students to act out parts of the story.
- **Implementation:** This keeps students engaged through physical activity and helps them connect with the material.

Visual task lists

- **Setup:** Create a visual task list for each lesson or activity with pictures or icons representing each step.
- **Implementation:** Encourage students to check off each task as they complete it, which can help those with ADHD stay organized and on track.

Quiet corners

- **Setup:** Create a "Quiet Corner" in the classroom with soft seating, noise-canceling headphones and calming visuals.
- **Implementation:** Allow students to visit this space when they need a break from sensory overload or when they need to refocus.

These activities aim to create an inclusive classroom environment that supports the diverse needs of students, including those with ADHD, by integrating movement, hands-on learning and social interaction into daily routines.

Making music and advocating for members

Meet 2024 Camden County ESP of the Year Rose Casey

Rose Casey became a proud union member when she was 17 years old. When she graduated from high school, her mother told her she had two options: hairdresser or secretary. She had a scholarship to cosmetology school but instead took a job at RCA in Camden, a union shop.

"When I took the job at RCA, I was still so young I had to have working papers," Casey recalls. "I was marched down to the union hall during my lunch to sign up. The person who took me down to sign up was the father of one of the principals I've worked with over the years. I used to say, 'You've got your father to thank for me being in a union!'"

Casey got the job at RCA when the hiring manager recognized a desirable trait in her. Although she was going up for the job against a woman whose father was a manager at RCA, Casey was hired over the other candidate because she played the saxophone and has played since elementary school.

"The hiring manager knew that I would stick with the job and wouldn't leave in six months because I had stuck with the saxophone," Casey recalls.

Casey originally wanted to learn to play the accordion, but her father steered her toward the saxophone since the family already owned the instrument.

"I still play that same saxophone today," Casey says. "It was used when my family got it. It's now well over 100 years old. I encourage the students to keep playing even after middle school, and to practice."

Casey practices what she preaches. An educational assistant in the Cherry Hill School District, she starts her mornings off in the band homeroom, playing saxophone



Camden County ESP of the Year Rose Casey poses with her cherished saxophone, which she plays with the band students.

with the students. In addition, she performs with the students at their concerts, a fact that has delighted Cherry Hill students, parents and staff for the 23 years Casey has worked in the district.

Casey is not only an advocate for music education, she also serves as the president of the Educational Assistants of Cherry Hill (EACH).

"I represent 300 educational assistants in Cherry Hill, in 19 buildings," Casey says. "I do not take a stipend. If I wanted a stipend, I'd have to increase members' local dues. When I negotiated the last contract with my team, in the first year, we got a 38.6% increase. By the end of our five-year contract, we will be down to just eight steps."

Casey recalls the celebration they hosted when they ratified their last contract.

I'm always thinking about what everyone needs and I'm not bashful about speaking up!

"The night we celebrated ratification, we also celebrated 25 years with NJEA" Casey says. "Everyone was here: NJEA President Sean Spiller; Vice President Steve Beatty; Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson, Bob Antonelli, the NJEA staff person who has primary responsibility for educational support professional (ESP) issues, NJEA Field Representative Caroline Tantum; UniServ South Director Patrick Manahan and consultants from all over Camden County."

Casey started working in Cherry Hill in January of 2002. By September, she was a building representative. In May 2003, she was elected co-president of the association. Seven years later, she became the sole president.

"I have a lot of experience being the president of other organizations," Casey says. "I was the PTA president and the president of the soccer league in which I coached. I've been involved at the county, state and national levels."

Casey has served on several NJEA committees, including Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, Affiliations, and was elected by the NJEA Delegate Assembly (D.A.) to the Hearing, Suspension and Expulsion Committee. She was a D.A. member as well as an alternate. She served on the NEA Diversity Training cadre and traveled around the country training NEA members for several years.

Despite all her activism and achievements, Casey doesn't know why she was named the 2024 Camden County ESP of the Year.

"I celebrated in Atlantic City at the NJEA ESP Conference," Casey says. "When my peers in my school found out, the music teacher I work with, Stephen Marr, organized a big celebration. The staff presented me with a gift card and a huge cake. All the students in the band celebrated with me."


Casey is tireless in her advocacy for her members.

"I advocate for everybody," she says. "I'm thinking about what everyone needs, and I'm not afraid to speak."

While Casey is responsible for advocating for educational assistants in the district, she makes it a point to ensure that ESPs in Cherry Hill are treated fairly.

"At the end of the school year, the district held a Wellness Day for staff on June 17, but educational assistants were officially done on June 14," Casey recalls. "If they wanted to come back for the celebration, they would have had to do it on their own time, without pay. That's not right, so as a member of Cherry Hill's Labor Management Collaborative, I worked with the group to hold a celebration for educational assistants on the day when we had a half day with the students."

"I've been around, and I've done a lot," Casey says. "I get involved and I advocate for everybody. I'm always thinking about what everyone needs and I'm not bashful about speaking up!" 🗣️



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Supreme Court clarifies legal standard for discriminatory transfer cases

By Kaitlyn Dunphy, Esq.

This past spring, the U.S. Supreme Court somewhat surprisingly issued an employee-friendly decision in the case of *Muldrow v. City of St. Louis, Missouri*. This case involved a female police sergeant who was involuntarily transferred to another position within the police force. She alleged the transfer was discriminatory in violation of Title VII, which is a federal law that protects employees who are members of certain protected classes from discrimination from their employers. New Jersey has a similar law called the Law Against Discrimination.

Sergeant Jatonya Clayborn Muldrow was transferred from her position in the Intelligence Unit to a less prestigious sergeant position where she supervised officers on patrol and sometimes went on patrol herself. The captain who transferred her often referred to her as “Mrs.” rather than the customary “sergeant” and commented that the male police officer he replaced her with was a better fit for the more dangerous work in that position.

Muldrow’s case was initially dismissed by the courts because she did not lose rank, salary or other benefits of employment when she was transferred. The courts found that since there was no significant harm to her, she did not meet the standard of demonstrating that adverse employment action was taken against her because of her sex.

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The Supreme Court reversed this ruling, finding that a plaintiff seeking relief under Title VII did not have to demonstrate *significant* harm done to them. Rather, it was enough for Muldrow’s case to move forward to show that her terms and conditions of employment were negatively impacted by the transfer.

While the transfer did not change Muldrow’s rank or salary, her responsibilities, schedule and other benefits were altered. In the Intelligence Division position, she was involved in high-level investigations into gun crimes, gangs, human trafficking and public corruption. That position was deputized as a Task Force Officer with the FBI, which gave her certain FBI credentials and jurisdiction. It was a plainclothes position that came with the use of an unmarked vehicle and a steady weekday schedule.

By contrast, her new position, while still that of a sergeant, came with none of these benefits, ran on a rotating schedule including weekends and included more administrative supervisory work. It was clearly the less desirable position.

The Supreme Court’s reversal of the previous court’s decision means that this case will be allowed to continue to be litigated.

As a result of *Muldrow v. City of St. Louis, Missouri*, an employee—including a school district employee—who challenges an involuntary transfer still must prove that the transfer was illegal because it was discriminatory and harmful. However, they will not have to prove that the harm was significant or purely financial.



NJEA Report

Task force recommends permanent elimination of SGOs

Creation of implementation working group proposed

The New Jersey Educator Evaluation Review Task Force submitted its report to Gov. Phil Murphy on Sept. 30. The 13 members of the task force, representing NJEA, other education stakeholder groups, the Legislature and the governor's office, worked throughout the summer to deliver this report by the Sept. 30 deadline set by the Legislature.

You can read the joint letter released today by several of the organizations, which highlights the main recommendations at njea.org.

The task force was created last spring as a result of legislation supported by NJEA members. It was part of a larger campaign by NJEA to reform the state's evaluation system to reduce the amount of time spent on evaluation and the unnecessary paperwork burdening educators across New Jersey. A particular focus was on permanently eliminating student growth objectives (SGOs), which have already been suspended this year for tenured teachers while a review of the evaluation system is undertaken.

NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty served as one of NJEA's three representatives on the task force. He released this statement, lauding the work of the task force so far.

I'm pleased that we have completed this important first step in the process. Our report contains a number of critical recommendations, including the permanent elimination of SGOs, among other measures, to move beyond a compliance-centered approach and embrace a system that values innovation, collaboration and the pursuit of educational excellence.

Very critically, the task force report says that we should continue our collaborative work beyond this initial effort. It's not enough to study evaluation. We need to fix evaluation! That is why the task force's cornerstone recommendation is to convene a working group to support the implementation of all these proposals.

...to move beyond a compliance-centered approach and embrace a system that values innovation, collaboration and the pursuit of educational excellence.

I want to thank Dayna Orlak, chair of NJEA's Certification, Evaluation and Tenure Committee and Elisabeth Yucis, NJEA PDII associate director, who joined me on the task force to make sure the voices of NJEA members were heard in every discussion and reflected in every recommendation. They will continue to serve in their roles as we move forward.

We are excited to continue this work in the coming year. We will help guide New Jersey toward an evaluation system that works for all members and ultimately makes our schools, our staff and our students more successful.

To assist in that work still to come, NJEA will be creating an internal workgroup of members. Those members will be drawn from around the state and will represent the diversity of members who are covered by the evaluation system. They will help guide our next steps with the task force and help shape the future of educator evaluation in New Jersey.

State Library to help prepare schools and libraries for Information Literacy Learning Standards

Partners with NJASL, NJDOE and LibraryLinkNJ



The New Jersey State Library, an affiliate of Thomas Edison State University, has announced a partnership with the New Jersey Department of Education, the New Jersey Association of School Librarians, and LibraryLinkNJ, to help New Jersey's K-12 public schools and libraries prepare for the state's forthcoming information literacy standards.

In January 2023, New Jersey became the first state in the nation to require that information literacy be taught in public schools. In anticipation of the new information literacy standards, the State Library and partnering agencies have already begun working to develop replicable models and tools for information literacy education and support resources for the public school and library workforce.

"With the constant spread of misinformation, it is more important now than ever for our children to build a strong foundation of information literacy skills," said Gov. Phil Murphy. "It is our responsibility to give our students the tools they need to become critical thinkers and separate fact from fiction. With New Jersey leading the way in information literacy, I am confident that our children will become informed, thoughtful and engaged citizens."

The State Library's Reimagining Information Literacy initiative has an overarching goal of helping certified school library media specialists, public librarians, academic librarians and teachers across the state, who will support students in learning about information literacy. State law defines information literacy as a set of skills that enables an individual to recognize when information is needed and to locate, evaluate and effectively use the information. Information literacy includes, but is not limited to, digital, visual, media, textual and technological literacy.

The Reimagining Information Literacy Initiative will provide education and training resources for New Jersey's K-12 public schools and libraries.

"Our students are constantly bombarded with information from digital, media and technological sources, so equipping them with the skills to discern and evaluate that information is critical to their success both in and out of the classroom," said Acting Education Commissioner Kevin Dehmer. "The Department of Education is fully committed to supporting our educators and students in this vital initiative, working hand-in-hand with partners like the New Jersey State Library to provide the necessary resources, training and instructional supports."

The State Library and its partners will develop online training modules, professional development resources, classroom curriculum and other support for New Jersey's public schools and libraries.

"Information literacy is a cornerstone of libraries," said Jen Nelson, State Librarian, New Jersey State Library. "Now, well into the information age and with the more recent advent of artificial intelligence tools and applications, students of all ages need to effectively evaluate and use information for all aspects of life. New Jersey libraries are committed to working alongside public schools to do this important work."

This project is made possible, in part, with \$748,588 in funds, provided by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, is an independent federal agency that provides library grants, museum grants, policy development and research.

Stefanie Lachenauer named New Jersey State Teacher of the Year



At her school, New Jersey State Teacher of the Year Stefanie Lachenauer is congratulated by association leaders. From left: Montgomery Township Education Association President Michael Razzoli, Lachenauer, NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty and Somerset County Vice President Henry Goodhue.

Stefanie A. Lachenauer, a Skills for Success and Global Leadership teacher at Montgomery Upper Middle School in Montgomery Township, has been named the 2024-25 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year. Since starting her teaching career in the Montgomery Township School District, she has embraced her passions as a certified trauma and resilience practitioner, focusing on mindfulness, trauma-informed practices, equity, social and emotional learning (SEL), and global leadership.

Lachenauer earned both her bachelor's and master's degrees in education from Rutgers University.

A veteran educator, Lachenauer leads her district's initiatives in mindfulness, trauma-informed practices, wellness and SEL. She has conducted numerous workshops and professional development sessions for educators both locally and internationally, including certifying Mindfulness Teachers through Mindful Schools.

Lachenauer is completing her first book, *Let the Glitter Settle: Mindfulness for Teens*. In 2018, she became a certified yoga and mindfulness instructor to support stressed teenagers and successfully led a grant-sponsored yoga and mindfulness club at the Upper Middle School until it became a permanent school club in 2023. Additionally, she facilitates the Youth Action Board, a grant-funded group of high school students dedicated to raising

awareness about mental health and reducing stigma surrounding mental health struggles.

"Congratulations to Stefanie Lachenauer, on this wonderful recognition," said NJEA President Sean M. Spiller. "Stefanie is dedicated to creating a brighter future for students and public schools, grounded in her principles of equity, wellness and leadership. Her compassion for students drives her commitment to nurturing them into global leaders. Through her thoughtful and authentic approach, she inspires both students and colleagues. Now, she can share that passion across the state. We take pride in having the best public education system in the nation, thanks to educators like Stefanie."

"As we face the uncertainty that challenges our basic human rights," said Steve Beatty, NJEA vice president, "Stefanie Lachenauer is the teacher we need to guide vital conversations with our students and communities about fostering resilience and critical thinking. She has earned this recognition by viewing her students as whole individuals and meeting them where they are."

"The educators in our schools lead with compassion and care for their students," said NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson. "Stefanie is a shining example of this, particularly in her commitment to raising awareness about mental health and reducing stigma surrounding mental health challenges for both her students and colleagues. Her focus on student well-being creates a supportive environment where all learners can thrive. By prioritizing mental health, she empowers her students to develop resilience and a positive mindset."

As the New Jersey State Teacher of the Year, Lachenauer is entitled to a six-month paid sabbatical from January through June 2025 to attend national and state conferences, to tour the state visiting classrooms and to work on various initiatives at the New Jersey Department of Education, courtesy of program sponsor ETS. ETS also provides \$3,000 worth of technology equipment.

NJEA will provide a rental car, equipped with EZ Pass, to help her travel to speaking engagements and meetings across the state. NJEA will also provide complimentary access to all major NJEA workshops and training opportunities, a \$500 clothing allowance, media training and communications support, and funding for a trip to Washington, D.C. to meet with the other state teachers of the year and the president of the United States.

Rediscover your point at ¡The Point!

Mini-workshops with instruments, flash choirs, movement, songwriting exercises, and an in-depth workshop—all at the NJEA Convention

By Todd Henkin

I used to play in a traveling band. We had a mid-90s white Dodge van called Tinkerbelle and crisscrossed the country playing gigs night after night. This model of being an artist was incredible and exhausting. There was little time to meet the community, make lasting connections and reflect on our experiences as we traveled. This exhaustion and lack of intentional reflection cut the traveling experience from the process of writing songs.

I decided to retool our model. In a project, titled Other Voices Other Rooms, we toured but spent meaningful time in classrooms co-writing songs, making music videos and heading to the studio with the students to record original songs. Our performances in these cities were for families, children and staff. I didn't know it then, but in the alchemy of this tour, in classrooms and studios full of children writing, stomping and singing, I'd transformed into a teaching artist and fallen in love with participatory artmaking.

Fast forward 10 years, and we are living through a pandemic. I'd recorded more albums, lived in Nashville and Seattle, and worked as an educator. I moved back to Philadelphia. With synchronous timing, I discovered and began working with Carnegie Hall's Lullaby project through

At the NJEA Convention, with four of my favorite teaching artists, we will provide a unique opportunity to start writing, singing, reflecting and reaching the core of purpose that reminds us why we do what we do: our point.

Todd Henkin is a professional musician, project manager, researcher and teaching artist. Learn more about him and his work at toddhenkin.com.



World Café Live in Philadelphia. Among an incredible team of teaching artists, researchers and administrators, we created the framework for a thriving community project in a time when we couldn't even meet each other in person.

These past few years in the UK, I've earned a master's degree in creative health, built songwriting programs into a neonatal unit and a community for those with chronic mental illness, written songs with NHS staff fighting post-COVID burnout and have begun creating participatory songwriting programs across the UK in high-need neighborhoods. I've seen and researched how important reflective songwriting can be as an innovative intervention for families, health workers and refugees to connect with pride to their accomplishments while understanding their challenges. I'm excited to share this body of work and offer an opportunity to New Jersey educators.

At the NJEA Convention, with four of my favorite teaching artists, we will provide a unique opportunity to start writing, singing, reflecting and reaching the core of purpose that reminds us why we do what we do: our point.

At ¡The Point!, we'll host mini-workshops with instruments, flash choirs, movement and songwriting exercises, and a booth for recording and beginning your song. I'll also host a more extended workshop for in-depth learning.

Join your co-educators in creating the beginning of a community of practice where reflection is welcome, witnessed and sung. This year, we'll also co-write and perform an original conference song.

Come by and join us!

PROUD MOMENTS



Churchill Junior High School spreads kindness

By Edith Weinstein and Kathy Merton

Every school year, Churchill Junior High School in East Brunswick celebrates students who have made a difference through acts of kindness in the community. Our students have poured their hearts into their projects, from research to execution, showcasing leadership and compassion every step of the way.

Students have purchased items for those in need, made and delivered care packages, visited animal shelters and brought supplies. They also created crafts and bracelets to lift the spirits of those who need a boost. These students made school improvements, including decorating our school inside and out with messages of positivity. They cleaned parks, fields and lakefronts. They visited assisted living facilities to do crafts and activities with residents. Some used grants from various organizations as a means to generate even more funding to causes close to their hearts.

Edith Weinstein is a teacher at Churchill Junior High School in East Brunswick. Kathy Merton has recently retired.



School Security Officer Marc Tyson, seen here with Edith Weinstein, was honored on National Random Acts of Kindness Day with a \$25 gift card to Jersey Mikes for making a positive impact in the daily lives of many of Churchill's students.

Those who have participated have a new perspective on kindness and how it feeds the mind and soul. The mission of our program is simple yet profound: to learn to live and breathe kindness and to leave a positive legacy. Kindness, as we've seen, knows no bounds.

The Butterfly Effect Kindness Initiative began with an impromptu class lesson on Giving Tuesday, sparked by videos such as "Grand Theft Donut" and "Chris Rosati Proves the Butterfly Effect." Chris Rosati's legacy reminds us that kindness has a ripple effect, touching lives in ways we may never fully comprehend.

Last year, we expanded the program to two more secondary schools in East Brunswick. It's exciting to see more students having the opportunity to participate in these life-changing experiences.

For three years, we've been fortunate to run the Butterfly Effect Kindness Initiative with the generous donations of many organizations. We want to thank the East Brunswick Education Association Pride Committee for supporting our yearly kindness night by providing funding for the award plaques and refreshments.

Build community involvement with a PEP Grant



Public Education Partnership (PEP) grants share the successes of New Jersey's public schools while building community support and involvement. PEP grants were formerly known as Pride in Public Education grants.

PEP grant proposals can be completed online. Local Presidents, PEP/PRIDE Chairs and FAST Chairs have access to the online application. As always, all expenses must be approved in advance.

Visit njea.org/pep for more information.

PROUD MOMENTS



The **SAYREVILLE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION** (Middlesex) proudly supports its community through a variety of activities and programs. SEA hosted its hometown heroes (pictured) and invited families in to explore the districts libraries and media centers. In addition, SEA held a Sensory Night to support POAC Autism Services, a color run and a carnival. SEA also held Spring Food Bank fill up.



Members of the **NORTH BRUNSWICK EDUCATION ASSOCIATION** at Parsons Elementary School (Middlesex) is proud to have hosted their first-ever Family Art Night. Students, families, staff and community groups engaged in various art projects together while highlighting the importance of art education in the community. The Girl Scouts of Central N.J. volunteered to help with the event. The Middlesex County Arts Institute sponsored Dibble and Dabble to attend and facilitate various art projects for students to take home as well as a mural for our school. Local sponsors such as Costco, Wegmans, Bagel Fresh Deli and Wawa donated refreshments for the participants as well.



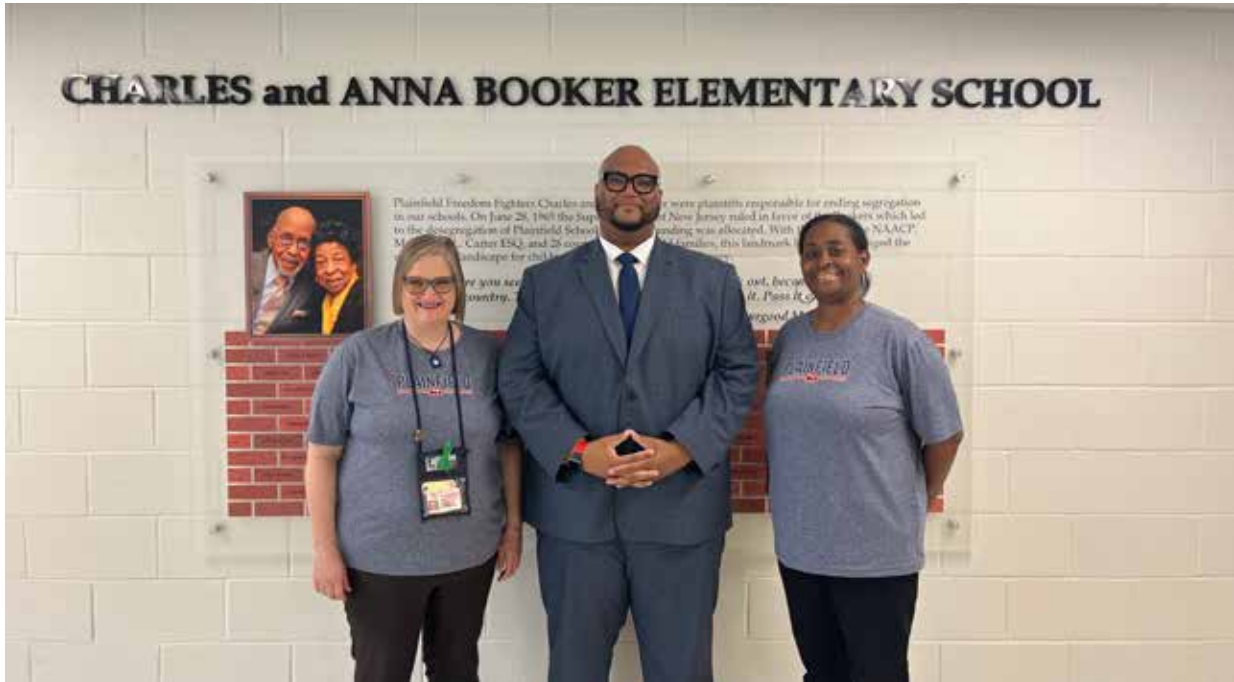
The **WEST WINDSOR PLAINSBORO EDUCATION ASSOCIATION** (Mercer) was proud to host a Celebration of Student Teachers. WWPEA hosted a reception for all West Windsor Plainsboro student teachers, cooperating teachers, colleagues, college supervisors and representatives from NJEA. At the reception student teachers received journals with inspirational messages from their cooperating teachers embossed with the association logo. WWPEA also awarded honorariums to two student teachers who were nominated by their cooperating teachers and selected by a committee of association members. These honorariums are given in honor and memory of Nickie Oliver, a dynamic and generous teacher with a marvelous sense of humor. Oliver was an involved MCEA/NJEA leader.



Plainfield EA

brings home groundbreaking contract

By Kathryn Coulibaly



PEA First Vice President Melissa Logan, President Keith Coston and Second Vice President Lori Davis stand proud at Charles and Anna Booker Elementary School.

Bargaining a new contract in 2023 and 2024 was personal for the Plainfield bargaining teams. The school community, which includes more than 14 buildings, 1,300 all-inclusive association members and nearly 10,000 students, had previously seen decades of acrimonious bargaining. But for the past five years, the association has been working hard to develop relationships and change the climate.

"We approached this from a very simple perspective," Maryanne Rodriguez, the NJEA field representative who works with the Plainfield Education Association (PEA) team, says. "We are all here to do good work for Plainfield's children and good working conditions lead to good learning conditions for students."

The association's bargaining team, led by PEA President Keith Coston and PEA Vice President and negotiations team

chair Melissa Logan, had two main priorities: improving the financial and benefits package for the lowest-paid earners and veteran teachers who had dedicated their working lives to Plainfield's children.

They achieved both of those goals and more by developing a positive working relationship with administration and the board of education.

Rigorous preparation yields results

They also rigorously prepared for negotiations, creating a representative bargaining team, attending the NJEA Jim George Collective Bargaining Conference, working in tandem with Rodriguez and communicating with the membership about their needs and priorities.

The results speak for themselves.

"Our salaries weren't competitive for certificated staff and in a teacher shortage, that's a problem," Logan says. "One of the highlights of our new contract is that in Year 5, we're going to be the first district in the state with an

Kathryn Coulibaly is the associate editor of the NJEA Review and provides content and support to njea.org. She can be reached at kcoulibaly@njea.org.

“We’re going to be the first district in the state with an \$80,000 starting salary.”

\$80,000 starting salary. Six years ago, our starting salary was just under \$54,000.”

In a contract filled with highlights, the PEA is particularly proud of what they were able to do for assistants.

In 2023, the district had 31 five-hour assistants and 164 six-hour assistants. These members include bus assistants and teaching assistants. The five-hour assistants had no employer paid health care and, if hired after 2011, had no pension. They were enrolled in the Defined Contribution Retirement Program (DCRP). Their annual salary was approximately \$31,000. The six-hour assistants hired after 2011 also had no pension, and an annual salary of approximately \$36,000.

The PEA negotiated an offer for all of the assistants to move to full-time assistants. This resulted in the following improved package for the assistants:

- Health insurance eligibility.
- Enrollment in the Public Employees’ Retirement System (PERS) (35 hours/week).
- A single-step guide, earning a \$38 hourly wage in 2024 (over \$47,000 per year) and increasing over the five-year contract to \$43.61 in 2028 (over \$57,000 per year).

In addition, the PEA negotiated:

- 3.5% per year, five-year contract, plus guide enhancement for certificated staff and support staff on the Non-Instructional guide (these are various specialists who work in human resources and other offices, grant-funded case managers, information technology, etc.)
- Certificated staff: first in the state to have a starting salary of \$80,000, commencing in the last year of the contract.
- BA guide for certificated staff breaks \$100,000 a year in the first year of the contract.
- Eleven-step guide, elimination of five steps on certificated guide over the life of the contract.
- Opportunity for nurses, professional school counselors and child study team members to become 12-month employees.
- 10-month drivers, assistants and security officers will be paid their hourly rate for summer work (previously a set stipend rate that did not keep pace with an increase in the workload over the years).
- Full-time release president provision for ESPs: When an ESP is PEA president, they will be paid on the Non-Instructional-2 guide for the term of their presidency. If, after their service as president, they



PEA President Coston looks through the contract during a meeting with the negotiations team.

return to their previous position, they will go back to their old salary guide.

- Increased sick day payout to maximum allowed by law.
- Increased longevity payments for certificated and ESP staff members. In 2023, the payment for 20 years of service ranged from \$500 to \$650, depending on job classification. With the new scale, all staff will receive a \$1,250 longevity payment after 20 years.
- Improved tuition reimbursement.
- All full-time PEA members will be eligible for tuition reimbursement.
- There is no lifetime cap on tuition reimbursement.
- An increase in the tuition reimbursement pot from \$150,000 to \$300,000 per year.
- A Felician University Partnership program.
- Reimbursement of mentoring fees by the district to the mentee.

“Both negotiating teams wanted to do right by our staff,” Coston says. “Everyone was committed to making Plainfield an excellent place to work and learn.”

“We’re proud that the improvements in this contract touch every unit, and everyone saw improvements,” Logan adds. “No one was left out.”

A fully representative team

Not only is the contract groundbreaking for the members, the negotiating team was also able to break a bad cycle of bargaining in the district.

"Previously, we worked for five years without a new contract," Coston says. "From 2011-2016, our members were stalled. We went all the way to super conciliation before it finally settled. This is the first time in more than a decade that we settled the contract before it expired."

Logan believes the negotiations team's collaboration was a major factor in its success.

"By contract, we have seven negotiating team members and three alternates," Logan says. "We wanted representation by unit, and we had an application and interview process. We asked people to apply to be on the team and then Keith, PEA Vice President Lori Davis and I interviewed the applicants. We wanted to make sure the team was fully representative of our membership—job categories, years in the district, everything."

Logan believes that a good mix of team members is the key to settling a good contract. The association encouraged anyone who did not make it onto the team to participate by helping share information and encouraging attendance at meetings about negotiations.

"We set up ground rules and we made sure to use good procedures for our team," Coston adds.

"These are incredible people with different views and opinions, but whatever the group decides, we're going to work together and move forward," Logan adds.

Answering every question

The PEA leadership is also proud that so many members participated in the ratification process.

"The entire general membership was invited to a meeting on a Monday in the gym," Coston says. "We had previously sent out the contract revisions to every member so they could review it and come to the meeting prepared to ask questions. We took our time to make sure everyone was able to ask their questions."

When the meeting went past the anticipated time, the membership moved to the cafeteria. That night, voting opened at 5 p.m. and closed on Friday. In all, almost 900 members voted to ratify.

For Coston, the achievement of an excellent contract is personal. He is a proud graduate of the district and even served as a student representative on the board of education when he was a high school student. Six months after graduation, he was recruited to work in the district as an administrative assistant.

"It's amazing to have been a student here," Coston recalls. "From kindergarten to when I graduated, they advocated for me and now I am advocating for them." 🙏



Jodi Beyers joins the team in a discussion of the contract.



Celebrating the contract

The PEA negotiating team and NJEA staff

From left: Faye Clark, administration building, administrative assistant (alternate); Andre Payton, security officer, high school; Keisha-Gaye Peynado, Booker School, special education teacher, elementary (alternate); Gregory Powell, Pinnacle Academy, business teacher, high school; Jodi Byers, Booker School, teaching assistant, elementary; Melissa Logan, Jefferson School, bilingual teacher, elementary, also serves as PEA vice president; Keith W. Coston Jr., PEA president; Maryanne Rodriguez, Region 15 NJEA UniServ Office, field representative; Lori Davis, 2nd vice president, ESL coach, districtwide; Lori DiSarro, Plainfield High School, special education/English teacher; Karen Richards, special services, social worker on child study team, middle school level (alternate); Nyla Glover, information technology, also serves on the PEA Executive Committee; Denise Taylor, Barlow School, ESL teacher, elementary; Tabatha Walton (not pictured), Region 15 NJEA UniServ Office, administrative assistant.

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HOLOCAUST EDUCATION TRIP CHALLENGES AND INSPIRES

By Kathryn Coulibaly

Every year for the past 25 years, Maud Dahme boards a flight to Europe in July. Dahme, the current chair of New Jersey's Commission on Holocaust Education, has been painstakingly planning this trip for many months. She will be joined by 30 to 35 educators who will spend the next two weeks learning about the Holocaust and visiting sites in four different countries, all in an effort to bring what they learn back to their students.

The group typically spends two to three days in each city. The tour usually includes Berlin, Germany; Prague, Czech Republic; Krakow, Poland; Lublin, Poland; Warsaw, Poland; and Amsterdam, Netherlands.

One of the stops on this trip will be Amersfoort in the Netherlands, the town where Dahme was born in 1936. At the age of 6, Dahme and her four-year old sister, Rita,

went to live with Christian families in the Netherlands in an effort to save them from the Holocaust. Dahme and her sister were among thousands of "hidden children" across Europe. After the war, Dahme and her sister were reunited with their parents, but the rest of their extended family were killed at Sobibor concentration camp. In 1950, the family emigrated to New Jersey, eventually settling in Palisades Park.

Dahme writes about the experience of being separated from her family in her book, *Chocolate, The Taste of Freedom: The Holocaust Memoir of a Hidden Dutch Child*. She also was featured in a PBS documentary, "The Hidden Child." For Dahme, now in her 80s, the journey—and sharing the stories of those affected by the Holocaust—is a lifelong mission.



Each year, the Holocaust Education tour group quickly creates a deep connection. The 2023 tour group, pictured here, continues to hold reunions.

"Many classroom teachers in New Jersey have met survivors," Dahme says. "They've seen the films and read survivors' stories. But actually being there is so powerful. The lessons they take back with them to their students and schools are incredible. It really is life changing."

Dahme and Polish guide Adam Szczucinski develop the itinerary, adapting as new sites become available or others close for renovation, recruiting speakers and identifying new opportunities to tell the stories of the people who were affected as they explore cities and towns that still bear the signs and the memory of the Holocaust.

For Dahme, bringing together educators on this trip is deeply personal. She invites the group for an orientation at her house in June. She wants to give everyone a chance to meet for the first time, get to know their roommate and go over the do's and don'ts.

The trip usually begins in the middle of July, which Dahme feels gives educators time between the school years.

In September or October, she hosts a reunion, also at her home. She finds that the people who participate in the trip make deep connections with each other and welcome the opportunity to come back together.

"The group comes together every year in a beautiful way," Dahme says. "After one day, we become a family."

The cost of the trip varies year to year, as does the itinerary. NJEA helps subsidize the trip for members and other organizations have given sums to offset the costs. Everything except souvenirs and a couple of the lunches are included in the cost of the trip. Upon arrival in Europe, usually beginning in Berlin, the group travels by air-conditioned, internet-accessible bus.

"Even though it's a difficult trip and we cry a lot, we also laugh a lot. I try so hard to strike the balance," Dahme says. "We talk to people about the culture, we enjoy the food. It's a journey of love to share with everyone, especially when we're in the Netherlands."

Witnessing history for future generations

Educators who have traveled with Dahme cover every subject and grade level, from kindergarten to college, art to special education, and everything in between.

In 2017, NJEA President Sean M. Spiller and his wife, Lauren, went on the trip. Hearing about the trip inspired Vice President Steve Beatty and his wife, Tamara, a special education teacher in Cinnaminson, to go.

"It was a life-changing experience in a lot of ways," Steve Beatty says. "I looked at it through three lenses:



The group visits sites in Germany, Czech Republic, Poland, and the Netherlands.

Kathryn Coulibaly is the associate editor of the NJEA Review and provides content and support to njea.org. She can be reached at kcoulibaly@njea.org.



The tour is led by Maud Dahme and Polish tour guide Adam Szczuczinski.

history teacher, human being and as a Jewish person.”

The tour is intense, and participants estimate walking six to eight miles a day.

“You had to balance the horrors with time to decompress and connect with different people in the group,” Steve Beatty recalls. “It helped to process it. We changed who we sat and ate with at meals every day. We wanted to get to know each person in the group. At night, there was an optional walk after dinner with Adam, the guide. We’d walk around for an additional hour or two, just seeing the sites.”

“It’s an amazing opportunity to take this trip,” Tamara Beatty says. “It’s once in a lifetime. To be able to go with fellow educators who are passionate about the subject just adds to the trip.”

Cheryl Jones, an elementary school teacher in Tenafly, had never heard of the New Jersey Commission on Holocaust Education until an advertisement for an online workshop caught her eye. During that workshop, she learned about the Holocaust education trip, which has had a profound impact on her and her teaching.

“The trip has broadened my understanding of how Holocaust education can be tailored for younger students,” Jones says. “In various learning scenarios, students are encouraged to delve deeply into their own roles, perspectives and viewpoints, while also learning to treat others with kindness and consideration. Cooperative learning activities not only foster mutual support but also provide valuable lessons in handling conflicts with fairness and compassion. I firmly believe that these fundamental skills are essential for every child to acquire and uphold. Finally, engaging children in discussions and activities that promote empathy, tolerance and respect for diversity help to cultivate a sense of responsibility and moral integrity.”

What will you do today to make this world a better place tomorrow?

Challenging yourself

The trip is an intense experience, physically as well as emotionally.

“A trip like this stirs up a lot of emotions,” Jones says. “It was shocking, disturbing, infuriating, sickening and sad, but it was also engaging, informative, thought-provoking, impactful and transformative.”

After guiding hundreds of people to visit the sites over 20 years, Dahme has found that people react to the experience in a number of ways. “Different people react differently,” Dahme says. “You don’t know how you will react.”

For Tamara Beatty, visiting Majdanek concentration camp in Poland was one of the most powerful memories from the trip.

“It wasn’t crowded,” she says. “It was haunting.”

On their way to the camp, they visited Tarnow, where the Jewish population of the village was killed, and the children buried in a mass grave.

Bringing the lessons home

NJEA subsidizes the cost of the trip for members with the understanding that members will bring what they have learned back to their schools, communities, and their local and county associations.



As a balance to the challenging content experienced during the day, the evenings provided a chance to unwind. From left: Tamara Beatty, Richard D’Avanzo, Cheryl Jones, Ann-Margaret Shannon and Steve Beatty.



In 2023, NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty and his wife, Tamara, a special education teacher in Cinnaminson, joined the tour.

"In my class, my students and I talk about what it means to be a bystander," Tamara Beatty says. "We read *Night* by Elie Weisel. We got books from the Holocaust Commission free of charge. There are a lot of resources that people don't know they can access, including curriculum."

Tamara Beatty was appointed to the New Jersey Commission on Holocaust Education in 2021 and hopes to help make more educators aware of the resources that are available.

"I think it's so important for educators to go on this trip because we can't let history repeat itself," Tamara Beatty says. "This happened and we have people saying it didn't. With people trying to ban books and refusing to allow us to teach the truth, I think it's so important that we have these opportunities to bring this experience to our students. As survivors pass away, we now share that responsibility to speak about what happened and what it was like. We have a shared responsibility for teaching the truth."

NJEA: Committed to supporting educators

Subsidizing the trip and supporting educators who choose to participate has been a priority for NJEA for many years.

"NJEA is an organization committed to equity work and justice," Steve Beatty says. "We have a lot of work to do. As educators, it is our charge."

Dahme has worked with NJEA for many years, and she is proud of the work that has been accomplished together.

"It's been so great to work with NJEA," Dahme says. "It's a wonderful relationship between the Holocaust Commission and NJEA. We collaborate on many other

projects. I served on the New Jersey State Board of Education for many years, and I got to know everyone at NJEA really well through the years."

Holocaust education is relevant in every grade

Regardless of the grade level or ability, the lessons of the Holocaust are relevant to every student.

"Holocaust education is powerful and necessary because it fosters critical thinking and encourages reflection on pressing issues such as prejudice, bystander behavior and the profound impact of individual actions on shaping society," Jones says. "By confronting these complexities, students may be equipped with the knowledge and moral compass necessary to navigate an increasingly interconnected and diverse world. Just as importantly, teaching about the Holocaust has the potential to empower learners and to prevent future tragedies."

When educators bring what they have learned back to their practice in the classroom and share it with their colleagues, they work hard to find age- and grade level-appropriate ways to talk about what they have experienced.

But the overriding principle is clear. As Tamara Beatty recalls, "Our tour guide at Auschwitz ended the tour by saying, 'What will you do today to make this world a better place tomorrow?'" 🇺🇸

Learn more about the NJ Commission on Holocaust Education trip

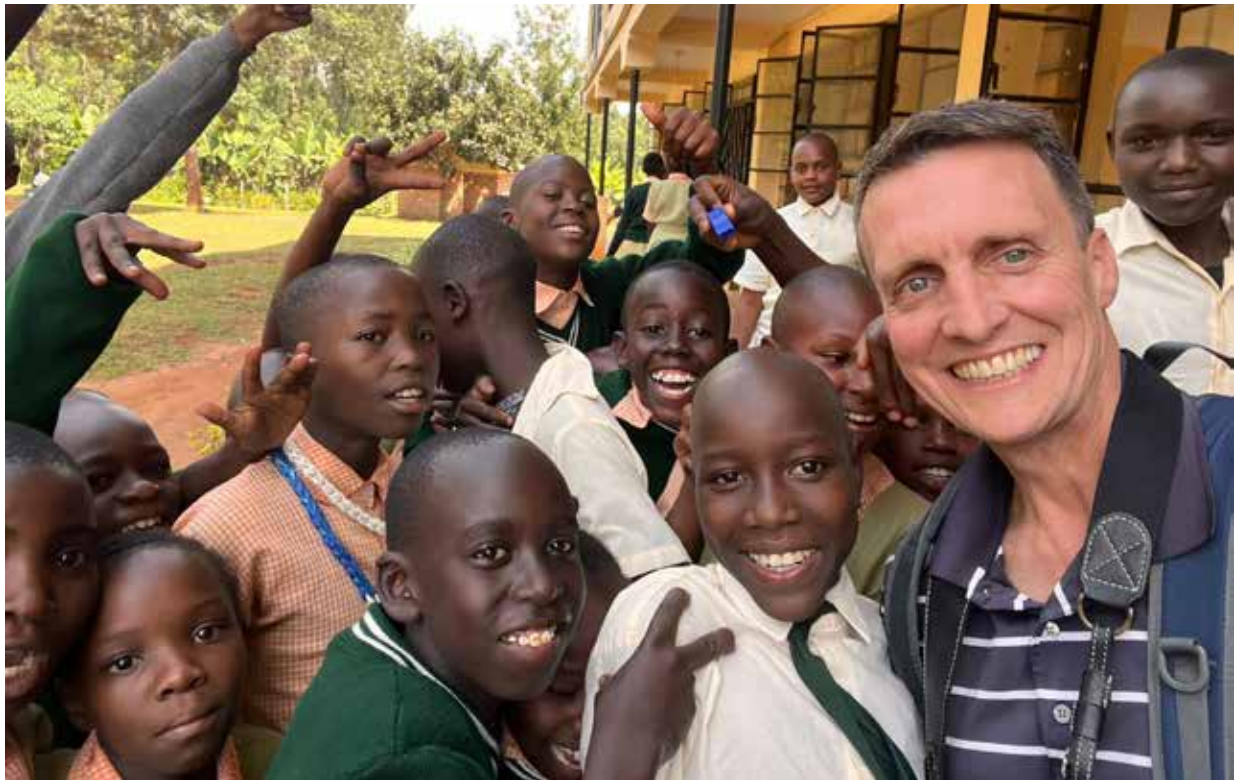


The trip is held annually in July, generally during the last two weeks. The cost of the trip varies, depending on the itinerary and number of participants. Information about the trip typically becomes available in December. The deadline to submit the deposit, which holds your spot, is Feb. 1.

For more information and educational resources, go to nj.gov/education/holocaust.

Turning empathy into social action with TEEEM

By Theodore Opderbeck



Ted Opderbeck, a Waldwick High School social studies teacher, visits The GRACE Academic Center in Kisii, Kenya six years after starting his work with them through TEEEM.

It's 6:55 a.m. on a cold, dark winter morning, yet much to my delight, I have 12 high school students sitting in my classroom waiting eagerly for our weekly virtual tutoring session with students halfway around the world in Kisii, Kenya! Every Thursday morning, a different crew of my students participates in these special times of English reading, Swahili lessons, singing, dancing and cultural fun with our new friends in Kenya.

In a world often characterized by disillusionment, division and disinterest, it is truly heartwarming to watch my students enhance their empathy and cultural awareness while simultaneously developing social entrepreneurial skills to improve the lives of other people.

Six years ago, I had the good fortune of learning about an inspirational global nonprofit organization located right in the heart of New Jersey with a mission to connect

students to communities in need around the world, including the school with which we work in rural Kenya. TEEEM (The Empathy Equality Entrepreneurship Mission) is now a rapidly growing organization that collaborates with over 65 high schools, middle schools and elementary schools across the state and nation.

Founded by a former photojournalist and New Jersey native, Jarret Schechter, TEEEM provides a host of free, innovative and dynamic educational resources that teach students here in the U.S. how to develop empathy and understanding for people living in difficult situations while fostering their own social entrepreneurial and leadership skills.

Among the many global nonprofit organizations sponsored by TEEEM, my students chose to work with The GRACE Project in Kenya, which offers high-quality

STEM-based schooling, sustainable agricultural training and medical care to Kisii, an underserved community in Kenya. GRACE stands for Greater Response to African Children's Education.

Since this initial connection, we have created powerful fundraisers, organized sports equipment and shoe drives, hosted virtual exchanges and tutoring sessions, interacted with students in Kenya for joint holiday and cultural celebrations and created awareness in our school and local community in Waldwick.

Last year, we even collaborated with the teaching staff in Kenya and designed a "Shark Tank" style event, where GRACE Academic Center students identified critical needs in their community and devised market-based solutions, which led to actual functioning entrepreneurial business ventures. My students offered technical support, presentation skill development and budgeting tips, while TEEEM provided over \$5,000 of prize money to help seed the students' businesses in Kenya. The winning group is currently sewing reusable sanitary pads for girls who face missed school days due to period poverty.

There is no greater joy as a teacher than watching students apply their learning to address real-world problems and make life better for others. Through TEEEM's guidance and our partnership with The GRACE Project, I have witnessed countless students combine their burgeoning empathy with newly developed social entrepreneurship skills as they passionately and enthusiastically see their ideas come to fruition.

In today's educational landscape, many students feel disconnected from their learning. This can lead to a perceived lack of relevance and significance. Indeed, a poll conducted by the National Center on Education and the Economy found that only 34% of high school students report feeling engaged in their learning. According to this research, the three most important factors for student engagement are real-life connectivity, hands-on problem-solving opportunities and independent student decision-making.

Because of our involvement with TEEEM and GRACE, my students constantly apply what they are learning in the classroom to work collaboratively with students facing poverty on another continent. All our lives are

Theodore Opderbeck has been a social studies teacher at Waldwick High School for 28 years where he teaches economics, law and society, and world history. He is an adviser to the Global Awareness and Photography clubs. He coaches the WHS varsity girls' volleyball team and varsity boys' tennis team. Opderbeck is the professional learning coordinator for The Empathy Equality Entrepreneurship Mission (TEEEM). He can be reached at opderbeckt@waldwickschools.org.



Top: Students enjoying free time at TEEEM's sponsored site in Kenya.

Bottom: TEEEM students at Waldwick High School helped Kenyan middle schoolers launch businesses to tackle local issues, such as making reusable sanitary pads to combat period poverty.

Photo credit: TEEEM



Singing and dancing with our friends in Kenya.

transformed and changed for the better. We continue to work together as active changemakers, thriving as we deepen our partnership and build a better future.

Social entrepreneurship and empathy

Imagine your elementary school students raising money to build clean water wells in Burkina Faso while reading children's books about real-world heroes who are helping their communities overcome water scarcity.

Envision your middle school students creating pop-up shops selling handmade bracelets, earrings and keychains created by Ogala Lakota artists from South Dakota's Pine Ridge Reservation, who are working tirelessly to improve their community.

Dream of your high school students hosting formal galas, movie nights, talent shows, clothing and sports equipment drives, pickleball/ping pong tournaments, baking competitions and color runs.

Each of these initiatives was organized and managed by New Jersey students within their classrooms and clubs. With dollar-for-dollar fund-matching from TEEEM, this school year alone, hundreds of thousands of dollars have been channeled to important humanitarian projects conducted by global nonprofits serving at-risk communities. With our students' help, medical clinics are saving lives, classrooms are full of enthusiastic learners, women are empowered,

clean water wells are providing health and nourishment, infrastructure projects and microenterprises are funded and the hungry are being fed.

Social entrepreneurship is at the heart of TEEEM's mission. In our world, social entrepreneurial skill development among students is desperately needed as business leaders are looking for innovative ways to apply private market-based models to address social needs. Social entrepreneurs use both profit-motivated ventures and charitable programs to raise funds and find pathways to address critical global issues.

My students have used the social entrepreneurship model to take bigger risks and increase their impact while continuously reflecting on their efforts and revising their ideas and dreams. Indeed, many of the schools associated with TEEEM have done the same.

Recently, my students partnered with a local eating establishment in Waldwick. The resulting "Dine and Donate" event raised \$1,800, which was matched by TEEEM for a total donation of \$3,600 to our partner school in Kenya. This funding will help cover the tuition for over 100 students who otherwise would not have the opportunity to go to school and build important skills and human capital.

When a school is matched with one of TEEEM's global partners, close personal connections are established.

Students are able to learn about the people and communities who are served by the nonprofits they choose. This greatly increases cross-cultural awareness and understanding. In many cases, students in the U.S. can communicate directly with others in their chosen sites through virtual programs, letter writing and visits to their schools by site leaders.

Our students gain new empathetic perspectives as they consider the challenges and obstacles that others face when living in difficult circumstances. My students in Waldwick have cherished our unique opportunities to build relationships with elementary and middle school students in Kenya.

Other schools around New Jersey who work with TEEEM are also forging connections with people from communities in Ecuador, Peru, Haiti, Burkina Faso, Uganda, Ethiopia, Ukraine, Cambodia and domestically on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota.

Student- and educator-centered programs

As TEEEM grows, so does its dedication to offering quality student- and teacher-centered programs designed to foster growth and learning on all fronts. The majority of staff at TEEEM proudly consist of educators, many of whom are or were NJEA members.

TEEEM offers high-quality professional development for teachers on topics ranging from fostering leadership and empathy within our students, encouraging social entrepreneurship vision and risk taking and learning from inspirational humanitarians working on the front lines within marginalized communities.

TEEEM also offers two leadership conferences for students that provide training and collaboration with other schools as students develop networks and share ideas.

Outside the classroom, TEEEM sponsors humanitarian service-based travel experiences to their global sites and offers scholarships to seniors who have learned to become active changemakers through their experience with TEEEM. While students and teachers gain much as a result of their involvement with TEEEM, the opportunities continue to expand.

Since joining forces with TEEEM, my Global Awareness Club has grown from its small beginnings to a flourishing group of over 60 students. Although we have chosen to channel the programs of TEEEM through a club, many schools do so through classes, specific units and even sports teams.

The beauty of TEEEM is its ability to cater to each school's specific structure and desires. World language teachers have partnered with global sites that speak the language they study, middle school civics classes have incorporated global empathy units including TEEEM-designed lessons and high schools have placed students

in dual-enrollment classes including Global Issues, Cross Cultural Perspectives and Social Entrepreneurship.

There is no cost to schools, students and teachers to join the TEEEM network.

Extending beyond school

Summer break is typically a time for students to disconnect from schoolwork, relax and unwind from a stressful academic year. However, because of the overwhelming demand and success of our morning joint tutoring sessions, we have extended our program throughout the last three summers. Totally driven by student interest and motivation, three of my club leaders developed a schedule, filled each session with our students and communicated with teachers and administrators in Kenya.

To see 20 smiling faces online at 7:30 a.m. on a summer day interacting with students from GRACE Academic Center is beyond exciting. My students and their friends from other area high schools even started to incorporate some Spanish and French mini learning sessions. We loved hearing our Kenyan students enthusiastically and proudly counting from one to 10 in Spanish or French. And on some mornings, they even get us to dance with them!

My hope is that my students will continue to build upon these tremendous experiences and nurture a lifelong desire to make the world a better, kinder place. Because of our strong ties to TEEEM, I have worked with countless students who have developed a passion for social issues and global equality rooted in empathy and forged by the leadership skills they crystallized while in high school. 🌍



Connect with TEEEM

Interested in connecting your students, classes, and school with TEEEM?



Email TEEEM Executive Vice President Taylor DeMaio at taylor@teeem.org.



Visit TEEEM at teeem.org.



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Your Story Matters

By Alyssa Guagenti and Peggy Widgren

The Your Story Matters movement at Jefferson Township Middle School has grown from a local initiative into a powerful statewide cause that aims to ensure every person's story is heard, valued and respected. This movement is about more than just storytelling—it's about community, inclusivity and creating a space where people feel seen and understood.

The essence of Your Story Matters is communicated among students and staff in everyday interactions and special activities, and the words "Your Story Matters" have found their way onto lanyards, clothing apparel and the walls of classrooms, hallways and other shared spaces. These daily spoken and physical reminders reinforce the message that all of our staff and students have something to contribute and that their presence in our community is valued and validated.

With the support of stakeholders from the state level to local communities at the grassroots, the movement underscores the importance of recognizing each individual's experiences, background and voice. On April 27, 2025, the movement will culminate in an event that promises to be both symbolic and impactful, coinciding with National Tell a Story Day, a fitting backdrop for the initiative's mission.

The importance of the Your Story Matters movement

The movement was born out of a need to address feelings of isolation and lack of connection in the school community. Our students need to feel that they are

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Peggy Widgren is the principal of Jefferson Township Middle School. She can be reached at mwidgren@jefftwp.org.



Frankie, Robby and Teddy beaming with excitement after completing the Color Run! A fun-filled experience shared with friends, filled with laughter, and vibrant memories!

contributing members and stewards of the school and the broader community. At its heart, Your Story Matters focuses on the idea that everyone has a story that contributes to the greater whole.

In an era where social divisions and individual struggles can often feel overwhelming, this movement works to remind people that their experiences are important, that they are not alone and that together we create a tapestry of shared human experience.

The slogan of the movement, "Each of us needs all of us, and all of us need each of us," beautifully encapsulates the central philosophy. It speaks to the interconnectedness of individuals within a community. Everyone's story—

whether big or small, joyful or painful—matters in shaping the collective identity. It emphasizes that no story is insignificant, and that by listening to and learning from one another, we build stronger, more empathetic communities.

From motto to movement

Your Story Matters represents more than just a slogan or a single event; it is a movement that permeates the entire school culture. This movement involves a series of intentional actions and practices that reinforce the value of every individual's story. It includes initiatives designed to bring students together, such as pep rallies, competitions and the One Book, One School program.

These activities serve multiple purposes. Pep rallies and competitions foster school spirit and camaraderie, creating a sense of unity among students. The One Book, One School initiative encourages shared reading experiences, promoting discussions and connections around a common theme. Additionally, items such as customized sweatshirts contribute to a sense of belonging and pride within the school community.

From school initiative to statewide movement

What began as a middle school initiative at Jefferson Township quickly gained traction across the county and the state. Teachers, parents and students at the middle school worked together to create platforms where people could share their stories. The school leadership, recognizing the positive impact of these storytelling sessions, partnered with local, county and state leaders to expand the program beyond the school walls.

State-level stakeholders have provided funding and resources to support these storytelling platforms, allowing for the creation of public forums, social media campaigns and school assemblies dedicated to celebrating personal stories. The initiative also received support from local businesses, nonprofit organizations and media outlets, all of which recognized the importance of promoting a culture of empathy and understanding.

National Tell a Story Day: A symbol of unity

April 27, 2025, will mark a significant milestone for the Your Story Matters movement. It will be National Tell a Story Day, making it the perfect date to celebrate the movement's message of inclusivity and shared experience. The event will begin with a Kids Color Run, offering young participants a fun and interactive experience where they can showcase their individuality while still feeling connected to a larger community. A 5K run will follow, inviting participants of all ages to join in and show their support for the cause while enjoying the beauty of the Morris County Parks Commission hiking trails.



Top: Children proudly adding their handprints to the “My Story Matters” banner, symbolizing the importance of their story.

Bottom: A spirited celebration at the end of the Color Run, marking the conclusion of a fun and successful day.

Local mental health agencies are generously volunteering their time and services at the Your Story Matters event, offering valuable support and resources to participants and community members. These agencies will set up information booths where attendees can learn about mental health care, counseling services and wellness programs available in the area.

Trained professionals will be on-site to provide guidance, answer questions and distribute materials that promote mental health awareness and self-care practices. Their presence at the event highlights the importance of mental well-being and ensures that those in need have access to vital resources within the community.

The funds raised from the Your Story Matters event will be reinvested into the school system to bring in valuable programs and presenters for the students. These resources will provide opportunities for students to engage with diverse topics, ranging from mental health and wellness to leadership, creativity and personal development.

By inviting guest speakers and offering specialized workshops, the school aims to create an enriching environment where students can explore new ideas, gain insights from professionals and continue to grow both academically and emotionally. This reinvestment ensures that students receive ongoing support and inspiration through impactful programming. 🌍

How to turn the classroom right side up when the world seems upside down

By Dr. Glen Coleman

Today's news can be overwhelming. The election, global warming and artificial intelligence (AI) are subjects that can cause alarm or fear. They can make anyone feel powerless, including us and our students. But we can use those feelings as an impetus to rethink basic assumptions on teaching. Doing so will help us become more engaged in safeguarding our sanity and upholding our profession.

Here are four outside-the-box aphorisms, questions or prompts to encourage you to rethink and thrive in today's classroom:

- Learning starts at the quadriceps.
- Make Mount Everest your goal.
- Community is key.
- The most interesting thing in the world is you.

Learning starts at the quadriceps

Consider that learning starts from the quads, not the brain alone. If you find your students' attention spans lagging, consider a game of "Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes," because if we move our bodies, we'll be more fully awake to learn.

Consider that people can't fall asleep while standing up, that perhaps our best conversations could take place with students on their feet and in small groups without notebooks, talking to each other without distraction. One thing would be certain: everyone would be awake.

Consider bringing your students to the front of the classroom to investigate what is projected on the screen: stand up close to a work of art, a map or a scientific equation without a notebook or computer. Hold a conversation there, as though you're at a museum,

analyzing an election map; marveling at Picasso's *Guernica*; or appreciating The Gettysburg Address—all up close.

Experiment with teaching only from the back of the classroom. Put students front and center. What would that look like? Could they debate an idea? Could they impersonate a character and put on a "one act" play? Could they lead their own class discussion?

Consider the power of breathing to inspire your students. Exhale more slowly than you inhale, and your pulse will slow down; or vice versa. To slow down in our anxious age, practice mindful breathing by exhaling slowly. Try a "slowest pulse contest" in class by practicing slow exhalations.

Consider the power of sunlight to awaken the mind. Indoor lighting is a snore. Sunlight is majestic. Perhaps sunlight can illuminate our learning space so as to awaken students to different points of view and renew their feelings of possibility. After all, as most students spend hours each day on their phones, a brief walk outside with your students could prove energizing.

Make Mount Everest your goal

Imagine giving students a difficult test at the beginning of a unit but avail them of numerous opportunities to retake until mastery. Imagine they work together to master it. Because the test is hard, they will make mistakes. Because they can try again, they can master the material at their own pace. Because most students will have mastered the basics, they can now make something new with what they learned—a project, an essay, a skit, a speech. These projects could fully engage the whole child.



Imagine availing students of two opportunities to deliver compelling speeches with no notes. The first time, give them permission to speak their most awkward, their most honest and vulnerable. Peers would then give each other feedback to improve for their second attempt. On their second attempt, students try again to hit it out of the park. This could demystify one of the most fearful tasks of all: public speaking.

Community is key

Imagine asking “How are you?” and daring to listen as a superpower to forge community.

Imagine listening as a hack for classroom management. Ask students who don’t usually talk to each other to hold a five-minute conversation. Ask them to learn something new about each other. You may try to make some good starter questions or find some useful questions through a search on the internet or through AI. Some examples:

- What would constitute a perfect day for you?
- For what in your life do you feel most grateful?
- What do you most value in a friendship and why?

These brief activities—perhaps done on a weekly basis—could help bring students into a greater sense of community.

Imagine the power of a joke book aimed at 3-year-olds as a seminal text to bring joy to your classroom. Imagine rattling off a few knock-knock jokes at the beginning of class—or have your students do so—to get students relaxed, engaged and happy to be there. Wouldn’t beginning the day with a smile make everyone’s day better?

Imagine expanding our perceptions of strength and leadership. Imagine that it is more than macho, hard, rough or stoic; it is also feminine, caring and compassionate. Perhaps ask students what leadership means to them. Then compare those traits to those exemplified by today’s leaders or historical figures such as Gandhi, King or Mother Theresa.

The most interesting thing in the world is you

Experiment with this premise: the most interesting thing in the world is you. When we infuse students’ interests into the courses we teach, students will find relevance in their lives. But take it a step further. Ask students to express their interests through the lens of what you teach.

Dr. Glen Coleman teaches social studies at River Dell High School and is the author of Teaching in the New Crazy: On Thriving in Overwhelming, Politicized and Complicated World. He can be reached at info@twominutestomastery.org.

As our world gets ever more infused with AI, we must double down on deep, enduring questions: Who am I? What’s important? What is success? Who are my friends? How do I know?

So, experiment with the prompts below. Here are some brainstormers:

Students, reframe Shakespeare’s famous soliloquy, “To be or not to be.” Model Shakespeare’s structure—such as his rhythm and rhyme scheme, or tone—but inform it with your passions, interests or concerns.

Students, show how algebra (or whatever course you teach) is seen in everyday life. Describe the variables and create the equation that helps you express your insight.

Students, analyze current events through the lens of Abraham Lincoln (or any person or character you’re teaching). What would Lincoln say?

Appreciate that “What do you think?” is a heck of a question when we take time to listen to the answer.

Appreciate that your local community is a golden, untapped resource. By going local (i.e., learning from our neighbors), we sidestep the algorithms that have made our national conversations so toxic. And as students strengthen their interpersonal communication skills by having such conversations, our courses grow in relevance and engagement.

Appreciate that as our world gets ever more infused with AI, we must double down on deep, enduring questions: Who am I? What’s important? What is success? Who are my friends? How do I know?

Appreciate that grit is gold, that “oops” is the sound of learning, and that getting back up and trying again is perhaps the greatest lesson of all.

Appreciate that great music, comedy, art and literature transcend time, that BB King, Bach or Bacharach still resonate, Abbott and Costello are still funny, and Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith and Joni Mitchell still inspire. Great art is a lodestar in trying times. Why not share a masterpiece with your students?

In praise of divergent ideas in our age of disruption

We live in a time when a lot seems upside down. Let’s use it to make our classrooms right-side up, i.e., safe spaces to learn, grow, question and feel a sense of community. So consider new points of view, experiment with new ideas and appreciate the untapped resources that are all around us.

By doing so, we’ll help ourselves and the next generation better navigate today’s challenges. 🏠



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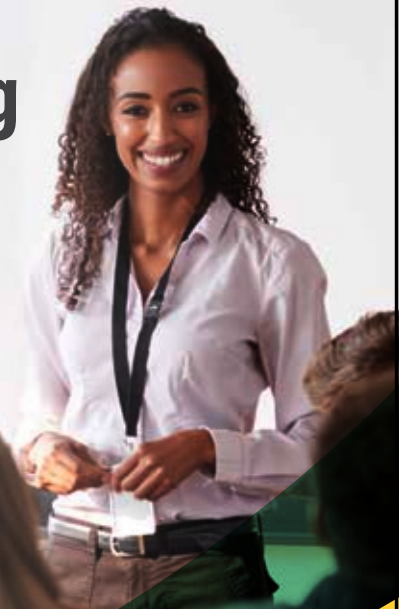
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NEW JERSEY Labor Management Collaborative

Newly branded NJ Labor Management Collaborative builds ecosystem of support

By Kimberly Crane



What's new

This October, the New Jersey Labor Management Collaborative (NJLMC) developed a new logo, new branding and dropped the words "public school" from its title in order to embrace the moniker used by most of its members.

In addition, the NJLMC will be rolling out support structures that allow districts to take leadership roles in regional and statewide networking events and workshops.

In spring 2025, NJLMC will offer opportunities to deepen individual practice and train peer coaches. Coaches will be mentored in meeting design, facilitation, hosting conversations and collaborative practices. Scan the QR code to sign up for the NJLMC newsletter to stay informed on these exciting next steps.

NJLMC participating districts should also be on the lookout for invites to join collective problem-solving sessions that investigate and turnkey the process of hosting an LMC Hub for their region.

What is an LMC Hub?

An LMC Hub is a place to gather and share information. Hubs are hosted by school districts central to LMC work in their region. Districts can elect to hold Hub meetings where participants network, share concerns, highlight successes and investigate ways to integrate LMC concepts into regular practice.

Kimberly Crane is an NJEA Communications Consultant and the vice president of the Highland Park Education Association. She can be reached at kcrane@njea.org.

For information on the New Jersey Labor Management Collaborative, email Mike Ritzius, NJEA liaison to the New Jersey LMC, at mike@LMCpartnerships.org

Districts new to the LMC process will receive support at Hub events, where they can explore how to solve problems using LMC strategies.

Hubs are supporting partners of state and national LMC organizations, such as The National Labor Management Partnership (NLMP), the NJLMC, universities in and outside of New Jersey, and out of state organizations such as the California Labor Management Initiative.

New branding

New branding was developed through a collaborative design process that involved representatives from stakeholder groups across New Jersey. The group used style guide tips to best represent brand pillars and reinforce the vision, mission and progress of NJLMC's work.

The brand pillars of being open-minded, connected and courageous lead the way for shared voices. Each brand pillar is clarified with concrete behaviors, beliefs and expectations of individuals and districts. These definitions were tested, refined and validated through focus groups and online surveys. When practiced consistently, these actions evoke the desired brand experience. NJLMC gatherings are intentionally organized in a way to encourage the brand pillars at each event.

New logo

The new NJLMC logo was designed with four spheres that represent union members, supervisors, superintendents and boards of education. The navy blue overlap represents the collaboration between all four New Jersey stakeholder groups. The white star in the middle of the logo illustrates the collective impact created by working collaboratively for the benefit of our students.

CAUTION

CAUTION

CAUTION

CAUTION

CAUTION

CAUTION

Certain hazards don't go away

By Allen Barkkume and Debra Coyle

This issue of the Health and Safety column covers some perennial hazards and resources that we have written about in the *NJEA Review* over the years. The health and safety section of the NJEA website, njea.org/health-safety, houses several resources from past health and safety columns as well as factsheets and the *NJEA Health and Safety Manual*.

Use the QR codes below to read the articles that are referenced. If you wish to find these articles on a laptop or desktop computer, visit njea.org and search the various article titles.

Summer mold

In New Jersey, summer weather conditions bring high heat and high humidity. When those conditions are combined with a large building of many separate rooms, all of which have their doors and windows closed for two months out of the year, we might return to a building that has been impacted by mold growth. These are the perfect conditions for mold to thrive. Controlling mold means getting the water, moisture and humidity out of school buildings.

Mold is perhaps the most troublesome indoor air quality (IAQ) problem facing NJEA's local associations. Mold is a problem confusing to many, difficult to prove and expensive to fix. Mold is sometimes visible but is often hidden behind walls and ceilings, under carpets and inside ventilation systems, which can make detection challenging. To learn more about mold—not just from summer conditions—read the past below.



"Get the Mold Out But Say NO To Air Sampling" (April 2016): This article explains why local associations should say "no" to mold air sampling and insist on better approaches by districts and their consultants.

Allen Barkkume is an industrial hygiene consultant for the New Jersey Work Environment (WEC) Council. Debra Coyle is the WEC's executive director. WEC is a coalition of labor, community, and environmental organizations working for safe, secure jobs and a healthy sustainable environment. Visit njwec.org to learn more.



"A Damp New Jersey Spells Mold in Schools" (October 2011): This article goes in depth on the effects mold can have on your health, actions local associations can take and ideas on possible sources of money available to the District if it is related to a major natural disaster or emergency.



"Measuring Air Quality in Your School" (March 2013): This article references mold and other indoor pollutants that can impact the quality of air from asbestos to lead and more.



"Ventilation Systems Affect Air Quality" (March 2012): In this article, you get some basics of heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems to help you be a better advocate.

Construction and renovation

Public schools need to be maintained and upgraded, but large-scale construction projects can be a major disruption to the learning environment. When a place of learning also becomes a construction site, there are several hazards to threaten the health and safety of occupants. Past articles include:



"Prevent Construction Related Hazards" (November 2022): This article covers ways to prevent construction-related hazards. Whether it's renovations, additions, electrical upgrades or dealing with mercury flooring, mold or ventilation, the activities can affect those in school buildings during the work or after that work is supposed to have fixed a problem.



"When School is Out Construction Begins" (October 2022): This article covers what steps are involved to ensure a safe return after construction and the role of the health and safety committee.



"Summer Construction and Renovations" (June 2013): Although this article mentions renovations after Superstorm Sandy the steps to take before, during and after construction and renovations apply to any project.



"Remedies for Contaminated School Sites" (May 2011): This article reviews best remedies for contaminated sites. It's worth noting some of these methods can be costly, so beware of recommendations for less effective measures.

Natural disasters and climate change

Rising sea levels are a certain outcome of the climate crisis, but there are many other threats that directly affect schools, students and workers. Wildfires are becoming more common, bringing tiny particles into the indoor air where they can accumulate to dangerous levels. Pollen has increased to levels almost three times the norm, exacerbating allergy symptoms for those occupying buildings with poor air filtration. Temperatures beyond a certain threshold make it difficult for students to learn, and dangerous for some workers to do their jobs. Extreme weather events can leave lingering threats in their aftermath, such as the ones listed below:



"The Importance of Understanding Heat-Related Illness in Schools Year-Round" (May 2023): This article covers heat-related hazards for both indoor and outdoor workers.



"Beware of Hazards Caused by Hurricanes" (December 2012): This article explains how the climate crisis is causing more frequent extreme weather events and how that is exacerbating existing common hazards in schools.



"Sandy: Is It Safe to Come Back?" (January 2013): This article dives into flood waters, which can be a "toxic stew" that may contain toxic chemicals and harmful bacteria, especially if flooding came from polluted rivers or bays, nearby industrial sites or underground industrial waste or storage sites or sewage treatment plants in the area lost power or overflowed in the storm.

Organizing around health and safety

There is power in numbers. Local associations that want better working conditions for members need to organize. Organizing is necessary because nothing else works. Never rely on school districts or government agencies to do the right thing. Below are articles on how to organize health and safety committees and tools the committee can use to address hazards:



"Ten Steps to School Health and Safety" (September 2015): This article lists the NJEA 10-step organizing approach for effective local association health and safety programs and how to start.



"Health and Safety Committees" (May 2022): This article reminds us self-care is important and what stressed and burned-out committees can do.



"Activism Gets Results" (December 2020): This article highlights success stories from health and safety committees.



"Organizing Solves Health and Safety Problems" (May 2015): This article covers ways to organize a health and safety committee and steps to make it happen.

WEC to honor Barkkume

The New Jersey Work Environment Council will honor Allen Barkkume, an industrial hygiene consultant, at its awards program on Dec. 2. Barkkume has worked with numerous local associations across the state to assist them in fixing hazardous school conditions. He has also attended many NJEA conferences conducting health and safety training.



Barkkume will be recognized at the WEC Awards Dinner and Ceremony, which will be held at the College of New Jersey in Ewing starting at 6 p.m. For more information and to purchase tickets go to njwec.org.

Allen Barkkume discusses workplace health and safety at the 2022 NJEA Convention.



PAST, PRESENT
AND FUTURE

NJREA PHILANTHROPIC FUND SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

Do you know any high school seniors with high academic accomplishments who are active in school activities and who are community-service minded? NJREA wants to help them continue their post-secondary education.

Through its annual scholarships, NJREA aims to continue its long-standing tradition of assisting well-rounded, high-achieving students embark on the path to successful and rewarding careers.

All scholarships are offered to graduating high school seniors who meet the criteria below. The Allen and Hickman scholarships to a four-year college or university have a value of \$1,500 for freshman year. The Aug Community College and Krichling Trade School scholarships each have a value of \$1,000 for the first year.

Each scholarship can be renewed for a second year, if applicable. Students must continue to meet the criteria for the scholarship, such as the recipient's continued enrollment as a full-time student and cumulative GPA at the end of freshman/first year.

Students may apply for only one scholarship, regardless of type.

Elizabeth A. Allen and Isabelle M. Hickman Scholarships (Four-year college or university)

- Will graduate from a New Jersey public high school, including vocational-technical and public charter schools.
- Has been accepted to a four-year college or university.
- Has a cumulative grade point average of 3.75 or higher.

Fred Aug Memorial Scholarship (Two-year community college)

- Will graduate from a public high school in New Jersey, including vocational-technical and public charter schools.
- Has been accepted by a community college.
- Has a cumulative grade point average of 2.75 or higher.

Walter P. Krichling, Jr. Trade, Vocational or Career and Technical Education Program (Two-year scholarship)

- Will graduate from a New Jersey public high school, including vocational-technical and public charter schools.
- Has been accepted to a trade school/vocational program to earn certification in a vocational field of work.
- Has a cumulative grade point average of 2.3 or higher.



Submission requirements

To be considered for any of the four scholarships, the applicant must submit two copies of the following:
The completed 2025 scholarship application form.

- Their high school transcript and school profile provided by the school counselor.
- A brief essay, illuminating goals and interests for college and beyond.
- A list of extra-curricular activities, athletics, honors, community services and employment.
- Two letters of recommendation, one of which is from a teacher at the high school.

Encourage eligible students to apply today.

All applicants must use the 2025 NJREA scholarship form available at njea.org/njrea-scholarships. Applications from previous years will not be accepted.

All information must be postmarked on or before Feb. 28, 2025. Late and/or incomplete applications will not be accepted.

Call Cathy Raffaele at 609-599-4594, ext. 2300 for any questions.

Around the counties 2024-2025

For questions and/or concerns, or if your county is not listed, please check your county newsletter or reach out to your county REA for more information. For trip details, check your county newsletter.

BERGEN COUNTY REA

Dec. 10 Winter luncheon meeting at Seasons Catering. Reservation deadline is Dec. 1, and the cost is \$50. To attend, contact Marie Papaleo at 201-407-2543.

CUMBERLAND COUNTY REA

Dec. 11: Holiday luncheon meeting at Millville Motorsports Park. To attend, call Pam Garwood at 856-392-6909.

GLOUCESTER COUNTY REA

Dec. 10: Winter luncheon meeting at Riverwinds Restaurant. Nonperishable food donations accepted for a local food bank. Reservation deadline is Dec. 3. To attend, call Margery Walsh at 856-381-1123.

HUDSON COUNTY REA

Dec. 4: Holiday Celebration at the Chandelier Restaurant in Bayonne. The cost is \$55 for members and \$60 for nonmembers. Reservation deadline is Nov. 22. To attend, contact Donna Middlebrooks at 973-610-7129.

HUNTERDON COUNTY REA

Dec. 12: Winter luncheon meeting at Mountain View Chalet for members only. To attend, call Joyce Kucyn at 908-479-6656.

MIDDLESEX COUNTY REA

Dec. 5: Winter luncheon meeting at The Grand Marquis. The entertainment will be the Sayreville Elementary School Chorus. Reservation deadline is Nov. 28, and the cost is \$45. To attend, call Susan Jaysnovitch at 732-925-1606.

MONMOUTH COUNTY REA

Dec. 10: Winter luncheon meeting at Jacques Catering. Reservation deadline is Nov. 29, and the cost is \$45. To attend, call Debbie Adamchak at 848-459-2672.

OCEAN COUNTY REA

Dec. 5: Winter luncheon meeting at Clarion Hotel. Reservation deadline is Nov. 22, and the cost is \$32. To attend, call Pam Raynor at 862-268-5210.

PASSAIC COUNTY REA

Dec. 4: Winter luncheon meeting at The Brownstone in Paterson. The meeting is for members only. To attend, call Karen Monaco at 201-317-6869.

SALEM COUNTY REA

Dec. 2: Winter luncheon meeting at Woodstown Diner. The entertainment will be Woodstown High School Chamber Choir. Reservation deadline is Nov. 25, and the cost is \$17. To attend, call Rosemma Ward at 856-467-4795.



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Virtual Series for 2024-25

Join the NJEA Professional Development & Instructional Issues (PDII) Division as we delve into these topics for 2024-2025

ALL WORKSHOPS WILL BEGIN @ 4:30PM UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.

AUGUST 2024

27 – Irrigating Book Deserts presented by NJEA & Booksmiles (2 p.m.)

SEPTEMBER 2024

18 – An Introduction to Artificial Intelligence (AI) presented by NJEA's PDII Consultants

24 – Survivors' Perspectives on Human Trafficking in NJ & Its Impact on Our Schools presented by NJEA & The NJ Coalition Against Human Trafficking

30 – The Underground Railroad in NJ presented by NJEA Members Sundjata Sekou, Tariq Raheem, Muneerah Higgs & Sari Alburtus

OCTOBER 2024

1 – Neurodiversity in a Singularly Focused World presented by NJEA & Shana Francesca of Concinnate

8 – Educator Evaluation in 2025 & Beyond presented by NJEA's PDII Division

22 – Arts Integration Foundations Pt. 1 presented by NJEA & ArtsEDNJ

23 – Using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Your Classroom presented by NJEA's PDII Consultants

NOVEMBER 2024

13 – Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools for the Classroom presented by NJEA's PDII Consultants

25 – Road to Wellness presented by NJEA & Rutgers Behavioral Health

DECEMBER 2024

3 – Using SEL to See & Connect Beyond Disruptive Behaviors presented by NJEA & SEL4NJ

16 – Incorporating Census Data in Classrooms to Teach Community Diversity & Foster Culturally Responsive Pedagogy presented by NJEA & E Pluribus Unum

JANUARY 2025

15 – An Introduction to Artificial Intelligence (AI) presented by NJEA's PDII Consultants

22 – How to Support Multilingual Learners Who Have Had Limited/ Interrupted Education presented by NJEA & NJTESOL/NJBE

28 – Arts Integration Foundations Pt. 2 presented by NJEA & ArtsEDNJ

FEBRUARY 2025

3 – Film Screening of "Till" with Writer Keith Beauchamp presented by NJEA & The Amistad Commission

5 – Using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Your Classroom presented by NJEA's PDII Consultants

12 – What's Self-Esteem Got to Do with It? Presented by NJEA & Answer

MARCH 2025

5 – Teacher Leadership & the Teacher Leader Academy (TLA) presented by NJEA's PDII Division

6 – Survivor Speaks & How to Bring Them to Your Classroom presented by NJEA & the NJ Commission on Holocaust Education

12 – Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools for the Classroom presented by NJEA's PDII Consultants

APRIL 2025

9 – Providing Sex Education with Cultural Humility presented by NJEA & Answer

29 – Harnessing the Power of Graphic Novels in the Classroom presented by NJEA & Teach Asian American Stories

MAY 2025

5 – Opening Up History: On the Road to Brown v. Board of Education presented by NJEA & E Pluribus Unum

12 – The Missing Stories presented by NJEA & E Pluribus Unum



Scan to register
for upcoming
PDII events

The benefits of communities of practice in education

By Dawn Howlen

In today's fast-evolving educational landscape, teachers face the challenge of staying up to date with current teaching strategies, addressing diverse student needs and navigating curriculum changes. Communities of practice (COP) can provide educators with a collaborative model for continuous professional development. Through COPs, teachers engage in shared learning, exchange ideas and solve classroom challenges collaboratively, making this approach more flexible than traditional professional development.

As described by Etienne Wenger, a leading expert on the concept, a COP is a group of people who share common concerns, problems or passions about a topic. They deepen their knowledge and expertise in that area by interacting on a regular basis. In education, COPs often consist of teachers, administrators or other professionals who aim to improve specific aspects of their work, such as classroom management, curriculum design or technology integration. These communities are self-driven and focus on the needs and interests of their members.

The goal of professional development is to enhance student learning, and COPs directly contribute to this goal. When teachers are engaged in continuous learning and reflective practice, they become more effective in the classroom. For example, a teacher involved in a COP on culturally responsive teaching might develop strategies that better connect with students from diverse backgrounds, leading to greater student engagement and success.

One of the most significant benefits of COPs is collaborative learning. While traditional workshops often lack follow-up or application opportunities, COPs create ongoing opportunities for educators to explore new strategies, apply them in the classroom and return to reflect on their effectiveness. For instance, a COP focused on using artificial intelligence might enable members to share best practices and troubleshoot problems as they arise. Peer support is another benefit of COPs.

Dawn Howlen is an associate director in the NJEA Professional Development and Instructional Issues Division. She can be reached at dhowlen@njea.org.

Teachers can sometimes feel isolated, but COPs provide a safe, collaborative space where teachers can share their challenges, seek advice and receive support.

COPs encourage teachers to engage deeply with specific topics over time. Additionally, COPs foster reflective practice, a key element of effective teaching. Educators are encouraged to critically evaluate their teaching strategies and adjust as needed, creating a culture of ongoing improvement that stays responsive to students' needs and enhances student learning.

COPs foster innovation by encouraging creative thinking and risk-taking in a supportive environment. By collaborating with peers from different backgrounds and experiences, educators can challenge their assumptions and discover fresh solutions to classroom challenges. The collaborative approach allows teachers to experiment with new techniques and adapt their practice based on feedback, ultimately leading to more effective and innovative teaching methods. 🏠

Register for NJEA communities of practice

The NJEA Professional Development and Instructional Issues Division is hosting three distinct communities of practice this year. We invite you to join us in exploring topics on artificial intelligence, social-emotional learning and thriving during challenging times.

Our purpose is to provide a collaborative space where educators can share knowledge, expertise and best practices. This community will promote equity, inclusion, diversity and belonging in educational practices and spaces, ultimately enhancing student success through empowered and well-equipped educators.

To register, visit learning.njea.org.



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NJAEA LAUNCHES THE CELEBRATION OF CULTURE SERIES

BY BIANCA NICOLESCU

In past years, NJAEA (formerly known as the NJEA Preservice) hosted the NJEA Preservice Academy, a series of virtual professional development workshops designed for aspiring and early career educators. Noticing a recent decrease in attendance to these virtual workshops, our NJAEA leadership team was determined to revamp it.

We created the Celebration of Culture Series, which aims to build engagement, better professional development and ultimately a culture of love for learning and prioritization of cultural responsiveness. This series of advocacy events will run throughout the 2024-25 service year, taking place across North, Central and South Jersey to ensure accessibility for all NJEA members.

Serving as the NJAEA President for the 2024-25 service year, I pioneered this idea after enjoying the NEA's Minority Leadership Training and Women's Leadership Training Conference in January of 2022. I was moved by many educators' own personal experiences with discrimination, gatekeeping and oppressive positions articulated by fellow colleagues.

Fanny Cruz-Betesh, a teacher in Ridgefield Park particularly inspired me to create programming like the Celebration of Culture. In her school building, she began conversations with her school administration about the lack of diversity and inclusion with regard to curriculum and hallway displays despite the district's outward mission of cultural sensitivity. Each month, she advocated for school faculty to find ways to bring students attention to the following months that students should be aware of and that schools should recognize.

- Sept. 15 to Oct. 15 — Hispanic Heritage Month
- October — Week of Respect (Begins the first Monday in October)
- November — Native American Heritage Month
- January — Holocaust Remembrance Day, MLK Jr. Day
- February — Black History Month, Lunar New Year
- March — Women's History Month
- April — Arab American Heritage Month, Autism Acceptance Month
- May — Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, Mental Health Awareness Month
- June — LGBTQ+ Pride Month, Juneteenth
- July — Disability Pride Month

Our NJAEA series started off in September by celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month. Participants learned about the best practices for supporting Spanish-speaking learners in the classroom by learning basic elements of the Spanish language and how to correctly pronounce traditional Hispanic names. Attendees also enjoyed delicious empanadas and yuca from a local Puerto Rican restaurant and entered a book raffle featuring three elementary-level books that celebrate Hispanic culture. A heartfelt thank you to Jeremias Salinas for his outstanding presentation.

In October, our NJAEA Political Advocacy Committee Chair, Drew Kazim, organized a celebration of voting rights by setting up a tour of the New Jersey Statehouse and encouraging aspiring educators to vote and remain civically engaged.

This month, NJAEA is celebrating Native American Heritage Month by spotlighting the history of an Indigenous tribe. Finally, in December we will celebrate the Hanukkah, Kwanzaa and Christmas holidays with a potluck.

Members can register for these events at njea.org/celebration-of-culture-series.

Despite these months of celebration, we have to keep in mind that this history and more largely, these underrepresented groups deserve recognition beyond just one month of celebration. Whether it's history, math, English, science or another subject area, educators have the opportunity—and the responsibility—to incorporate a range of historical narratives and ideas that reflect diverse lived experiences as well as our shared humanity.

Putting students' intersectional identities at the forefront of learning challenges traditional boundaries of subject matter by integrating social justice, equity and elevated cultural understanding into our educational values. When we prioritize humanity over rigid curricular content and embrace creativity in lesson planning, we can transform how education is perceived and experienced, fostering more inclusive and meaningful learning environments. 🌍

Bianca Nicolescu is a senior at The College of New Jersey and is president of the New Jersey Aspiring Educators Association. Learn more about NJAEA (formerly NJEA Preservice) at njea.org/njaea.

Public servant from bell-to-bell

The fight for pension justice in New Jersey

By Jeremiah Kleckner



I have served the people of New Jersey as an educator since 2005. When I chose this career, I was told about the humble dignity of being a teacher and the promise of a pension that would allow me to retire without fear of poverty. This was the deal I made in exchange for dedicating my adult life to educating and caring for our children from the opening bell until dismissal.

But before Gov. Phil Murphy took office, six governors, representing both parties, failed to fully fund our pension system, with some paying almost none of the state's required share. Murphy quickly worked to correct that, and this year will make the state's fourth consecutive full pension payment.

But the damage done by his predecessors lingers. Combined with the introduction of a tiered system that first began in 2007, that damage has eroded that promise for those who followed me into this field.

Tens of thousands of education workers now face the reality of reduced pensions or no pensions at all. For Tier 1 members (those hired before July 1, 2007), early retirement with full benefits is still possible. However, for Tier 5 members (those hired on or after June 28, 2011):

- A minimum of 30 years of service is required to retire if under age 65.
- Starting work at age 25 and retiring after 30 years at age 55 would result in a 30% reduction in your pension compared to Tier 1 members.
- Must work until age 65—10 years longer than Tier 1 members—to avoid reductions and collect full benefits.

The situation gets worse for those who were hired on or after May 21, 2010, and are working less than 32

hours a week. Rather than being enrolled in the Teachers' Pension and Annuity Fund (TPAF) or the Public Employees' Retirement System (PERS), they are enrolled in the Defined Contribution Retirement Program (DCRP). Years in the DCRP do not count toward the 25 years needed for post-retirement medical benefits. These paraprofessionals, secretaries, food service workers, nurses, custodians and transportation professionals deserve the same benefits as the rest of us, which they had before these degrading changes were made.

Tier 1 members also need to be wary of the "traps" set in our current system. A break in service longer than 24 months can lead to a loss of tier status and a shift to Tier 5 when returning to work. For example, someone who starts in Tier 1 but takes a multiyear maternity leave before returning to work may find themselves in Tier 5, facing a completely different retirement scenario just as they are starting to build a family of their own.

Become a Pension Justice Advocate

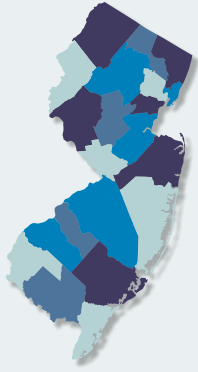
It's time to recognize that the changes made to our pension system were a mistake and that we need to return to a strong, fair pension system that works for everyone.

If you are unsure what tier you are in, ask your local union representative to help you find out. This information is available in your personal benefits statement on the state's Member Benefits Online System, or MBOS.

If you already know how to check your account, teach a colleague. Support your union with words and actions because this is an "everybody" problem that requires an "everybody" effort. And we need to support allies in the state Legislature and the governor's office who have demonstrated through their actions that their pension promises mean something.

Visit the NJEA's Pension Justice page—njea.org/pensionjustice—to advocate for your future and the futures of those who serve by your side. We are public servants from bell-to-bell. After that, we become the public and we deserve the pensions we were promised. 🇺🇸

Jeremiah Kleckner is a language arts teacher at Perth Amboy High School and a secretary of the Perth Amboy Association of School Employees.



SUSSEX TO CAPE MAY

Workshops and conferences

highlights

Amistad and
arts education

2024 AMISTAD CONFERENCE AT ROWAN

Join the Rowan University's Colleges of Education and Humanities and Social Sciences, for an immersive conference featuring cutting-edge research and pedagogy on Black history, interdisciplinary collaborations and innovative initiatives created to strengthen the implementation of the New Jersey Amistad education law. The conference is free to the public.

Dr. Stephanie Harris, director of Africana Studies at Seton Hall University, will deliver the keynote address. The day will include workshops led by K-12 educators, Rowan faculty, scholars, students and community historians and updates from elected officials on legislation to strengthen the Amistad law.

Date: Saturday, Dec. 15

Time: 8:30 a.m.-3 p.m.

Location: Rowan University, Chamberlain Student Center

To register, visit go.rowan.edu/amistad.

The deadline is Nov. 30.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FROM ARTSEDNJ

Culturally Responsive Arts Education Workout

The Culturally Responsive Arts Education (CRAE) Workout is an eight-week curated asynchronous and synchronous experience that focuses on developing the capacity of educators and administrators to think about how culturally relevant and responsive approaches can shift curriculum, instructional content and teaching practices to more effectively represent and validate all students' cultures and lived experiences. This free program begins Jan. 15 and concludes March 8. For more information and to register, visit artsednj.org/CRAEworkout.

Arts Ed NJ On-Demand course:

Empowering Artists: Designing Student-Centered Learning Driven by the 2020 NJSLS-VPA

Build your capacity to develop process-driven arts education practices to fulfill the mission and vision of the 2020 New Jersey Student Learning Standards in the Visual and Performing Arts. Designed for PK-12 arts educators, arts supervisors, and anyone responsible for ensuring the arts standards are taught with fidelity and in a manner that advances student identity, agency and belonging. This two-part course will provide arts educators with a broad and deep understanding of the 2020 New Jersey Student Learning Standards in the Visual and Performing Arts. After completing this self-paced course, arts educators will be better prepared to design learning experiences that will activate student empowerment through the four artistic processes. The first module in part one of this two-part course is free.

For more information and to register visit artsednj.org/ondemandlearning-hub.

Elect a leader who will fight for **your pension!**

2025 is a big year for New Jersey, because we will elect a new governor, along with new members of the General Assembly. And we are already preparing for that critical election.

In June, NJEA members endorsed our president, Sean Spiller, in his historic run for the governor's office. We believe having an experienced educator in the highest position in New Jersey will be great for students, families and educators in our state.

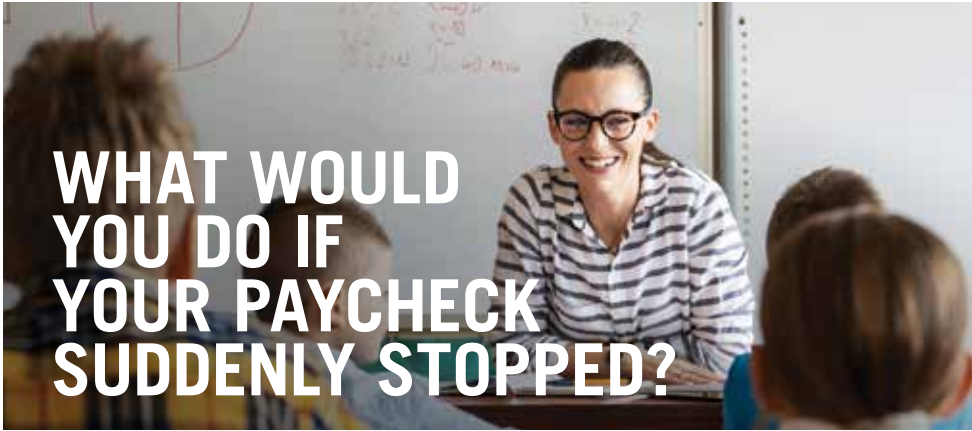


We are asking you to be one of the first to join this exciting campaign to help propel our president to the Statehouse next year. **Scan this QR code** on the left to **#StandWithSean** and be part of the winning team.

#STANDwithSEAN

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NOVEMBER IS INDIGENOUS PEOPLE'S MONTH

By Amy Moran, Ph.D.

In the schools of our childhoods, white colonial histories, norms and perspectives were reinforced at the expense—indeed, the omission—of those of Indigenous people who were already here. And many of us now teach American history written from the point of view of the colonizers, often unknowingly reinforcing white supremacist ideals.

It's been said that silence is violence, meaning that when we choose not to address injustice or decide against being an upstander, we're allowing the injustice to continue. Our non-response is complicity with the oppressive social forces. Critical literacies support reading texts through the lens of noticing what's missing, whose voices have been silenced, and whose experiences have been omitted in service of reinforcing power dynamics that put some at the center while relegating others to the margins. This certainly is the case with Indigenous studies and LGBTQIA+ studies in our American history texts and pedagogies.

As we continue to raise awareness around LGBTQIA+ issues in schools, we can work with students to explore and appreciate some of the ways various Indigenous cultures honor LGBTQIA+ community members. For example, gender nonbinary people have always existed in cultures around the globe, and various Indigenous communities in North America are no exception. The term Two Spirit was adopted from niizh manidoowag (two spirits) in the Anishinaabe language from the Great Lakes region as part of the modern pan-Indian vocabulary. This occurred during the third annual inter-tribal Native American/First Nations Gay and Lesbian American Conference in 1990. But as the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) indicates, many tribal members prefer to use words for the variety of genders from their own people's language.

This autumn, we've seen two powerful examples of LGBTQIA+ allyship within and by Indigenous communities in entertainment media.

First, actor and Emmy nominee D'Pharaoh Woon-A-Tai (Oji-Cree), the lead in *Reservation Dogs*, arrived at this year's Emmy awards with a red handprint inked over his mouth. He did this to raise awareness around missing and murdered Indigenous women and Two Spirited people. His protest brought attention to Hollywood's reinforcement of the white, cisgender, heterosexual, patriarchal ideals as enforced by a paucity of films that represent the lived experiences of Indigenous people. The action also cast a spotlight on the multiple forms of violence Indigenous people continue to experience in the U.S.

Second, in a poignant scene in the Netflix documentary *Will and Harper*, Will Farrell's friend Harper Steele—a newly out trans woman—visits a small-town Oklahoma bar where she encounters threatening signs and signals. However, she is welcomed warmly, especially by two Native American gentlemen who serenade her with their tribal music to welcome her to that space and that land.

New Jersey's progressive and affirming education policies provide a scaffold for interrupting imperialist pedagogies about colonial histories. How can we think of social and emotional learning competencies, Holocaust and genocide studies, and the curricular mandate to include experiences of LGBTQIA+ people and people with disabilities as tools of decolonization? How can we use those tools to re-center marginalized people and expand our view of social studies as opportunities to deepen our understanding of humanity by framing decolonization as a justice issue? Questions like these help shift our thinking toward social studies education as a moral imperative to analyze power dynamics, bring injustice to light and forge new patterns and policies that prevent similar injustices from recurring.

If you don't identify as a First Nations person and/or don't live near Native American communities, you may not center your cultural awareness on Indigenous issues. But like with other identities that may not belong to us, we can make it our responsibility—indeed our honor—to acknowledge, affirm and celebrate Indigenous cultures, concerns and contributions across this land. 🌈

Amy Moran, Ph.D. is an out queer educator, leader and activist working to make education affirming and inclusive for all of their students and colleagues. Moran has taught middle school for 29 years and was a high school GSA adviser for 16 years. She can be reached at rainbowconnectionNJEA@gmail.com.

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HOLIDAY HACKS WEBINAR NOV. 13

Maximize your NJEA membership and attend our upcoming webinar, "Holiday Hacks and End-of-Year Car Buying Tips" on Nov. 13 at 4:30 p.m. Register at njea.org/mbwebinars

Access all this and more at memberbenefits.njea.org!



CORRECTION: NEA RETIREMENT PROGRAM – FINANCIAL PLANNING

On the NJEA Member Benefits page in October, a headline was inadvertently repeated. For a listing about financial planning resources and specialists who can help with all your financial planning goals at neamb.com/retirement-goals, the incorrect headline referenced NJEA, which does not offer financial planning services. The headline should have read, NEA Retirement Program – Financial Planning.



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Questions? Email Beth Buonsante at bbuonsante@njea.org.

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Got a great idea?

Get it funded, just like these NJEA members!

Heart SMART I & II – Morris County educator Kathleen Erbe, from the Washington Township School District, was awarded a \$9,558 continuation grant to build on the school’s work educating students about their physical health, encouraging increased activity and learning how to collect and process quantitative data. The program will fund heart rate monitors and pedometers and provide professional development and collaboration opportunities for educators.

NJEA Frederick L. Hipp for Excellence in Education provides grants of \$500 to \$10,000 for educators just like YOU and projects like this one!

The only foundation of its kind in New Jersey, the Hipp Foundation supports initiatives to promote excellence in education. Since 1993, the foundation has disbursed more than \$2.5 million in grants for innovative educational projects.

Apply by March 1, 2025 at njea.org/hipp.





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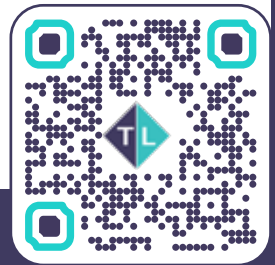
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The NJEA Teacher Leader Academy (TLA) admits candidates of any race, color, creed, national origin, ethnic origin, disability, marital status, domestic partnership status, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity to all the rights, privileges, programs and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the NJEA TLA. It doesn't discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, national origin, ethnic origin, disability, marital status, domestic partnership status, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity in administration of its educational policies, admission policies, or scholarship programs.

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NOV
06

WEDNESDAY

Executive Committee

NOV
09

SATURDAY

Delegate Assembly

JAN
11

SATURDAY

Delegate Assembly

NOV
06-07

WED & THURS

NJREA Convention

DEC
04

WEDNESDAY

Executive Committee

JAN
18

SATURDAY

MLK Jr. Human Rights Celebration

NOV
07-08

THURS & FRI

NJEA Convention

JAN
10

FRIDAY

Executive Committee

JAN/FEB
31-01

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Official registration will open in mid-April 2025.

Contact LaQuia Norment (lnorment@njea.org) with questions.

Trust the progress

#StandWithSean as the next governor of New Jersey



There's an election every year in New Jersey. And this year, we have a powerful reason to remember that.

Within days of your receiving this edition of the *NJEA Review*, the Election of 2024 will be behind us. But with the primary elections for New Jersey's next governor and Legislature just seven months away, the Election of 2025 has already begun. And in that election, we have a candidate for governor who will build upon the progress we've made here in New Jersey these last eight years: NJEA President Sean M. Spiller.

While the stakes were high in the election that just passed, the stakes of the next election are

high for the working people of New Jersey—including anyone who is employed in a public school, aspires to work in public education or has retired from a career serving New Jersey's students from preschool through higher education.

The decisions made in Trenton often have a much more immediate impact on our profession and our public schools than decisions made in Washington, D.C. Nearly every right and benefit that public school employees enjoy in New Jersey has a direct connection to our state's laws and regulations.

For the last eight years under Gov. Phil Murphy, those decisions have benefited public school employees.

In 2020, following intensive lobbying from NJEA members, we finally got relief from Chapter 78. When Murphy signed Chapter 44 into law, members saw a dramatic decrease in their contributions to their health insurance premiums. Once again, a raise in salary meant a raise in take-home pay.

Also in 2020, the governor signed laws that provide due-process rights for educational support professionals as well as protections against the subcontracting of their jobs.

In 2021, under Murphy's leadership, we saw the state make its first full pension payment since 1996—with a full

state pension contribution made every year since.

In 2023, the governor signed legislation that did away with edTPA—an unnecessary, onerous and expensive performance assessment for those aspiring to become teachers.

Also, in 2023, the governor signed legislation that expanded eligible uses of sick time. Prior to that law, public school employees could not legally take a sick day to care for an ill family member.

This year, another law signed by Gov. Murphy convened an Educator Evaluation Task Force and paused the collection of student growth objectives (SGOs) for tenured teachers. The task force just submitted its report and recommends that SGOs be permanently eliminated.

But what the law gives, the law can take away.

That's why the primary election on June 3, 2025, and the General Election on Nov. 4, 2025 are so important for New Jersey public school employees. Will we have a governor who builds on the progress we've made these past seven years? Or will we have a governor who follows in the footsteps of Chris Christie who demonized educators, slashed pensions and benefits, and whose department of education brought us SGOs and edTPA in the first place?

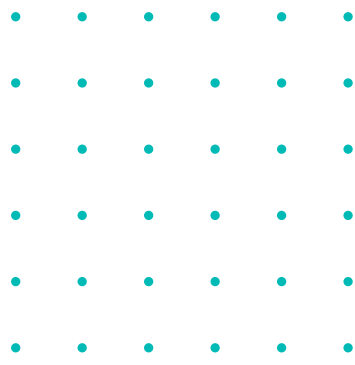
Sean Spiller is the candidate you can trust to keep New Jersey moving forward. He will make sure our pensions remain fully funded. He will protect the gains we've made and build upon them. He will ensure our students continue to get the resources and support they need to thrive. He will foster an economy that will benefit working families and all New Jersey residents, which, in turn, will fill our classrooms with students ready to learn. 🏡

This is our chance

To learn more, join the campaign or donate, go to ***SeanSpiller.com*** and sign up today. Do your part to make sure that we elect Sean Spiller as New Jersey's next governor.



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