

NEW JERSEY EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

# REVIEW

DECEMBER 2024

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*an education and advocacy resource*



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*Stefanie Lachenauer*

**2024-25 Teacher of the Year**

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At the Jim George Collective Bargaining Conference in October, North Plainfield Education Association members Melanie Garcia de Caraballo (foreground) and Diana Tahuico participate in an activity to gather information on collective bargaining priorities and concerns. For more photos from the conference, visit [flickr.com/njea/albums](https://www.flickr.com/photos/njea/albums/).



Daniel Fields, a sixth-grade teacher at Monroe Township Middle School and a Middlesex County representative to the NJEA Delegate Assembly (D.A.), delivered the inspirational message for Nov. 9 meeting of the D.A. In his message, he noted that Matthew Yuro, vice president of the New Jersey Aspiring Educators Association, is one of his former students.



NJREA member Vida Story, a retired Hackensack teacher and former association building rep, hasn't missed an NJEA Convention since 1967. She attended that first convention as a college student. You can hear her brief interview in 2017 with "Classroom Close-up, NJ" at [bit.ly/vida-ccu](https://bit.ly/vida-ccu).

# FEATURES



## 18 | MEET 2024-25 STATE TEACHER OF THE YEAR STEFANIE LACHENAUER

Stephanie Lachenauer, a teacher at Montgomery Upper Middle School in Somerset County, is the 2024-25 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year. "I want to help kids know who they are and love themselves," Lachenauer says. "Their grades don't define them. One of the things that I love about my job right now is that I am teaching my students the skills that I wish I'd had back in school."

BY KATHRYN COULIBALY



## 26 | LET'S NOT FEAR COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

So often, restorative justice is discussed in the abstract. In this article, we trace the experience of two groups of middle school boys in conflict and how they participated in a restorative justice practice to heal their divisions and build community.

BY SYREETA L. CARRINGTON



## 24 | DOVER SUPPORT STAFF ASSOCIATION BUILDS BRIDGES

With a new negotiations team, the Dover Support Staff Association (DSSA) recently reached a three-year agreement with the Dover Board of Education that achieved significant goals. With a team composed of many members new to the negotiations process, and several who are relatively new to the district, the DSSA prioritized training to ensure that all team members approached the table well-informed and prepared.

BY DAVID YASTREMSKI



## 30 | HOW TO DANCE WITH THE AI DEVIL

Teachers are rightly skeptical of Silicon Valley's announcements. The tech industry's pattern is to release its innovations into the world, and let society sort out the unintended consequences. While reservations about generative AI haven't vanished for the author of this article, she has shed some of her concerns and even found ways to use it to enhance her English/language arts classroom.

BY SUSAN CARNEY



## 34 | NJEA CONVENTION PHOTO GALLERY

The NJEA Convention is the largest educational gathering of its kind in the world. Hundreds of professional learning programs, aisle after aisle of educational exhibitors, meetings of professional affiliated organizations and student talent all came together for two days in Atlantic City. Check out a selection of photos from the photo gallery found online at [flickr.com/njea/albums](https://www.flickr.com/photos/njea/albums).

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## The number >230

At least 230 NJEA members ran for public office in New Jersey in November. They ran in state, county, school board and municipal positions. Of those, at least 180 won their races

**Source:** NJEA Government Relations Division, Office of Politics and Policy

## Top 12 reasons to join njea.

### Reason #4: Self Advocacy

Strong unions empower educators to advocate for themselves. Membership gives you a voice and a place at the table and the ability to influence decisions that affect your career. Be part of NJEA and your local union and be proud of the work we do every day to strengthen our profession.

Visit [njea.org/top12](http://njea.org/top12) for more.



Stephanie Lachenauer, a Skills for Success and Global Leadership teacher at Montgomery Upper Middle School in Montgomery Township is the 2024-25 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year.

**PHOTO BY**  
Kathryn Coulibaly

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# REVIEW.

180 W. State St., P.O. Box 1211, Trenton, NJ 08607-1211 • 609-599-4561 • [NJEA.org](http://NJEA.org)

President: Sean M. Spiller | Vice President: Steve Beatty | Secretary-Treasurer: Petal Robertson  
Executive Director: Kevin Kelleher | Deputy Executive Director: Denise Graff Policastro

## 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](http://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*

## Standing strong together

I often say that we have the best schools in the nation, and that those great schools are because of each of you and the work that you do every day.

Public education is our shared mission and value: we know the power that education has to transform lives and create opportunities. We believe in the promise inherent in each student in our schools, and each one of us is working to help them on their journey to reach their full potential.

We also have the best schools in the nation because, after the long hours you put in at work, you still find the time to be the very strongest advocates for our students, our schools, our colleagues and our communities.

That advocacy is why we engage in the political process. We have a responsibility to make our voices heard at every level—in faculty and union meetings, school board and county commissioner meetings, in the Statehouse, the courthouse and, sometimes, the streets in front of those buildings. We have to engage in the political process because our elected officials hold power over our students, our schools and every facet of our lives.

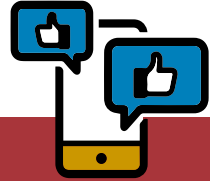
Regardless of the outcome of any political race, we must maintain our commitment as a justice-centered union. It is often most important to speak up when the door to opportunity is being shut in our faces and people are not listening to educators' voices. It's not easy to speak up in spaces when other voices are drowning out what our students and our colleagues need. It's in those moments when we need to have the most courage and continue to reach out and build bridges.

We know that we will face challenges ahead, but as a union, we will continue to raise our voices and fight for our students and our communities.

Every single moment, we will do what we can. I am proud and honored to serve as NJEA president and to have earned the endorsement for governor of the state of New Jersey. I am committed to making sure that we move forward together in this state. There is no one better equipped to lead than a union advocate who knows how to organize and bring people together. There is no one better to lead than an educator who knows what our communities need.

This is our chance to make a difference, and to ensure that we are standing up for exactly what we hold true and value most. Thank you for what you do each and every day. The work goes on.

In unity,



## SEAN M. SPILLER

Facebook

@SpillerforNJEA: It was an honor to spend time in Union County working with our elected leaders, like Senator Joe Cryan. More than ever, we need to work together to elect leaders who will support what happens in our classrooms. And with our campaign for governor of NJ, we're going to travel the state to ensure the stories of educators EVERYWHERE are heard! #ThisIsOurChance #SpillerForGovernor

On Nov. 14, NJEA President Sean M. Spiller shared several images from the Union County Get Out the Vote Brunch. In one of the photos, he is pictured with NJEA's endorsed candidate for U.S. Senator and the first Korean American to be elected to that seat, Andy Kim.

## STEVE BEATTY

Facebook

@SteveBeattyNJEA: And that's a wrap at the 2024 NJEA Convention! Another fantastic day of connection and community. Starting with the SOGI breakfast, a powerful keynote and Q&A with Chasten Buttigieg, Lt. Gov Way, Higher Education meetings, MOC luncheon and finishing with John Hunter before being treated to the talented all-state chorus and orchestra. And the workshops, exhibits, music making, affinity and more. Thank you to the entire PDII staff—and all staff that helped put the incredible two days together.

On Nov. 8, NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty shared many photos of his experience on day two of the 2024 NJEA Convention. In addition to the events mentioned in his post, he was pictured shaping clay at MudGirls Studios, visiting the crisis canines and meeting representatives from the New Jersey Commission on Holocaust Education, members from the New Jersey Aspiring Educators Association, and various NJEA members and leaders from across the state at the NJEA Presidents Gala.

## PETAL ROBERTSON

Facebook

@PetalforNJEA: Unions are good for communities. Don't forget that when you vote on the local, state and national level. [Click here for our list of endorsed candidates: election.njea.org.](#)

On Nov. 4, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson shared a TikTok video from @thewokemama, which emphasizes that unions being present in our communities improve our communities by making sure workers are fairly compensated for the work that they do, are provided with health insurance, and receive retirement benefits

OFFICERS ONLINE

# The ADVOCATE

## RESOURCES FOR YOUR LOCAL ASSOCIATION

### NJEA elections: voting registration for non-classroom teachers

All NJEA members who are not classroom teachers or educational support professional members must identify themselves in order to vote in the appropriate unit in NJEA's spring 2025 elections. A "classroom teacher" is any person who is certified, where required, and a major part of whose time is spent in direct contact with students or who performs allied work that places that person on a local salary schedule for teachers.

NJEA members who were considered classroom teachers in last year's elections, and who now consider themselves non-classroom teachers must complete and return a registration form in order to be included in the non-classroom teacher unit of representation.

Go to [njea.org/NJEAelections](https://njea.org/NJEAelections) to download the form.

### Beatty elected NJEA president, Robertson to be vice president Four to vie for secretary-treasurer in 2025

Current NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty has been elected by acclamation to serve as NJEA's next president beginning Sept. 1, 2025. Current Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson was likewise elected to serve as vice president beginning the same time. Each will serve a two-year term and be eligible to run for reelection to a second term in 2027. Current NJEA President Sean M. Spiller will continue in his role through the end of his second presidential term on Aug. 31, 2025.

Four NJEA members, Denise King of Monmouth County, Tina Dare of Gloucester County, James Frazier of Union County and Henry Goodhue of Somerset County, will vie for the open position of secretary-treasurer.

Beatty and Robertson were declared elected by acclamation as no one filed petitions to run against them. Each of the four candidates for secretary-treasurer filed petitions that were certified by the NJEA Elections Committee. That election is scheduled to take place by mail from April 1 through 15, 2025, with all NJEA members eligible to vote.

Beatty, who first took office as secretary-treasurer in 2017 before he became vice president in 2021, thanked NJEA members for their trust in his leadership.

"It has been an incredible honor to serve for more than seven years as secretary-treasurer and now vice president of NJEA," Beatty said. "I'm proud of what we have accomplished as a union and of the work we are doing right now to secure our future and strengthen our profession. This coming year is a critical time for NJEA as we fight for pension justice and evaluation reform and, of course, as we work to elect one of our own as the next governor of New Jersey. I look forward to working with Petal and the next secretary-treasurer to help NJEA grow even stronger and more effective in advocating for our members, our students and America's best public schools."

Robertson, who will be the first Black woman to serve as vice president of NJEA, also expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to continue serving as an officer.

"The past three years have shown me what NJEA members are capable of when we use our voices and step strongly into our power," Robertson said. "I'm proud of the work that Sean, Steve and I have done over the last three years in partnership with members from across New Jersey to embrace inclusivity and elevate educators' voices. Our diversity is our great strength. Next year we have the historic opportunity to elect our president Sean Spiller as the next governor of New Jersey. I'm excited for the future of our union, because I believe that when we work together, there is no limit to what we can achieve for our students, our schools and our fellow NJEA members."

Spiller, who is currently running for governor of New Jersey, offered his congratulations to Beatty and Robertson.

"I'm happy for Steve and Petal, but even more than that I'm happy to know that NJEA will be in great hands under their leadership," said Spiller. "I look forward to working with them over the next 10 months to keep moving our union forward and to position NJEA for success in 2025 and beyond. I'm grateful to the NJEA members who trusted me to lead over the last 11+ years and I'm excited to work with all members in the coming year as I run to be New Jersey's next governor so we can keep our schools the best in the nation and make our state the best place in America to live, work and raise a family."



## Pumping at work: Know your rights

By Lauren Zucker, Ph.D.

The PUMP Act and the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act are two pieces of federal law that provide rights and accommodations for pumping employees in addition to protections under state law here in New Jersey. But there's still much confusion around these protections, which makes it difficult to navigate in a complex school environment.

Even as someone with experience and expertise on this topic, it was essential—for my own and my baby's well-being—to seek assistance from union leaders, lactation activists and legal experts to avail myself of these rights under federal and state laws.

For example, the federal law provides lactation protections up until a baby's first birthday, but our stronger New Jersey breastfeeding laws put no age limit on the protections. This is still a point of confusion in our schools that may be reflected in board policies.

I encourage you to review and share these:

**New Jersey Breastfeeding Coalition**  
breastfeedingnj.org

### NJEA Review

"Advocating for Members' Lactation Rights," June 2023  
njea.org/lactation-rights

**U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division**  
"Frequently Asked Questions – Pumping Breast Milk at Work"  
bit.ly/dol-pumping-faq

**"Education-Specific FAQ"**  
bit.ly/dol-pumping-ed-faq

**A Better Balance**  
"Pregnant or Parenting at School"  
(Students' Rights under Title IX)  
bit.ly/bb-titleix-fact

**NJEA**  
"Building a Family" workshop series (webinars)  
njea.org/familysupport

**"Digital Resource Toolkit"**  
bit.ly/njea-baf-digital

Topics include pregnancy loss, overcoming infertility, the adoption/fostering process, equitable birth outcomes and parental mental health, paid leave access, and lactation rights for educators.

---

*Dr. Lauren Zucker is an English teacher at Northern Highlands Regional High School in Allendale. She serves as membership chair for her local association and represents Bergen County on the Women in Education Committee. Zucker writes about teaching and research at laurenzucker.org.*



**njea**

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.  
Human and Civil  
Rights Celebration



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Saturday, January 18, 2025 • Noon to 4 p.m.

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## Join your fellow members at the annual Black Tie Celebration of NJEA 51<sup>st</sup> Human & Civil Rights Award Luncheon

**Event includes:** Cocktail Reception from 12 – 1 p.m.

Awards Ceremony & Luncheon to begin at 1 p.m.

*"Education must enable one to sift and weigh evidence, to discern the true from the false, the real from the unreal, and the facts from the fiction." ~ MLK, Jr.*



# TEACHER LEADERSHIP

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NJEA's Teacher Leader Academy is a N.J. Department of Education approved one-year program for candidates seeking to earn the NJ Teacher Leader Endorsement.



For more details, visit  
[njea.org/tla](http://njea.org/tla)

Teacher leaders create new models of professional learning, develop new systems to monitor student progress, connect with families and communities and advocate for the profession.

Apply today to join a dynamic community of educators who are finding ways to lead from the classroom as they share ideas, support their colleagues, and work with school and district leaders to create systemic change that supports high-quality teaching and learning.

WEB: [njea.org/tla](http://njea.org/tla)

EMAIL: [teacherleader@njea.org](mailto:teacherleader@njea.org)



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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# COOL STUFF



## LOOKING TO FULFILL CIVICS REQUIREMENTS FOR 3RD-8TH GRADE?

The New Jersey State Bar Foundation has released free civics curriculum guides to help teachers participate in its Law Fair and Law Adventure mock trial competitions. Law Fair and Law Adventure help to fulfill the new State mandated civics education requirements. In these competitions, students and their teachers write original mock trial cases according to rules provided. The entry deadline is Jan. 31. Visit [mocktrial.njsbf.org](http://mocktrial.njsbf.org).



## NEA READ ACROSS AMERICA CALENDAR AVAILABLE

The Read Across America calendar is now available. With a unique theme each month and selections for elementary, middle and young adult readers, it's a fantastic way to explore diverse books for your collection. Each recommended title comes with resources to help you bring these stories to life. You'll find activity suggestions, discussion questions and additional title recommendations that connect to the themes of the stories.

Visit the Read Across New Jersey page at [njea.org/ranj](http://njea.org/ranj) for this calendar and other resources.



## 2025 NEW JERSEY HALL OF FAME EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Did you know that educators receive free access to the New Jersey Hall of Fame (NJHOF) at American Dream? Just bring your valid school ID when you visit. It's the perfect way to preview the experience before planning your next field trip. The NJHOF is also granting one complimentary field trip to school districts in New Jersey through the end of 2024.

The application windows are now open for the 2025 New Jersey Hall of Fame Areté Scholarship and Essay Contest. This year, NJHOF is expanding these programs to include four Areté recipients and three essay contest winners.

Find more information about New Jersey Hall of Fame's educational programming and free lessons at [NJHallofFame.org/learn](http://NJHallofFame.org/learn) or email Alexandra Genova at [alexandra@njhalloffame.org](mailto:alexandra@njhalloffame.org).



## ESSAY CONTEST: WHO BELONGS IN THE NEW JERSEY HALL OF FAME?

NJEA and the New Jersey Hall of Fame invite students to shape the future of the NJHOF by recommending potential inductees—living or deceased. Nominations can include famous people or even ordinary citizens who do extraordinary things. Students should research or interview, if possible, the person they wish to nominate and write an essay no longer than 500 words, typed and double-spaced.

The student must include their name, age, grade level as of their entry submission date, address, phone number, parent/guardian's name, school name and school district. If the essay is a school project, the student should include the teacher's name who assigned the activity.

There are three submission categories: Grades 3-5, Grades 6-8, and Grades 9-11. A panel of representatives from the NJEA and NJHOF will judge the entries. The winning students' nominations will be forwarded to the New Jersey Hall of Fame Academy for induction consideration the following calendar year.

All essays must be postmarked or timestamped by March 21, 2025, to be eligible. Send entries to New Jersey Hall of Fame Contest, c/o Meredith Barnes, NJEA, PO Box 1211 Trenton, NJ 08607-1211, or email [mbarnes@njea.org](mailto:mbarnes@njea.org) with NJHOF Essay Contest in the subject line.

For more information about the New Jersey Hall of Fame, visit [njhalloffame.org](http://njhalloffame.org).



## Holding hands and helping out

### Meet 2024 Union County ESP of the Year Jennifer Galik

Jennifer Galik spends a lot of time reassuring parents. As the administrative assistant to the director of Special Services in Union Township Public Schools, she works closely with preschool parents who are beginning their educational journey.

"I work with a lot of very wonderful, but very nervous, parents who are dealing with the potential of a child with some level of disability," Galik says. "I do a lot of hand-holding, reassuring, explaining and explaining again. But I also generate data for the department for state reports and for general purposes. I deal with the Special Education Medicaid Initiative (SEMI). These students require greater services, so SEMI reimburses districts for some of the costs."

Galik has worked in education for 31 years, 26 of those in the Department of Special Services.

"People might not see it, but I feel like I've made a difference in people's lives," Galik says. "I've worked there for so long and I know the staff so well. I love the work that I do because it gives me enough diversity and challenges to keep me happy throughout the day. I have a wide variety of duties, and it's interesting, touching and sometimes sad."

Being named the Union County Educational Support Professional of the Year was a wonderful surprise for Galik.

"After so many years of working in the schools, it made me feel amazing to be named the Union County ESP of the Year," Galik says. "It was a surprise!"

Galik has been an active member of her union since her second year in the district.

"I've always been a strong union member," she says. "I've picketed, and I've gone to Trenton to advocate



for members. If they need someone on a committee, I'll serve on the committee. I know that the union is only as strong as its members. Without the strong participation of the members, you don't have power when it comes to negotiating and protecting the rights of the other members. Being named the Union County ESP of the Year means so much to me because it feels like I'm being recognized for all of my work."

# Attorney general launches anti-bias public awareness campaign

## “No Hate in the Garden State”

By David Bander, Esq.

The New Jersey Attorney General’s Office has created a public awareness campaign and distributed new material emphasizing the state’s commitment to ensuring that all students and school employees are able to learn and work in a safe educational environment that is free from discrimination.

The initiative, “No Hate in the Garden State,” organizes relevant anti-bias materials in one place and allows simplified reporting of potential bias incidents, which can be reported anonymously. No Hate in the Garden State has its own website at [nohatenj.gov](http://nohatenj.gov).

Bias incidents are defined as any act that targets a person, group of people or property because of membership in a protected category. They can include behavior such as name calling, using offensive language or gestures and writing graffiti on property.

According to the attorney general, bias incidents have increased in New Jersey in recent years. In the state’s most recently released Bias Incident Report (see sidebar), there were 2,211 bias incidents reported in 2022. This is a 53% increase over the 1,447 incidents reported in 2020. Clearly, continued vigilance is needed.

For noncriminal incidents, the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination (LAD), the state’s primary anti-discrimination law offers recourse. The LAD protects students and school employees from discrimination or harassment based on race, sex, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression and other protected characteristics. It also requires schools to respond to incidents, proactively address the potential for such incidents and take reasonable steps to end discrimination or harassment.

The guidance for K-12 schools (see sidebar) clarifies their role in meeting their obligations under the LAD and ensuring a supportive environment, including four key steps:

- **Assess:** Schools should comprehensively assess their current anti-bias policies and use data to review whether students in protected categories are disproportionately over-classified as having disabilities, underrepresented in advanced courses and programs or subjected to discipline.
- **Educate:** Schools should educate by providing professional development and anti-bias training, ensuring that instruction reflects the state’s curricular mandates and holding events throughout the school year to focus on bias prevention.
- **Innovate:** Schools should innovate by considering new approaches to school discipline and engaging families and community members in larger discussions.
- **Reflect:** Schools should reflect on how well they are living up to their goals, celebrate successes and openly reaffirm their commitment to preventing acts of bias. The guidance encourages collaboration to eliminate bias, and all members of the school community have an important role to play in this effort.

If you are interested in additional resources on this topic, please review the “No Hate in the Garden State” website and related materials at [nohatenj.gov](http://nohatenj.gov).



## Resources

**No Hate in the Garden State website**  
[nohatenj.gov](http://nohatenj.gov)

**New Jersey Office of the Attorney General**  
“Bias Incidence Report: 2021-2022”  
[bit.ly/njbias-21-22](https://bit.ly/njbias-21-22)

**New Jersey Division on Civil Rights**  
Guidance: “Addressing Bias in K-12 Schools”  
[bit.ly/njbias-guidance](https://bit.ly/njbias-guidance)

**New Jersey Law Against Discrimination**  
[bit.ly/njlad](https://bit.ly/njlad)

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# NJEA Report

## Paterson renames street in honor of former PEA President Peter Tirri

By Angel Boose



State, county and local leaders came to Paterson to celebrate the naming of Pete Tirri Way. From left: PEA President John McEntee (left), retired Paterson Superintendent Eileen Shafer, NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty, Passaic County Commissioner Dell McCall, daughter Angela Tirri, PEA 1st VP Charles Ferrer Sr. (behind Angela), son Vince Tirri, wife Fran Tirri, Paterson Mayor Andre Sayegh, Pete Tirri, Passaic County Commissioner Sandi Lazzara, Paterson Councilman Luis Velez, Assemblyman Benjie Wimberly, City Councilwoman at Large Dr. Lilisa Mimms, Paterson Superintendent Dr. Laurie Newell and Commissioner Valerie Freeman.

In the city of Paterson, Straight Street between 20th and 21st avenues, has been renamed “Pete Tirri Way” in honor of longtime Paterson resident, educator and union leader Peter A. Tirri. The renaming recognizes Tirri’s decades of dedication to the students and educators of Paterson. He served as the president of the Paterson Education Association for 42 years, leaving behind a great legacy.

A street naming ceremony was held to honor Tirri and unveil the new street name outside of the Paterson Education Association building on Friday, Sept. 27. It was attended by city officials, school officials, NJEA state and local leaders, as well as Tirri’s previous PEA officers, members, family and friends.

“It’s no surprise the street being renamed is Straight Street because Pete has always been a straight shooter,”

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said Sanid Lazzara, deputy director of the Passaic County Board of County Commissioners. Lazzara is also an NJREA member who retired from Woodland Park.

Born and raised in Paterson, Tirri loves the people who live and work there. He is the proud product of the Paterson public school system. He attended School #5, School #12 and graduated from Central High School in 1964. After graduating with a bachelor’s degree from Paterson State College and, after the college’s name changed, a master’s degree from William Paterson College, he applied to work as a math teacher in the city that he loved.

Tirri began his teaching career in the Paterson School District in 1969 at School #30, which was later named Martin Luther King Jr. School. He eventually realized math was his forte and was assigned to solely teach that subject. In 1978, he was transferred to School #12 as a basic skills intervention math teacher.

## Becoming an advocate

Like most leaders, Tirri ran for PEA president because he felt there needed to be more effective leadership in the local association. Once elected, he immediately got to work with his team of five officers. Their work and dedication began to quickly attract more involvement in the association. Members saw the work that was being done and, because of Tirri's positive approach, they wanted to help.

With increasing member involvement, the association outgrew its existing space. PEA went from conducting union business in one room of a building on West Broadway to purchasing a three-story building. The building has since been paid in full.

Tirri attributes much of his success to many of the great teams he had throughout his 42-year presidency and prides himself on bringing people together.

"They dedicated themselves to the work—for years—because of what was being done, because of us working together," Tirri said. Many of the people he worked with over the years were present for the street naming ceremony, which is a testament to the kind of man Tirri is.

## Leaving a legacy

"Dad would never imagine his name being on a street sign," said Tirri's son Vince, who serves in the Army National Guard. Vince reminisced about how tough it was growing up in a union household, but how he learned to appreciate it as an army officer.

"Our family's focus became what we can do for others," Vince said. "Because of my dad, I had the greatest teacher in leadership."

PEA will forever benefit from the selfless work of Tirri and his team.

"His legacy is etched in the countless victories he secured at the bargaining table and the unwavering support he provided for all employees" said Andre Sayegh, mayor of the city of Paterson.

## Honoring a true leader

The idea to name a street after Tirri was initiated by PEA's current president. After looking out of the windows of PEA's office day in and day out, President John McEntee thought the street sign outside of the window should bear Peter Tirri's name.

"It's unbelievable what things live beyond his time as president," said PEA President John McEntee. "So many people benefit from his work."

PEA has a 295-page contract book with countless protections because Tirri went to jail for the educators he served to have better wages, daily preps and duty-free lunches.

"With Pete's generation beginning to retire and move on to different things, I realized how important they were



Retired Paterson EA President Pete Tirri speaks at the street dedication ceremony. Behind him is Paterson Mayor Andre Sayegh.

not only to the city and the union, but to the organized labor union," McEntee said.

Tirri's impact extended to the heart of Paterson. He was a steadfast partner, collaborating with city officials and community leaders to address the challenges facing not only educators, but the students and the schools.

NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty shared that Tirri made his mark felt across the state for an entire generation.

"He was a long-time member of NJEA's Delegate Assembly, the governing body that steers our union," Beatty shared. "True to form, he was more than just a participating member. Surprising no one in this room, he took on leadership roles and used his voice, guided by his passion for supporting members to move our union forward."

Tirri chaired the NJEA Urban Education Committee, advocating for state-level policies that impacted schools in urban areas across the state. He also served as a member of the NJEA Working Conditions Committee, going on to chair that committee until retiring in 2015.

"He was a staunch advocate for ensuring our schools were healthy and safe for our students before that was a common phrase that we all used," Beatty said. "Peter knew that educators' working conditions were students' learning conditions. He fought tirelessly to ensure our students had nothing but the best conditions in which to learn."

## A lasting tribute

Tirri has advice to current and future association presidents.

"Be prepared to deal with any and everything," Tirri said. "You'll never believe all of what can happen." He said officers need to trust one another and work on building a good relationship, which includes "hanging out together."

PEA flourished under Tirri's leadership, becoming a powerful force for positive change in the Paterson community. Pete Tirri Way will forever bear his name as a testament to his enduring legacy and a reminder of the impact one individual—and his team—can have on a community.

# NJEA celebrates members who stepped up to run and lead

## At least 230 NJEA members ran for public office across the state

While most of the attention was focused on federal races, the Nov. 5 election saw at least 230 NJEA members on ballots across New Jersey. They were running for offices from county commissioner to local school board and everything in between. At least 180 of them won their races, including many who ran, and won, against radically anti-education candidates.

NJEA members have long stepped up to serve in political office. NJEA President Sean M. Spiller, who is running in the 2025 New Jersey gubernatorial race and is NJEA's endorsed candidate, praised his fellow members who pursued office this year.

"I'm so proud of every NJEA member who stepped up to run because they want to build a better world for the children we educate," Spiller said. "And I am excited for all those who won their races and now get the opportunity to take their advocacy to a new level. In choosing careers in public education, we've already demonstrated that we are deeply invested in the future of this state, of our country and of the world. We are innovators, problem solvers and consensus builders. I believe our state is stronger when educators are at the table making decisions and setting policies. I'm proud to represent all of these members who will have that opportunity after this election."



# THIS IS *our* TIME!



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**SPILLER**for  
GOVERNOR **2025**

## Please join me **TODAY**



*This material is produced by NJEA and is intended exclusively for NJEA members.*



# Plainfield EA wins 2024 NJEA Jim George Collective Bargaining Award

At the 2024 NJEA Jim George Collective Bargaining Summit, held on Oct. 25-26, the Plainfield Education Association (PEA) was named the winner of the Jim George Collective Bargaining Award.

Their story was covered in the November 2024 *NJEA Review*, which explained how bargaining a new contract in 2023 and 2024 was personal for the PEA. 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 was a landmark settlement that is a statewide leader.

PEA President Keith Coston accepted the award on behalf of PEA.

The awards ceremony was a highlight of the conference, which brought together 318 members from across the state to network, share ideas and learn new skills to help them advocate for themselves and their members. This year's conference featured lab style workshops that facilitated discussions all focused on the steps involved with preparing for negotiations.

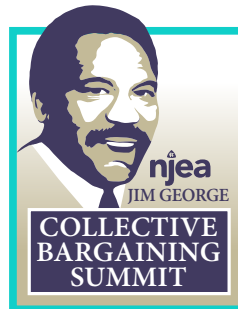
## Jim George Collective Bargaining Award finalists

The NJEA Jim George Collective Bargaining Award is presented annually to an association that has accomplished one or more of the following:

- Bargained one or more new contractual provisions not already found in another affiliate's contract.
- Conducted an extraordinary community organizing effort that resulted in a contract settlement.
- Used the bargaining experience to propel new members into association involvement and leadership positions.
- Achieved a particularly good settlement, in comparison to the state average, in salary increases, health benefits, professional development and/or member protection.
- This year, after reviewing the 13 nominations, five finalists were selected. They were:
  - Belleville Education Association
  - Edison Education Association
  - Hammonton Education Association
  - Irvington Education Association
  - Plainfield Education Association



The Plainfield Education Association is this year's winner of the Jim George Collective Bargaining Award. Seated, from left: NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson, PEA 2nd VP Lori Davis, PEA 1st VP Melissa Logan, PEA President Keith Coston, UniServ Field Rep Maryanne Rodriguez, NJEA VP Steve Beatty. Standing from left: PEA Negotiations Team members Andre Payton, Faye Clark, Nyla Glover, Keisha Gaye Peynado, Jodi Byers, Gregory Powell, Denise Taylor, Lori DiSarro and Karen Richards.



## Who was Jim George?

Jim George was a driving force in NJEA's quest to secure collective bargaining rights for public school employees. His long relationship with NJEA began when he was a teacher and union leader in Cinnaminson. An activist at heart, he served the Cinnaminson Teachers' Association as its treasurer and then local president.

At the forefront in the fight for member rights, George is best known for his stirring remarks at the 1967 Asbury Park Rally for Teacher Rights. It was then that George spoke the words that would become the inspiration behind NJEA's Collective Bargaining Summit: "A new order is at hand. A new generation has been conceived—and we are not afraid."

George joined the NJEA UniServ staff in 1967 and served members in Burlington County until 1986 when he became a UniServ coordinator serving the southern portion of the state. For 28 years prior to his untimely death in 1995, George inspired NJEA members, leaders and staff. It was George who first suggested that NJEA hold a collective bargaining summit to invigorate the association's commitment to bargaining. His legacy lives on through the summit and award that bear his name.



# AN AGENT OF CHANGE FOR STUDENTS

MEET 2024-25 NJ STATE TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Stefanie Lachenauer

By Kathryn Coulibaly

Stefanie Lachenauer was one of those children who knew they would grow up to be a teacher. The oldest of three sisters, she loved everything about school.

Lachenauer grew up in Nutley, but as much as she loved school, she faced some challenges.

"I struggled with stress," Lachenauer recalls. "I dealt with some bullying and often felt left out. I had that constant feeling of never being good enough. My grades were good, but no amount of clubs or activities could make me feel like I was enough."

Lachenauer reinvented herself in college. She earned her undergraduate degree from Douglass College, Rutgers University in 2006 and went on to earn master's degree in education from Rutgers Graduate School of Education in 2007.

"When I got to college, I had a blank slate to truly discover myself," Lachenauer says. "I never saw myself as a leader before, but when I got to college, I transformed. I was the president of my class and served in student government, including as the executive vice president. I also helped run the Save Douglass College campaign."

At times, though, Lachenauer still struggled with feelings of self-doubt.

"I actually failed a class in college in my first semester," Lachenauer recalls. "It was so hard for me, but it was the best thing for me to go through. I learned a lot about resilience, and that a failure isn't a true failure if you learn from it. I retook that class and earned an A!"

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Lachenauer had a great student teaching experience in South Brunswick, with cooperating teacher Neel Desai. Desai does a lot of mentoring across the state with different groups and Lachenauer really appreciated having a good mentor who pushed her to continue learning and perfecting her craft.

During her time at Douglass, Lachenauer had an externship over winter break with Susan Lacy, the principal of Village Elementary School in Montgomery.

"I had the opportunity to observe many different classrooms," Lachenauer says. "It really helped me identify what kind of a school environment I wanted to be in. I knew that I needed a school where I could keep learning, keep growing and have the ability to take risks and try new things. I always want to keep challenging myself to be a better educator and to continue to learn more. I chose Montgomery because I wanted to be in a place where they saw more in me and there was room for growth and trying new things."

## Teaching what she wished she'd learned

Lachenauer began her career at the lower middle school teaching social studies and language arts. Twelve years ago, she moved to Montgomery Upper Middle School, first teaching seventh and eighth grade social studies, but recently she has embraced a new challenge.

"I want to help kids know who they are and love themselves," Lachenauer says. "Their grades don't define them. One of the things that I love about my job right now is that I am teaching my students the skills that I wish I'd had back in school."

In her own life, Lachenauer has worked on building her



Lachenauer teaches four classes of Skills for Success in which students are given the opportunity to explore their interests, personality types and career goals. With every class she teaches, she incorporates mindfulness strategies to help her students manage their mental health.

self-care and stress management strategies. She has two yoga certifications, three mindfulness certifications and is a trained trauma-informed practitioner, coach and trainer. She found these strategies to be so beneficial, she shares them with staff and students and is completing her first book, *Let the Glitter Settle: Mindfulness for Teens*.

"I was always really into social-emotional learning (SEL), but it was around 2012 that I really incorporated mindfulness and other practices," Lachenauer says. "I'm passionate about kids loving themselves as they are, but also seeing themselves as agents of change. I was able to create two courses that really support students."

Lachenauer teaches four classes of Skills for Success. Together, they identify their strengths and personal learning styles, learn stress relief strategies and the science of stress. They take personality assessments similar to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Lachenauer conducts lessons on success, risk and failure. Students work on career exploration with the Future Me project. There are also mindfulness lessons incorporated throughout the course, so students have a chance to practice frequently and build that skillset.

"I want them to use everything they learn in my class to think about what they want their future to look like," Lachenauer says. "When you know who you are, you can make better choices for yourself, and you know what works for you."

### Learning to work toward a common goal

Lachenauer also teaches Global Leadership based on the United Nations Global Goals for Sustainability.

"We use the design thinking process and pick one of the U.N. goals and work on a solution that's culturally appropriate," Lachenauer says. "We study how the problem has been addressed before and look at what works and what doesn't."

Montgomery Upper Middle School is one of only 37 schools in New Jersey with a unified elective program where special education students learn alongside general education students.

"Most of the unified classes are arts and music, but we also included the Global Leadership program," Lachenauer says. "It is powerful to watch our students of varying backgrounds and abilities work together toward a common goal to create positive change in the community."

### Traveling with a purpose

Lachenauer brings that same energy to her work with Montgomery's Youth Action Board, a community group of high school students that she founded and facilitates who meet to address the issues facing them and their peers. Funded through the Municipal Alliance and Youth Services Commission, the board conducts social media



Lachenauer collaborates closely with her colleagues, including Cory Weingart, Young Entrepreneurs and Skills for the Digital World teacher, and Whitney Ehnert, sculptures and ceramics, painting, and unified art teacher.

campaigns and creates events and outreach to address the issues their peers are facing. In 2023, the board held a Mental Health Matters Event to help break the stigma of getting mental health support. In 2024, they created an event about social media and its impact on youth.

Lachenauer's energy and global mindset aren't just assets in her community, they've also taken her around the world. She has presented at conferences in Houston and Dallas, Texas, and Berlin, Germany. Her work has had global reach both in person and virtually.

"I like to travel with purpose," Lachenauer says. "I've traveled to more than 50 countries, sometimes with students. I've done a bunch of service learning projects with Education First and Habitat for Humanity. With students, we built mud brick homes in Honduras, a sidewalk in Argentina and a road in Peru."

Lachenauer founded the Joyful Journeys Travel & Adventure Club where she organizes student and adult travel. She has partnered with Education First since 2014 when she spent a summer volunteering at the Mariposa Foundation. She has led over 10 student tours and two adult tours. This summer they are going to Japan on a STEM tour.

"I don't speak great Spanish yet, but I was inspired by Mrs. Perrotta, my high school Spanish teacher," Lachenauer says. "Thanks to her influence, I've been to 10 out of 22 Spanish-speaking countries and developed a love of the language and cultures."

## I want to help kids know who they are and love themselves.

These global experiences in education are inspired, in part, by her beloved grandmother.

"My grandparents lived in Germany but neither went to school past the eighth grade," Lachenauer recalls. "They instilled in me the importance of education. My grandmother lived with me during the pandemic, and she told me that she always wished she could have been a teacher. I remember feeling a sense of guilt for the opportunities she didn't have that I got to enjoy. Sometimes you compare yourself to other people who seem to have fancy careers. But to hear my grandmother, who I loved most in the world, say that she wanted to be a teacher changed the way I looked at it."

### Self Care Days

In 2020, Lachenauer created Self Care Days for her school with the Compassionate Care Team, her school's trauma informed group. This came as a response from the pandemic. They now have a Self Care Day once a marking period where they teach students coping skills, stress management and executive functioning skills. They teach



Lachenauer works with Montgomery's Youth Action Board, a community group for high school students who meet to address the issues facing them and their peers.



Montgomery Upper Middle School is one of only 37 schools in New Jersey with a unified elective program where special education students learn alongside general education students.

students about wellness through the wellness wheel, which can help individuals identify core health values and goals.

These events have been so successful they are now operating district wide.

**Opportunities to visit schools statewide**

Lachenauer is proud to have been named the Somerset County Teacher of the Year and now, the New Jersey State Teacher of the Year.

“It’s the greatest honor to be able to represent our state and support the amazing things we do here,” Lachenauer says. “I’m really excited to share where I can, to listen and to learn about our education across the state. Educational programming may vary, but student and staff wellness is very important to me. I’m excited to visit other schools and share my story about what I’ve learned and help others on their journey.”

Lachenauer will have more time to visit other classrooms as the Teacher of the Year. Among the perks of being named the Teacher of the Year is a six-month sabbatical where she will work with the New Jersey Department of Education in Trenton.

If you’d like to connect with Lachenauer to have her visit your school, you can email her at [2025NJSTOY@gmail.com](mailto:2025NJSTOY@gmail.com).

In addition to the sabbatical, courtesy of program sponsor ETS, Lachenauer also will receive \$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 also will provide complimentary access to all major NJEA workshops and training opportunities, a \$1,500 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. 🏠



The Dover Support Staff Association achieved significant goals in its new contract: Standing from left: Sarah Klein, Olga Cifuentes, DSSA President Katherine Aragon, Sarita Madrid, Rosita Robles and DSSA Secretary Mariluz Colon. Seated from left: Michael Morales, Nestor I. Barradas. Not pictured: DSSA VP Barbara Dominguez.

## Dover Support Staff Association builds new bridges at the negotiations table

By David Yastremski

With a new negotiations team, the Dover Support Staff Association (DSSA) recently reached a three-year agreement with the Dover Board of Education that achieved some significant goals. These included bringing two new job classifications into the association and establishing seniority for bus drivers and aides while making significant improvements to salary guides across all divisions.

Representing secretaries, custodians, maintenance and grounds personnel, bus drivers, computer repair technicians, and newly added bus aides and community liaisons, the DSSA successfully reached a deal despite several team members being new to the union and all but two being new to the bargaining experience.

With a team composed of many new to the negotiations process, and several who are relatively new to the district, DSSA prioritized training to ensure that all team members approached the table well-informed and prepared for the process. Because of a departing superintendent, the team worked hard to reach a deal before a new superintendent arrived. DSSA President Katherine Aragon stated the process needed to be quick, but the team stepped up, participated in training and put in the time to get the job done.

"We held several meetings where I asked for volunteers, but not many members were volunteering," Aragon says. "We just kept asking and people started volunteering."

Mariluz Colon, a Dover employee for 23 years, who was a new team member, stated that the members were never asked before.

"I decided I needed to step up," Colon says.

Aragon and Colon, both officers of the association worked hard to recruit a diverse group of team members: Rosita Robles represented school community liaisons; Michael Morales, the only member with prior negotiation experience, represented the custodians; Nestor I. Barradas represented grounds and maintenance staff; Olga Cifuentes represented bus aides; Sarita Madrid represented bus drivers; and Sarah Klein and Barbara Dominguez represented secretaries. They all worked closely with Region 17 NJEA UniServ field rep Antionette Blaustein.

Of the nine members of the negotiations team, all but one were brand new to the experience, and over half of the team had less than four years with the district.

"Having their perspectives at the table was very important to make sure everyone's concerns were addressed," Aragon says. "When Antoinette had a request,



everybody went to work to get information.” she says. Each team member connected with their groups to provide the necessary information and gather feedback for the team.

Olga Cifuentes, a school bus aide with four years of experience, commented that those conversations were sometimes difficult because many of her colleagues were new members who didn’t understand the amount of time it takes to negotiate and how the team needed to make difficult decisions.

“They asked for things that may not have been negotiated, and they didn’t agree with that,” Cifuentes said.

“Although everyone came back from their individual group meetings with different questions or concerns, we always came together at every meeting, to figure out the next step or the next question to ask. Sometimes, those conversations were difficult to have,” Aragon recalls.

Sarita Madrid, a second-year bus driver, also participated as a first-year team member. During the last round of negotiations, there was no bus driver on the negotiations team. As the youngest member of the team, Aragon commended Madrid for stepping into a challenging role, as she was tasked with gathering input and providing feedback to drivers who worked in the district for many years.

“She would have to go back to the drivers, many of whom have worked in the district for years, to ask questions, get feedback and listen to their concerns,” Aragon says.

For the first time, two additional roles—bus aides and school community liaisons—were represented as part of the bargaining unit. Rosita Robles, who has served the school in multiple roles over the past eight years, offered an additional benefit to being at the table.

“I believe the board of education has a better understanding of our roles,” Robles says.

Aragon notes that board of education members don’t frequently understand the roles of educational support professionals in the district. She says that several of the team members were invited to share their individual perspectives and stories directly with the board. This opportunity allowed DSSA members to address board members’ questions at the table so they could fully understand their challenges and thus help support staff better serve their schools and students.

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*David Yastremski teaches English and Communication at Ridge High School in Bernards Township. He serves on the negotiations team for the Bernards Township Education Association and treasurer for the Somerset County Education Association. Yastremski is a part-time NJEA Communications Consultant. He can be reached at [dyastremski@njea.org](mailto:dyastremski@njea.org).*

## Settlement highlights

Representing secretaries, custodians, maintenance and grounds personnel, bus drivers, computer repair technicians, and newly added aides and community liaisons, the DSSA successfully reached a deal despite several team members being new to the union and all but two being new to the bargaining experience.

Some highlights of the new three-year contract include:

- 3.0% increase on the guide each year.
- \$13,000 for guide improvement for each year.
- Additional bereavement and family illness days.
- New salary schedules for the community liaisons and bus aides.
- A defined workday and year for the bus aides and community liaisons.
- Bus aides and drivers will receive two polo shirts, a reflective vest and a quarter zip jacket per year and a jacket every other year.
- Overtime seniority language for bus drivers and aides.
- Defined language for uniforms for custodial/maintenance staff with an increase for boot reimbursement.

Blaustein echoed how the entire team stepped up to the task.

“This team was exceptional because despite having little prior experience in negotiations, they stepped up to the challenge with remarkable professionalism, dedication and adaptability,” Blaustein says. “They navigated complex discussions with confidence and maintained a focus on achieving the best possible outcome.”

Reflecting on the experience, the negotiations team shared a newfound confidence regarding the union’s role in their lives. They shared that some members don’t understand what the union does for them. As a team, they acknowledged they now know what to consider for the next time.

Michael Morales, a school custodian with 15 years of experience, highlighted that the conversations started during this process are far from over, and the important conversations continue even though they settled their contract.

“We continue to talk, planning for the next time,” he says.

Aragon stresses that the contract is the “everything, everyday” of our jobs, stressing that learning about how the memorandum of agreement is developed and the specific language that is needed requires a lot of time, meetings and conversation with members.

“This team’s performance is a testament to their hard work and commitment,” Blaustein says. “They have set a strong example of what can be accomplished when we work together and rise to the occasion.” 🇺🇸



# Let's not fear having **COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS**

*By Syreeta L. Carrington*

It was a Friday in April, hours before school would let out for spring break, when a colleague contacted me to inform me about a situation that he'd recently been made aware of. A group of seventh grade boys, "Friend Group 1," accused another group of seventh grade boys, "Friend Group 2," of having called them names such as "hoodlums" and "thugs" outside of school. Group 1 consisted of boys who identified as Black, Black and white, and Black and Latino. Group 2 consisted of boys who identified as white, Asian and Latino, white and Latino, and white and Asian.

It had spilled over into my colleague's social studies classroom as well. He gathered as much preliminary information as he could. But because he didn't teach all of the boys, he was limited in what he could do. In the course of his initial conversation with the boys he did teach, he learned they wanted to deal with what had transpired in a restorative justice setting.

That is why he reached out to me. I am the restorative justice teacher in my building.

Within restorative justice is the philosophy that when we are in relationship with one another, we are less likely

to cause harm. However, we live in the real world, and I work in a middle school, so conflict is inevitable.

While part of my job is aimed at shifting the climate and culture of our building, I also help to build and maintain relationships, whether they be student to student, student to adult, or adult to adult. It also includes working to repair harm and transforming conflict.

## **Sitting circle in theory**

The work of repairing harm and transforming conflict often occurs within the context of "sitting circle." Sitting circle is a term of art and one of the seminal practices of restorative justice. It is a device-free zone where participants literally sit in a circle with nothing obstructive in the way such as tables or desks. Sitting circle is a means by which conversation is facilitated.

In circle, there are norms and guidelines that we follow. We also employ "rounds," which are questions or prompts designed to give everyone a chance to be heard. The subject matter of circles depends on the matter at hand and can range from celebratory circles to circles that deal with harm. It is important to note that sitting circle to address harm does not guarantee an outcome, but it does provide a safe space for participants to address it.

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*Syreeta Carrington is a restorative justice specialist at Glenfield Middle School in Montclair.*



Restorative justice is the philosophy that when we are in relationship with one another, we are less likely to cause harm.

### Sitting circle in practice

I told my colleague that I put the boys on my schedule for the week we returned from break. In the meantime, I spoke with a much beloved school counselor in my building, Stevena Sims, with whom I work closely and who is also trained in restorative justice. I filled her in and asked her if she wanted to facilitate the circle with me. She agreed.

The first session with the boys got off to an interesting start. Before we even began, one student approached me privately and asked if he could also participate as he was part of Friend Group 2. I invited him to join.

When the boys began trickling in, some were a bit animated, while others were more taciturn. Some of the boys in Friend Group 1 told me that another student should be included. I also invited him to join, and we waited for him to arrive.

Although they were all familiar with sitting circle, they looked at me not quite knowing what to expect in this particular context. I started off by thanking them for requesting a restorative justice session as they could have very easily decided to “resolve” their conflict in another, less productive way. Since no one was especially eager to “go first,” I shared with them the information that had been shared with me and invited them to correct anything that I’d gotten wrong. That seemed to get them talking.

The boys stated that there was some overlap between the two friend groups. They informed us that there was one boy in particular whom they believed should also be invited to participate. Unfortunately, we only had 40

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**We engaged in some  
difficult and uncomfortable  
conversations, but they  
leaned into the work.**

minutes for our session, but it was clear to me early on that we were going to need at least another session. I pointed out that our time was short and asked them if they would agree to come back again next week. They all agreed.

I told them that in the meantime I would speak to the additional student. Because this is middle school and things move at the speed of light, by the time I got the opportunity to speak to the student, he’d already heard about the restorative justice session and expressed his desire to participate.

Over the course of a month, Mrs. Sims and I had the privilege of working with this group of seventh grade boys. There were 11 in all.

Although our discussions centered on race and language, the boys in Friend Group 1 also reported having been excluded by the boys in Friend Group 2 when they wanted to join their after-school football game. However, it was revealed that they did allow one boy in the group to play.

## We have to be willing to put in the effort if we want to see the results.

In addition, boys in both friend groups shared that they either witnessed or had been on the receiving end of offensive and racist language. As we began to unpack their experiences, what became clear was that these young boys were also hurting because of the breakdown of relationships.

We spent five sessions listening to one another's perspectives and exploring topics. For example, one of our sessions was devoted to how race intersects with sports and economics. Mrs. Sims and I were very proud of these young boys. They were courageous. We engaged in some difficult and uncomfortable conversations, but they leaned into the work.

We spent our last session reflecting on our time together. Then the boys worked in small groups to see which group could build the tallest freestanding marshmallow and spaghetti tower. After the activity, we came back to circle for final thoughts and observations.

These are some of the sentiments that were shared:

- "I am glad that we had this time together. It made me feel better."
- "It taught me about words and how we need to think about them. It's possible that the words we use not only hurt us and others but can also hurt people who are in our families and are part of various communities."
- "I'm glad that we did this."

### There are no quick fixes

Like with most things in life, there are no quick fixes. That should not deter us.

We are already in competition with devices and social media, each vying for our students' attention. We cannot afford to forsake genuine, face-to-face conversations that have the power to connect and heal us. But first, we have to be willing to put in the effort if we want to see the results.

Our students deserve that. Our future depends on it.

### Advice for hard conversations

In my school, like in many other schools, we've had to grapple with instances of racism, antisemitism and homophobia. It is not enough to simply admonish the behavior and hope it doesn't occur again. We are in the

business of educating children and education remains our best defense against these societal ills.

We have to have the courage to have hard conversations with our students. They are already trying to figure it out to varying degrees of success within their social circles.

I am cognizant of the fact that not everyone can engage in the type of work that I have described, whether it's because of the time investment or the subject matter of the discussions. However, I want to encourage us to not shy away from having courageous conversations with our students and offer some advice about navigating them.

**You don't need to be trained in restorative justice to engage in most conversations with students.**

Before I became a restorative justice teacher, I taught social studies. I am aware that when students are "buzzing" about something, it can be nearly impossible to proceed with whatever the day's lesson is. However, sometimes we have to put aside our regularly scheduled program and address what is happening in the classroom.

What is required is a willingness to address the issue, setting guidelines for the discussion such as raising your hand to be acknowledged and imposing a time limit if it appears that the issue cannot be resolved within a specified timeframe.

You could say something like, "let's take 15 minutes to talk about what everyone is buzzing about, and then we'll proceed with the lesson." If 15 minutes isn't enough, and if you're willing to continue the discussion, offer them an alternate time—maybe after school or during recess—when you can give them space to continue the conversation.

Students will be grateful because you have sent the message that you prioritized their needs. One of the chief complaints that I often hear from students is that adults don't listen to them.

**If you hear something, say something.**

If a student says something, whether it is yelled in the hallway or in a classroom, don't pretend not to have heard it. If it's in the hallway you can calmly approach the student and pull them aside and ask them if you heard them correctly.

Keep in mind that tone matters. You can say something like, "Did I just hear you say...?" or "What did you mean by...?"

If the comment occurs in the classroom and you don't address it, your inaction signals to the other students in the class that you will do nothing about comments that they've probably been exposed to before. Sometimes just saying, "Stop it. That language will not be tolerated

in this classroom," is enough to get the message across. Students are looking to the adults to do something. They take their cues from us.

**Don't be afraid to consult with your colleagues and tap their strengths.**

Perhaps you're not comfortable with a particular subject matter. Instead of brushing it off and moving on, you can tell the students that you are not prepared to have this conversation at this time, but you would like to revisit it soon.

It may involve speaking to a student or a handful of students after class to gain a better understanding. However, it may require reaching out to colleagues who have more experience and may be more comfortable engaging in certain topics.

Maybe it's not the subject matter that's at issue. In my case, I'm quite comfortable having conversations about race. Sometimes, it's about the relationship. Although I pride myself on developing relationships with students, I know that some of my colleagues have better relationships with some students. If that is the case, I may consult with a colleague who can give me insight, or I may ask them if they would agree to assist me in having a conversation with a student. That is precisely why I asked Mrs. Sims to help facilitate the restorative justice sessions. In addition to being trained in restorative justice, she had meaningful relationships with the majority of the boys and could speak expertly on the topic of race.

The goal is to meet the need. If you're not best able to meet the need, endeavor to find someone who is. 🙏



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# How to dance with the AI devil

## Allowing AI in my ELA classroom

By Susan Carney

Teachers are rightly skeptical of Silicon Valley's announcements. The tech industry's pattern is to release its innovations into the world, and let society sort out the unintended consequences. Classroom fallout from cellphones and social media included the loss of students' self-esteem, shortened attention spans, classroom distractions, new avenues to bullying and mental health issues. When I discussed the proposed Congressional ban on TikTok with my ninth grade students last year, one female student declared, "I hope TikTok gets banned because it will save me."

But the release of generative AI tools has set off unprecedented fear among educators, laying at the schoolhouse doors one of the biggest challenges I've seen in 20 years of teaching.

Teachers immediately recognized AI's potential to help students cheat. In my discipline, English/language arts, colleagues and I worried that we would spend our weekends grading robot papers. We started banning computers in our classrooms and insisting on handwritten essays. We worried that students would lose their authentic

voice and the ability to do the hard work of writing. And we worried about many existential issues—an occupational hazard for those who regularly teach dystopian novels.

My panic and fears about generative AI haven't vanished, but I have shed some of my concerns and even found ways to use it to enhance my English/language arts classroom. I know what you are thinking. Invite AI into the classroom? Isn't that dancing with the devil? Well, folks, he is already here. So as David Bowie once sang, "Let's Dance."

### Learning the steps

I attended an NJEA workshop and other professional development programs to learn about generative AI designed for educators. Then I played. AI converted PDFs to PowerPoints, created quizzes in seconds and instantly produced rubrics. The products weren't perfect and needed adjustments, but I recognized that AI could lighten my workload. AI's weaknesses showed me that AI can assist, but not replace, teachers. Why couldn't the same be true for students?

And in fact, it is. When I looked at AI from the student's perspective and prompted AI to complete some of my classroom assignments, I learned that generative AI could

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*Susan Carney is an English/language arts teacher at River Dell High School in Oradell.*

complete the work, but not well; its essays were voiceless and had few details. No students hoping to earn good grades could simply allow AI to do their work. But in AI's weaknesses, I found a new tool to help me teach students research, writing and critical thinking skills that I previously feared AI would destroy.

Once I knew more, I invited my students into the process of learning with me. Don't worry about trying this. You are not giving students new ideas; they are already using AI. And do not fear that these "digital natives" will know more than you. They are prolific posters and content creators, but they often don't understand the risks, dangers and limitations of the technologies they are using.

Together we read articles and discussed AI. Students were amused by stories of attorneys who were disciplined because they submitted AI generated briefs filled with fictional case law to judges. They enjoyed examining AI generated images of the founding fathers created while Google's Gemini was being trained to be more inclusive. We had productive, interesting discussions of AI's limitations, hallucinations, biases and flaws. We learned about media literacy, fact-checking and inclusivity—all important topics in the ELA classroom.

Once everyone had dispensed with the myth that AI is flawless magic, we could begin exploring its abilities to enhance our work.

## Two stepping through the research process

English classrooms are at the forefront of teaching students to critically think about information, sources, accuracy and diverse viewpoints—indispensable skills in an age of misinformation. It is critical that students learn to use AI to enhance rather than fully perform their research.

My students began their research projects last year learning about generative AI's limitations as a research tool: AI hallucinates, makes up sources and sometimes does not have current information. I demonstrated many of these flaws live to my students by asking ChatGPT targeted questions.

Using more reliable websites and library databases, my students began their work. They struggled, however, to think of keywords and quickly abandoned rich topics, reporting that there was just no information to be found. This is understandable; their content knowledge and reading were limited. Rather than giving them keywords, I let them ask ChatGPT for some keywords. As my students found and read articles, they acquired additional keywords, and their knowledge grew. AI helped them begin that journey.

Once students had read multiple articles and proven they could conduct research, they laid out their notecards on a desk and organized their ideas, creating their own outlines. Then, they asked AI to generate an outline to compare to the one they created.

## AI can assist, but not replace, teachers. Why couldn't the same be true for students?

One student noted that AI had raised a counterargument he hadn't considered. As a result, he started searching for more information. Another student noted that the AI generated outline had "a more logical order" than hers so she was rethinking her paper's organization.

My students achieved the same research, media literacy and writing goals as in the past, but AI augmented their ideas and assisted their planning.

## The "write" moves and techniques

With no reliable AI detectors, AI's essay writing skills are English teachers' biggest fear. Battles with students and parents about AI-generated work are simply unwinnable. Many colleagues have abandoned computers and insisted on handwritten essays produced in class. They rightly want authentic work from their students because they value the art of writing.

I share their values, but timed in-class essays written on paper don't yield the best writing from all learners. Good writing is a process that involves multiple drafts and editing, both of which students are not willing to do when writing by hand under time pressure.

So, I invited AI into the process of teaching writing.

I gave students topics and had them prompt AI to generate a short essay on that topic. Then we had a class prompt-a-thon, where student teams prompted AI to give them improved essays. Working in groups, they not only learned to critique writing but also learned basic prompt engineering and the skill of iteration.

This activity was an eye-opener. Students' prompts surfaced misconceptions about the "rules of writing." Sometimes students couldn't articulate the goals of the essay. They also needed guidance about the ethical use of AI in writing and proper citation for it.

One student concluded: "AI didn't really write a strong essay. It would be faster for me to just write it."

Teaching tone with AI can also be fun. Students asked AI to write an email to a teacher about an unfair test. They

## Facing your fears

- **Educate:** Learn about AI and play with this technology.
- **Invite:** Let students help write classroom policy.
- **Experiment:** Ask AI to generate assignments that you give students.
- **Evaluate:** Reinvent your assessments.

started with an angry tone, then changed to a deferential tone. (This year I'm hoping to try out last summer's hot TikTok words—demure and mindful, anybody?) As students analyzed the emails, they noted which changes and choices adjusted the tone. We asked: was it successful? How can we improve the output to better reflect the tone? This is writing and rhetorical analysis all in one lesson.

### Interpretive dance

AI's large language models have been trained on many great novels and novel summaries. Ask it about most books assigned in your classrooms. It offers interpretations and summarizes key ideas, much like the Spark Notes my students access online.

The new reality of AI forced me to reevaluate my reading assignments. When students enter my classroom, they are not taking multiple choice reading quizzes—which have never been the best measure of who actually read the book.

Try an AI reading check like a "Character Chat" to test their reading, imagination and creativity. When prompting AI, we ask it to adopt a persona; in this activity we applied that by prompting AI to answer our questions as a character in the book. I reviewed students' prompts and instructions, looking for evidence of reading. Then students asked AI to answer their questions in the persona of that character. When done, their groups evaluated how well AI captured the character's personality. This is a creative character analysis.

Students can also demonstrate reading with generative AI art tools. I asked them to use an AI platform, DALL-E, to generate a scene from the book, a book cover or a character. They were assessed on the details, symbols and mood they described in their prompts. Then we did a gallery walk and students discussed their classmates' AI-generated products.

In a hopeful moment, I found an artistic student sketching her ideas, creating an exemplary rendering of a scene in the book and quietly resisting the idea that art can be made by machine. And guess whose work the class liked best?

I also addressed existential concerns about machines doing our thinking about novels. I asked Copilot, Microsoft's AI tool, to make a short multiple-choice quiz about a novella assigned to my students. I deliberately asked it to address a part of the story that the author left ambiguous. As expected, AI produced a confident, "one right answer" quiz with an answer key.

I kept a straight face as the students attempted the quiz in groups. They battled over the "correct" answer to that one question, demonstrating that they saw multiple interpretations for that scene. After allowing them to struggle a bit, I explained that the quiz was AI generated. I acknowledged the nuances of the text that made it impossible to answer that quiz question. Then I asked them, "What if I had surrendered all of my thinking about this to AI?"

Our conversation that day reinforced my point that technology, which cannot reason or think, cannot replace human interpretations of literature.

### I hope you'll dance

AI has presented new challenges to teachers, and, as with most technology, it was thrust upon us with no warning, no training and no guardrails. But it is here, and we now have new content to teach: AI Literacy and Prompting Skills.

I still teach old school annotation, close reading and writing. Core foundational skills remain important. But I have found ways to open the classroom door to discuss and use generative AI.

With fuller knowledge, our classes can make AI the devil we know rather than the devil we don't—and even make him a decent dance partner. 🕺



## Resources

**NJEA Virtual Learning Workshops and Resources**  
[learning.njea.org](https://learning.njea.org)

**EdTechwithLisa**  
[Edtechwithlisa.com](https://edtechwithlisa.com)  
[bit.ly/AI Learning Menu](https://bit.ly/AI Learning Menu)

**AI for Education**  
[aiforeducation.io](https://aiforeducation.io)

**University of Delaware**  
"AI Literacy: Algorithms, Authenticity, and Ethical Considerations in AI Tools"  
[guides.lib.udel.edu/AI/home](https://guides.lib.udel.edu/AI/home)

**Facing History & Ourselves**  
"The Ethics of Generative AI in the Classroom"  
[facinghistory.org/resource-library/ethics-generative-ai-classroom](https://facinghistory.org/resource-library/ethics-generative-ai-classroom)





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1: NJEA President Sean M. Spiller, NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty (left center), and NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson (right-center) cut the ribbon to officially open the 2024 NJEA Convention, joined by national, state and local leaders in the association and public education.

2: Chasten Buttigieg delivered a stirring keynote address, followed by a Q and A with NJEA President Sean M. Spiller, on Friday morning.

3: Bayonne EA President Gene Woods with New Jersey Commission on Holocaust Education member Maud Dahme.

4: The NJEA Convention Committee with NJEA President Sean M. Spiller

5: The legendary Mavis Staples opened the 2024 NJEA Convention with an uplifting concert. She also spoke about how her family and her church family used their gifts to support the Civil Rights Movement.

6: Mychal "America's Favorite Librarian" Threats was interviewed by NJASL President Karen Grant and North Hunterdon High School Librarian Martha Hickson, and NJEA President Sean M. Spiller for Thursday afternoon's keynote. From left: Grant, Hickson, Spiller, Threats, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson, NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty, NJASL liaison to NJEA Angela Coxen and NJEA Director of Professional Development Dr. Chrissi Miles.

7: John Hunter, creator the World Peace Game Foundation, delivered the Friday afternoon keynote.

8: NJEA's officers create ornaments at the MudGirls Studio on the Exhibit Hall Floor. From left: MudGirls exhibitor Nao Plamantouras, Spiller, Beatty, Robertson, and MudGirls exhibitor Tajah Gay.

For more convention photos, visit [flickr.com/njea/albums](https://www.flickr.com/photos/njea/).



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9: From left: New Jersey Aspiring Educators Association (NAEA) Secretary Chelsea Berwick, NJAEA President Bianca Nicolescu, NJEA President Sean M. Spiller and NJAEA Vice President Matthew Yuro.

10: NJREA member Nadine Batchelor Hale and her guest show their support for NJEA PAC-endorsed candidate for governor, Sean Spiller.

11: Dr. Tiffanie ThrBak speaks at the NJEA Members of Color Diversity Brunch.

12: Todd Henkin, who presented on the Exhibit Hall Floor in The Point! worked with members to create a song over Thursday and Friday. They performed the song, titled "Ready to Roll Forward" just prior to the Friday afternoon keynote. From left: Henkin, Laura Lizcano, Beth Hopkins and Bethlehem Roberson.

13: The New Jersey All-State Chorus and Orchestra performing in Boardwalk Hall on Thursday night.

14: Leaders of the Educational Support Professionals Advocacy Network, from left: Gloucester County EA President Chrissy Kosar, Penns Grove-Carneys Point Regional School Employees Association President Amy Tighe, and GCEA Office Manager Kelly Ann Morris.

15: Stella Lopresti Busick and Rose Busick walk the Red Carpet to Voices Unveiled: The Film Festival at the NJEA Convention.

16: The guest of NEA Director Karoline Bethea-Jones, Alban Jones, hams it up at the 360-degree camera on the Exhibit Hall floor.

17: NJEA's officers gather with attendees at a breakfast hosted by the NJEA Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Committee.

18: Peehi Waho speaking in the program, Rise of Peacemaking Panel Discussion.

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19: Members who Stand with Sean as New Jersey's next governor, during a meet and greet with NJEA's endorsed candidates Sean Spiller. From left: Lauren Greenfield, Keith Hinton, Sean Spiller, Tiffanie ThrBak, Vilmory Hernandez, Shereen Ducasse and Janet Adams.

20: Rowan Professor of Mathematics Eric Milou presents Invigorating Secondary Mathematics.

21: Rowan Professor of Mathematics Eric Milou presents Invigorating Secondary Mathematics.

22: The Boys and Girls Club of Atlantic City, the official 2024 NJEA Convention Charity, receives their donation from NJEA on Wednesday evening, just prior to the convention.

23: NJEA Lt. Gov. Tahesha Way, a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. with members of the Divine Nine sororities and fraternities when Way spoke at the NJEA Convention.

24: BooksSmiles gets free books into the hands of children. Pictured are founder Larry Abrams and board chairperson Kara D'Alonzo. Learn more at [booksmiles.org](http://booksmiles.org).

25: A student performs at Thursday evening's New Jersey All-State Jazz Ensemble and New Jersey Honors Choir.

26: Tim Post, an exhibitor from the Amazing Escape Room, takes a break in the Goat Yoga section of the Health and Safety area.

27: New Jersey Attorney General Matt Platkin answers members' questions about student safety, particularly students from marginalized communities.

For more convention photos, visit [flickr.com/photos/njea/albums](https://www.flickr.com/photos/njea/albums).



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## Think globally, act locally

# Talking climate breakdown in schools

By Dorothy Wigmore

“We are teetering on a planetary tight rope,” United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres warned the world in late October, referring to his agency’s latest greenhouse gas emissions gap report. “Either leaders bridge the emissions gap, or we plunge headlong into climate disaster, with the poorest and most vulnerable suffering the most.”

It’s scary stuff. New Jersey faces more and worse storms, floods, blizzards, heat domes, wildfire smoke, droughts, infectious disease outbreaks and other climate breakdown consequences.

For example, New Jersey now is warming at a faster rate than the global average, and faster than other northeastern states. Then there was Superstorm Sandy, 2011’s Tropical Storm Ida and 10 other hurricane-related storms since; related flooding hit coastal and inland areas, affecting schools and their communities.

Job-related health and safety implications for schools include:

- Increased pesticide use to deal with the more tick-related infections (e.g., West Nile, Lyme).
- More asthma, heart-related and other health problems from indoor and outdoor air pollution.
- Increased heat’s toll on the kidneys, heart and other systems, and heat stroke deaths.
- More difficulty to teach and learn in hot classrooms and school grounds, sometimes leading to verbal or physical abuse.
- More cancer-causing ultraviolet (UV) radiation for outdoor workers.

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*Dorothy Wigmore is a long-time health and safety specialist and WEC consultant. She has worked in Canada, the U.S. and Mozambique, focusing on prevention and worker participation to fix job-related hazards.*

- Harm from cleaning up after storm and other damage (e.g., from asbestos, musculoskeletal strains, electricity).
- Wet conditions contributing to mold growth, affecting school air quality and staff and student health.
- School bus drivers face dangerous road conditions.
- Increased stress levels for reasons related to life inside and outside schools, including eco-anxiety and the effects of closing schools because of poor air quality, heat domes, storms, etc.

Heat stress is one of the most obvious hazards. An indirect effect on staff is the harm to children’s ability to learn.

“Overall, it’s stressful to teach in that heat. It’s sad, because the kids don’t learn as much,” says recently retired New Jersey science teacher Alice Freund. “One school I was in, we had to wheel in this giant floor fan. But where to put it? The kids all wanted it near them and if it was too close to someone, papers blew off their desk. It’s very disruptive, like it is with kids getting water bottles filled.”

“I often wonder how much class time is lost thanks to the climate breakdown,” she adds.

### Bringing climate breakdown into the curriculum

In 2020, New Jersey became the first U.S. state to include climate breakdown in its K-12 New Jersey Student Learning Standards.

Using interdisciplinary units, the goal is to help students “understand how and why climate change happens, the impact it has on our local and global communities and to act in informed and sustainable ways.” The first seven subjects came into effect in 2022 (social studies, world language, visual and performing arts, computer design,



health and physical education, career readiness, and science). English and math were added in 2023.

"It's an amazing set of standards, especially affecting non-science teachers," Freund says. "For them it's, 'What? I'm doing third grade, and I have to teach climate change?' There's a lot of work to do around implementation."

The state allocated funds for this, including collaboration across school districts. State and non-profit groups have resources too. Freund is active in Divest New Jersey and Third Act Educators, which produced a handout and resources to implement the standard.

"The standard matters because we need to build awareness of how our lives as human beings affect the planet overall," says Atlantic County special education math teacher, and NJEA Executive Committee member, Melissa Tomlinson. She uses graphs about things such as rising sea levels and temperature trends in her data unit.

"It leads to broader conversations about how to alleviate things that could happen in our schools and communities," she says. Like Freund, she wonders what schooling will look like if temperatures get so high, or air quality is so bad, that schools are closed.

She is part of NJ21 United's efforts "to track what implementation of the standard looks like, what's going on in terms of environmental justice and what educators think should be in their schools."

Tomlinson also continues to learn from the pandemic, keeping air filters going in her classroom. The filters clean the air of viruses, pollen, wildfire smoke and other often-invisible particles.

"We shouldn't have to fight for effective units in each classroom," Tomlinson says. "Maybe we'll have to get legislation to make it happen."

## What is to be done?

Health and safety activists and committees can:

- Support S-2422/A-3521, which would provide heat protections to New Jersey workers by establishing a heat stress standard and Occupational Heat-Related Illness and Injury Prevention Program. Visit [actioncenter.njea.org](http://actioncenter.njea.org) to take action.
- Take and promote the NJ21 United survey and other efforts to assess and support use of the standards and related occupational health and climate justice issues. (See "Resources" sidebar.)
- Develop and advocate for a district climate action plan accounting for occupational health and safety hazards (e.g., assessments to determine which workers are vulnerable, when, how, and why) and how emergencies are handled.
- Emphasize ways to reduce heat in schools (e.g., better insulation, white reflective paint or green plants on roofs, shade trees around buildings).
- Use the plan in walk-throughs.
- Use those walk-throughs to inventory and evaluate ventilation systems, air conditioning and air filters/cleaners, following up to improve school air quality.
- Investigate and support opportunities for just transition and green jobs (ones including healthy and safe work, not just an environmental focus).
- Support teachers and students taking the Sustainable Jersey for Schools 2024-25 Student Climate Challenge, especially those adding an occupational health lens (e.g., the healthy school environment and green cleaning, design and purchasing topics).



## Resources



**New Jersey Climate Change Education Hub**



**Heat Hub NJ**



**International Labour Organization**

"Ensuring Safety and Health at Work in a Changing Climate"



**NJ21 United**

"NJ Educator Climate Justice Survey"



**NJEA Review**

"Achieving Health and Safety Wins in a Pandemic"



**NJEA Review**

"Tackle Harmful Heat With Ventilation and AC"



**Third Act Educators Working Group**

"NJ Climate Change Education Standards"



PAST, PRESENT  
AND FUTURE

## MEDICARE PREMIUMS FOR 2025 ANNOUNCED

### 2025 Medicare Part B premiums

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) announced the 2025 premiums for Medicare Part B in November.

Part B premiums will increase to \$185 per month in 2025, an increase of \$10.30.

Retirees will also pay a different premium amount in 2025 if they fall into a different income-related category. This change happens once individual filers reach an annual income of \$106,000 or a joint-filer reaches \$212,000, for income earned in 2023.

INCOME LEVELS FOR SINGLES	INCOME LEVELS FOR JOINT FILERS	2025 PREMIUMS
\$106,000 or below	\$212,000 or below	\$185.00
\$106,001 to \$133,000	212,001 to \$266,000	\$259.00
\$133,001 to \$167,000	\$266,001 to \$334,000	\$370.00
\$167,001 to \$200,000	\$334,001 to \$400,000	\$480.90
\$200,001 to \$500,000	\$400,001 to \$750,000	\$591.90
\$500,000 and above	\$750,000 and above	\$628.90

### 2025 Medicare Part D premiums

Since Jan. 1, 2012, all Medicare-eligible retirees enrolled in the School Employees' Health Benefits Program (SEHBP) are automatically enrolled in the state-selected Medicare prescription plan, which is currently OptumRx. This program includes the Medicare-eligible retiree to be enrolled automatically in Medicare Part D.

While there is no standard Medicare Part D cost associated with the program, enrollees whose incomes exceed the legislated threshold amounts—\$106,000 in 2023 for a beneficiary filing an individual income tax return or married and filing a separate return, and \$212,000 for a beneficiary filing a joint tax return—will pay a monthly, income-related payment. See the chart .

INCOME LEVELS FOR SINGLES	INCOME LEVELS FOR JOINT FILERS	2025 PREMIUMS
\$106,000 or below	\$212,000 or below	\$0.00
\$106,001 to \$133,000	\$212,001 to \$266,000	\$13.70
\$133,001 to \$167,000	\$266,001 to \$334,000	\$35.30
\$167,001 to \$200,000	\$334,001 to \$400,000	\$57.00
\$200,001 to \$500,000	\$400,001 to \$750,000	\$78.60
\$500,000 and above	\$750,000 and above	\$88.80

### Information pertaining to both Part B and Part D

The Social Security Administration uses the income reported two years ago to determine a beneficiary's premium. Thus, the income reported on a beneficiary's 2023 tax return is used to determine whether the beneficiary must pay a higher monthly premium in 2025. If a beneficiary's income decreased significantly in the past two years, they may request that information from more recent years be used to calculate the premium.

For those members receiving post-retirement medical benefits (PRMB) paid for by the state of New Jersey, the standard Medicare Part B premium is reimbursed in the member's pension check.

For any income-related additional amounts for Medicare Part B and D premiums that a member receiving PRMB

or their spouse/partner pays is reimbursed at the end of the year in which the adjustment is paid. However, this is only after the proper paperwork is filed with the New Jersey Division of Pensions and Benefits.

Notice on how to file for any income-related adjustment reimbursement will be sent to retirees, as well as posted on the New Jersey Division of Pensions and Benefits website, by early February.

If you have questions about your Medicare Part B or Part D premium, call 800-MEDICARE (800-633-4227). Any questions regarding the reimbursement process should be directed to the New Jersey Division of Pensions and Benefits at 609-292-7524.

Members can also view updates via the division's "Letters to Retirees" at [state.nj.us/treasury/pensions/pension-retirees.shtml](http://state.nj.us/treasury/pensions/pension-retirees.shtml).

# 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, call 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.

**March 12:** Winter luncheon meeting at Millville Motorsports Park. To attend, call Pam Garwood at 856-392-6909.

## ESSEX COUNTY REA

**Feb. 12:** Winter luncheon virtual meeting. Reservation deadline is Feb. 5, and there is no cost for this meeting. To attend, call Kathie McKoy-Osborne at 973-715-6591.

## 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 non-members. Reservation deadline is Nov. 22. To attend, call Donna Middlebrooks at 973-610-7129.

## HUNTERDON COUNTY REA

**Dec. 9:** 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.

**Mar 6:** Spring luncheon meeting at The Grand Marquis. There will be a NJEA Member Benefits Fair. Reservation deadline is Feb. 27, 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.

**April 8:** Spring luncheon meeting at Jumping Brook Country Club. Members Benefits Fair. Reservation deadline is March 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.

**March 13:** Spring luncheon meeting at Clarion Hotel and Conference Center. Reservation deadline is Feb. 27, 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.

**March 19:** Spring 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 856-534-0782.

# BEYOND DECEMBER HOLIDAYS

## A call to celebrate diversity all year long

By Dr. Kim Pinckney



As educators, we strive to create welcoming classrooms where students feel seen and valued. A crucial aspect of fostering this sense of belonging is celebrating the rich tapestry of diversity within our schools, communities and the world at large. While acknowledging holidays traditionally celebrated in December can be a starting point, it is essential to move beyond a “holiday-centric” approach to one that embeds diversity into our curricula and classrooms throughout the entire year. That is the vision behind the NJEA Consortium. Through a grant funded by the National Education Association (NEA), the Consortium moves beyond “Holidays and Heroes” to foster connections, community and curriculum development in an authentic, intentional way.

But what is wrong with December? Holiday celebrations are fun; we all love a good party! Yet when we lump most cultural celebrations into December, we are not honoring all cultures equally. Many Christian and secular holidays are based on the solar calendar, with one of the holiest holidays taking place in December. However, many Islamic holidays are based on the lunar calendar with dates shifting each year. Many East-Asian and Jewish holidays are based on the lunisolar calendar, borrowing from both lunar and solar cycles. Celebrating “December Holidays” favors one tradition over others.

### Why year-round inclusion matters

When we make space to acknowledge diversity year-round, we live our intentions of creating welcoming environments where all students feel valued. Here are some benefits:

**Authentic representation:** Students who see themselves reflected in the curricula develop a stronger sense of identity and self-worth.

**Breaking down stereotypes:** By exploring diverse perspectives throughout the year, we challenge misconceptions that lead to prejudice and discrimination. Students learn to appreciate the richness of humanity and develop empathy for others.

**Fostering critical thinking:** Diverse curricula encourage students to question dominant narratives, analyze

information from multiple perspectives and develop nuanced understandings of complex issues.

**Preparing global citizens:** In an increasingly interconnected world, students must develop intercultural competence and global awareness to contribute to a more just and equitable society.

### Strategies for year-round inclusion

**Celebrate throughout the year:** Incorporate celebrations of cultures and heritages throughout the year, not just during December.

**Perform a curriculum audit:** Review your existing curricula to identify areas where diversity is lacking or where stereotypes may be perpetuated. Make changes accordingly.

**Include diverse voices:** Incorporate a wide range of voices, authors, artists and historical figures’ perspectives into your lessons and libraries. Invite guest speakers from the community to share their experiences and expertise.

**Culturally responsive teaching:** Adopt teaching practices that acknowledge and value students’ diverse cultural backgrounds.

**Offer student-led projects:** Empower students to explore topics related to diversity through research projects, presentations and creative activities. Encourage them to share their own cultural backgrounds and experiences.

**Engage in ongoing reflection:** We all have conscious and unconscious biases. Continuously reflect on your own assumptions and how they might be impacting your teaching.

**Leverage existing resources:** Consider the NJEA Consortium as a resource. We are in progress creating and curating lesson plans, content scholar talks, immersive field trip experiences and other resources for your use. Visit [learning.njea.org/consortium](http://learning.njea.org/consortium) for more information.

### Valuing, respecting and empowering students

Celebrating diversity all year long is not about being politically correct; it is about creating an educational environment where every student feels valued, respected and empowered to reach their full potential. By intentionally and proactively integrating diversity into our curricula and classrooms, we can foster an inclusive culture that benefits all students and prepares them to thrive in this diverse and interconnected world.

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*Dr. Kim Pinckney is an associate director in the NJEA Professional Development and Instructional Issues Division. Pinckney coordinates the NJEA Consortium. She can be reached at [kpinckney@njea.org](mailto:kpinckney@njea.org). For more about the NJEA Consortium, visit [learning.njea.org/consortium](http://learning.njea.org/consortium).*

# Myths versus facts around educator certification

by Camy Kobylinski

Navigating New Jersey's educator certification system can be challenging, especially with common myths that cloud the process and lead to costly missteps for educators and schools alike. These misconceptions often result in educators being incorrectly assigned to positions outside their certification area, overlooking important requirements and even misunderstanding the pathway to permanent certification.

Without clear guidance, both prospective and current educators may find themselves entangled in compliance issues that could have been avoided. This article will unpack several myths about New Jersey educator certification and provide accurate insights to help educators ensure alignment with state requirements.

## Separating fact from fiction

**Myth:** Most New Jersey instructional endorsements are valid in grades kindergarten through grade 12.

**Fact:** With a few exceptions, such as for certificates covering preschool through Grade 3, kindergarten through Grade 6 and middle school specializations for grades 5 through 8, most teaching endorsements are valid in preschool through Grade 12.

**Myth:** Teachers can take the Praxis assessment for a subject outside of their certification area and then be eligible to teach that additional content.

**Fact:** All teachers must hold the endorsement for the content they are assigned to teach. A Praxis assessment is only one part of the eligibility for additional endorsements.

**Myth:** Any certified teacher can teach financial literacy courses.

**Fact:** Financial literacy courses may be taught by teachers holding certificates in Social Studies; Business Finance, Economics, and Law; Comprehensive Business; Comprehensive Family and Consumer Sciences; General Business or Math. Additionally, elementary certificate holders may teach financial literacy in the grades in which they are certified to teach for no more than one-half of the daily instructional assignment.

**Myth:** Novice teachers who have been hired for part of the school year do not need to have a mentor.

**Fact:** Teachers who have not completed the 30-week mentoring requirement must be mentored if their employment will last beyond 60 days. Novice teachers may complete mentoring through short term employment across more than one district. However, each district must be diligent in documenting the weeks of completed mentoring in the New Jersey online certification system called NJEdCert.

**Myth:** School districts take care of applications for provisional certificates.

**Fact:** While school districts must initiate the process to enter a teacher in the provisional teacher process, candidates should ensure that this step has been taken by checking their certification records in NJEdCert. Once a provisional certificate has been initiated or recommended for renewal, the teacher receives notification to complete the application and pay any fees.

**Myth:** Standard certificates are automatically generated by the New Jersey certification system.

**Fact:** Districts should be submitting proof of mentoring completion and evaluation results throughout the first years of employment. If applicable, the candidate obtains verification of completion of the alternate route program. Once all requirements are completed and reported to the New Jersey Department of Education, the district must recommend the teacher for a standard certificate. The teacher will be prompted to respond and pay any fees before a standard certificate will be issued.

## Understanding the certification system is essential

Understanding the intricacies of New Jersey's teacher certification system is essential for both new and seasoned educators seeking to avoid costly and time-consuming errors. With proper guidance and a clear understanding of certification steps, educators can focus on their roles without the stress of unexpected compliance issues.


Through informed decisions and proactive steps, educators can secure the appropriate certifications and build successful teaching careers in New Jersey's education system.

More information about New Jersey's certification process may be found at the New Jersey Department of Education website, [nj.gov/education/certification](https://nj.gov/education/certification).

NJEA members may access additional clarification or support by contacting their local association leadership. 🌐

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*Camy Kobylinski is an associate director in the NJEA Professional Development and Instructional Issues Division. She can be reached at [ckobylinski@njea.org](mailto:ckobylinski@njea.org).*



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## ADVOCATE FOR PAID STUDENT TEACHING

YOUR STORY IS NEEDED

To further strengthen the case for paid student teaching and ensure that future educators receive the support they need, your voice matters.

Last year, Gov. Phil Murphy supported the Student-Teacher Stipend Pilot Program, providing \$3,000 stipends to student-teachers during their full-time clinical practice semester at approved New Jersey Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs). This funding helped cover essential living costs, such as housing, nutrition and education expenses, while aspiring educators completed their training. This year, Murphy allocated \$10 million in the state budget to continue this support in the 2024-25 academic year.

In the New Jersey General Assembly, A-2362 seeks to make these stipends permanent. Sponsored by Assembly members Chris Tully, Herb Conaway and Pamela Lampitt, the stipend program would offer eligible students up to \$7,200 per semester for two academic semesters. Its Senate companion, S-2604 is sponsored by Sens. Vin Gopal and Linda Greenstein. These bills are part of ongoing

efforts to address the state's public school staff shortages.

NJAEA leadership continues to advocate for legislation to both increase these stipends and make student-teaching stipends a permanent part of state law. Aspiring educators deserve fair compensation for their work.



### Share your story

The National Education Association is also working to end the injustice of unpaid student teaching. Your student teaching story—past or present—is needed to advocate for a more accessible path to becoming an educator.

Please take the Paid Student Teaching Survey to share your student teaching experience, successes and challenges around paid student teaching efforts. The estimated form completion time is five to 15 minutes. Please also share the survey widely. [🔗](#)

# NJ SCHOOL JOBS

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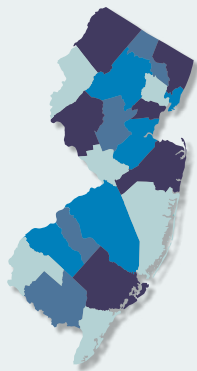
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# SUSSEX TO CAPE MAY

Workshops and conferences

## highlights

Poetry, prose, civics,  
and language

## SHOWCASE

Showcase experiences have been endorsed by NJEA's Professional Development Institute and are also posted on [njea.org](http://njea.org). Those seeking endorsement of a professional development experience that they will provide should email Dawn Howlen ([dhowlen@njea.org](mailto:dhowlen@njea.org)) and Tamanyka Booker ([tbooker@njea.org](mailto:tbooker@njea.org)) in NJEA's Professional Development Division.

## WINTER POETRY & PROSE GETAWAY

Jan. 17-20

Seaview Hotel

The Winter Poetry & Prose Getaway is a three-day conference where educators hone their creative writing skills and expand their teaching strategies. Held at Seaview Hotel near Atlantic City, Jan. 17-20, it is presented by Murphy Writing of Stockton University. The conference was founded by NJEA/NJREA member and author Peter E. Murphy, who believes that when writers leave behind the distractions of their busy lives to gather in an encouraging community, they can make important breakthroughs in their art.

Beginner and experienced writers may choose from workshops in fiction, memoir, nonfiction, poetry, songwriting, storytelling and more. Participants will receive craft discussion, writing prompts, writing time, feedback, motivation and inspiration. Enjoy challenging and supportive workshops, insightful feedback and an encouraging community.

### Scholarships available for 2025 writers' conference

Tuition is available on a sliding scale from \$570 to \$770. South Jersey teachers may be eligible to have their districts pay their tuition when they register with ETTTC hours. Scholarships are being offered for first-time participants of the 31st annual Winter Poetry & Prose Getaway writers' conference.

Visit [stockton.edu/wintergetaway](http://stockton.edu/wintergetaway) or scan the QR code for registration information or contact [murphywriting@stockton.edu](mailto:murphywriting@stockton.edu) or 609-626-3594.



## More to learn

### 2025 NJTESOL/NJBE SPRING CONFERENCE

#### Intersectionality: Shaping Experiences & Creating Opportunities

The 2025 conference of the New Jersey Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages/New Jersey Bilingual Educators (NJTESOL/NJBE) will have two components: an in-person conference and a video library conference.

#### In-person conference

The In-Person Conference will take place at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in New Brunswick on May 20-22. You can register for one, two or all three days. The conference will feature three keynote speakers: Alisha De Lorenzo, Dr. Patriann Smith and Missy Testerman (2024 National Teacher of the Year).

In addition, you'll select from many presentations approved for the continuing education requirement, network with your colleagues and obtain the latest information on state and national initiatives. You can also meet with representatives at the sponsors' and exhibitors' booths to find the latest and greatest teaching tools. You can earn professional development hours throughout the day.

#### Video library conference

The Video Library Conference is a select collection of library presentations you will have access to view starting on May 27 using the conference platform. There is no set schedule, and you will be able to view the workshops for three months. By using your unique login, your hours will be tracked so that you can earn professional development hours. Please note that the select collection of presentations will not include the keynotes or special invited guest speakers.

#### Topics

Presentation topics will include General Interest, Content Area Instruction, Bilingual/ESL Preschool through Grade 12, Higher Ed, Teacher Education, Adult Education, K-12 Administrators and Dual Language/Biliteracy.

#### Registration and more information

Register early for a discounted rate. Registration includes one free year of membership.

Visit [njtesol-njbe.org/spring-conference](http://njtesol-njbe.org/spring-conference) for more information and to register.

For other conference questions email Caia Schlessinger, Conference Coordinator, at [conference-coordinator@njtesol-njbe.org](mailto:conference-coordinator@njtesol-njbe.org).



## 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](https://artsednj.org/CRAEworkout).

### Arts Ed NJ On-Demand course

#### Empowering Artists: Designing Student-Centered Learning Driven by the 2020 NJSLV-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](https://artsednj.org/ondemandlearning-hub).

### NJCSS OFFERS CIVICS WORKSHOPS

The New Jersey Council for the Social Studies is offering a series of workshop centered on civics. All the workshops are free. They will all be held at Rutgers University's Busch Campus Center in Piscataway, 8:30 a.m.-3p.m., coffee and lunch are included.

Five professional development hours are awarded for each session. Materials are provided. For workshop descriptions, more information and to register, visit [civiced.rutgers.edu/events](https://civiced.rutgers.edu/events).

**Dec. 11:** Engaging Middle School Students in Civics

**March 11:** Teaching Civics in Elementary Grades

**March 18:** Project Citizen workshop for grades 3-12

**April 2:** We the People Workshop for Middle and High School Teachers

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## TRANSFORM CONFERENCE



### Empowering Education Ecosystems: TRANSFORM for Tomorrow

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Are you ready to take your professional learning journey to the next level?

**TRANSFORM** is the must-attend event for educators who are passionate about creating inclusive and innovative learning environments.

Join us for a day of inspiration, collaboration and growth as we delve into key topics shaping education today.

Look for more details and registration in early 2025 at [njea.org/transform](https://njea.org/transform).



**SATURDAY  
April 5  
2025**

Continue the journey at NJEA IMPACT Conference 2025 on Wednesday, July 16, 2025



## A superintendent shares LMC journey and results

By Danny Robertozzi with Kimberly Crane

Dr. Danny Robertozzi is the superintendent of Clifton Public Schools. With Lori Lalama as the president of the Clifton Education Association, the district and the local association are actively engaged in labor-management collaboration. Robertozzi recently responded to a series of questions from NJEA Communications Consultant Kimberly Crane concerning collaboration between district leadership and the association.

### How did Clifton's LMC journey begin?

Unofficially, our collaboration began prior to my appointment as superintendent in July 2019. Lori Lalama had just become the Clifton Education Association (CEA) President. We met for lunch and immediately found that we had similar philosophies about working together collaboratively to solve problems.

Later that year, we went for formal training at the Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations. At Rutgers we learned about research indicating that collaboration can improve academics. We then began formalizing our district LMC by creating a Districtwide Collaborative Team and School Based Collaborative Teams. Our focus was to engage the people closest to a problem so that we could improve the quality of solutions. Our biggest challenge was getting people to believe that we should work together and not be adversarial. This was a major philosophy shift that people weren't used to.

### What positive LMC results has Clifton experienced?

We have created a more open environment where people are not afraid to voice their opinions and become part of the solution. We have built more trust among stakeholders and have better communication and information sharing.

"Easy wins" include purified water fountains—easing traffic/parking issues—new teacher desks—and a district calendar and snow day staff survey.

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*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](mailto: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](mailto:mike@LMCpartnerships.org)*

"Larger victories" include passing a \$168 million referendum to fund facility improvements—negotiating a 1,200-member contract in two meetings, easing teacher workload, revising elementary schedules, revising end of semester exams, half days at start of year, lunch on half days for all students and free credit recovery summer school for grades 9-12.

Our team also presented a program titled Building Bridges: A Collaborative Journey of Union/Management Partnership in Clifton Public Schools – From Water Fountains to Report Cards at the 2024 California Labor Management Institute Conference.

### What LMC practices are embedded in Clifton?

We have quarterly district collaborative team meetings led by a principal and a teacher, not the superintendent and the association president. The team consists of representatives from each category of employee in the district.

Employees receive a quarterly LMC newsletter on district collaboration. Each school has monthly LMC meetings that include the principal, a union leader, and representatives from grade level and content areas.

We have a five-point decision-making model to determine how collaborative a decision is going to be addressed prior to our teams working together on solutions.

### What is the future of LMC in Clifton?

We have created and are evolving SLAM Teams to get work done in a more efficient manner. SLAM teams are self-organizing lean autonomous and multidisciplinary.

We will continue to prioritize evaluation and feedback, celebrate achievement and enhance communication.

*"For Labor Management Collaboration to succeed, true partnership is essential, along with a willingness to embrace diverse perspectives. Establishing strong collaborative frameworks is just as crucial as the people involved, ensuring that the work can endure well beyond our time." – Danny A. Robertozzi, Clifton Superintendent of Schools*

*"A successful Labor Management Collaborative Team envisions a proactive partnership between labor and management, built on mutual respect and shared responsibility, to enhance student success through open communication, data-driven decisions and collaborative problem-solving for the benefit of the entire school community." – Lori Lalama, CEA President*

# MAKING HISTORIES VISIBLE

by Amy Moran, Ph. D.

On the line in this past election was the possibility of increased access to critical literacies versus book bans, civil rights for all versus legislation that limits civil rights for LGBTQIA+ people, and more.

But weeks before, on Oct. 21, 2024, during LGBT History Month, a brilliant conference, Making History Visible, was held in Red Bank. It was hosted by Make It Better 4 Youth (MIB4Y), the Monmouth County Consortium for LGBTQ Youth, in concert with the NJEA Consortium, which seeks to infuse historically marginalized identities into K-12 teaching and learning. The focus of the day was communicating new and wonderful ways to infuse relevant LGBTQIA+ histories and histories of people with disabilities into classroom curricular content.

## LGBTQIA+ inclusion

The first half of the day centered LGBTQIA+ inclusion, with special guest Kate Okeson, executive director of the New Jersey Advisory Commission on Advancing LGBTQIA+ Youth Equity and Inclusion in Schools (and former co-author of Rainbow Connection). She was on hand to warmly welcome presenters and participants with opening remarks.

Eric Marcus delivered the keynote address. Marcus is a journalist, podcast producer and oral historian whose 1992 and 2002 books about queer history led him to co-create Making Gay History, a nonprofit organization that addresses the absence of substantive, in-depth LGBTQ+-inclusive American history from the public discourse and the classroom.

Presenters Jennifer Musial and Anna Tracschler also gave a talk about building the Hudson County LGBTQ Oral History Archive. Attendees were excited about teaching oral history techniques to students in their local districts.

Presenter Shelby Glass described co-creating a mobility mural that depicts the paths taken by sight-impaired people, offering methods for using art as a communicative tool to inform everyone about the lived experiences of those using Braille, canes and seeing-eye dogs.

When it comes to questions about whether this inclusion work is relevant or timely, MSNBC journalist Stephanie Ruhle recently asked a nonbinary Rutgers student what questions they would ask Vice President Harris.

"How soon do you think we can get the Equality Act passed?" they responded.

The Equality Act, which passed the House in 2021, is an amendment to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation and gender identity.

However, when Ruhle asked what they would ask then candidate Trump, their question was markedly different.

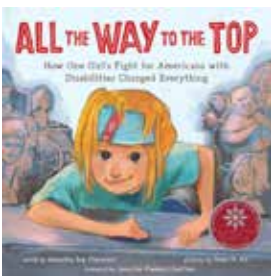
"Do you see me as a human?" they responded.

Startled by the sorrow in the sentiment, Ruhle needed a full 15 seconds to collect herself, responding to the student with a catch in her throat, "I am so sorry," suddenly understanding how grave the outcome of this election will be for so many.

When we work to make histories visible, we will be including facts from this historic time about whether and how we helped bend the arc of our moral universe toward justice for the most vulnerable people in our schools and society. 🏳️‍🌈



Please share the ways you help make LGBTQIA+ histories visible where you work at [rainbowconnectionNJEA@gmail.com](mailto:rainbowconnectionNJEA@gmail.com).



## Disability history as empowerment

The afternoon centered on disabilities studies and ways of including the rich contributions of people with disabilities throughout history. Rich Cairn's presentation, Disability History as Empowerment, through the

New Jersey Equity Commission encouraged educators to focus on the agency of disabled people and providing multiple forms of accessibility (access to physical, pedagogical and narrative spheres) for all students.



## Resources

For more resources from the Making History Visible conference, scan this QR code.

*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 30 years and was a high school GSA adviser for 16 years.*

# STAFF NEWS

## HIRES AND PROMOTIONS



NJEA congratulates **SHAUN WALKER** on her promotion to administrative assistant in the Region 21 UniServ office in Livingston, on Sept. 1, a position she has held in a temporary capacity since July 2023. Walker initially joined NJEA staff in

Oct. 2004 as a part-time office assistant in the Region 20 office in Jersey City. In December of 2006, Walker was promoted to the position of full-time secretary in the Region 27 office in Wayne. In 2008, she transferred to the Livingston office. Walker lives in Elizabeth.



NJEA welcomed **MARIANNE FRISINA** as a temporary secretary in the Government Relations Division Office of Policy and Politics on Sept. 16. Frisina comes to NJEA with experience in administrative and information technology support

roles, most recently serving as a business support coordinator for Burlington Stores. Government Relations fits well with Frisina's interest in U.S. history—her four cats are named Benjamin Franklin, Abigail Adams, Alexander Hamilton and Dolley Madison. A Levittown, New York native, Frisina is a graduate of General Douglas MacArthur High School. She holds an associate of arts degree from Nassau Community College. Frisina lives in Yardley with her husband, Anthony.



NJEA welcomed **ROBIN DENOIA** on Oct. 16 as secretary in the UniServ Region 7 office in Toms River. Prior to joining the NJEA staff, DeNoia worked as the office manager/bookkeeper for an industrial rental properties company in Bergen

County. For 16 years, she worked with students with special needs in Ridgefield Park as a teaching assistant. DeNoia moved to Toms River three years ago. She enjoys spending time with her daughter Casey and family. She has a two-year-old grandson and is expecting the arrival of her granddaughter in the spring.



NJEA welcomed **DR. DAQUAN BASHIR** as an associate director in the NJEA Office of Human and Civil Rights, Equity and Governance on Oct. 16. Dr. Bashir comes to NJEA with 11 years of experience in program/project implementation,

specializing in educational leadership focused on diversity, equity and inclusion. His competencies include program management, strategic planning, curriculum development and workshop facilitation. Prior to joining NJEA staff, Dr. Bashir worked for the Computer Science Teachers Association where he directed an equity-based fellowship, launched a series of online professional development courses and coordinated research that has had a sustained impact on teacher practice. Dr. Bashir holds a Dual Bachelor of the Arts in Computer Science from Rutgers University and the New Jersey Institute of Technology, a Master of Science in Higher Education Administration from Walden University, and a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership from St. Peter's University. He lives in Willingboro with his wife, Keisha, their two children, and dog.



NJEA welcomed **SAMUEL PINIZZOTTO** as software application developer in the Office of Information Systems on Oct. 16. Pinizzotto brings more than 30 years of experience in web technologies.

He wrote web applications and documentation for many customer products, internal web portals and tools for end users. He most recently worked as a lead developer and senior web developer for Humanscale, a New York-based international ergonomic products company. Pinizzotto holds a bachelor's degree in computer science from Rowan University. He lives in Laurel Springs with his wife and two children.



Last May, **MAYROSE WEGMANN**, UniServ Northwest regional director, graduated from Rutgers University Eagleton Institute of Politics where she completed a Graduate Fellowship receiving the prestigious Harold and Reba Martin Award. As part of the commencement ceremony, Wegmann received honor cords in red, white, and blue—representing democracy and public service. Wegmann was elected 2024 Eagleton Class Representative and spoke at the ceremony about the important role union educators play in changing the lives of our students and enhancing our democracy. She also spoke of her experience growing up with an incarcerated father—an experience that inspired her to become a union organizer and advocate for public education.

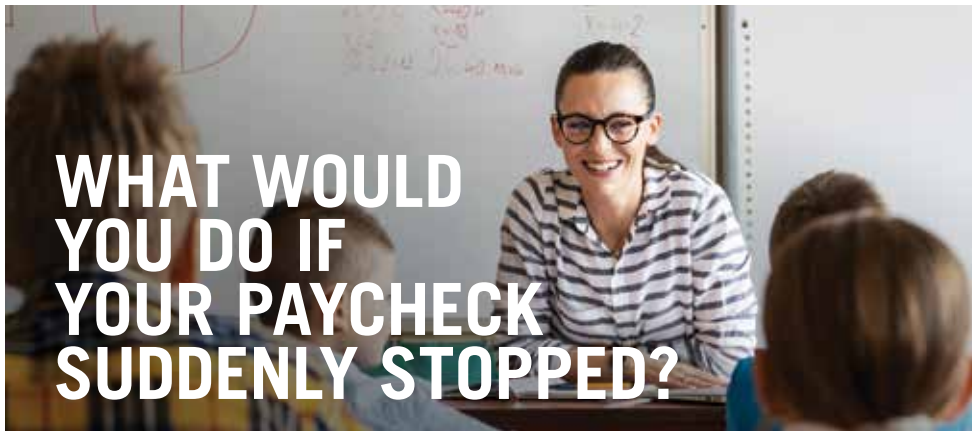
Also in May, Wegmann received a Master of Public Affairs and Politics from Rutgers University Edward J. Bloustein School for Planning and Public Policy. The degree program focused on finding public policy solutions to poverty and the racial wealth gap.



**CAMY KOBYLINSKI**, an associate director in the NJEA Professional Development and Instructional Issues Division, recently became a WomenHeart Champion after graduating from the Science and Leadership Symposium at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. Kobylinski is one of the over 60 million women living with heart disease—and part of a group of 45 women who were trained at the Symposium to educate others about heart disease, the #1 killer of women.

“As a heart disease survivor, I know the importance of having a strong support system, and I want to be there for women who are in need,” Kobylinski said.

By becoming a WomenHeart Champion, Kobylinski joins a group of more than 1,000 trained volunteers from across the country. The three-day symposium is led by Mayo Clinic’s world-class cardiologists, as well as experts in health policy, advocacy and communications. Trainees, who are all women heart disease survivors, are taught how to increase awareness about heart disease in women, run support groups and learn about lifestyle, diet and meditative techniques to reduce stress.



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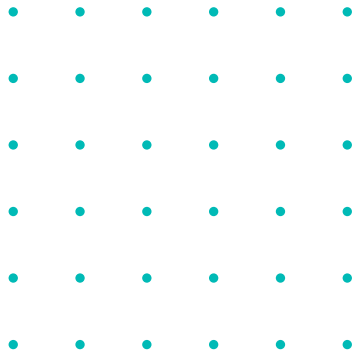
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# DECEMBER & *beyond*

In-person or virtual status of any meeting is subject to change.

<b>DEC</b> <span style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">04</span>	<b>WEDNESDAY</b> Executive Committee	<b>JAN</b> <span style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">18</span>	<b>SATURDAY</b> MLK Jr. Human Rights Celebration	<b>FEB</b> <span style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">07-09</span>	<b>FRI TO SUN</b> ESP and Health and Safety Conference
<b>JAN</b> <span style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">10</span>	<b>FRIDAY</b> Executive Committee	<b>JAN/FEB</b> <span style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">31-01</span>	<b>FRI &amp; SAT</b> Winter Leadership Conference South	<b>FEB</b> <span style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">21-22</span>	<b>FRI &amp; SAT</b> Winter Leadership Conference North
<b>JAN</b> <span style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">11</span>	<b>SATURDAY</b> Delegate Assembly	<b>FEB</b> <span style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">05</span>	<b>WEDNESDAY</b> Executive Committee	<b>MAR</b> <span style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">01</span>	<b>SATURDAY</b> Members of Color Empowerment Conference

For more information go to [NJEA.org](https://www.njea.org)














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# What unites us



You don't have to talk politics to stir up a lively debate in New Jersey. Just use the words "Taylor ham" or "pork roll" in mixed company.

What different parts of the state call lunch meat is not a particularly serious issue. But as anyone who has ever been to an association meeting at any level knows, an openness to debate and disagreement is part of what makes our union strong.

And while it can be all too easy to focus on what divides us, there is so much more that unites us.

First and foremost, we want every public school in New Jersey to be a great public school. Because of the hard work and professionalism of our members, our schools are consistently ranked the best in the nation, and we fight to keep them that way. That's why we lobby every year for school funding that provides the staffing and programs our students need to grow into well-rounded, educated adults.

We want those who work in our public schools—teachers, librarians, school bus drivers, nurses, custodians, secretaries, paraprofessionals, school psychologists and every member of the school team—to earn competitive salaries and receive excellent health benefits. Last month's *NJEA Review* cover story on the Plainfield Education Association and this month's feature story on the Dover Support Staff Association illustrate that improving salary, benefits and working conditions for members are at the heart the work of NJEA and its local associations do as part of NJEA's mission as a justice-centered union.

We want the schools where our students learn—and where we work—to be safe, clean and healthy. That's why NJEA invests in staff, resources and partnerships to empower and inform health and safety committees in as many local associations as possible.

We want to be respected and appreciated for the work we do. While doughnuts are nice on various staff appreciation days, genuine respect is demonstrated when school districts pay staff well and take their ideas and concerns seriously. Through the partnerships built through the work of NJEA's regional UniServ offices, NJEA's leadership on the New Jersey Labor Management Collaborative, the NJEA Teacher Leader Academy and other initiatives, the association is working every day to ensure teachers and educational support professionals are respected and treated as true partners in their districts and communities.

We want to grow in our profession. That's why NJEA puts significant resources into professional development. While the NJEA Convention offers outstanding professional development, the convention is not the only place where you'll find it. NJEA and its county and local associations provide thousands of hours of such professional and career learning all year long.

So while we may never agree whether to call it pork roll or Taylor ham, to root for the Philadelphia Flyers or the New Jersey Devils, or to put jimmies or sprinkles on our ice cream, we are united on the values that matter: great public schools, well-paid and respected staff, safe and healthy schools, justice for our members, our students and our communities, and a union that works to uphold those values. 🍷



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.....

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- Unleashing Aliveness: Combating Stress, Burnout and Overwhelm in Life and Work
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