

Local/County Leader Talking Points
S-1/A-1: The Marriage Equality Act

- Our collective bargaining agreements and school district policies contain a number of provisions related to members' marital status, including health benefits and child care leave. This legislation will ensure that none of our members, including those in same-sex marriages, are denied their rights under our contracts and district policies.
- The words "spouse" and "marriage" apply to a clearly defined set of legal rights and responsibilities that do not always apply to "civil unions" or "domestic partnerships." This has implications for our members under some collective bargaining agreements, as well as under some district policies. When an employee's partner is referred to as his or her legal spouse, and when their legal relationship is called a marriage, there is no confusion as to which provisions of the collective bargaining agreement and school district policies apply to them.
- Civil unions were supposed to provide same-sex couples with a legally recognized relationship status that afforded exactly the same rights as marriage. Since that time, there have been many cases where such rights were not recognized.
- Our members come from diverse backgrounds and hold widely diverse religious beliefs. This law cannot interfere with any member's faith and conscience. As an association, we represent our members' employment interests regardless of creed, sexual orientation, or marital status. We will continue to do so whatever the outcome of this bill.
- This bill exempts clergy and others who object on religious grounds from having to perform a ceremony.
- It also says that any child whose parent or guardian provides the school principal with a signed statement indicating that any part of the health, family life education, or sex education curriculum is in conflict with their conscience or moral or religious beliefs shall be excused from that portion of the course where such instruction is being given, without penalties for credit or graduation.
- This is a classic "teachable moment." As educators, we spend a lot of time discussing the issue of fairness. As school employees, we are required to implement New Jersey's comprehensive anti-bullying law. One of the key components of that law is respect for all individuals, regardless of real or perceived sexual orientation. If we truly believe that all students should be treated equally, we must demonstrate through our actions that we will treat all adults equally.